

Nazi propaganda research paper example

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



The Nazis, in the true spirit of their time, grew a massive in-house propaganda machine over the course of their short reign in Germany. They did this using many different media, including print, film, and simple word-of-mouth. In this paper, we will look at the various ways they used propaganda to sway opinion in their favor and to convey their message to their audience, the German civilian population.

1. Plan of Investigation

How best do we go about gathering information on the topic? One way is to gather the key media they were using to convey the propaganda and then to investigate them on an individual basis.

For print media, one obvious source was penned by Hitler himself. His book (it can scarcely be called an autobiography due to the exaggerations and its political purpose) dedicates much of its time to propaganda, a form of communication which did not have the negative connotations it does today at that time. We will also look at the ways the Nazis used newspapers, such as the *Völkischer Beobachter* and *Der Stürmer*, to spread their message.

For film, we will review examples of the better-known Nazi propaganda films, such as Leni Riefenstahl's famous *Triumph of the Will*. We will examine the Ministry of Propaganda's strategy for sponsoring these films.

Finally, we will look at the *Kraft durch Freude* program, a massive part of the overall Nazi propaganda scheme. This program made promises to the average German that would improve their overall quality of life affordably. Heavily promoted through propaganda, the program itself represented an attempt to bind the regime's propaganda directly to the hopes and dreams of the people.

2. Summary of Evidence

During the Nazi era, the word propaganda did not have the negative connotations it does today. This is underscored by Hitler's eagerness to delve into the topic in *Mein Kampf*, itself a work of propaganda. Hitler addressed the issue directly by claiming that he realized the importance of propaganda when he was subjected to British materials during World War I and found them to be better-targeted than German propaganda. He claimed that this experience made him aware of the importance of propaganda, although this was a common claim at the time in nationalist German circles and those who were outraged at the outcome of World War I for Germany. As to how propaganda was to be employed, he clearly stated, Propaganda must not investigate the truth objectively and, in so far as it is favourable to the other side, present it according to the theoretical rules of justice; yet it must present only that aspect of the truth which is favourable to its own side.

(Hitler 163).

Hitler indeed goes into great detail on propaganda in the manifesto, laying out a precise plan on how to deceive the German population. Perhaps this is evidence that people who so easily fell prey to it had probably never actually read *Mein Kampf* (Hartmann).

Newspapers acquired by the party would prove to play a pivotal role. The *Völkische Beobachter* became affiliated with the party as early as 1920, and maintained the "appearance" of being a genuine newspaper for 25 years as the "official" representative of the party (Kershaw, 155-156). In contrast to

this, another newspaper acquired by the party, *Der Stürmer*, would present propaganda much more bluntly and was used as an organ for the Nazi's pseudo-scientific racial ideas and to incite violence against particular groups. One interesting aspect involving *Der Stürmer* were the "Stürmerkasten", which were prominent display cases located in towns and cities in public so that everyone had the ability to read the publication. This helped to reach the target audience, mainly poor young men, very effectively (Bytwerk). Joseph Goebbels, head of the Ministry of Propaganda, had a particular interest in film, and he gladly ensured the sponsorship of numerous films intended to spread propaganda. The most famous example is certainly *The Triumph of the Will*, which covers the 1934 Nazi party rally at Nuremberg. Hitler commissioned the film. It remains controversial to this day, as the content is clearly skewed, yet the techniques used by the filmmaker are much admired artistically. Its popularity and the powerful images of the massive rally in Nuremberg, the scale of which the majority of the public had never seen before, certainly made an impact on its viewership, both in Germany and abroad. One notable way it subconsciously influenced public opinion was its opening, which shows Hitler's plane flying through the clouds to land at Nuremberg; politicians at that time rarely traveled by plane, particularly in a compact nation like Germany. The effect of Hitler literally descending from the sky in such an unconventional manner for the time was subconsciously religious (Barsam 31).

Overall, hundreds of lesser-known films, some of which were never officially released, were made by the Ministry of Propaganda. Some were more obviously propaganda than others, but all films had to go through the

Ministry to become licensed, and so filmmakers themselves often chose to incorporate themes they knew would meet approval, such as “ nordic-ness”, prior German military feats, or anti-British propaganda.

One of these films, never released but available today on the Internet, stands out as particularly unique: Theresienstadt: A Documentary Film from the Jewish Settlement Area (1944). Jewish prisoners in that concentration camp were forced to make a “ documentary” about “ life” in the “ settlement area”. Fake storefronts were put up, and real prisoners were used as actors. The intent was apparently to lessen rumours that were spreading about Nazi treatment of the Jews. After the film was mostly complete, most of the principle prisoners involved were sent to Auschwitz and gassed to hide the evidence (Rubin 7). The film was never released, probably because the fear and starvation on the faces of the prisoners could not be hidden by any camera angle. But the gall of the plan in the first place underscores how far the Nazis believed they could convincingly take propaganda.

The propaganda was so pervasive that it invaded every aspect of daily life. Radios were distributed to the population at low cost. Programming in the early days of the regime tended more toward speeches, but as the war wore on, lighter programming was introduced in an attempt to distract the public. Other programs were highly publicized, such as Kraft durch Freude (Strength through Joy), partially responsible for the cheap radios but also known for being responsible for making the Volkswagen, promoted as an affordable car that everyone would eventually be able to purchase through a savings scheme, as well as making vacations on the Baltic coast affordable (most people did not actually benefit from these programs, but the idea that they

one day might served as effective propaganda).

3. Evaluation of sources

The sources used here include a primary source (Hitler's manifesto, *Mein Kampf*), Ian Kershaw's biography of Hitler, Hitler, widely considered the definitive work on the man and his worldview, a few scholarly articles, as well as a news article and an article from a website seeking to document the experience of the German military in World War II. While some carry more weight than others, all contribute to forming the overall picture of how propaganda was used as a tool to permeate nearly every aspect of life for the German population by the end of the war.

4. Analysis

Given the evidence presented, there can be little doubt that the Nazis very deliberately made use of any and all means of propaganda they could think of in order to indoctrinate, or at least maintain control over, the German population during the war. Hitler and Goebbels in particular did this consciously. We see that Hitler personally placed a great importance on the value of propaganda, as he either personally believed or deliberately cultivated a belief that World War I was lost due to superior British propaganda (Hitler 163). By creating a Ministry of Propaganda and giving it authority over basically all cultural materials produced (at least officially) within the country, he was acting in a deliberate manner to curtail any and all opposition against Nazi doctrine and rule. Indeed, it was a deliberate attempt at brainwashing. And it showed a contempt for the common man's ability to think for himself:

The broad masses of the people are not made up of diplomats or professors of

public jurisprudence nor simply of persons who are able to form reasoned judgment

in given cases, but a vacillating crowd of human children who are constantly wavering between one idea and another. (Hitler 163).

Through these methods, almost any and all attempts at rebellion were avoided during the 12 years the Nazis were in power. This perhaps disturbingly speaks to their effectiveness, given the extreme sacrifices made by the German population in the later years of the war.

5. Conclusion

The Nazis used propaganda to effectively control almost every aspect of German cultural life during their time in power. They censored and limited what could be read, what could be viewed, and what could be listened to on public airwaves; they deliberately modified footage using techniques to emphasize their power; they tempted the population with incentives like the opportunity to own a vehicle or the ability to go on an affordable vacation. They secured themselves a position at the center of not only peoples' daily lives, but also at the center of their hopes and aspirations using the media. And there can be little doubt that that was their original intent.

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