

National Socialism and Hitler's Nazi Party

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German dictator Adolf Hitler (center) went to Munich on November 9, 1938, with 3,000 "old fighters" from all parts of Germany to commemorate the unsuccessful Nazi uprising of 1923. Ap Photo

National Socialism was a totalitarian movement led by Adolf Hitler. It is also called Nazism. Hitler was the head of the Nazi Party in Germany. National Socialism had mass appeal, hostility toward outsiders, and rule by dictatorship. The charismatic dictator Hitler was the sole source of inspiration for people and the nation. The goal of the Nazi party was to destroy all enemies of the Aryan people and help the Nazis take back from other European countries what they thought were their historic homelands.

Roots of National Socialism

Germany was once called Prussia. In the 17th through 19th centuries, Prussians regarded the spirit and the discipline of the Prussian army as the model for all life. Prussians also embraced political romanticism and instinct and the past over reason. These traditions were later reinforced by the 19th-century adoration of science and of the laws of nature, which seemed to operate independently of all ideas of good and evil. Further

reinforcements came from such 19th-century intellectual figures who made claims of the racial and cultural superiority of the “Nordic” (Germanic) peoples over all other Europeans and all other races.

Hitler’s view was influenced during his youth by these currents in the German tradition, but also by specific Austrian political movements. They were pro-German and anti-Semitic. Hitler’s ferocious nationalism, his contempt for eastern European people, and his hatred of the Jews (a Semitic people) largely began with his bitter experiences as an unsuccessful artist. He lived a threadbare existence on the streets of Vienna, the capital of the multiethnic Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The propaganda of Hitler and Nazis

This intellectual preparation would probably not have been enough for the growth of National Socialism in Germany if not for that country’s defeat in World War I. The defeat and the resulting disillusionment, poverty, and frustration paved the way for the success of the propaganda of Hitler and the Nazis. The Treaty of Versailles (1919), the formal settlement of World War I, was written without German participation. It alienated many Germans with its harsh penalties. From the beginning, Hitler’s propaganda called for revenge for this “traitorous” act, through which the German people had been “stabbed in the back.” His call for building the army had strong appeal within the German military, which regarded the peace only as a temporary setback in Germany’s plans to expand. The ruinous inflation of the German currency in 1923 wiped out the savings of many middle-class households and led to further public dissatisfaction.

Hitler added to German hopes by declaring his faith in the mission of the German race. In Hitler’s book “Mein Kampf” (written from 1925 to 1927; “My Struggle”), he outlined both his goals and his theories of race and propaganda.

Playing on people's fears

A picture of Nazi Party leader Adolf Hitler in 1937. [Click to enlarge]

The growth of communist power in the Soviet Union (now Russia) aroused fear in Germany and around the world. Many people in Europe and the U.S. thought communism was a threat to their way of life. Hitler exploited those fears by saying he would defend Europe against communism. This won him the support of many conservative people who misunderstood how totalitarian his movement was.

Hitler’s had a deep understanding of how people think and what makes them angry and afraid. He stressed the fact that all propaganda must be able to reach even the least intelligent people and that its truthfulness is much less important than its success.

Movement rejected human rights

Hitler identified the Jews with both Russian communism and evil. The Jews were to be discriminated against not according to their religion but according to their “race.” National Socialism declared the Jews to be forever fundamentally different from and harmful to Germans.

National Socialism rejected democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and all movements of international cooperation and peace. Instead, it stressed instinct, the subordination of the individual to the state, and blind obedience to leaders appointed from above. It also emphasized the inequality of men and races and the right of the strong to rule the weak. It sought to suppress other political or religious views.

Totalitarianism and expansionism

The Nazi Party originated in 1919 and was led by Hitler from 1920. The party came to power in Germany in 1933 and governed through totalitarian methods until 1945, when Hitler committed suicide and Germany was defeated and occupied by the Allies at the close of World War II.

The history of National Socialism after 1934 can be divided into two periods of about equal length. Between 1934 and 1939 the party established full control of all phases of life in Germany. The public welcomed the government provided by the Nazis. The jobless were put to work in extensive public projects like building roads and an affordable national car (Volkswagen) and rapidly multiplying factories for guns and weapons. Germans were swept up in this mass movement designed to make Germany great again. Economic recovery from the effects of the Great Depression and forceful German patriotism were key factors in National Socialism’s appeal. Further, Hitler’s continuous string of diplomatic successes and foreign conquests from 1934 through the early years of World War II secured the unqualified support of most Germans, including many who had previously opposed him.

The power of manipulation

Despite its economic and political success, National Socialism maintained its power by manipulation. The Nazi regime disseminated continual propaganda through all media. Its rallies — especially its elaborately staged Nürnberg rallies — were designed to show power. The underside of its propaganda machine was terror, with its secret police and concentration camps. It encouraged German anti-Semitism to make the Jews a symbol of all that was hated and feared. The Nazis portrayed the Jews as the enemy of society.

National Socialism unified all police and security organizations. Opponents of the regime were labeled as enemies. Special detention camps were created. In these camps, the Nazi police had supreme authority and introduced a system of sadistic brutality unrivaled in modern times. The Nazis killed millions of Jews and other people in the Holocaust.

Germany's invasion of Poland on September 1, which initiated World War II, was the logical outcome of Hitler's plans. His first years were spent preparing the Germans for the struggle for world control and building up Germany's military, and then he aimed to unite all people of German descent within their historical homeland. His next step was acquiring enough land for Germany to become economically self-sufficient and militarily unstoppable. There, the Germans would rule over other peoples ruthlessly. His military campaigns of 1939-41 were successful, so his vision expanded into other continents and eventually the entire world.

Germany defeated in 1945

The extravagant hopes of Nazism came to an end with Germany's defeat in 1945, after nearly six years of war. National Socialism as a mass movement effectively ended on April 30, 1945, when Hitler committed suicide to avoid falling into the hands of Soviet troops completing the occupation of Berlin. Germany was divided until 1990, though remnants of National Socialist ideology remained in Germany after Hitler's suicide, and a small number of Nazi-oriented political parties and other groups were formed in West Germany from the late 1940s. In the 1990s, gangs of neo-Nazi youths in eastern Germany staged attacks against immigrants, desecrated Jewish cemeteries, and engaged in violent confrontations with protestors and police.

Quiz

- 1 Which of the following sentences from the article BEST develops a central idea?
- (A) National Socialism had mass appeal, hostility toward outsiders, and rule by dictatorship.
 - (B) Many people in Europe and the U.S. thought communism was a threat to their way of life.
 - (C) The history of National Socialism after 1934 can be divided into two periods of about equal length.
 - (D) The extravagant hopes of Nazism came to an end with Germany's defeat in 1945, after nearly six years of war.

- 2 Read the sentence from the section "The propaganda of Hitler and Nazis."

From the beginning, Hitler's propaganda called for revenge for this "traitorous" act, through which the German people had been "stabbed in the back."

Does this sentence support a central idea of the article? Why or why not?

- (A) Yes, it explains why German people supported World War II.
 - (B) Yes, it shows how Hitler drew on people's pain and anger to gain power.
 - (C) No, it does not show Hitler's massive influence on public opinion.
 - (D) No, it does not relate to the establishment of National Socialism.
- 3 Read the final paragraph of the article.
- Out of the following, which is the MAIN reason the author chose to conclude the article with this paragraph?
- (A) to explain why the Nazi Party ended after the death of Hitler
 - (B) to describe the lasting impact of the National Socialist ideology in Germany
 - (C) to provide information on which country eventually defeated Hitler and the Nazis
 - (D) to show that once Hitler was defeated, Germany was split into East and West

- 4 What is the MOST LIKELY reason for including information about Hitler's "threadbare existence" as an artist in the section "Roots of National Socialism"?
- (A) to inform readers about Hitler's early life
 - (B) to demonstrate Hitler's ineffectiveness as an artist
 - (C) to show that Hitler was not always respected
 - (D) to show Hitler's character and his resentment over his failure