

How successful were nazi policies towards women? essay sample



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The Weimar Republic destroyed the lifetime traditions of German women. Suddenly, everything that they had once believed in vanished and life that was previously based on hierarchy and order took a very ambiguous form. The discontent of the women lay in the outcome of the First World War and its by-product, emancipation, was not welcomed by most middle class women. In addition to this the inflation worsened the outcome of the emancipation and working on the streets became a major source of income for many. At the same time, men that returned from the war demanded their work positions back, which meant that women had to go back to the kitchen. The inflation had irreversibly affected the historical and economic status of the women who were, at this time, not receiving comfort in either public or private life. Women felt torn between the reality and the past, not knowing what to do with the lives that they were being forced to lead.

Hitler seemed to be a very appealing leader amidst the anarchy of the Weimar period and to women, he seemed even more charismatic because he spoke of the old tradition, and it was the loss of their traditional place in the family that made women felt as though they were now without an identity. The Nazi regime offered German women the restoration of this identity, a return to the familiarity of their homes and the right to bare and care for their offspring all of which with seemingly small economic and psychological cost. It offered them a ' quick-fix' for the problem, an offer that Germany's women could not refuse. It is often said that women were also fascinated by Hitler and became hysterical on occasions when he appeared in public which was primarily down to Hitler's manipulative use of propaganda in and for electioneering campaigns.

Having played a significant part in Hitler's consolidation of power, women were quickly placed under his ideology, as was everyone in Germany on Hitler's accession in 1933. Nazi ideology stressed that women should be confined to a purely domestic role in society; their duty was to produce healthy Aryan children, uphold conservative principals and comfort their husbands in their service to the state all of which was aimed at Hitler's Volksgemeinschaft ideals. These ideas were advertised, and can be summed up in the Nazi slogan of Kinder, Kuche, Kirche, the central theme of the Nazi policy towards women. Many of the policies towards women suffered from contradictory opinions and the Nazis were not as successful as they intended to be on implementing Nazi policies and ideology on the women in Germany.

The first step taken by the regime to bring women in to line with Nazi ideology was the creation of the Women's Front by Robert Ley on 10 May 1933. The aim of which was to take women from the major decision making roles and from positions of power such as being members of the Reich but to keep a feeling of morale amongst them. All 230 women's organisations in Germany were to expel their Jewish members and integrate into the Women's Front or face being disbanded. Most organisations happily obliged to this and were pleased to support a regime that they saw as nationalistic and supportive of the traditional role of women.

The organisation of women did not stop here though, in 1934, Gertrud Scholtz-Klink was appointed National Women's Leader of the Third Reich and it was her task to indoctrinate German womanhood. Scholtz-Klink was a great supported of Nazi views on women's role, exhorting women to be enthusiastic breeding machines for the Reich and so was a useful tool for <https://assignbuster.com/how-successful-were-nazi-policies-towards-women-essay-sample/>

Hitler. Under her leadership over 1.5 million women attended maternity school and 500 000 women studied home economics between 1933 and 1938. Similarly, Scholtz-Klink organised the Frauenwork organisations in which four million of Germany's women participated. In doing this, the Nazis gave increased opportunities for mainly middle class women to become involved in public life, although they did succeed in excluding them from decision making therefore reducing their role in society outside of the home.

Hitler's main policy with women was pro-natalism which stemmed from the Nazi ideal of Volksgemeinschaft and was a policy encouraging the birth of pure Aryan children, Hitler seeing the responsibility of women as bearing and bringing up the future leaders of Nazism. Almost immediately after coming to office, the regime embarked on this policy aimed at women. In 1933, marriage loans of up to 1000RM were offered to newly weds on the grounds that the wife would not work outside the home and that neither of the couple were Jewish.

The loan was interest free and to be repaid over a period of eight and a quarter years but for each child born to couples taking part in the programme, the amount to be repaid was reduced by 25%. By 1937 700 000 married couples had received a loan and so there is no doubt as to the popularity of this policy. In line with the same pro-natalist policy, mother's day was changed to Hitler's mothers birthday which became a national holiday and family allowances were set up to help families on low incomes. The status of mothers was raised dramatically by a series of propaganda campaigns an example of this being the Mother's Cross in 1939 for those with large families. The mothers cross was awarded to women who had <https://assignbuster.com/how-successful-were-nazi-policies-towards-women-essay-sample/>

given birth to a certain number of children; a woman with four children received a bronze cross, with six a silver cross and with eight children she would receive a gold cross.

Despite these incentives, the birth rate did not respond in a significantly positive way to Nazi policy. Despite the fact that abortion was made illegal in 1933, the number of women who sought to terminate their pregnancies remained high. The birth rate remained fairly constant throughout the 1930s although it did increase between 1933 and 1934 at the end of the depression. It could be seen that this was a positive response to Nazi policy but is more likely that it was due to the return to full employment and the end of the depression that had seen such a low moral throughout Germany. Nazi propaganda seems to have had some effect on women but not as much as the leaders had hoped for and this could well be because propaganda stressed that it was a woman's responsibility to bear children not for personal reasons but out of her duty to the state, which could have put many women off the idea. The number of marriages increased as well but this too is more likely to have been a sign of the end of the depression as people were beginning to be able to afford to indulge in such events again, rather than because of the introduction of Nazi marriage loans.

Leading up to and during the second world war, the quest for a larger population of genetically pure Germans led to a further encouragement or procreation, but this time procreation outside of marriage, in Hitler's Lebensborn programme. Organised by the leader of the SS, Heinrich Himmler, it encouraged German women to bear the children of SS officers

whether or not they were married to them and German Girls were educated in their duty to have Aryan children in the League of German Girls.

The reason that Hitler did this was because these women, and SS members, were both what he view as the ' ideal German' and so a child born of one of these couples would undoubtedly be ' pure' in his view. Again using eugenics, Hitler ensured that women who did not fit into the specifications of his ' German ideal' were sterilised so that they would not be able to reproduce. Although Hitler's policy seemed, at a first glance, to be one that would increase the birth rate the eugenic policies reduced the country's population potential and not only this, but it did not coincide with the original promises that the Nazi party had made to German women. Hitler had promised women a return to the traditional role that they had previously held in the family and the promotion of breaking marriage vows and ' sleeping around' in this way, simply for the benefit of the state, was making family relationships very difficult and was pulling families apart in a complete contradiction to Nazi propaganda.

The new regime also shaped a clear policy in their negative view towards women at work and in particular educated women who were in professional jobs and the education of women who wanted to take on these professional roles in the next stage of their lives. This revolved around the Kinder, Kuche, Kirche policy which Hitler stated as the main reasoning behind all of his policies concerning women. Almost immediately following Hitler's appointment in 1933, nearly all of the 19 000 female civil servants in both regional and local governments lost their jobs, as did around 15% of women teachers.

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By early 1934 there were no women left working in the Prussian Civil Service and the 3% of lawyers who were women faced a dramatic decline in their status. From 1936 onwards no women was allowed to serve as a judge and women were no longer accepted for jury duty. The number of women who were allowed to enrol in to universities was also reduced to 10% to keep women at home. The regime was very aware of the impact that women could have, however, after their ability to practically bring Hitler into power in the years leading up to 1933, and so was careful not to upset the women's organisations which had so willingly joined the Women's Front. In 1934, the Minister of the Interior, Wilhelm Frick, responded to a widespread unease about the sacking of women teachers by reversing the policy temporarily to make the party seem as though it was not acting solely against women.

Although Hitler's aim had been to take women out of employment as much as possible to keep them focussed on their main task which was to reproduce, the number of women in employment, although remaining low in the first few years of the regime, increased on the return to full employment and the conscription of men to fight. The economic improvement after 1933 was at first fuelled by rearmament based industries and therefore did not have much of an effect on women in work however the conscription of men and then the return to near full employment created a labour shortage, which meant that the regime was forced to reverse its policies and begin to try and persuade women to go back to work and to enrol in further education at universities even though it not what they ideally wanted. Between 1933 and 1939 the number of women working increased from 11.6 million to 14.6 million, which shows a dramatic contradiction between nazi ideology and

the reality of the situation. The Nazi policies on reducing the amount of women in employment were therefore not successful although it did seem that they were going to be at first, as the number of women in employment did fall but as the economic situation improved, so the situation of women in most professions improved despite the regime's official line.

The information that I have obtained showing the success of Nazi policies towards women illustrates some of the limitations on the totalitarian nature of the regime. In Hitler's eyes, women played a vitally important role in his creation of a Volksgemeinschaft and so his policies towards them, although strict and determined, adopted quite a cautious approach, thus only few women were forced out of jobs and into the home, many did it of their own accord because of their desire to return to their traditional role and identity. Nazi ideology did succeed in mobilising the allegiance of women which is what they intended to achieve with the creation of the Woman's Front. Many of the other policies that Hitler implemented on his appointment as Chancellor in 1933, however, were not as successful as he would have hoped them to be and the small successes that there were represented not so much a social revolution as an attempt to return to their traditional values.

The direct impact of Nazi policies was limited; earlier marriages and a rising birth rate were related more to increasing prosperity not to social policy and with the achievement of nearly full employment in 1936, women were required to return from the workplace - a complete contradiction to the initial Nazi policy. Hitler wanted to create more Aryan children, but his implementation of eugenics policies reduced the population potential. He

wanted to create the 'perfect family' but the introduction of SS 'brothels'
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made family relationships difficult and more and more men were divorcing their wives. There were mixed reactions from women regarding Hitler's policies, they voted Hitler into power because he offered them a return to the traditional values that they felt they were being denied of and, to a certain extent he did give to these women what he had promised but, although filling a lot of theirs, did not succeed to fulfil his own desires.