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# How did the use of propaganda affect the development of Nazi Germany as a single-party state?

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How Did the Use of Propaganda Affect the Development of Nazi Germany as a Single-Party State?

By

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IB History HL 2

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March 3, 2013

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3 March 2013

## **Plan of Investigation**

**How did the use of propaganda affect the development of Nazi Germany as a single-party state?**

During World War II, Germany was a single party state led by Adolf Hitler. The Nazis were responsible for the worst genocide of the 21st century when they persecuted Jewish people throughout Europe. The use of propaganda through different media outlets, like newspapers and comic books, influenced the opinions of many citizens of Germany and affected the country's rise as a single party state. The aim of this investigation is to look at the scope of how propaganda in the media affected the development of Nazi Germany as a single party state. The investigation will look at different types of propaganda, as well as the people who created it, and how propaganda could have influenced the people of Germany during its publication or creation.

## **Summary of Evidence**

In the time between World Wars I and II, Germany was a nation filled with turmoil. Hitler and the Nazis' mentality was that propaganda should "embrace every medium for inspiring or demoralizing the mind, from the most obscene article in the gutter press and the latest song-hit, to the radio scripts of the wireless commentators" (Sington 36). Before

there was a Nazi Party, Hitler was a member of the German Worker's Party, where he was "appointed the party's propaganda and publicity man. . . Hitler laboriously pounded out invitations to its meetings and dropped them in the letter boxes of influential political supporters" in order to gain renown for his group that would later become the Nazi Party (Jones 234-235). As the leader of the Nazi Party, Hitler employed many techniques such as creating symbols, newspapers and his own delivery of speeches to captivate the German audience (Hoffman 74-75). He even used the increasing popularity of wireless radios and film to spread his political influence (Bergmeier 3; Hoffman vi). Even though Hitler's ideas were not groundbreaking, "What was new was the attention Hitler paid to presentation, how he said something rather than what he said. Hitler believed that unlike a newspaper, a film or even a radio address, a speaker appearing before an audience could form a direct and personal contact with the listeners. . . Hitler fed off and channeled the emotions of the crowd, avoided condescending to them, and strove to express people's own thoughts" (Bachrach 32). He was even able to allow his ideas to reach multiple audiences by the way he presented information and make a powerful image of himself (Bachrach 35 & 39).

The Nazis also ". . . moved away from the wordy broadsides with visually confusing images used by most of their political opponents to create posters with strong, vibrant, colorful images and simple slogans, like 'Work and Bread,' to catch the eye" and further influence the public (Bachrach 39). They rarely even wanted people to convert to their doctrines; it was more effective to fit the propaganda to certain social groups and influence people based on their interests or characteristics (Farago 168). To get the Germans to follow him, Hitler

“set out to persuade their fellow- countrymen that Germany had been treated shamefully and monstrosly by the Allies and must someday reassert herself and restore her ‘honour’” that was taken away by the Treaty of Versailles at the end of World War I (Fraser 85).

The establishment of a Party Propaganda Department and other organizations spread the Nazi ideals throughout all parts of German society and daily life. The Propaganda Ministry “obtained. . . supervisory powers over the press and the radio, . . .right to proclaim and regulate national holidays and. . . censorship of plays, books and films for immorality. . . the Propaganda Ministry took over all the commercial advertising activities conducted by the State. . .” (Sington 80-81). Hitler “. . . appointed Josef Goebbels a member of the German Government and established under him a Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda. With this signature an institution was born which was to control the written and spoken word in Germany, to direct every medium of expression, and to advertise German economic and political activities at home and abroad” (Sington 78). For Germany, “. . . the Propaganda Ministry in the whole machine for controlling and creating public opinion might be compared with that of the Ministry of War. It coordinates, plans, and is responsible for the smooth carrying out of the whole propaganda effort of the German Government. The Party Propaganda Department, on the other hand is comparable with the General Staff of an army which actually directs operations and musters and organizes the forces and their supplies and ammunition” (Sington 83) “The simultaneous holding of high Party and State offices by the same individual and the officially promoted interchange of prominent officials between the Party Propaganda Department and the Propaganda

Ministry guarantees a balance of power between State and Party:  
Goebbels is not only the Minister. . . he is pledged to further the  
uncompromising and ruthless aims of the Party” (Sington 83).

### **Evaluation of Sources**

Germany Between Two Wars: A Study of Propaganda and War-guilt is a book by Lindley Fraser studying Germany from the end of World War I to the outbreak of World War II. The origin of this source is an analysis of the actions of the German government and how they used propaganda to shape the opinions of the public. The purpose of this source is to show the people of German society the extent to which they were misled by the government’s propaganda campaigns. The value of this source is that it looks at all aspects of the gap between the World Wars, and was written around the time of the events that it describes. At the same time, this could be a limitation to the source because it was written a short time period after the actual events, and therefore sheds no light on how propaganda influenced Germany during World War II and after.

The Goebbels Experiment: A Study of the Nazi Propaganda Machine is a book by Derrick Sington and Arthur Weidenfeld that studies Goebbels and the inner workings of the departments that controlled the distribution and management of German propaganda. It documents the hierarchy of government officials, who was in charge of propaganda, and how it was distributed. The purpose is to inform people about the inner workings of Germany and how propaganda was shown to all of it’s citizens, as well as explaining the extent of the media the Nazis were in

control of. The value of this source is that it was written immediately after the time period when the events occurred and government departments that it describes, so it captures the feelings and opinions of the people experiencing it. The limitation is also that it stays strictly in its own time period, and cannot give any information about how Nazi propaganda affected Germany as a country in the future, after the Propaganda Ministry was dissolved.

### **Analysis**

Hitler was skilled at harnessing different types of propaganda because of his experience with the German Worker's Party, making him good at persuading people to think his way. He realized that he could get people to be on his side if he advertised his party, and this helped the Nazis gain popularity and followers in Germany. Hitler also regulated every part of German society with propaganda, such as films and radio, forcing the citizens to listen or see it all day, every day. If a person were constantly surrounded by media telling them what to believe, they would eventually listen to what it was telling them. Hitler tailored his speeches to his audience. If he would have used the same speech on everyone, his propaganda technique would not have been as effective. Since all people are not the same, not all citizens of Germany would have reacted in the same way to a speech. For example, "Antisemitism was always a central Nazi tenet, yet Hitler and other leaders realized that not all Germans responded to their strident anti-Jewish messages. . . In other places, however, the Nazis played down antisemitism or left it out almost entirely from their propaganda campaigns" (Bachrach 39 & 42). By varying his speeches for who he was speaking to, he was able to appeal

to a wider range of Germans, and unite as many people as possible under the beliefs of his Nazi Party.

Also, by using bright colors and slogan techniques, the Nazi Party was able to make their doctrines and propagandas memorable to the people of Germany. This influenced them because the propaganda was in all of the films and posters. Since all of the advertising available was for the Nazi Party, people would be more susceptible to being influenced by it, especially if they saw it everyday. Furthermore, “The uniformed, easily influenced mind of the child is quickly and deeply impressed by colour, music, flags, lighting and ceremony” (Sington 60). Children are more easily influenced by what they see in the media, as is apparent with the children of today being influenced by violent video games. If Nazi propaganda was so prevalent in German culture, the children would be more likely to agree with what it was saying and become followers of the Nazi Party since they believe everything they hear.

Since Hitler also made every speech a big production, he was able to create public interest in what his message was. As he gave his speeches, “What distinguished their delivery from the generally tedious speeches of democratic politicians was their forcefulness, vision and mesmerizing emotionalism” (Hoffman vi). With his speeches being spectacles full of theatrics, like emotional tones and background music, made the audience intrigued by his antics and not as focused on the doctrines that he was preaching.

Hitler’s main controller of propaganda, Josef Goebbels, infused propaganda into every aspect of German culture, to make the Nazi ideals inescapable. Most historians see Goebbels as an effective propagandist as



he was able to make Nazi ideals widespread throughout Germany. On the other hand, according to Mark Weber: “It is also common to imagine that, however skilled, Goebbels was little more than a clever ranter who won support from his countrymen by appealing to base feelings of envy, revenge, conceit and arrogant pride” (Weber, “Goebbels’ Place in History”). Weber shows that some people did not find Goebbels or his propaganda methods effective, and that without these emotions being prevalent in the hearts of the German people, he would not have been effective at instilling the Nazi ideology into them.

Another way the Nazis were able to control the minds of their people, and even influence the citizens of other nations that they had invaded, was through the film industry. They were successful with this tactic because “By over-running the greater part of Europe and virtually blockading some of the neutral countries the Germans have secured domination over the whole European film market” (Sington 209). This allowed the German government and its propaganda agencies to glorify their actions and spread their party doctrines to a large number of people. For example, war films filled with shots of soldiers on the battle fronts could instill pride in the Germans. The Propaganda Ministry’s control of the film market meant that every time a citizen saw a film, they were exposed to the propaganda presented in it, like the anti Semitic tendencies of the characters. The influence of the Nazis over broadcasts was also helpful to get their ideas into the minds of citizens as radio was very popular during and between the world wars. Since people listened to radios for entertainment, they would be under the influence of Nazi propaganda, even in the privacy of their own homes.

## Conclusion

The use of propaganda in Germany clearly affected its rise as a single party state. Hitler's early work as a creator of propaganda made him realize how important it was to becoming a leader, and the way he spoke instilled reverence in all who heard him. The creation of a propaganda ministry further influenced society in Germany, as every aspect of their culture was infiltrated with Nazi propaganda including film, radio and advertisements.

**Word count: 1985**

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