

Was adolf hitler a madman or genius?

[People](#), [Adolf Hitler](#)



A genius is defined as someone possessing an “ extraordinary power of intellect, imagination or invention.” Few people in history can complete this definition and be given the title of ‘ genius’. Among this cadre of intellectuals, visionaries and innovators, we discover a figure most unexpectedly. A small man, wearing an awkward moustache, by no means imposing an air of intelligence upon observers as many would expect a genius to do. ‘ Genius’ is not the first title which comes to mind when the name ‘ Adolf Hitler’ is mentioned, in truth, it is probably one of the last.

Fuhrer of Germany’s Third Reich, he is undoubtedly the world’s most hated man, and yet elements of genius are ingrained in his persona.

Hitler, in the final dozen years of his life, was irrefutably evil. However he was not born with this attitude, nor the racial prejudices he is hardheartedly remembered for. Born in 1889 Braunau, Austria, to Klara Hitler and the customs official Alois Schickelgruber, Adolf was the first child of the union.

Klara was Schickelgruber’s third wife, and of Schickelgruber’s children from previous marriages two of the three died in childhood, while the third died still an infant.

Adolf’s mother ‘ showered’ him with love. This was in contrast to his father, who, in keeping with the manners of the time, beat his son regularly . The family moved to Passau, then Hafeld, Adolf lived, for a short six month period, across from a Benedictine Monastery. Among the symbols in its coat of arms, a swastika, also of note is Hitler’s childhood ambition to become a priest. Looking back, it is true that childhood experiences manifest themselves in someone’s character, though not absolutely.

At the turn of the century, Adolf was a budding artist, and attended Realschule, where his talents, instead of blossoming, promptly decayed. By age 16, he had dropped out of Realschule entirely, his poor grades not offering enough encouragement to justify staying. This disturbance in his life was compounded upon the death of his father two years earlier, and would be further upset when his mother died in 1907.

After quitting school, Adolf lived the life of a vagrant. He wandered Vienna for the better part of five years. With virtually nothing to his name, Hitler began painting postcards and living off the meager profits. Soon after, he would abandon art entirely, his dream was never realized, and never would be, he was sucked into the thrall of politics. He gained most of his knowledge of politics and debate during this period in his life, as well as the foundation of his racist views. Penniless and depressed, with a future that was hardly promising, Hitler, like countless others, blamed the Jews for his misfortunes. His misfortune was amplified by his surroundings, Vienna was prosperous, and the working class was smaller than in most European cities. Propaganda supporting this view was easily obtainable; Vienna was a pulsing centre of anti-Semitism at the time.

Though at first he avoided the Austrian draft, Hitler was sent back by German police. He failed the physical exam and returned to Germany. He enlisted with the Bavarian army and first saw battle at Ypres, wounded in 1916, he would return to the trenches briefly before suffering an Allied mustard gas attack. Blinded, Hitler was in hospital at the end of the war. It was here, at an army hospital, not a psychiatric centre, that Hitler was diagnosed as a “ psychopath with hysterical symptoms,” though this

diagnosis can hardly be called admissible, considering the qualifications of the examiners, and the mustard gas-induced state he was in.

In spite of his difficulties, The Great War saved Hitler. His passionate hate of what he deemed lesser races like the Jews and Slavs spurred his intense national devotion. He was awarded two Iron Crosses for bravery, praise for a job well done, although it was all little consolation to the defeated.

When Hitler left the care of the hospital, he came into a different Germany than the one he left. It was certainly not the nation he had fought for, now he saw a nation controlled by anarchy. Among the political groups fighting for power, the communists, of whom Hitler quickly developed a hatred rivaling his previously formed opinions on Jews. Hitler, like many other Germans, communists and nationalists, was humiliated by the Versailles treaty, and unhappy with the Weimar Republic.

Paramilitary groups sprouted in Germany, and under orders from one such group, Hitler was first exposed to the German Worker's Party. Assigned to act as a spy, he soon found parallels between the ideologies presented in the party and his own. Anti-Semitism was a main platform of the German Worker's Party, and Hitler magnified its importance after his quick rise to leadership within the party. His first speech, given in October 1919, was powerful enough to transform the German Worker's Party from a mere discussion group to a true political party. In February of the next year, Hitler outlined the party program; among the major points were undoing the Versailles Treaty, and the denial of human rights to Jews. The audience of about 2000 was enthralled by the motivational speaking of Hitler; their

response sparked what would become the greatest oratorical career of the century.

The National Socialist German Worker's Party, as it was renamed, had found its leader, who was developing what the world would know as Nazism. Now in the early 1920s, the world hardly paid notice to Hitler, a simple street corner orator, though looking back it is plain to see that he laid out his plans for all to see. He had warned the world of what would happen in a Germany under Hitler's rule, yet he was for the most part ignored.

Hitler was flourishing in his new forum of political speaking, and, at the peak of his confidence, led the Beer Hall Putsch. This was following the influx of interest in the Nazi party, inflation running wild; they seemed a welcome alternative to the current mismanagement of the Weimar Republic. In only a decade, the value of the mark had fallen significantly, now, in 1923, a single American dollar could buy 50 000 marks. With the Brownshirts and Erich Ludendorff behind him, Hitler marched on the Bavarian government, hoping to then take Berlin in similar fashion. But a membership of thousands, sympathizers numbering many more, an inspired leader, and poor economic conditions could not provide Hitler with the Bavarian government. He was injured, dislocating and breaking his arm, and tried for treason.

Hitler had seemingly gone from the peak of popularity to the level of a common criminal, yet his hopes were renewed when he was given a public trial. He used the trial as a vessel of publicity, and the German people, for the most part, empathized with Hitler, as a result, he was given a mere five year sentence. He served less than a fifth of his lenient punishment,

another reason he saw for the overthrow of his government, treason was a serious offense, and should be punished as so.

In his short time in Landsberg prison, Hitler managed to write *Mein Kampf*, with the aid of close friend Rudolph Hess. *Mein Kampf*, a supposed autobiography of the Nazi leader, was, to the disappointment of publishers, hardly biographical at all. It was instead an incredibly long, monotonous, explanation of Hitler's political ideals. Yet again, Hitler had laid out, plain for all to see, his plans should Germany ever fall into his hands. However, it is unlikely anyone took anymore notice now than in the days of his first speeches for the German Worker's Party, the book did terribly, at least in its first years. The early thirties would see sales make a momentous leap upwards.

From the time of Hitler's release and reorganization of the Nazi party until the stock market crash of 1929, Germans were becoming more and more disinterested with Hitler's party and their aims. All this was reversed following the crash in 1929. Nations around the world were thrown into a chaotic down spiral, and in Germany, Hitler was prepared to save the people from this apparently inevitable horrid fate of lifelong poverty.

The problems plaguing the world were complex, there was no quick fix for the depression, yet Hitler had found one. His promise of restoring Germany to its past glory, and rescuing her from the depression was embraced wholeheartedly by the German population. In 1930, the fortunes of the Nazis turned sharply, their previous 12 seats in the Reichstag were increased to 107, and they were now an acknowledged power in German politics.

With Hitler playing at politically maneuvering himself into power, as opposed to leading a rebel movement that would overthrow the government, the Reichstag was no longer as strong as it was when Hindenburg first came to power. Masterfully employing his political power, Hitler had soon painted Hindenburg into a corner. In January, 1933, President Hindenburg regrettably called Hitler to be Chancellor of the Reichstag.

As Chancellor of the Reichstag, Hitler was able to place Nazi minds in power in the right places. Goering was the minister of interior in Prussia, and Frick the minister of interior of the Central Government, with the addition of Werner von Blomberg in the ministry of defense, Hitler had Germany under his thumb. Only a month following his appointment, Hitler took emergency powers at the approval of Hindenburg. The privileges bestowed on Hitler through these emergency powers enabled him to drive the last nails through the coffins of his opposition with ease.

The emergency powers were handed to Hitler following the Reichstag Fire, lit by Marinus van der Lubbe, allegedly a communist, who confessed to the crime following Gestapo torture. It is common opinion that van der Lubbe was a Nazi puppet, set up to commit the crime and further Hitler's consolidation of power.

Political enemies of the Nazis were quickly disposed of; the culmination of these was the Rohm purge in the summer of 1934. The purge killed major army officers whose dedication to the Nazi's cause was questionable, leaders within the Brownshirts, and most significantly, Ernst Rohm. With his SA dismantled, military officers in Germany trusted Hitler more readily; he

formed a bond with the army, who had been threatened by the presence of an independent force like the SA.

Hitler had been ruthless in taking power. All emotions that he might have had were set aside, he let nothing interfere with his rapid gains in power. This was perfectly exemplified when he ordered the murder of Rohm, a friend, certainly dedicated to Hitler, who was killed to secure power for the Nazis in the future. Hitler had established himself as a merciless leader of the Reichstag, and he continued this style of rule when he took total control of Germany in 1934 following Hindenburg's death.

Now dictator of Germany, it was only a matter of time before the tirades of rage and authoritarianism shown in *Mein Kampf* were seen first hand by the German people.

Fuhrer of Germany, the Third Reich, Hitler quickly began spreading his influence throughout the population. With Himmler in charge of the police force which would enforce Hitler's rule, the German people were ripe to accept Hitler's new ideas. His ideas were seen in an increasingly favourable light because of the expertly created propaganda of Joseph Goebbels. The truest sign that Hitler had won over the people of Germany was the Nuremberg rally of 1934, it was something new to the political stage, was formed from the mind of Hitler which was so well attuned to propaganda, and it worked wonders to his advantage. Hitler now had an unconditionally loyal following, with this accomplished, he turned his attentions away from German soil.

Hitler still spared some attention for his homeland, Germany must be prepared for what he had planned; he began denying rights to Jews, enforcing a series of acts which would culminate on Kristalnacht. He also formed alliances with Mussolini in Italy, and the Japanese. Together, Hitler and Mussolini aided Franco in the Spanish Civil War, hoping to give fascism another voice in the world. Hitler was planning for war, which should have been obvious to any interested observer at the time, many of his actions could not be otherwise justified.

Arguably the most important actions leading up to World War II were Hitler's occupation of neighboring territories. Marching troops into the demilitarized Rhineland, Hitler offered a direct challenge to the French, who did nothing to halt their disrespect of the Versailles Treaty. After a failed coup in his native Austria, he managed to seize control in 1938. He also negotiated the occupation of the Sudetenland in the 1938 Munich Conference; this conquest would be followed in 1939 with the whole of Czechoslovakia, and the greater part of Poland.

In the five years between his crowning as Fuhrer and the invasion of Poland, Hitler never ceased to complete the goals outlined in Mein Kampf. The humiliation of the Versailles Treaty was abandoned as the Nazi regime continued to defy it. The construction of submarines and war planes was prohibited, yet Hitler continued with these programs, he also expanded the German army, readying for war. In 1935, he had instituted laws which made Jews German citizens no more. This supplanted the Jews' place in society, soon they were the target of the anger pent up inside the German people.

Hitler himself did not devise all the achievements of the Nazi regime, but he had foresight and was able to ascertain who could best serve his needs. None other than Himmler could control the German police or the SS with the same cruelty desired by Hitler. Goebbels produced propaganda which mesmerized the public with the glory of the Third Reich, a near impossible task for most in his field at the time. And the appointment of first Dr. Hjalmar Schacht as the minister of economics, who managed to save the Reichsmark, and find the money to fund extensive military production, as well as save a failing economy. After Schacht, Goebbels took over, instituting a four year plan, which would make Germany self sufficient by 1940 . These two men were influential in the success of Hitler's reign, he would not have retained popularity had he not been able to deliver upon the promises he had made.

All of this was a mere prelude to war. With a carefully negotiated non-aggression pact in place with the Soviets, alliances with Japan and Italy, and both Austria and Czechoslovakia under Nazi control, Europe was nearly defenseless. Only the French and the British would stand against Hitler in response to his attack on Poland.

Hitler employed Blitzkrieg against the Poles and then the French, moving quickly, fighting a new kind of war that none of the Nazi's foes were prepared for. Poland fell to the superior German forces in a month, and Hitler carefully circumvented the Maginot Line to conquer France in 1940. Soon he had Denmark and Norway and in the summer of 1940, at the peak of his popularity, controlled most of Western Europe. Concurrently, the Battle of Britain raged above them, though the Nazis could not compete with the British Air Force, and never succeeded in taking Britain.

The air battle with Britain was still a stalemate, and Hitler turned his attentions back East again, launching Operation Barbarossa against the Russians on June 22nd, 1941. This was Hitler's quest for Lebensraum, living space for those of what he deemed pure race within Europe. With German forces advancing in Russia by leaps and bounds, it seemed as if Hitler would in fact reach Moscow, but the harsh Russian winter halted his troops, and the Soviets began to push the Nazis West in 1943. They would continue to push the Nazis West, pausing in Stalingrad, which Hitler refused to surrender, against insurmountable odds, until they met British and American troops in Berlin.

To state the obvious, Hitler lost World War II. But if the dice had rolled just a tad differently, perhaps he would not have. Hitler took many gambles in his near conquest of Europe, challenging the French in the Rhineland, threatening war in Czechoslovakia, yet the fateful decision to launch Operation Barbarossa was the first time since his electoral loss to Hindenburg that Hitler had not enforced his will quickly and concisely.

Hitler can be commended for the sound strategy he employed in the war, following the Rohm purge, there were significantly less qualified officers in Nazi Germany. Few of those remaining were anything more than placeholders there to encourage their Commander in Chief to act as he pleases. Thus Hitler was essentially directing the German forces in Europe himself, and doing quite well for himself, until his emotions clouded his previously tactically sound judgment in Stalingrad. Hitler could not accept failure, he couldn't cope with surrender. In his Last Testament he wrote, "... the surrender of a district or town is out of the question and that, above

everything else, the commanders must set a shining example of faithful devotion to duty unto death.”

His Last Testament, written just hours before his death, is a chilling window into his psyche. Even with the Allies closing in, and death knocking, Hitler still clings to his beliefs, his ideals. He believes in them so deeply that even in his last moments he cannot ask forgiveness for the wrongs he had committed. It is even plausible to think that, in the mind of Adolf Hitler, the only thing he needed to be forgiven was not fulfilling his dream of a Nazi Europe. Hitler’s Last Testament is proof that he, and Goebbels, who witnessed the composition, believed what he preached, and that the Allied victory would not end a plague upon mankind, but begin one.

Hitler’s beginnings in Vienna were not pleasant, though not completely out of line with the status quo. The death of his parents must have been slightly emotional, even for such an emotionally distant man. From his envy of those living well in Vienna came the inspiration for his intense hatred of the Jews. His prejudices were formed when he was young and impressionable, they did not sprout from madness. They must have seemed the furthest thing from madness, propaganda degrading the Jews and Slavs so thoroughly was readily available, and, like most propaganda, was indistinguishable from the truth. His prejudice against communists was founded on their actions following World War I; he blamed them for the chaotic situation in Germany. It can be assumed that he hated the communists for many of the same reasons that Americans would, and surely an entire nation in the West cannot be mad.

No ordinary peasant can go from street corner artist to dictator of a nation and international political heavyweight. Nor can a mesmerizing stare act as a vessel for such a transformation; Hitler had some quality which set him above the ordinary vagrant. His talents in public speaking were extraordinary, able to whip the listeners into agitation as easily if they numbered a few thousand members of the German Worker's Party or their numbers encompassed an entire nation.

Gaining support of the people even while on trial for treason, Hitler exhibited to the public his mind for politics. Uncompromising in his beliefs, (he never strayed far from the details laid out in *Mein Kampf*); Hitler was able to force his ideals on anyone he met. He repeatedly glorifies these methods in *Mein Kampf*, " Either the world will be ruled according to the ideas of our modern democracy, or the world will be dominated according to the natural law of force; in the latter case the people of brute force will be victorious." Germans enforced his will, and men opposing Hitler were quickly influenced to see his analysis of a situation. His hard stare and inspired speech made him nearly impossible to deny.

Not every mind has the presence of thought necessary to step back and objectively examine a crisis, yet Hitler did just that in the years leading up to his Chancellorship. The stock market crash was quickly twisted to serve Nazi goals, it was yet another example of poor governing on the part of the Weimar Republic. Hitler managed to keep his head even after his loss to Hindenburg in the Presidential Election, and as a result eventually took control of the Reichstag. Another stroke of genius or perhaps a stroke of luck, in the Reichstag fire helped Hitler secure the emergency powers which

would place him a step closer to controlling Germany. The next step was the Rohm purge, another strategically sound move towards creating the Third Reich.

Satisfying the people of the Reich by breaking the shackles of the humiliating Versailles treaty, he also gave them something to unite for. He united them in hatred. He made them hate, unleashing a “ veritable barrage of lies and slanders against whatever adversary seems most dangerous, until the nerves of the attacked person break down... This tactic is based on precise calculation of all human weaknesses, and its result will lead to success with almost mathematical certainty....”

He led the nation against the Jews, and they continued to follow him to war, many would follow to their graves. Hitler had the power of personality and intelligence to create a following, he knew how to control people, what made them tick, what he could do, and what he couldn't. He graduated his Nazification of Germany to minimize resistance in the population, in the end it seems that the German people did not resist at all, completely absorbed with wishing nothing more than to please the Fuhrer.

Hitler was far from insane, though he suffered from the personality disorder narcissism . This hereditary disorder is more an explanation of Hitler's personality than anything else. Narcissists are aggressive, which Hitler obviously was, lashing out at the Jews, Slavs, communists and others, his employ of intimidation is also a marker of a narcissistic personality. People suffering from this disorder are also noted to have extreme ambition, and also make use of gestures in self-expression. Both of these things drove Hitler forward, propelling him to success, fueling his drive for power. Usually

a hindrance, here they were necessary to Hitler's success, he did not succeed in spite of these traits, but rather because of them.

Hitler was a master propagandist ; ultimately his use of propaganda was what set him apart from other leaders. He denied the public the knowledge of an alternative, making his already convincing argument worlds easier to accept as truth. He communicated with his people in an innovative way, and did the same with propaganda. Shown by American expatriate Ernst Hanfstaengl how Americans reacted to the atmosphere of sporting events and " could be whipped up into a frenzy through blaring music, group cheers, and chants against the enemy," he mimicked events in the Nuremberg rallies, the size of which were enough to put doubt in the minds of any resisting Nazi ideals.

They rallied to him, like sheep to a shepherd, under the swastika, which was, in itself an achievement of Hitler's genius. His followers now had a " striking banner to follow and to fight under." Hitler achieved complete control of the German population in less than ten years, elements of genius were at work, he knew how to do what he imagined, something most politicians cannot truthfully say.

Looking back on Hitler's life, there is no doubt he was evil. The extermination camps he created are undeniable proof of this, yet he is certainly not insane for committing evil acts, however despicable and disgusting. Hitler held an incredibly skewed set of values, but his genius lay instead with the ways in which he imposed his ideals.

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