

Did hitler and the
nazis improve
germany?



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Upon the death of Hindenburg in August 1934, Adolf Hitler declared himself führer, combining the offices of Chancellor and President into one. Along with the Enabling law, this effectively made Hitler a dictator of Germany. Hitler and the NSDAP single-handedly controlled Germany for several years in a period known as the Third Reich. Historians still argue to what extent Hitler and the Nazis improved Germany in this period and who gained and who suffered from their rules and laws. This essay aims to examine a number of different aspects in the life of the German people, Jews as well as non-Jews, and how they were affected by the Nazi rule.

Hitler wanted to ensure that the Nazis had complete control of Germany and in order to accomplish this he used the SS, a group formed in 1925 by fanatic loyalist to Hitler, consisting mainly of Aryans. The SS was, by Hitler and the Nazis considered a key component in controlling Germany. The SS was divided into different sections: the ordinary police, the Gestapo, their own fighting unit called Waffen SS and also the death's head, which controlled the death and concentration camps.

The Gestapo was the state secret police, run under the command of Heinrich Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich. The Gestapo could easily arrest anyone they wanted to and send them to concentration camps; no questions asked. The Gestapo comprised a large network of informers spread all over Germany and spied on people in every way possible. People informed on each other, because they thought the Gestapo was going to find out anyway. Germans were required to inform the Gestapo and they were threatened that if they did not, they could be arrested. This could quite possibly be one of the reasons Gestapo was the most feared force among ordinary Germans.

Hitler also took control of the legal system by making the judges swear an oath to Hitler and thus ensuring that virtually no Nazi official was ever punished but Nazi opponents hardly ever received a reasonable trial.

To punish disobedient Germans and also to scare other Germans of 'not repeating the same mistake', Hitler used concentration camps, a prison where opponents of the Nazi regime were taken for questioning, torture and 're-education'. Often people were also killed in these concentration camps.

Overall, I think that the strict control of the Nazi regime was beneficial to some Germans (especially the loyal Nazi followers) in view of the fact that it must have reduced the crime rate, considering that nearly all the 'trouble-makers' would have been in concentration camps. The element of threat used to control Germany, must also have caused a drop in the amount of crimes. Furthermore, the harshness of control in Germany could possibly have given some Germans a positive feeling of security. However, it must also have made the Germans feel insecure, since they were given the impression that they were constantly being observed by the Gestapo. I think that the only people who must have benefitted from the Nazi control, was the Nazi-followers and people with similar confidence in or respect for the Nazis. People who were not so keen about the Nazis, people telling Nazi jokes; people not quite believing in the Nazi beliefs and also the Nazi 'enemies' (Jews, Communists, people considered weak genetically and physically) must have been the ones suffering the most from the strict control of the Nazi regime.

In hope of 'moulding' the new generations into loyal Nazi supporters, Hitler introduced the Hitler Youth, a paramilitary organization of the Nazi Party, in the 1920's. They knew that education was one of the best possible ways of manipulating the mindset of the 'yet to come'-German constituents. When Hitler established the Hitler youth, youth organizations were already widely used for religious as well as political purposes. Shortly after Hitler came to power, he abolished all these organizations, resulting in the Hitler youth being the only legal youth organization and thus pushing its numbers from around 100,000 to about 4 million members. It later became compulsory to join. The organization, which allowed children from the age of 10 to 18 to join, was split into two groups: one for boys that focused on preparing them for joining the army or the SS and one for girls that taught them Nazi views on motherhood and healthy reproduction as well as how women should ideally behave according to Nazi beliefs (something I will cover later in this essay).

Hitler and the Nazis also worked hard to ensure that the schools and universities followed the Nazis and made sure that every student grew up to become loyal Nazis. A great deal of the German teachers joined the Nazi Teachers' Association, and it was obligatory for all teachers to teach Nazi idealism and those who did not accept this were given the sack. Students were encouraged to inform on teachers who did not live up to the Nazi standards or if they said anything that went against the Nazis in anyway.

After Hitler seized power, the German curriculum was significantly adjusted to suit the Nazi beliefs. The schools concentrated a lot more on physical aspects of the education. For instance, students were to regularly get a

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physical inspection and if they did not live up to the standards, they were severely disciplined and could, in some cases, get expelled. The subject contents were also considerably modified by the Nazis. In history children learned about the rise of the Nazi party and were taught about the injustice behind the Treaty of Versailles and about the 'November Criminals' who allegedly stabbed Germany in the back. In biology they were taught about genetic weaknesses and how Aryans were the superior race. In German they studied the Great War and the heroes of the Hitler Youth; Geography focused on the Nazi idea about lebensraum, i. e. more space to the Germans, whilst in science the lessons taught student about principles of ballistics, military aviation etc.

However, as controlled the German youth may seem, anti-Nazi youth movements also began to appear and groups such as The Swing Movement, which consisted mostly of middle class teens, and the so-called Edelweiss Pirates, a group of working class teenagers, began to show Germany what their beliefs towards the NSDAP was. They tried to violate as many of the Nazi regulations as they could; they sang anti Nazi songs and listened to English and American songs including Jazz, which was banned due to the view that it was black music and black people were inferior. Some of them also helped to shelter deserters from the German army.

A few of the students, who were considered physically and genetically fitter than the average, went to the Adolf Hitler Schools, a school intended to educate the future leaders of Germany using really tough physical training. The top students of those schools went on to the Order Castles, which were

schools where students were taken to the absolute limits of physical strength and endurance.

Of course, among the idyllic German children were also children who did not measure up, socially nor genetically, to the Nazi standards. To get rid of them, they were taken to isolated institutions, hospitals and concentrations camps. Some were even murdered.

Taken as a whole, I think that, although the Nazi Youth Organization was fairly evidently a Nazi scheme for turning the new generations into Nazi supports and preparing them for war, I think that these groups did help to bring together the German children and teens and the level discipline and tough physical training, must, in some measure, have had a positive effect on the children. However I also believe that modifying the school curriculum as drastically as they did was very unethical, since the students had no choice; school was compulsory and they could either choose to listen to what the Nazis were telling them or not and the parents could not chose to put their children in any other school if they did not like the fact that their children were taught Nazi principles. Another thing that relates to this is the fact that the education the children received, given that the children were somewhat open to Nazi influence, also caused conflicts in the homes, due to children and parents not being equally fond of the Nazis, resulting in rebellious teens and similar domestic struggles.

The economy is another great topic of discussion in the debate about the Nazis improving Germany or not. When Adolf took office, Germany was considered the European country with the bleakest future. Quite possibly no

other country in the world had worse prospects. Germany was technically bankrupt with no likelihood of rehabilitation. There were many varied reasons to blame for this: Massive unemployment, industrial stagnation, crippling strike actions by unions, private investment had fallen to one sixth, collapse in agricultural prices, escalating numbers of bankrupt companies, total earnings had fallen by half, about 90% of the German people were in dire straits, the Versailles treaty confiscated the richest mineral land and imposed escalating debt repayments that would not be lifted for fifty years and communists, funded by the Soviet Union, were taking advantage of the political turmoil with frequent strike action and violent abortive coups.

On taking up office as Chancellor of Germany, Adolf Hitler described himself as determined to address the economic catastrophe and unemployment by any means and as soon as possible. He clearly outlined his aims as: reducing the unemployment, which was about 6 million in 1933, building up German armaments industry, rearming the army navy and air force and make Germany economically self sufficient. However he knew that he was facing problems: It was difficult to export goods, since trade had almost completely collapsed in the Great Depression and he knew that Germany was short of certain essential raw materials and they could not afford to pay for many of the imports. He talked to the Reich bank President, Dr. Hans Luther, who was known as a frugal and practical man. Since the total remaining State Funds was only about 150 million marks, he offered Adolf no assistance or advice and therefore Hitler decided that Luther was not the man for the job.

However, having turned the party newspaper, *Volkischer Beobachter*, from ruin to a decent profitability, Hitler had developed an interest in economics.

He worked on ideas, asking what could and what could not be done with the German economy and he asked Dr. Hjalmar Schacht to do the same. The two of them came up with what is known as "MEFO Bonds". Schacht formed the limited liability company: 'Metallurgische Forschungsgesellschaft' or "MEFO" for short. The company's 'MEFO bills' functioned like bills of exchange, convertible into Reichmarks upon demand. MEFO did not actually exist and was only a 'balance sheet entity'. These bills mainly came out as payment to weaponry manufacturers. Basically, the MEFO bills allowed the Reich to run a greater deficit than it would normally have been able to. The public eagerly accepted the bonds and Hitler had billions to create jobs with, without causing inflation. "By the end of Adolf Hitler's first year in office unemployment had fallen from 6,000,000 to 3,374,000. An unprecedented 2,627,000 jobs had been created at a time when the rest of the world was in deep economic recession." [1] As the employment progressed, government income automatically increased due to several things: Many unemployed no longer needed to be supported with state funds, the newly employed now paid tax from their wages and with increased confidence, private industry in turn dared to expand and employ new staff.

Hitler was also known to drastically improve the social status of the German worker. He regularly toured factories and farms, talking to the workers, to learn their opinions at first hand.

The Nazis also helped a large number of small businesses, such as shopkeepers, self-employed craftsmen and the like by closing down Jewish businesses. Even though, of course the Jews suffered quite severely from this, the competition to the non-Jewish businessmen decreased greatly, since

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Jewish businessmen were known to be very successful in Germany. The Nazis abolished the trade unions and massive rearmaments programmes were launched, having a positive effect on the big businesses of Germany. However the government took control of prices, wages, imports, the allocation of raw materials and what they had to produce.

They also tried to increase the agricultural production by telling farmers that they were one of the most important people of Germany and erasing some of their debts. The farmers also benefitted from increase in food prices; however it was not as easy as they thought, because with the increased number of industries in Germany, which means more jobs available, a lot of the farmers moved to the towns because of the better paid jobs.

In 1936, Hitler announced the Four-Years Plan under the control of Goering. It was created to prepare for war within four years and it aimed to make Germany self sufficient in materials like oil, rubber and steel. Germany was to do this by increasing the production of raw materials needed for rearmament, further reducing imports, trying to tighten controls on prices and wages, persuade big businesses to produce the key synthetic raw materials such as rubber, use forced labour force if needed and build new industrial plants such as the Hermann Goering Works. However, despite the fact that it turned out to be somewhat successful, it did not completely succeed, because in 1939 Germany was still dependant on foreign imports, and the Nazi thought that the only way for Germany to become completely self sufficient was to invade and conquer other countries, which could then provide the food and raw materials needed.

In general, most of the major aspects of the economy seemed to benefit from Nazi control in view of the fact that after five years of NSDAP industrial and economic activity showed that: paper manufacture had increased by 50%, the manufacture of diesel oil had increased by 66%, the production of coal had increased by 68%, the production of oil fuel had increased by 80%, the production of mineral oil had increased by 90%, the production of artificial silk had increased by 100%, the production of Paraffin had increased by 110%, the production of steel has increased by 167% and the production of lubricating oil has increased by 190%. Furthermore, the production of petrol and other motor fuels increased by 470%, aluminium production increased by 570% and the production of Zellwolle increased by 2,500%. They were also successful in increasing the foreign trade in imports from 4.2 to 5.5 milliard Reichmarks and in exports from 4.9 milliard Reichmarks in 1933 to 5.9 milliard Reichmarks in 1937[2]. They also managed to improve the economical situation for a majority of the Germans, although most of the Jews possibly suffered from things such as closure of Jewish businesses to enhance other businesses' possibilities. He managed to bring down the unemployment from about 6 millions to virtually nothing. A few outsiders were pretty impressed by what Hitler and the Nazi had been able to do with the economy: In 1939, an impressed Spanish world news correspondent wrote: "Prejudices aside, anybody visiting Germany again for the first time after an interval of five years, cannot fail to be impressed by the obvious signs of an economic renaissance. He would see factories, formerly dilapidated and closed down, now reopened and refitted, working again under normal conditions. He would see an army of employed workers increased by hundreds of thousands, and above all, note the loading ramps

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piled high with commodities, stand amazed at the constant stream of big transport lorries, each with its four-wheeled or six-wheeled trailer... all the signs and portents, which five years ago told the story of business depression, had vanished into thin air and been replaced by an auspicious display of re-awakened enterprise"[3].

Another key factor in the Nazi regime was propaganda, which was quite cleverly controlled by Dr. Joseph Goebbels, minister for enlightenment and propaganda. It was one of the key things to help reduce the opposition to Hitler. Goebbels was a very fanatical believer in the NSDAP so he wanted all of the Germans to think the same of the Nazi as he did. He carefully controlled and decided what the Germans should and should not hear.

Art was used a lot to present the Nazi ideal world: Posters of the perfect Aryan families or a picture of a strong German Aryan demanding work, freedom and bread. A lot of pictures of the Nazi parades and such were used to present the Nazi party as a well structured organization. Music was restricted to German folk songs, marching music and classical music. Foreign music such as jazz was not tolerated. Theatre was to only focus on German history and political drama. Cinema was, by Goebbels, considered a very important way of indoctrinating Nazi ideas. Some films, shown in the cinemas, told stories about Aryan protagonists and 'evil' Jews.

Radio was also believed to be very important, but the problem was that not every had access to a radio. To solve this Goebbels made millions of very cheap radios; however these were only able to pick up German broadcasts.

Typical broadcasts would be Hitler's speeches or programmes about German history.

Hitler also controlled newspapers such as the *Völkischer Beobachter*, the official daily newspaper of the NSDAP; *Das Reich*, focusing more the intellectual part of the Germans; *Der Stürmer*, the most anti-Semitic of them all and *Das Schwarze Korps*, the SS publication. All of these, each either targeting different audiences or targeting the same audiences but in different ways, helped to spread out Nazi ideology and beliefs against Semitism and Bolshevism.

The Olympics was also used as a good way of showing the rest of the world what the German people can do. Goebbels told Germany, that the Olympics would be their chance to showcase their ideas and the strength of the new Germany as well as the superiority of the Aryans. Germany was very successful and managed to win the most medals however the African-American Jesse Owens was the person, who won the most medals.

By and large, I think that, although the propaganda was obviously very successful, I do not think that it benefitted Germany in many ways. It may have given a slight boost in the German morale (the non-Jewish German, that is), because, as outlined above, Goebbels did put a lot of work into presenting Germany as a superior nation and showing how the idyllic German was (strong physically and genetically, Aryan) and the few of those who actually lived up to these depictions must have gained lots of self-esteem. However, those who did not live up to the German standards of perfection, 'the inferior ones', must not have felt very good. Furthermore,

many of the restraints put on things like music, must also have had some negative effect on the mood of the Germans. As evident from anti-Nazi groups such as Edelweiss Pirates, who listened to Jazz and danced American dances such as the 'Jitterbug', rebellions were inevitable.

One of the major, and probably the most obvious, arguments to go against the belief that the Nazis improved Germany is the topic concerning Jewish persecution. As already mentioned several times earlier, the Jews were definitely one of the groups suffering the most from Nazi rule. Due to a still 'not quite certain'-reason, Hitler has, for a big part of his life, had a very intense aversion to Jewish people. Hitler had frequently stated his views about how he believed the Jews were taking all the good jobs. To some extent, you could agree, considering that, although the Jews were a minority group, they still made up 16 percent of the lawyers, 17 percent of the bankers in Germany and there were about 10,000 Jewish doctors. You could argue that this shows that the Jews were a quite successful race. Due to this, jealousy is obviously unavoidable. Whether Hitler's dislike originated from jealousy or something else remains a topic of debate, however it is pretty certain that a lot of other Germans were highly affected by jealousy, which is why Hitler had reasonably wide support in his anti-Semitic views. However, whereas a lot of people agreed with Hitler's views on Jews, some disagreed and helped and defended the Jews; some of these even used to be National Socialist before Hitler came and introduced his philosophies.

When in power, Hitler gradually made the Jewish policies more severe. In the beginning, when the rules were not as severe as they later became, the rules were mostly regulations to separate Jews, the ones considered racially

inferior, from the Aryans, who were regarded as the dominant race. Rules could be as simple as: Jews not allowed to be in public areas, or use facilities used by Aryans; Aryans not allowed to be treated by Jewish doctors and vice versa; while Aryans could walk on the pavement Jews had to walk on the streets.

As time went by, Hitler slowly turned up the severity of these laws: Boycott of Jewish shops, lawyers and doctors, Jews were prohibited from being employed in the government and eventually Jews were completely banned from working in any upper-class position, because they were reserved for the Aryans. In 1933, persecution of the Jews became official viewpoint amongst the Germans; in 1935 laws were passed disallowing Jews and Aryan to marry and making Jews ' subjects' rather than people in the court; in 1935 Jews were forbidden to join the armed forces and anti-Semitic propaganda began to become much more widely used. Laws, making all Jews lose their German citizenship, were also passed. In 1936 Jews were banned from the professions, simply to prevent them from having an influence on education, politics and the industry in any way. In 1937, the Nazi began an attempt to improve non-Jewish businesses by confiscating Jewish businesses and in 1938, in an event known as Kristallnacht, the Nazis destroyed Jewish homes, shops and synagogues.

However, as the subject of the Nazis and the Jews is very often today a very emotional and obviously disliked discussion, there are also people, who argue that the Nazis had some Jewish support in spite of everything they so infamously were known to have done to the Jews. A few documented Jewish supporters of the Nazis were: Emile Maurice, Hitler's Jewish friend in prison

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that co-founded the Nazi-SS and therefore became the SS member number 2, whilst Hitler was SS member number 1. When Himmler became Reichsführer-SS and established the racial purity rules for SS officers, he wanted Maurice and other members of his family to be expelled from the SS; however Hitler stood by his old friend and told Himmler to make an exception for Maurice and his brothers[4]; Gertrude Stein, a renowned Jewish author and Nobel Prize winner nominated Adolf Hitler for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1938, stating that “ I say that Hitler ought to have the peace prize, because he is removing all the elements of contest and of struggle from Germany. By driving out the Jews and the democratic and Left element, he is driving out everything that conduces to activity. That means peace...”[5]

Generally, I do not think that the persecution of Jews benefitted Germany in any way. It only made the life of the Jews very miserable. It may have slightly improved the bonds between the non-Jews, but I do not think that this by any means can outbalance the amount the Jews suffered.

Along with the degree of Jewish persecution, the Nazis also persecuted certain groups of non-Nazis; groups such as gypsies, the disabled and the homosexuals. The disabled were seen as useless and a burden on the community. To get rid of them, Hitler launched what is known as the ‘ cleansing program’, in which thousand of people were killed. He also introduced the sterilization law: a law that aimed to sterilize all those who were considered ‘ unfit’, often people with mental or physical people went under this term. In total an estimated 275, 000 disabled people are believed to have been killed by the Nazis. The Nazis did not approve of homosexual either and, just like Jews, considered them genetically impure.

Homosexuality was declared a crime of degeneracy and in 1933 to 1944 thousand of men, accused of being homosexuals, were sent to concentration camps for 'rehabilitation'.

Generally, I do not think that any of the kinds of persecution employed in Nazi Germany was beneficial, due to a personal belief, that it made people suffer for unnecessary reasons. However, whether it was right or wrong to exterminate the really mentally or physically ill or the children who was suffering from what you could call diseases that decreased the quality of their lives is a moral question; just like the debate about abortion and whether it should be legal to take away the child right to live.

The church was also fairly influenced by the Nazi rule. Hitler was stuck in between either keeping the church or destroying it. Hitler knew that destroying the church could perhaps help to transform religious believers into Nazi believers. However, he also knew that big portions of the German people were members of the church and destroying the church could have a drastic impact on his votes. Therefore, Hitler decided to do a mixture of both; he kept churches on the condition that he was in control. Hitler had promised the churches to keep their schools and teachings intact; however he eventually broke his word and combined the churches to create a German-Christian Church, which was led by Ludwig Muller. This made it possible for him to implement his own modifications to the teachings of the church. For example, Hitler got rid of many of the teachings about Jewish biblical legends, such as Moses. This proved reasonably successful, as in 1937 the 85% of Catholic school dropped to 5% and the percentage of Protestant schools fell from 58 to 9, consequently limiting the influence the church's

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teaching had on the German people and increasing the German susceptibility of Nazi beliefs. However, even though the church was under the Nazis power, Hitler did not possess complete control; revolutions were common and people such as Paul Schneider, Martin Niemoeller, Cardinal Galen and Josef Fath were some of those who went against Hitler's church.

A final thing to mention in this essay before concluding is ' Women in Nazi Germany'. The Nazis believed that women were expected to stay at home and have children. The Jungmadel and the Bund Deutscher Madel, Nazi youth organizations for girls, taught the girls that their role was as good housewives and mothers and have loads of children with racially pure men. They were also told not to smoke or diet as it could affect their ability to have healthy children. The Nazi used a mnemonic known as ' the three Ks' to teach the women what was important as women. The three Ks were: ' Kinder' (Children), ' Kuche' (Kitchen) and Kirche (Church).

Women were also encouraged to get married, preferably with Aryans. A law for the encouragement of marriage, which gave newly weds government loans of a thousand Reich mark, was set up in 1933. This loan could be paid off by getting a lot of children.

In 1934 the ' The 10 commandments for choice of spouse' was published by the government. The ten commandments were: Remember that you are German, if you are genetically do not remain unmarried, keep you body pure, keep your mind and spirit pure, choose only a spouse of German or Nordic blood, when choosing a spouse ask about his ancestors, health is also a precondition for physical beauty, marry only for love, do not look for a

playmate but for a companion for marriage, you should want to have as many children as possible.

Physical constraints were also put on the German women. Women were not allowed to wear make-up, have hair dyed or have perms. They were only to wear flat shoes and no trousers allowed. Slimming was illegal as it was thought unhealthy and would upset child-bearing. Smoking was not allowed either, as it was considered 'un-German'. To the Nazis, the ideal German woman had blue eyes, was blond and sturdily built. She was meant to have broad hips and no interest in fashion, make-up or slimming; women who were not Aryan looking, smoked cigarettes, did not follow Nazi clothing principles and wore make-up were disapproved of.

In hope of increasing birth rate, the Nazis took the women out of the labour market: In 1934, women were dismissed from the professions and in 1936, female judges were forbidden and women were disallowed to sit in jury. However in 1937, as Germany was rearming, the Nazis needed women to replace the men who had joined the army so consequently they abolished the marriage loans and they introduced the compulsory 'duty year' for women entering the labour market; this forced women to work one year in agriculture, as a domestic servant or as an auxiliary nurse or social worker.

As evident from above, the Nazis were very worried about the decline in birth rate, suspected to be due to an increased use of contraception, abortion and women wanting paid work. Hitler knew that there had to be an increase in population, if Germany was to become a great power again and he also knew that women were very important if they were to achieve this.

Therefore he began awarding medals for women who had more than 4 children; he encouraged unmarried women to have children via 'Lebensborn's' where women got pregnant by racially pure SS officers and he banned contraception and abortion.

Many women had a positive attitude towards Hitler and the Nazis; many felt an affection for Hitler. He received letters from several women wanting him to father their child and observers at Nazi rallies in the 1930s described how screaming women wanted to touch Hitler. However not all women supported the Nazis, because large numbers of women joined left wing groups and in 1933 the Nazi began opening concentration camps for women.

Overall, I think that the life of the German women generally improved during the Nazi regime, despite a few women opposing the Nazis. They were encouraged not to work and only focus on having children and taking care of their husbands. The limitations put on them in form of what they could and could not wear must however have been somewhat an annoyance, but in some measure perhaps also necessary, to bring out the right picture of Nazi Germany. Also, it could seem like a lot of pressure were put on the women to marry, have children and take care of their husbands. This may not always have been equally pleasant for all women.

To conclude I would like to express my opinion on the question. Personally I believe that Hitler and the Nazis did mostly improve Germany. I think the areas where they were particularly successful where in areas such as the economy; figures mentioned earlier show that they lowered the unemployment from about 6 millions to nearly nothing, the industrial

production of things such as coal, diesel oil, paraffin and steel had raised by up to 190% and aluminium production had increased by about 570% during Nazi control. The outside world also recognized Germany economical success: In 1947, Winston Churchill said: “ The war was not just a matter of the elimination of Fascism in Germany, but rather of obtaining German sales markets.” Share this: Facebook Twitter Reddit LinkedIn WhatsApp