

Impacts of nazi propaganda



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In the Summer of 1941, the Nazis launched Operation Barbarossa in an attempt to invade occupy Russia before winter. While the offensive saw widespread success in parts of Ukraine and western areas of the USSR in its early months, much of the German forces were repelled when approaching large Soviet cities in the winter months and found themselves stuck in the brutal conditions. This led to what Thomas Mann called “ an even that, incidentally, ranks amongst the most egregious strategic failures in military history”.[1]When winter began in 1941, German forces were approaching Moscow and attempted to sack the city and control the USSR. However, with the weather deteriorating, enough time was secured by the Soviets to launch a counterattack and repel the Germans: “ Although the Red Army experienced greater losses than the Germans during the campaign, the inability of German forces to defeat the Soviet Union marked a significant setback for the German military effort.”[2]The Nazi’s, as orchestrated by Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels presented the results in a manner that did not reflect a failure, but a setback presented with “ heartfelt candor”. For the Nazi’s, it was standard to mislead and persuade the German Volk to believe whatever they said or supported through intelligent and deliberate methods. The speech Mann delivered over broadcast to the German people in response to Goebbel’s version of the results of Operation Barbarossa not only provided historical evidence of how the Nazis maintained power and influence, but foreshadowed largely the next 30 years of international global conflict as well.

The Nazis relied heavily on their propaganda strategies and misleading of the German people to gain power throughout the 20s and 30s; and then

secure and retain that power along with the support of the Volk during the 30s and 40s. Nazi propaganda manipulated the psyche of the Germans by using several different methods to influence support and action, or inaction, from the people. These tactics invaded German's lives and strove to fuse the mentality of the people with the ideology of the Nazis. Nazi ideology many times fell in line with Gobineu's *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races*. In summary, he "believed that race created culture, arguing that distinctions between the three races - "black", "white", and "yellow" - were natural barriers, and that "race-mixing" breaks those barriers and leads to chaos." [3] And, of course, Gobineau believed that coming from white Aryan ancestry was the paramount summit of humanity. The constant work done by Goebbels, Hitler, Himmler, Heydrich and other Nazi elite to optimize the Nazi's Department of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment eventually enables Goebbel's lies and inconsequential assessment of one of the most critical military losses in history to be received warmly by the Volk. The purpose and advent of propaganda however, evolved and developed over time as Nazism spread and Nazi elite gained power. The Beer Hall Putsch of 1923 played a big factor in this evolution of Nazism; the failure of the coup in Munich showed that the Nazis needed to reevaluate their strategy and to some degree reinvent their ideology. [4] While in jail for the coup, Hitler wrote the infamous *Mein Kampf*, detailing in it how the Nazis would have to secure the support of the masses rather than seizing power by force. Thus, through this tactical pivot, the prevalence of propaganda and process of Nazism inserting itself into daily German life took off.

In the years to follow, Nazism grew amongst the people and then later encouraged the people to be instruments of their beliefs. So, Nazi rhetoric until the mid-30s would introduce the Volk to their values centered upon blame, violence, and a succinct social hierarchy featuring the Aryan race atop. Rhetoric was coupled with the implementation of social eugenics programs; based largely on speculation and preference of the Nazis. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler for the first time, declares non-Aryan races like Jews and gypsies as inferior. Much of the Nazi propaganda efforts dwindled down to the message that Germans should do everything possible, including genocide, to make sure their gene pool remained pure.[5] In 1933, the same year the first concentration camp, Dachau, was established, the Nazis created the Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring which saw thousands of forced sterilizations and deportations of 'inferiors' to these newly built camps. The Nazi's eugenics program was key in having the Volk 'buy' into the ideology because the masses finally saw, in a tangible manner, that their government was following through on rhetoric that the obstacles to greatness for Germany were inferior groups and peoples. This sentiment began simply as threatening political groups and opponents shortly after Hitler's release from prison; sentiment was taken into action quickly following Hitler's rise to power though.

To accomplish the ultimate goal of ruling a racially cleansed society, Hitler first had to solidify his power and reign for the long run; once Hitler rose to power, it was only a matter of time until action was taken against he and the Nazi's first obstacle. In 1934, a power struggle between Hitler and Ernst Rohm was inevitable. Rohm wanted to integrate his special division, the SA,

into the military; Hitler saw an opportunity here to turn the odds back in his favor and exaggerated Rohm's intentions to the point of accusing him and the SA of planning a putsch.[6]In addition, Rohm's homosexuality in the Nazi political climate all but condemned he and the SA. Hitler went on to order Himmler and his division, the SS, to eliminate several political threats including Rohm, other SA leaders, and hundreds more. With this achieved, Hitler's path to a complete totalitarian regime was in reach and would take shape in concert with the war effort to come. In the absence of political opposition, propaganda created by the Nazi's themselves became one of the only and definitely most popular means by which to obtain news and information on the state of the German government and nation. After the Rohm affair that became known as the Night of the Long Knives, it was natural for the Nazi message to shift from blaming and scapegoating political opposition to doing the same for groups that Hitler deemed non-Aryan. With complete political security, eugenics programs underway, and increased rhetoric claiming that these large non-Aryan populations like Jews and gypsies were Nazi Germany's next obstacle, a Holocaust was looming over Europe.

Speaking from a reactionary stance to Goebbel's speech, Mann questioned:

" History will one day be divided over what was more repulsive, the Nazi's words or their deeds. And it will be difficult to decide when this riffraff was more offensive to humanity: when they were lying or when they were telling the truth. Because in their mouths, even truth becomes a lie, an instrument of deception—and there is no more disgusting way to lie than by manipulating the truth."

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By this time, February 1943, the cyclical nature of the Nazi's 'public enlightenment' strategies and its ingraining in the Volk for over a decade had clouded the malice within Nazism. Nazism is about furthering hateful sentiment toward a hypothetical 'other'; much of the goal of the early rhetoric was to convince the people that their struggles and pitfalls were not their own but simply an effect of other's lives, beliefs, and cultures. This 'other' was always changing, from political enemies and Nazi naysayers, to Jews, homosexuals, gypsies, physically disabled, mentally ill, and many others. However, for Nazism to succeed and not end up excluding every group, it defended and supported the Aryan nation as the pinnacle of humanity. If there was no opposition and Nazi Germany was able to grow and expand freely, all cultures and groups would either need to conform or be eliminated along with the memory of said culture or group. So, because the Nazi's labeled so many different groups as enemies and used violence to reaffirm that, they had to approach the public kindly and as if they were protecting their citizens by doing so. The stark contradictions in action and rhetoric towards its own people shrouded the permanent evil that was part of Nazism and led to intellectuals like Mann to beg the question of whether the lies and manipulating of the truth or actual violence and destruction was more condemning. This question is framed similarly to that of whether the chicken or the egg came first which is quite fitting towards the end of the war because the answer has become so distorted and complicated that it is rhetorical. Both the lies and violent actions complemented and exacerbated one another so frequently that it is nearly impossible to identify one or the other as the more egregious offense.

Mann goes on to identify another Nazi tactic to captivate its peoples by citing, "...the victories of the Russians and the Nazi losses were portrayed so openly and honestly and possibly even exaggerated in order to thrust the Anglo-Saxon world into fear of the 'Red menace,' fear of the European continent being flooded by Bolshevism." Even in attempts to advance the Nazi theme of blame and racial discrimination as well as political supremacy, Hitler and its leaders would instill fear into its people, not necessarily that they would be remiss to obey, but that he and the Nazis could not even save them unless Nazi Germany as a whole stood firmly behind the Nazi identity; which ended up being centered upon cleansing the European continent of every group unlike themselves and waged a prodigal war to do so. For example, at the end of the war, Hitler says, "If the war is lost, the nation will also perish. This fate is inevitable. There is no necessity to take into consideration the basis which the people will need to continue even a most primitive existence. On the contrary, it will be better to destroy these things ourselves, because this nation will have proved to be the weaker one and the future will belong solely to the stronger eastern nation (Russia)."[7] In line with the true message of Nazi propaganda in year's past, the takeaway from this excerpt is that Hitler and the Nazis were constantly convincing their people that they were their last and only hope of being the most dominant nation in the world as not to lose influence over them. Largely this worked well for many years because those not completely sold on the Germany the Nazis provided would be thrust into bystanding because of how much Nazi rhetoric and policy invigorated and excited those who were to be included in Hitler's Aryan nation. This bystanding began in Germany and would spread to wherever Nazism would expand next. In *Maus* by Art Spiegelman, he tells

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his father's story in a comic novel and one particular instance highlights this nature of bystanding in Europe out of fear of the consequences. Art's father must reaffirm what happened by stating, " You had to *pay* Mrs. Motonowa to keep you, right?" " Of course I paid...and *we*// I paid...What you think? Someone will risk their life for nothing?".[8]Vladek had to once again highlight how helpless Jews and other enemies of the Nazis became because of both fear of the Nazis and blind support all over spheres of influence or occupation in Europe; both fear and support clearly were enhanced and accelerated by propaganda.

Finally, the context in which Mann's speech is delivered really makes the reader understand the state in which Germany is in. Mann had to deliver this message of bashing the Nazis, Nazism, and Goebbel's speech informing the Volk of the loss in Russia through broadcast. If he had given such a speech in any public space in a sphere of Nazi influence, he would have been detained and most likely killed immediately. What is apparent to Mann about the Nazi's methods and malign intentions is not nearly as apparent to the Volk. Even much of our understanding today of how Nazism operated on such a grand scale is described when Mann discusses their tactics, goals, and intentions and uses examples to back it up. Therefore, Mann goes as far as to suggest there is a clear, underlying psychology of Nazism, which has now been the subject of historical and psychological analysis and diagnosis since the end of the war in 1945. In one broadcast, this author is able, to some degree, to introduce the angle in which we psycho-analyze the Nazis and Nazism today. It is remarkable that in 1943, before the war's end, one was able to see through the fog of propaganda, lies, and violence that pulled the

veil over millions and would forever change the landscape and protocols of international affairs.

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[1]Thomas Mann, Response to Joseph Goebbels, Broadcast on 23 February 1943

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[5] https://www.history.com/topics/germany/eugenics#section_4

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[7] <http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/defeat/enter-bunker.htm>

[8] Maus: A Survivor's Tale (Book 1 Chapter 6 Page 144)