

## CHAPTER I

# Students: The Intellectual Aristocracy of the German Nation

In Germany, the academically educated, as a body, constitute a kind of intellectual aristocracy. Those that belong include theologians and teachers, judges and civil servants, doctors and engineers, in short all who through their courses at the universities have received entry into the learned or the leading professions. On the whole, the members of these professions make up a homogenous social stratum and acknowledge each other as socially equal on the basis of their academic education.

—Friedrich Paulsen, Professor of Philosophy, Berlin<sup>1</sup>

Young, colorfully costumed men marching in parades, long lines of scholars in libraries assimilating the works of Germany's cultural heroes, dashing fraternity men defending their honor with swords—these are a few of the images that the word *student* would call up in the imagination of many nineteenth-century Germans. The pageantry of student fraternities and grand university ceremonies allowed them a role in dramatic public events rivaled only by military parades. The life of full freedom, thought essential to the student experience, was a special period without requirements or duties. Such a life without daily obligations was allowed to almost no other group within German society, even small children. The noble pursuit of *Bildung*, a concept with connections both to personal development and to national culture, allowed many Germans to see students as the embodiment of the nation. This chapter is dedicated to explaining how students gained this special importance within the larger German society and why they were seen as the intellectual aristocracy of the German nation.

Students' assertions that they were an intellectual aristocracy should be differentiated from the arguments that students represented a "feudalized bourgeoisie." The concept of the feudalization of the bourgeoisie was developed by Max Weber and Werner Sombart and in the 1980s was expanded by Jürgen Kocka. It suggests that many in the middle class adopted the norms and values of preindustrial aristocratic elites as well as willingly deferred to preindustrial groups. This chapter will show how students' conceptions of themselves as an intellectual aristocracy could be consistent with the ideals of a self-confident and liberal middle class. Rather than Norbert Elias's description of an aristocratic code "geared to a warrior ethos, to maintaining inequality among people, to judging the stronger as the better, and thus to the unalterable harshness of life," students imagined themselves as part of "the true aristocracy of authentic humanity" or, as Theodor Mommsen described, "voluntary fighters for justice, truth, and intellectual freedom."<sup>2</sup>

The evidence in this chapter connects to the arguments of Dolores Augustine-Perez that various groups drew on the historical implications of aristocracy to boost their social status.<sup>3</sup> The attraction of the ideal of the aristocracy related to the fascination with history apparent across middle-class culture. Like aristocracies, universities were institutions centrally concerned with the protection and perpetuation of cultural heritages. Students could claim a connection to the nobility because of the aristocratic implications of the classical curriculum focused on ancient Greece and Rome and the full freedom of the student lifestyle, as well as the sense of taste and style that they honed through student culture. Students embraced some of the values of the aristocracy of birth—bravery, courage, strength, pride, passion—but they also shared the values of the middle class: they expressed faith in progress that would be achieved through reason, scientific investigation, and hard work. In conflicts, they fought to be seen as the representatives of tolerance, character, independence, and academic freedom.<sup>4</sup>

### Freedom, *Bildung*, and Student Life

It gave me a new attitude toward life . . . I fairly reveled in a freedom unknown before.

—The American G. Stanley Hall on his experience  
at German universities<sup>5</sup>

Most university-bound students in the German Empire attended a preparatory school (*Gymnasium*) that provided them with the academic foundation necessary for university study. The intensity and focus of these institutions allowed the student to master large amounts of information. A nine-year prescribed course of study included classes in Greek, Latin, religion, physics, philosophy, history, literature, math, and natural history.<sup>6</sup> After their first year, students had an average of thirty-four class hours per week, in addition to home assignments. Student memoirs suggest that much of the coursework focused on memorization. At many of these college preparatory institutions, German teachers used harsh methods to enforce discipline. The rules at high school were also strict and could include prohibitions against smoking, carrying a cane, or visiting a restaurant unless accompanied by a parent.<sup>7</sup> These disciplinary methods, many Germans believed, played an important role in shaping a young person's character at a pivotal stage. Many parents expected their children to learn to do their duty, even against their immediate desires, as a path to professional success and to a reliable character. In the bosom of the family and the discipline of the school, "everything was determined, allowed or forbidden . . . the high school student is an *Untertan* [underling or subject] nothing else."<sup>8</sup> The students' years in college preparatory school built up to the high point of students' youthful education, the *Abitur*, an exhausting exam that tested students in all subjects. The broad foundation the student acquired in preparatory school created the basis for the student to pursue his or her own interests at the university. The difficulties of the preparatory high school, in particular the rigorous *Abitur*, enhanced students' budding sense of superiority over those who had not passed this trial by fire.<sup>9</sup>

Between 1870 and 1914, students had the choice of twenty-two universities and of four faculties: theology, law, medicine, or philosophy, what would today be considered liberal arts and sciences. Those who wished to study chemistry, engineering, mining, dentistry, or architecture enrolled in one of the technical colleges or mining academies.<sup>10</sup> Most students finished their studies with a state examination in their chosen field. Some went on to conduct independent research and write a dissertation. Finally, those who taught at universities were required to write a second dissertation, a *Habilitation*. These qualifications gave the candidate considerable status because German universities were pioneers of innovative scholarship, imitated across Europe and in the New World.<sup>11</sup>

German universities attracted international scholars primarily on the basis of excellence in research; however, the full freedom of student life pro-

vided an additional incentive for study in Germany. German academics prided themselves on what they believed to be an academic environment in which they could research, write, and publish in full academic freedom.<sup>12</sup> Yet Germans did not embrace academic freedom without any restrictions. Max Weber famously noted, “Freedom of scholarship exists in Germany within the limits of political and ecclesiastical acceptability. Outside of these limits there is none.”<sup>13</sup> In Germany’s federal system, state authorities set academic policy, and thus the different state political cultures shaped the limits of academic freedom. One of the most well-known tests of the limits to academic freedom occurred when the officials of the Prussian Ministry of Education and Religion<sup>14</sup> forced the dismissal of the Jewish physicist and Social Democrat Leo Arons against the objections of the united Berlin philosophical faculty. The Prussian administration considered membership in the Social Democratic Party incompatible with the responsibility of academic life and passed a special law, *lex Arons*, to prevent him from teaching at German universities. Other internationally respected scholars, including Georg Simmel and Ferdinand Tönnies, also were denied academic positions as a result of their political or personal backgrounds.<sup>15</sup>

Even considering the limits on academic freedom at universities, the student had considerably more autonomy at the university than in the high school.<sup>16</sup> Because most courses of study required only one final cumulative exam at the end of the university years, the student had considerable freedom in ordering his or her day. Even a student as serious as Alfred Stern, who would later become a professor, reported that his lectures occupied him only from 8 to 9 in the morning and 12 to 2 in the afternoon. He then spent the remainder of his day at the library or in museums.<sup>17</sup> With exams years in the future, the student spent time as he or she wished without accounting to anyone. Female students, however, often had family responsibilities that their fellow male students did not. Julie Vogelstein traveled home to her parents each weekend and selected Berlin to begin her studies specifically so she could be near them.<sup>18</sup> For many male students, the discipline of the preparatory school made university freedom all the sweeter. Although serving the purpose of preparing the student intellectually, the lifestyle of full freedom within student life had clear parallels to traditional aristocratic independence and freedom. As with the nobility of birth, students could live without any requirements or expectations.

This organization of German institutions of higher education allowed some students to avoid study—or at least their classes—altogether. The problem of student attendance at lectures had reached the point that

in 1895 the Prussian Ministry of Education and Religion mailed students numbered cards, which professors collected, in an attempt to ensure that students attended class at least once. While the correspondence of the Ministry of Education and Religion shows that most students fulfilled this requirement, some rectors even saw this attempt at enforcing attendance as an infringement of students' academic freedom.<sup>19</sup> Some observers argued that the few who would take advantage of the freedom at universities would more than make up for those who wasted their time there.<sup>20</sup> The full freedom of student life provided the best opportunity for extraordinary students to develop to their full potential.

It was through the experience of freedom without limits that the student could attain *Bildung* (cultivation).<sup>21</sup> Cultivation emerged from a combination of the student's existing qualities as well as interaction with the environment. The process of becoming cultured occurred in a mysterious fashion that resembled the creation of a work of art and involved the student's entire personality. *Bildung* transformed the individual, changes that did not end on graduation but continued through the student's life. The exposure to texts and discussions both stimulated the intellect and raised the student morally.<sup>22</sup> This moral and personal aspect of cultivation also appeared in Friedrich Meinecke's impressions of his fellow students at Bonn. He described his circle of friends from the Rhineland as quite different from the type that he had known in Berlin, as more free from convention and playful, always joking and teasing. "Yes," he argued, "in fact they were *gebildeter* [more cultivated] if *Bildung* means the transformation from what one learned to master in school into natural integrity and humanity."<sup>23</sup>

If, as Meinecke suggested, "natural integrity and humanity" were important elements of *Bildung*, and *Bildung* was the goal of university study, how could professors measure students' progress? For many professors, exams were only one indication of students' development. Theobald Ziegler, professor of philosophy at Strasbourg, argued that exams "can only prove what a student has learned and knows, but not what he is and has become at the university." As a result, in exams an "uncultivated crammer [*ungebildete Lernkopf*]" can do better than a well-rounded person grounded in philosophy.<sup>24</sup> Because of the problems with exams, professors like Ziegler tended to rely on family background as an indication of the intellectual and moral development that was supposed to occur at universities. This approach to education meant that students from outside of the traditional *Bildungsbürgertum* faced added barriers to their academic success. At the same time as more students of Catholic, Jewish, and lower middle-class origins

were attending universities and as Germany was becoming a more democratic society, the elitism inherent within the traditional ideal of *Bildung* contributed to class prejudice against students from modest backgrounds.

### Students, Sex, Freedom, and Morality

Happiness in life lies . . . in victory over wickedness. Only he who is the master of himself will become a free happy person.

—Hans Hauri, *Advice to Young Men*<sup>25</sup>

Like the European aristocracy of birth, students lived according to their own value system. Despite the origins of most students in the middle class, at times the full freedom of student life crossed the lines of appropriate middle-class morality, the most outstanding violation of which was students' sexual behavior.<sup>26</sup> Among some students rumors circulated that remaining chaste could damage a young man's health, and thus visits to a prostitute were a natural way of dealing with the body's needs. Newspapers put the average marriage age for the academically educated at thirty-three years and claimed that less than 1 percent of that population remained abstinent until marriage.<sup>27</sup> These men would have had few opportunities for intimate relations with women of their own class, as families closely protected their daughters' virtue. Dance classes allowed students the possibility of intimacy with women of their own age, but few daughters of elite families took part in these classes.<sup>28</sup> Else Gerstel even remembered that her girls' school anatomy books managed to avoid genitals altogether: "The human being pictured nude was an absolutely sexless being. Urination and digestion were discussed discreetly in the text, but there was nothing that distinguished the male from the female body."<sup>29</sup>

Middle-class unmarried men, thus, had the options of abstinence, visiting prostitutes, or establishing relationships with shopgirls or waitresses. With some 50,000 prostitutes in Berlin, at least according to student newspapers, the student would have no trouble finding a companion for the evening. The daughters of students' landladies were often a great temptation; in Tübingen the "Morality Club" described students "renting" both their room and their landlady's daughter at the same time.<sup>30</sup> Other students began a "little relationship" (*kleine Verhältnis*) with young women of the lower middle class, who risked shame but also gained the (remote) possibility of marrying and moving up the social ladder.<sup>31</sup> As a law student in

Breslau, Franz Jung's passion for cards and drink, for example, led him to a "demi-monde of students, circus performers, artists, and waitresses." His nights out with this group often ended in the Café Royal, an establishment frequented by prostitutes.<sup>32</sup> Newspaper articles asserted that 50 to 75 percent of university-educated men visited bordellos, and of these 75 percent became infected with sexually transmitted diseases.<sup>33</sup>

In 1898, reformers began publicizing the high number of sexually transmitted diseases among students. In one study of 600 Berlin students, 25 percent were found to have sexually transmitted diseases. This statistic compares with 16.4 percent of "young businessmen," 3 to 4 percent of soldiers of the Berlin garrison, and, also more shocking to contemporaries, 30 percent of waitresses. The line between prostitute and waitress was gray, which meant that students' venereal disease rate was only slightly lower than semiprofessional sex workers.<sup>34</sup> Another study from 1905 using information collected from a Breslau university skin clinic (*Hautuniversitätsklinik*) suggested that Berlin's students were far from unique. Only 14 percent of the visitors to the clinic were celibate.<sup>35</sup> The pressures on students by fraternity fellows or the role model of men in fraternities might have played a role in student vice. University administrators investigated the possibility of an "official sex night" of one fraternity on the basis of reports in the periodical *Grenzboten*. The Prussian Ministry of Education and Religion took the article seriously enough to send out requests to each university asking if the authorities there had heard of such behavior. One rector admitted that when he was a student, members of his fraternity visited brothels together as a group. Rumors swirled around one fraternity in Bonn that allegedly "kept a girl" for the exclusive pleasure of its members.<sup>36</sup>

While these fraternity activities were universally condemned, it was integral to the concept of *Bildung* that (male) students themselves choose right and wrong, without the pressure of outside forces.<sup>37</sup> To uphold their roles as men in society, they must possess self-control. Because of his experience of the "freedom" of life without limitations, the student's eventual achievement of the "freedom" of complete self-mastery became all the more meaningful. Thus Professor Ziegler could argue that the person who was morally improving himself must work through a period in his life when he thinks through his position on morality and his own moral fiber. Ziegler further claimed that the individual could best work through his own moral values when he actually moved away from society's standards and was "allowed to stand freely against them; and it is for this reason that this state of living without fetters [*Zustand der Ungebundenheit*] is such a

happy circumstance for the development of the moral character.”<sup>38</sup> That the student tasted temptation himself and saw through its glittery attraction allowed him to resist it all the more effectively in the future. Because this period prepared students for their later role as leaders of the nation, it was important that professors, burghers, and reformers not interfere with students’ rights to drink, duel, loaf, and use their time as they saw fit.

This perspective was, it should be noted, not held throughout German society. Of course, it referred only to men, as Hauri’s title *Advice to Young Men* suggested. It was also a worldview particular to some liberal Protestants, or more specifically to German liberal Protestants. A recent comparative monograph that focused on Oxford and Heidelberg emphasizes the dramatic differences in attitudes toward morality. In Oxford, authorities restricted almost all public contact between male students and women.<sup>39</sup> German *men* had much more freedom. In Germany, conservative Protestants as well as most Catholics found much to criticize in this dominant view of student morality. Catholic student organizations defined their organizations specifically against the immorality and irreligious activities of the Burschenschaft and the Corps. Outside of the university, Catholic politicians condemned reformers who wanted to focus on venereal disease rather than sexual morality. At universities, representatives of Catholic fraternities, along with the Protestant Wingolf, the Protestant Schwarzbund, and reform groups, supported strict moral norms.<sup>40</sup>

The flexibility within student morality that had traditionally been a part of the understanding of students’ role as intellectual aristocracy of the nation conflicted with the changes that had taken place at the university. Women’s entry to higher education created a new class of students who under no circumstances could follow their male colleagues’ model. There are some suggestions that women within the Free Students (*Freiestudentenschaft*) tried to call for changes to student moral norms. The presence of women as students may well have also forced male students to confront the consequences of their behavior, which often left waitresses pregnant and shopkeepers’ daughters in disgrace as young men moved on to study elsewhere. Social Democratic newspapers also highlighted the hypocrisy of students’ arguments about sexuality and the consequences for the (often) working-class girls who developed relationships with university men. The new prominence of Catholic groups at universities and their strong stand in favor of traditional morality highlighted the inconsistencies between students’ actions and middle-class rhetoric. Members of the middle classes staked their claim to national leadership in part on their

strong moral values, values that some students apparently did not follow. Student newspapers also discussed the problem of prostitution and the importance of reform. In order to preserve their position within German society, the intellectual aristocracy of the German nation was forced to confront and possibly alter a traditional understanding of student sexual norms.<sup>41</sup>

## **I Am a Student**

“I am a student.” Within this is a sense of self that is similar only to the officer and nobility and [embodied] in this are the hundreds of years that turned the universities into knights’ castles, from which one proudly looked down on life down there where the plebeians and philistines lived their narrow and monotonous existence.

—Friedrich Naumann<sup>42</sup>

Students completed a unique education so that they might take their places as leaders of the nation. As the members of the intellectual aristocracy should possess some familiarity with a wide range of scholarship, students were advised that they should spend their first year at the university exploring a variety of disciplines. Only at that point should they commit themselves to a course of study. Professors writing on student life particularly recommended philosophy courses, since they were helpful in all courses of study and as a way to open students’ eyes to new ways of seeing the world. It was also important, they argued, to hear lectures on natural science and literature. Above all, students should study the classical world, where the student could reflect on, in Friedrich Paulsen’s words, “the highest patterns of art and taste.” Through a study of antiquity, the student could cultivate a “sense and taste for the beautiful and sublime in literature.”<sup>43</sup>

Other methods of acquiring this “sense and taste for the beautiful and sublime” required that the student leave the classroom and experience German culture in the world outside the university. Students could take advantage of discounted tickets for the theater, museums, zoos, and concerts. These consumption and cultural expectations were usually not beyond the reach of even lower middle-class students, and thus there was the democratic possibility that even such students could imagine themselves as part of the intellectual aristocracy. Rahel Straus, whose widowed mother could not provide for her education, earned extra money from tutoring Greek,

Latin, and science, and a wealthy uncle paid for her fees, room, and board. Enough money still remained for her to experience a bit of the student romance. She wrote in her memoir about her studies around 1900, "I never had any money, but so what! Everything was so inexpensive." She recalled that half an hour of rowing cost 15 Pfennig, "and since we rowed in twos and threes most of the time, this was almost nothing." A cup of coffee with cream at the confectionery in the afternoon cost 12 Pfennig, and "on the days that I received my tutoring money, we always had a special party."<sup>44</sup> Like Rahel Straus, many students enjoyed sports like swimming, rowing, ice-skating, and tennis.<sup>45</sup>

Not only physical activities shaped this intellectual aristocracy of the nation, but an emulation of Germany's cultural heroes. The histories of individuals like Goethe and Schiller filled fraternity newspapers, particularly descriptions of their experiences as students. These articles not only helped to buttress the student's conception as part of an intellectual aristocracy but also provided a road map for appropriate student behavior. The particular interest of romantic figures in nature, poetry, and music meant that these would be seen as the appropriate preoccupations of German students in the late nineteenth century. The traditional narrative of students' memoirs also almost always included a section on travel during university breaks. Together with his fellows, the student would set off on several-day hiking journeys, sleeping either outdoors or in the barns of friendly farmers. Through these journeys the student learned to appreciate Germany's landscape and Germany's people. The liberal publicist and pastor Friedrich Naumann suggested that on these travels the student should take the time to talk with the "modest people" (*kleine Leute*). Such interactions, according to Naumann, would help cement the leadership role of the educated middle class.<sup>46</sup> Surrounded by their professors as guides and along with their fellow students, the university students gained an appreciation and understanding of German culture, the German environment, and the German people.

Wealthy students often used their studies as a way to travel. Heidelberg was a particularly beloved destination, and in fact only 25 percent of students in Heidelberg had been born in Baden.<sup>47</sup> Julius Walter Levi remembered that the student was advised to avoid studying at just one university and "should hear many different perspectives in order to build his own."<sup>48</sup> Each university had its own particular reputation—Munich for the art and bohemian circles, Halle for the piety of the students, Jena for its intense fraternity life—and the student who visited more than one university could gain a well-rounded view of the experience of student life.<sup>49</sup>

Many universities became German nations in miniature. Because they were organized in nationwide federations, fraternities welcomed traveling students and organized gatherings where students met with others from across the country. Thus, unlike most other Germans, many fraternity members had the chance to form bonds of lifelong brotherhood with others from different regions.<sup>50</sup> Student fraternities, with their members from across Germany, saw themselves embodying the nation.

Because of the elite status of the student, pranks were often accepted as a part of student life. An example from Tübingen shows the great leniency accorded to students. Between 11 November 1898 and 15 February 1902, a medical student from Remels in Ostfriesland, Heinrich Sneider, received punishments from the authorities twenty-six times. The police fined him nineteen times for disturbing the peace, three times for unauthorized piano-playing after 11:00 p.m., and once for each of the following: “polluting/fouling the street,” “blocking traffic,” “making a public nuisance,” “driving a carriage without lights,” and “refusing to obey the order of a police officer.” He paid between 2 and 5 Marks for each offense. The special status of the student meant that only after Heinrich Sneider had physically threatened the rector did the university authorities finally expel him.<sup>51</sup>

As befitting an elite engaged in a common intellectual endeavor, students interacted with their classmates as equals. Students’ equal status and separation from the rest of society helped to cement their position as an intellectual aristocracy of the German nation. Writing in 1899, Professor Arnold Ruge claimed:

Student life and university life in general is freer, simpler, less a struggle for the ends and for material success, than all other milieus that one could enumerate. Within this lies a great cultural power. The student recognizes within his milieu no differences of rank [*Standesunterschiede*], if his father is an artisan or a government minister, no person would ask such a question; one is simply a student. If he has a larger or a smaller monthly allowance, this does not alter his standing among his fellows. These are not the standards of value that one is accustomed to in practical life. If he is Christian, if Catholic or Protestant, or if he is a Jew, he is a student and that’s that.<sup>52</sup>

For men like Ruge, students served as proof of Germany’s romantic soul in an age of materialism and rapid economic development. Despite the industrialization that had created great divisions in wealth and power within

German society, the student still ideally “recognizes no differences of rank within his milieu.” According to Friedrich Paulsen, “at the university one finds next to the sons of the aristocracy of birth and the aristocracy of wealth also the sons of farmers [*Bauern*] and artisans, village school teachers and petty officials [*kleinen Beamten*]. And it is a fact that they all feel and act in principle as equals.”<sup>53</sup> The life of the student seemed to evoke a time before the age of power politics, when Germans were known as dreamers, idealists, and romantic poets. The student milieu, removed from the materialism of the rest of society, along with the student’s intense engagement with literature, art, history, and nature, created a foundation for the students’ roles as the future leaders of German society, the defenders of German culture, and the intellectual aristocracy of the nation.<sup>54</sup>

Of course the reality of student life rarely lived up to these visions of the academic world. The lofty ideals themselves also contributed to arrogance. The exalted status of the student, combined with youthful pride and the idealization of *Bildung* that could not be measured, justified elitism. Some attributed a “cultivation of a sense and taste for the beautiful and sublime” to social status and family background rather than to intellectual merit. Furthermore, the distance between the ideal and the actual becomes particularly clear in a commonly accepted division of students into three groups: intellectuals, fraternity men, and “bread students” (*Brotstudenten*). Intellectuals seriously pursued *Bildung* and benefited from the academic freedom of German university life. Fraternity men often spent more time drinking and dueling than studying. The financially pressed “bread students” had to work as quickly as possible to complete their degrees before their money ran out.

Economic factors also shaped the hierarchies of fraternity life, and only those from the wealthiest families obtained entry into the most prestigious fraternities.<sup>55</sup> Within student life, the ideal of the cultivated student was explicitly set against not only the “bread student” but also the “striver.” Class prejudice also led students to expect these categories to go together.<sup>56</sup> The “striver” chose to ignore everything but his studies, focusing on achieving the best possible results on his exams. Such men were assumed to have a narrow mentality and were closed off to an ennobling appreciation of literature, art, music, or nature. Some argued that the university experience was wasted on such students. The “bread-student” and the “striver” played important roles within student consciousness as models against which they defined themselves.<sup>57</sup>

Misgivings about the “bread student” also related to concerns about the expansion of German higher education and the numbers of lower-middle-class students arriving at universities.<sup>58</sup> As living standards rose in the Wilhelmine era, it became possible for more members of the lower middle class to attend universities. Student fees did not usually pose a considerable barrier for study at universities. In the 1880s, the state funded 78 percent of the cost of education. Students paid their fees directly to their lecturers, but universities offered free courses, which allowed a student to avoid paying fees.<sup>59</sup> Universities also subsidized the fees of poor students. In academic year 1886 to 1887 this aid averaged 157 Marks per semester.<sup>60</sup>

Even though the fees were low, the costs of room and board eliminated the possibility of college education for most families. For 1899, Arnold Ruge broke down the monthly student budget as in table 1.<sup>61</sup> With an average worker’s salary at less than 100 Marks per month as late as 1913, this budget was beyond the means of most families. Moreover, university study also entailed further costs. Students required support both during their study at the university and during their year of military service. Law students finished their professional preparation with one to two years of unpaid internships.<sup>62</sup> Some teachers and pastors were forced to wait as many as several years before a free position opened up. Those who did not study would spend this time working, either contributing to their parents’ support or saving for their own families. It is also significant, however, that university study in Germany was more affordable than in England where students spent the equivalent of 400 to 500 Marks per month. In Germany, the costs of education still restricted university study to students who were already part of elite groups or to those whose families were prepared to make great sacrifices so that their children could attend universities.<sup>63</sup>

**TABLE 1. Typical Monthly Student Budget (in Marks)**

Simple, light, quiet room	25–30 M
Morning coffee	6–7 M
Lunch	37–40 M
Dinner	15–18 M
Morning and afternoon coffee breaks	6–7 M
Laundry, heating, lamp oil, and soap	15 M
Notebooks and writing paper	5 M
Leisure, including beer, cigars, theater, and concerts	15–20 M
Total	135–150 M/month

Source: Arnold Ruge, *Kristische Betrachtungen und Darstellung des deutschen Studentenlebens in seinem Grundzügen* (Tübingen, 1906).

## Student Life and Fraternities

In short, the active semester in the Corps [fraternity] has more value to them than all the wisdom in heaven, all the beauty of the earth, and all the scholarship and art of humanity. Whoever has lived it, has lived it all and more.

—Bilder aus Universitätsleben.<sup>64</sup>

In contrast to Anglo-American colleges, the German university provided no institutional support for students outside of the lecture halls. In England and the United States, students lived in dormitories where they ate, studied, and socialized. In contrast, German students made their way alone, with accommodation arranged with strangers or relatives.<sup>65</sup> Wealthy students would rent “students’ rooms” (*Studentenbuden*) in a boarding-house, usually composed of a small sitting room and a bedroom, often with their meals included in their rent.<sup>66</sup>

Memoirs also reveal that many students spent lonely first semesters. As a result of this institutional absence and the German passion for organizing, students formed myriad colorful and distinctive groups. Organizations constantly competed against one another for status and members. Otto Flake reported that at Strasbourg as soon as a new student’s name was entered into the official register of the university rolls, he would be sure to receive visits from fraternity chapters looking for pledges.<sup>67</sup> One student who had studied at Marburg in the 1890s remembered that all the students at the local high schools knew which student had pledged which fraternity.<sup>68</sup> In general, these groups can be divided into the fraternities (*Korporationen*) and the associations (*Vereine*). Most fraternities dueled, followed a strict set of rules (*Komment*), and bound their members to life-long brotherhood. In contrast to the ritual of fraternities, associations were organized more informally, often on the basis of one’s field of study or special interest. Members would meet several times a month, hear a lecture, and then socialize in a local pub. These groups could be as large as fifty or as small as six. Whether in fraternities, academic clubs, or looser social groupings, probably most students were involved in some kind of organization. Student organizations also formed federations of fraternities across universities. These helped to create a sense of commonality, break down the particularistic loyalties of some fraternity chapters, and create a strong sense of German nationalism.<sup>69</sup>

By the early twentieth century, associations often adopted some ele-

ments of fraternity life, and the dividing line between fraternities and associations was not as clear as it had been in earlier decades. Jacob Witkowski, for example, joined the Modern Linguistics Club, which had about twenty members. Although none of the members had any money, being “almost all penniless, living from fellowships, free meals, and tutoring jobs,” their financial situation did not affect their spirit or scholarly enthusiasm. Under the leadership of the older students, they practiced Germanic and romance languages together in small groups. Before every official meeting, a lecture was held, most often by students but sometimes by professors who took part in their meetings from time to time. On the special days, the anniversaries and Christmas parties, professors appeared in full strength. The presence of professors spurred students to follow traditional fraternity customs. As long as the professors were present, “procedure was followed strictly according to the rules of dueling fraternities, that is, drinking governed by the tyrannical authority of the pledge sergeant over the pledges and hard penalties [for failure to comply].”<sup>70</sup> By the early twentieth century, many associations like Witkowski’s had taken on the trappings of fraternity life, some going so far as to bind themselves to the code of honor requiring duels. The adoption of fraternity norms for an organization like Witkowski’s whose members were “almost penniless” suggests the ways that even poor students were following the ritualistic norms of student life, in part to secure their status within Germany’s intellectual aristocracy.

Student organizations date back to the early modern period with associations called *Landsmannschaften*, usually composed of students from the same region. The *Landsmannschaften* at Charles University in Prague in the sixteenth century divided into Bohemian, Polish, Saxon, and Bavarian groups. By the early nineteenth century, students rebelled against these organizations’ particularism, brutally enforced hierarchies, and oppression of pledges (*Pennalismus*). The *Landsmannschaften* had been notorious for terrorizing townspeople, both with practical jokes and out-and-out violence.<sup>71</sup> *Landsmannschaften* were also different than later fraternities in that they included no requirement for lifelong brotherhood. Also in contrast to later fraternities, they were inclusive and accepted all students who came from a particular region. The purpose of the early modern *Landsmannschaft* was to provide help and protection for the young student far away from friends and family, unlike later fraternities that put emphasis on the intellectual and moral education of the young man. In the late eighteenth century, Enlightenment thought also touched student cultures and helped to bring about the creation of new types of student organizations,

the student circles (*Kränzchen*) and societies closely connected with local Freemason lodges, which also helped to reshape the *Landsmannschaften*.<sup>72</sup>

Of nineteenth-century student organizations, the Corps could trace its lineage most directly to the *Landsmannschaften*.<sup>73</sup> Many early Corps chapters were formed from *Landsmannschaften* at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The first specific use of the French term *Corps* comes from Heidelberg in 1810, and with it students wanted to distinguish themselves both from the old tradition of the *Landsmannschaften* and (later) the new radical ideas of the *Burschenschaft*. Not only their long pedigree but also the background of their members made the Corps the most prestigious of student fraternities. With Bismarck and even the Emperor Wilhelm II as members, the men of the Corps took pride in their links to the aristocracy. The aristocratic members of the Corps, however, were concentrated in a few chapters at a few universities, especially in Bonn and Heidelberg. In 1899, in Bonn 30 of 116 members were of noble stock, in Heidelberg 77 of 150, in Munich 19 of 477, and in Tübingen 9 of 221.<sup>74</sup> Although only 8 percent of all Corps members descended from nobility, the Corps did dominate the civil service. According to the Corps newspaper in 1899, of the 142 highest positions in the civil service, Corps alumni filled 124. As some of the oldest societies and with members coming from the best families, the Corps could claim a special place at universities. In the German Empire, many Corps chapters refused to associate with other fraternities if the superiority of the Corps were not openly acknowledged.<sup>75</sup>

After the 1890s, the Corps faced not only internal but also strong and consistent external criticism. Their focus on fraternity activities rather than study made them a target for reformers. The criteria of family wealth and power required for admission to the Corps conflicted with ideal of merit inherent within *Bildung*. For many students, they could not represent student ideals, and by the 1890s with declining membership numbers and the competition from other organizations, alumni demanded change. By 1898, Corps men called for an alliance with the *Burschenschaft* to preserve their place within student life.<sup>76</sup> Despite the dramatic growth of the student body as a whole, the numbers of the Corps students remained consistent. As a proportion of all students, the Corps dropped from 7.9 percent in 1887 to 4.9 percent in 1914.<sup>77</sup> Their open arrogance and elitism, as well as the connections between the Corps and the conservative parties, meant that while Corps members held considerable prestige in society in general, they could no longer preserve their position as the clear leaders among students.

Second in status was the *Burschenschaft*, whose members took pride

in their history of nationalist activism from the early nineteenth century. They initially emerged as a reform organization and emphasized ethics, religion, and a moral life as a means to strengthen the German nation.<sup>78</sup> They brought together nationalism and a form of Protestantism with roots in Pietism. Freedom emerged as a central concept of the *Burschenschaft*—freedom in the double sense of inner freedom (the free development of the moral personality) and outer freedom (civil rights, freedom of speech, and constitutional government). Early *Burschenschaft* members also particularly emphasized the role of friendship and a democratic acceptance of all virtuous men without regard to social, economic, or religious background. These were the ideals of democracy, tolerance, and equality brought into the most intimate of spheres. In their view, it was the power of these friendship ties that gave *Burschenschaft* men the strength to take on tasks for the German nation as a whole. Through their organizations they were engaged in “cultivating a new, complete, and pure humanity.”<sup>79</sup> *Burschenschaft* members particularly distinguished themselves from the Corps by the willingness to engage in politics and, at least for the *Burschenschaft* of the early nineteenth century, a political stance that was Protestant, liberal, and German nationalist. In 1912, Heinrich von Treitschke described the differences between *Burschenschaft* men and Corps men as follows: “In general from the *Burschenschaft* have come more scholars and writers and from the ranks of their later opposition, the Corps, more men of state.”<sup>80</sup>

The first *Burschenschaft* chapters emerged in Jena at the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars. With patriotic sentiments riding high, five Corps chapters were dissolved on 29 May 1815 and then were reconstituted on 12 June 1815 as one fraternity with name of *Burschenschaft*. Between 1815 and 1817 new *Burschenschaft* chapters sprung up throughout German-speaking Europe, and many universities saw a battle for influence within the student body between *Burschenschaft* and Corps chapters.<sup>81</sup> On 19 October 1817 in the *Burschenschaft*’s most famous gathering, the Wartburg festival, chapters from across Germany celebrated the 300th anniversary of Luther’s posting of the Ninety-five Theses and the three-year anniversary of Germany’s participation in the victory over Napoleon at the Battle of Nations. The *Burschenschaft* represented one of the first national organizations with members from across German-speaking Europe. By 1818, their membership reached three thousand students, around a third of all students in the German Confederation (not including Austria, around 40 percent of all students).<sup>82</sup>

The history of the *Burschenschaft* in the early nineteenth century was

important as a model for students at the end of the century. The cultivation of nationalism in the Burschenschaft prepared the way, or so Burschenschaft men claimed, for the political German state of 1871.<sup>83</sup> Students saw themselves following in the footsteps of the Burschenschaft in their commitment to sacrifice for the good of the nation. Diverse groups such as the Free Students and the nationalist Union of German Students would later see themselves as heirs to the Burschenschaft legacy.

Approximately 35 percent of all students joined fraternities or associations with national federations, which kept exact membership numbers. Nine to ten thousand of these students, or approximately one-fourth of all students, belonged to organizations that “carried colors,” signaling their ability to duel.<sup>84</sup> Since some of these federations included chapters in Switzerland and Austria, their percentage of the German student population, however, is probably lower. Also, these fraternities were not evenly distributed across universities. In small and southern universities, more students joined fraternities, and in contrast, at large research institutions like Leipzig and Berlin fewer students chose to participate in fraternity life. The numbers of the looser associations are harder to measure since they quickly formed and dissolved. At Breslau, at least as many students joined associations as fraternities, while at Berlin, associations were far more popular. It would be safe to say that at least half of all students joined associations or fraternities, and if one included informal associations, the numbers may have been as high as two-thirds of all students.

Learning social graces was an important part of fraternity life. For male students, fraternity leaders could become models for behavior of all kinds: from table manners, to personal demeanor, to drinking cultures. In Münster, the university employed a dance teacher, and his contract noted that he must make himself available for clubs and fraternities before their special events.<sup>85</sup> The intellectual trust that fraternities fostered could also allow for a true exchange of ideas. In memoirs, students fondly remembered intense debates and discussions with their fraternity brothers and friends. Friedrich Meinecke saw his friendships as inseparable from his scholarship: “Often, if not always, it was my friendships that I valued and experienced more intensely than my scholarly efforts. Friendship and scholarship intertwined and supported each other, together with the inner transformations they brought about in me.”<sup>86</sup>

Recent research has suggested that becoming an ideal German man meant becoming a whole person with the entire range of human characteristics. In opposition to the Anglo-American world in which the ideology

of separate spheres emphasized the links between women and sensitivity, emotion, and faith, in the German context values associated with the exemplary man included friendship, love, religiosity, and creativity. At universities, the homosocial fraternities in which many men participated allowed for the embrace of ideals that were often associated with women—together with those that symbolized masculinity like the duel. In contrast to the Anglo-American context with private sphere of women and the public sphere of men, among German academic elites, the private was the sphere of youth and the public the sphere of full manhood. The separation of these realms related to stages of development of the young man. This formulation of the spheres as separate stages provides an interesting way of rethinking gender roles.<sup>87</sup>

The embrace of the “feminine” ideals of passion, sensitivity, love, and longing related directly to the cultural context of university life. The continuing importance of romantic poets and novelists helped to construct a model of masculinity with passion at its center. The ideal man felt beauty deeply, loved intensely, lived fully, and experienced the extremes of emotions. In their transgression of gender norms, educated elites became whole men and thus a spiritual aristocracy superior to other groups. Men like the law professor Rudolf von Ihering (1818–92) wrote critically in his autobiography of some of his fellows who did not embrace these passions, were “dry icebergs” and “‘leathery’ arch-jurists.”<sup>88</sup> Especially after German unification with universal suffrage, gender was the defining criterion for political participation. Claiming an ideal form of masculinity allowed these elite educated men, together with their fellows united in lifelong brotherhood, to distance themselves from other groups in German society.

If fraternities were an institutional form of friendship itself, it becomes easier to understand their significance within university life. As we have seen, in Jacob Witkowski’s Modern Linguistics Club, students performed fraternity rituals especially rigidly when professors were present, which suggests the links between fraternity and intellectual life. Both associations and fraternities inculcated their members with the idea that their organizations were essential academic institutions. Even the members of organizations with fifteen participants would write their histories, and by the mid-1890s all nationwide federations had their own newspapers, usually appearing twice monthly. One survey in 1904 projected a circulation of 70,000 copies of seventy-two newspapers, this at a time that the total number of students at universities and technical colleges was 56,000.<sup>89</sup> These publications were also placed in local bars and in the student libraries,

which allowed them to reach larger audiences than their circulation figures suggest. Organizational newspapers informed students and alumni about meetings and upcoming events and also included several long lead articles. Along with fraternity rituals and annual celebrations, newspapers helped to cement the role of student organizations as central institutions within universities. By informing members about the histories of their organizations, describing the accomplishments of the alumni and associates of their groups, and explaining the values and the ceremonies of student life, the writers for these newspapers aided in the creation of the lifelong bonds of fraternity members and helped to construct the ideal of the intellectual aristocracy of the nation.

## Conclusion

This chapter has explored student life and its complexities with the aim of showing the essential importance of the student for larger political events. The unique German student life—the freedom, the colorful pageantry, and the pursuit of cultivation—helped to shape students' views of themselves as the intellectual aristocracy of the nation. In a period of rapid change, the student with a focus on *Bildung* and freedom was (or so many assumed) the living embodiment of Germany's romantic past and at the same time its physical future. The idea of academic freedom, the central value of the German university and the liberal middle class, also seemed directly associated with youth: the reflection of a youthful spirit of truth and honesty. With their picturesque parades and dramatic duels, students reminded Germans of their poetic history.

This chapter has also provided an overview of some important student fraternities. For this book, an understanding of fraternities and associations is significant because these groups, and in particular the *Burschenschaft* and *Corps*, dominated student life. On the Sunday stroll, when fraternities walked as groups in full costume, and at the university celebrations, when fraternities dominated the festivities, these groups symbolically acted out their privileged and honored place at the university. As the carriers of the *Burschenschaft* legacy, and in many cases as strong nationalists, they also staked out a claim as the vanguard of the nation.

Together with the students' association with nationalism and pageantry, it was the life of full freedom that allowed students to present themselves as part of an intellectual aristocracy of the nation. Although

this full freedom theoretically could link students with the aristocracy of birth, for at least most students and their professors this freedom was seen as a consistent with a future of middle-class respectability. As a central part of university study, it was necessary for intellectual growth. By examining students' sexual behavior, it is possible to see the lengths to which many took this embrace of freedom. At the same time, this example highlights the distinction between the aristocracy of birth and the intellectual aristocracy. For students, this period of sexual experimentation was to be limited to the years of study and was to provide the foundation for an even more secure embrace of middle-class morality later in life. Such an interpretation of student norms had the potential to draw students closely together in their sense of common complicity in transgressing society's moral norms, but as we have seen, it also created new tensions within student society as groups like Catholics or women voiced their objections. The moves toward reform common in much of student society after 1900 represent a democratic impulse within student life and a consideration of the consequences of student sexual norms for the women in the student milieu. The next chapter continues the focus on gender and student politics and examines student ritual forms. For many male students, especially as women finally were officially admitted to university study, it became more important to rely on student rituals and performance to cement social status. The reforms in the ritual of the duel and the development of honor courts also shed light on liberal trends within student life. It is to these rituals that we turn in chapter 2.