

Propaganda during nazi germany assignment

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Examine why and how film was used for propaganda purposes in Nazi Germany. “ The function of propaganda is, for example, not to weigh and ponder the rights of different people, but exclusively to emphasize the one right which it has set out to argue for. it’s task is not to make an objective study of the truth,...its task is to serve our own right, always and unflinchingly”(Hitler, 1971, p182).

Propaganda as defined by Welch(1983, p2), is the art of brainwashing, so as to alter attitudes and ideas. Though the art of persuasion is nothing new, it became more innovative in the first half of the twentieth century, such as through the “ popular press, then the film and the radio”(Tegel, 2007, p. 12). This was headed by the Ministry of Propaganda under Joseph Goebbels, who was appointed by Hitler who believed that he had found his expert(Welch, 1983, p3)

According to Reuth(1993, pxiii) “ A successful twentieth century propagandist has to possess two different sets of qualities: He must have an intuitive grasp of the feelings and thoughts of the masses and must be able to convey messages to them which hold their attention and combine simplicity with attractiveness. ” This was why film was one of the most effective form of propaganda used. The cinema, together with the radio and motor-car was effectively used to allow the Nazis to assume power(Grunberger, 1995, p378).

It was widely used because both Hitler and Goebbels were obsessed with it, as well as to attack the Reich internal(mainly the Jews) and external enemies(the Allied powers). More importantly, film was used to rally and

influence the masses. This was crucial during the war years where films even led the Germans to believe that the “ war isn’t lost”. This essay would hence analyze the extent to which film was being used and the effectiveness of it as a form of propaganda

One motive why film was used by the Nazis as a propaganda tool was because both Hitler and Goebbels were obsessed with it. Hitler himself wrote in his book, *Mein Kampf*(Tegel, 2007, p1) that film alone, presents a concrete understanding of propaganda as through pictures, the masses could easily understand whatever that was being propagated without having to think. This was in line to what he believed, that propaganda has to be simple so that it could be easily understood by the masses(Hitler, 1971, p181).

Similarly, Goebbels too, share the same thought as the Fuhrer, who described film as “ one of the most modern and far-reaching media that there is for influencing the masses today”(Tegel, 2007, p18)In his diary dated in 22 January 1942, he noted that “ Propaganda must therefore always be essentially simple and repetitive”(Lochner, 1948, p56). According to Tegel(2007, p4), unlike Hitler who favored a more direct approach to propaganda, Goebbels on the other hand, opted for a less overt approach, in the pretext of entertainment.

In fact, Goebbels saw the cinema as a form of escapism as to him, the public required engaging escapist material, despite the peak of Nazi success in spring 1940 (Moeller, 2000, p94). This showed that Goebbels was astute to use film as a form of both entertainment as well as to spread propaganda messages. Being the nation’s number two film expert and the right to censor

films, he could banned films which he thinks it's essential for urgent reasons relating to the public good(Ibid, p128).

In addition, to secure greater control over the cinema , he nationalized all the major film companies-Ufa, Tobis and Bavaria, and two important smaller firms, Terra and Froelich. This was depicted in his diary on 27 January, 1942, " Film production is flourishing almost unbelievably despite the war. What a good idea of mine it was to take possession of the films on behalf of the Reich several years ago! It would be terrible if the high profits now earned by the motion picture industry were to flow into private hands"(Loucher, 1948, p38).

This shows that Goebbels was cunning to take advantage of the high revenue generated form cinema-goers to channel it to the state, which he now controls. It also illustrates how Goebbels took advantage of the cinema to for propaganda purposes. Another motive why film was used by the Nazis as a propaganda tool was it's ability to rally and influence the masses. Propaganda was needed to persuade the masses to accept Nazi policies . Besides tolerating the government, Goebbels believed that the mobilization of the people was also vital for a wholehearted commitment to the Nazi state(Welch, 2002, p25).

As Grunberger(1995, p377) noted, cinema attendances quadrupled from 250 million in 1933, to 1000 million in 1942. Thus, film was an effective weapon used to propagate the people. Film was hence used by the Nazis to rally support for the " euthanasia action" as depicted in the film, I Accuse(1941) (Moeller, 2000, p99) The Nazis saw the need for racial purity. (Welch, 2002,

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p83))Thus racial propaganda was used to spread both anti-Jewish and Slavic feelings as well as to showcase the superiority of the Aryan race(Ibid). In Mein Kampf, Hilter stressed the need for establishing racial attitudes, No boy or girl must leave school without having attained a clear insight into the meaning of racial purity and the importance of maintaining the racial blood unadulterated. "(Ibid) The film I Accuse(1941) was a success as it attracted a very large audience and was seen by over 15 million people. The melodramatic film showcase a triangular love story with emphasis on the intensity of Hanna's suffering, and the disagreement between her husband(Heyt) and his friend(Lang) over the use of euthanasia on his wife(Reeves, 1999, p122).

The film was able to convince the Germans to view euthanasia in a positive light, without making it obvious(Ibid). Welch(2002, p90) added that the Security Department " claimed" that even the working class were keen to endorse the change in law allowing the ' mercy killings' of the sick and mentally handicapped. More importantly, it allowed the Nazis to achieve the goal of propaganda as film proved to be more effective than speeches in spreading the Nazi propaganda (Moeller, 2000, p100). This shows why film was a preferred choice over other forms of propaganda, despite the fact that Hitler was a skilled orator.

However, we have to note the limitations of the effectiveness of film propaganda in justifying the Nazi's " euthanasia action". As Reeves(1999, p123) argued, regardless of how persuasive a single film can be, it was impossible to challenge the existing moral and religious attitudes that were ingrained in centuries of religious and secular experience. For example, the <https://assignbuster.com/propaganda-during-nazi-germany-assignment/>

film was unpopular in Catholic areas where the clergy discouraged people from viewing it(Welch, 2002, p90). Perhaps, only believers of film propaganda such as Goebbels would claimed it as a success in persuading others to support the Nazi policies(Reeves, 1999, p123).

The success of film as a form of propaganda can clearly be seen in The Triumph of Will(1935) which was used to consolidate Hitler's status as the Fuhrer of Germany(Tegel, 2007, p77). In The Triumph of Will(1935), Hitler was depicted as a godlike figure " descending from the clouds; adoring crowds of women, some in folk costume; children gazing shyly at the Fuhrer, ...low-angled shots of Hitler addressing his followers from the podium against the backdrop of a large swastika flag"(Ibid, p75).

Reeves(1999, p107) commented that the two interlocking ideas that are established at the core of the film required not just the presence of the Fuhrer but also " embodiment" of the nation. The intention of the film was to manipulate the opinion of the public by showcasing the achievements of Hitler(Ibid, p111). Tegel(2007, p94) concurred by describing The Triumph of Will as the most effective propaganda film made, as Riefenstahl(who directed the film) was able to cater to the needs of the Nazi party and showcase it's glory.

On the other hand, there were limitations of film to mould the attitudes of the public towards Hitler. According to Reeves(1999, p110), it was his military achievements such as the reoccupation of Rhineland that boosted his popularity. This had led many Germans to accept Hitler as the " demigod of Nazi propaganda" as the remarkable achievements could only be

accomplished by a leader of equally remarkable qualities. (Ibid) More importantly, Hitler(1971, p176) noted that “ it was not until the War that it became evident what immense results could be obtained by a correct application of propaganda”.

Film propaganda was used to honour the German army(Moeller, 2000, 102) and to advocate “ persistence and the importance of leadership”(Tegel, 2007, p178) during the war years. Bismarck(1940) and particularly Kolberg(1945), which was the last film made before the end of World War Two. The film was an appeal from Goebbels for complete sacrifice by the German people(ibid, p186) as well as to restore faith in Hitler by “ celebrating the resistance of the fortress town to the invading Napoleonic armies, under the courageous leadership of its mayor”(Reeves, 1999, p106).

In addition, the effectiveness of the film propaganda can be evident when the audiences who watched Bismarck(1940) were able to draw comparisons between the efforts of Bismarck and the Fuhrer in unifying the nation(Reeves, 1999, p106). This showed that the audiences were able to comprehend the propaganda messages from the film(Ibid). Moreover, Goebbels recognized the demand for light-hearted and entertaining films to lift the morale of the masses(Moeller, 2000, p94). Of the 1100 films that were being produced, almost half were either romances or comedies, to provide a form of escapism for the people(Grunberger, 1995, p376).

The fact that the period of the war saw the two greatest box-office success being screened, The Great Love(1942) and Request Concert(1940), showed that Goebbels was able to keep the success of film appealing by introducing

different genres to propagate the audiences(Reuth, 1993, 284). Lastly, film was used by the Nazis to attack the Reich internal and External enemies. Internal enemies particularly the Jews, were both hated by Hitler and Goebbels. Hilter in his book Mein Kamf(1971, p325) described the Jews as ‘ bastards’ and that the “ racially pure people which is conscious of its blood can never be enslaved by the Jew”.

Hence, films such as Jew Suss(1940) and The Eternal Jew(1941)were use to promote anti-semitic feeling. Moreover, Goebbels noted in his diary that Jew Suss(1940) is “ the first truly anti-semitic film”(Reeves, 1999, p113). In Jew Suss(1940) , the Jews were being portrayed as ruthless capitalists, deceitful and dangerous(towards Aryan women). Yet, it had a propaganda message to the audience: it reinforce the point that the battle against the Jews is extremely serious as well as biological(Tegel, 2007, p145).

It can also be seen as a fable of the consequences if the Nuremburg Laws are broken, and if the Jews are permitted to reside in Germany where they do not belong(Ibid). The effectiveness of film as a form of propaganda can be seen in the fact that Jew Suss(1940) was ” awarded both the Pradikat Of Particular Value Politically and Artistically and also Valuable for Youth”(Reeves, 1999, p114). It was screened widely for the youths and the members of the SS and the police and this showed that the film had a wide appeal among the different groups of people in Germany(Ibid).

More importantly, it was the sixth most popular commercial film and was viewed by 20, 300, 000 people between 1940 and 1943(Tegel, 2007, p146). The effectiveness of Jew Suss(1940) as a form of film propaganda can be

evident in a report made by the Strasbourg Security Police which claimed that the film had prompted the audience to bellow: " Dirty pig Jew! ' You Jewish swinal! ", ' Filthy Jewboy! '.. particularly from women; and the rape scene, linked as it is with the only just bearable torture scene, really outrages people. While the expulsion of the Jews and the execution of Suss.. s greeted with great satisfaction and relief(" Serve him right, dirty Jew", " They should all be hanged! ")"(Reeves, 1999, p114) From here, it was clear that the propaganda message was effectively digested by the audience, which was Goebbels main intention. This was evident in the reaction of his targeted audience: the Aryan women. It had also reinforced his justification to the Germans, for the Jews to be exterminated(The Final Solution). Furthermore, crude documentary such as The Eternal Jew(1941) gave the Germans the impression that " pictures do not lie"(Reuth, 1993, p262).

In The Eternal Jew(1941), the Jews were being compared to rats creating massive destruction on human beings(Reeves, 1999, p116). According to Grunberger(1995, p379), such anti-semitic political films had a greater impact on the minds of the cinema-goers than romances or comedies. This was evident as even the teenagers who came out from the theatre begin to employ violence on the Jewish passers-by(Weinberg, 1984, p116). However, the film was not as commercially successful as that of Jew Suss(1940). For instance, the film managed to attract just about a million cinema-goers as compared to Jew Suss(1940) which had over 20 million(Reeves, 1999, p116).

Though it was successful with " the politically active sections of the population", it was rejected by the majority of the cinema- goers(who were the prime targets of Nazi propaganda)(Ibid, p117). This was evident in the <https://assignbuster.com/propaganda-during-nazi-germany-assignment/>

reaction of the audience as stated in the report, " We've seen Jud Suss and we've had enough of this Jewish filth" have been heard", adding that there " isolated cases" of women and younger men fainting during the ritual slaughter scenes. "(Ibid). This showed that film propaganda had it's limitations. As depicted in the above, we can see that the ordinary Germans were tired of Nazi propaganda films.

Tegel(2007, p166) questioned the effectiveness of the film due to the fact that it was " crude, repellent and outrageous in its statements". She also added that the unpopularity of the film could be due to the film itself and not because of the anti-Semitism in it(Ibid). However, to Reeves(1999, p117), the rejection of the film could be due to the unwillingness of the German cinema-goers to accept the Nazi ideology. Moreover, while the Nazis were obsessed with spreading anti-Jewish propaganda, majority of the masses were often ignorant to the so-called ' Jewish Question'(Ibid, p119).

Other than attacking internal enemies of the Nazi state, film was also used to attack Germany's external enemies. The British in particular, was depicted in Ohm Kruger as a cruel colonial master over their subjects, the South African Boers. Such anti-British film was such a successful propaganda that it resulted in an deep excitement for war against the British(Moeller, 2000, p101). Similiarly, anti-Polish propaganda film, Baptism of fire(1940) showed the defeat of Poland by the German Airforce-the Luftwaffe(Welch, 2002, p122). The film also served as a form of intimidation to foreign diplomats when it was screened in neutral countries(Ibid, p123).

Welch(Ibid) also added that *Baptism of Fire*(1940) was possibly the most remarkable of all the propaganda film that highlight the extent of Hitler's Blitzkrieg victory. In addition, Reeves(1999, p126) concurred with Welch as the film was effective in communicating it's ideology(which was to prepare the German invasion of Britain) as well as to showcase it's masculinity culture. This can be evident in the Security Department report which stated that some of the audience " were eager to have a clearer footage of the defeated poles(Ibid). Hence, we can see that film propaganda was effective in conveying it's message to the audience.

However, there were limitations to it's effectiveness. Reeves(Ibid) argued that footage of the destruction of Warsaw(capital city of Poland) resulted in the feelings of anxieties about the " horrors of war", despite the peak of German victories. Here we can see that the purpose of the propaganda seemed to backfire as " the message it seeks to convey goes against the knowledge and experience of the target audience"(Ibid). Although superficially, film propaganda seemed effective in achieving the Nazis goals of misleading the people, the extend of it's effectiveness is questionable.

To Tegel(2007, p166), it was difficult to assess if the audience were able to be brainwashed by Nazi propaganda as some of them merely saw such films for pure entertainment purposes. Hence, the high cinema attendance in box-office hits such as *Jew Suss*(1940) does not mean that most people were inclined to support the anti-semitic policies of the Nazis. Reeves(1999, p115) added that the presence of the Security Police(who recorded the views of everyone)have distorted the reliability of the claim that film propaganda had been a success.

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The 1936 law which prohibits public criticism of films also created an atmosphere of fear where people were unwilling to put across their honestly held opinions(Ibid, p104). Moreover, the success of the Nazi films could be due to the “ staple ingredients of popular cinema, sex and violence” and not because of it’s propaganda content(Tegel, 2007, 166). As Haffner(2008, p96) remarked, it was an irony that most Germans(except the most stupid ones) do not believed in the Nazis propaganda, yet they were being forced to be persuaded in believing the Nazis propaganda lies.

In fact, Hoffner compared Nazi propaganda to commercial posters which “ moulds opinion and determine conduct”(Ibid, p103). The fact that there are customers who shunned Nazi films and flocked to houses showing the few foreign films(mostly B-grade Hollywood), which Goebbels forbid, showed the extent of the effectiveness of film propaganda(Shirer, 1962, p247) Based on the above, it seemed that apparently, Nazi film propaganda seemed to be effective. However, the hearts and the mindsets of the people may not be easily swayed by the Nazi propaganda messages.

People could outwardly appeared to have ‘ receive’ the propaganda messages for the fear of being suspected to be anti-Nazis. In conclusion, film was commonly used to instill party ideology, authority, leadership and incitements of racial hatred. Nazi propaganda seemed effective as most Germans blindly and readily surrender themselves to Hitler and the Nazis. Other than films, the radio was also another effective channel that bind the masses closer to the state(Fest, 1963, p63)However, at the later stage, when Germany begin to suffer defeats, people became more aware and critical of the “ fantasy” which they saw in films.

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As Reeves(1999, p129) concludes, the power of propaganda is dependent on the achievements of the regime and when the achievements begin to decline, “ no amount of propaganda could rebuild the Hitler myth”. In fact, film propaganda seemed to have lost its’ main motive of overt propaganda since Goebbels recognized the need for entertainment through “ disguised’ propaganda. Hence, with fewer cinema-goers, the film industry begin to decline. 2743 words. References 1. Fest, C. Joachim, The Face of the Third Reich(Great Britain: C. Tinling & Co, 1963) 2.

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