The social impact of nazism in germany history essay

" Nazism: The ideology of the Nazis, especially the policy of racial nationalism, national expansion, and state control of the economy."

The true scope of the ramifications of Nazism is poorly understood for it is not simply a political ideology, but rather, a system of government that brought the world into a second world war, a holocaust of millions, and a path of intense nationalism and conformity. While we are accustomed to a mindset where political parties create policies that are designed to govern a particular people, Nazism also took on that role as well as one that bordered on a religious ideology. Nazism took over the lives of all German peoples. It invaded towns, factories, schools, and culture in such a way that would revolutionize the way Germans would see their power and destiny. Nazism gave the German people power as well as a charismatic leader to follow through with its plan. It was a fatal attraction for the Germans that would force them to abandon tradition and a world they knew to one where the swastika alone flew from the mast.

It is clear from history that a key aspect of Nazism came from the acquiring of support at a local level. The local Nazi leaders of towns supplied the surge of support to elect Nazi officials into high ranking positions- eventually leading to the announcement of Adolph Hitler as Chancellor of Germany in the year 1933.[1]

Normally, one would assume that this Nazi regime would fail in a society where the people felt content with the direction of their country and their countries ability to protect them. However, because of how the end of World War I was conducted it left the average German citizen to pay " unfair"

(depending on which country you ask) war reparations. Germany was not involved in the discussion of their fate during the Paris Peace Conference and a man like Roosevelt could not sway the conviction of men like Clemenceau and others to reduce the German sentence. The German people felt betrayed in the European community and now viewed their government as sub par to their needs. Because of these intense feelings for change, the radicalism of Nazism was welcomed. In fact, not to compare President Barack Obama to Adolph Hitler, but in today's world, when people felt that the government was not meeting our needs, we as American's, elected a man that promised change.

Many threads of Nazi development can be linked to the fact Germany did not undergo a successful bourgeois revolution like other countries in Europe. This lack of inner revolution from the people kept them in a sort of complacency that did not break the status quo of an elitist society. The norms of society were to maintain a class structure and the status quo of what they had always known.[2]

An aspect of this history that I believe played a huge role in why the German people allowed Nazism into their lives was because it gave them a sense of purpose and power. After World War I they felt lost; seeing their economy suffer, their life savings go to paying war reparations to other European countries, and having parts of their country in ruin from the war, the people were simply looking for a change- a change that came with Nazism and Hitler. Hitler and Nazism are synonymous for one may not have lived without the other.

Hitler has a charismatic personality overflowing with power and decisiveness that was not found in his political opponents. In an essentially political void, Hitler, " combined the strengths (and flaws) of his natural personality with artfully contrived gestures, Hitler fashioned a charismatic presence that enabled him to achieve absolute power over an entire nation."[3]This kind of new vigor and determination in government was exactly what the Germanic people were looking for.

Personality and power, although powerful tools, were not the sole reason the Germanic people followed Hitler. The German people were desperate for relief of the Depression, and Hitler provided the answer that spelled relief in terms of the German economy. Workers on the German labor front had been going through some very hard times and they posed the greatest " uncertainty about the shape of the new social order".[4]Hitler realized to gain the support of the working class he must not simply apply a detached bureaucratic manner, but rather one that would " restore the dignity of manual labor and emancipated it from the deprecating glance of the brain worker."[5]These brain workers, or skilled workers, were part of the elite society- contributing to already rigid and problem inducing class structure. A new unity of the German working people was to be created and it came in the NSDAP which stands for " independent working class organizations of any political persuasion"[6], a new unified labor force was created. The employers of the working class, under Hitler's rule, " dissolved their own class organizations and joined the Labor Front, which became therewith the official bearer of the doctrine that class conflict had been abolished."[7]

Once this class conflict, one that was further dividing an already secular Germany, was united Hitler and Nazism started to make a sort of standard of living and a standard culture for all of the German people. He reinstalled a sense of what it is to be German in a time when nationalism and pride were dismal. Hitler's enthusiasm gave people hope and a sense of belonging to a country that was being run by a man they admired and loved for joining them together in the " father land"- a term that is connected with German nationalism during this time.

" The German countryside and German culture were translated by a gigantic feat of organization into commodities to which all Germans should have equal access: symphony orchestras played in the factories during the lunch-hour, and firms were given cheap block-booking for the civic theatres at night; factory libraries were expanded (and purged), sport was nationally organized, encouraged and subsidized so that even the poorest unskilled worker was able to sail or play tennis; and folk-culture groups revived and preformed traditional rural songs and dances."[8]

After relieving the economic problem of employment and joining the labor parties together, Adolph Hitler promised supremacy over enemies of the German people. Hitler identified the enemies of Germany and put Jewish and Bolshevik faces on his personification. This was essential in Hitler's success because he gave the Germanic people someone to blame for their hardships; someone they had been seeking all along. Jews and communists, described by German propaganda as " evil incarcerate"[9], were responsible for the wide scope of social, political, and economic troubles experienced by Germany, particularly the Depression. Non-Aryans were considered to be at

the bottom of the social Darwinism scale and a convenient face for blame. [10]" According to Hitler the Jews in Germany and elsewhere were the champion of ' Marxism', the ' dictatorship of the proletariat', ' democracy' and the ' majority principle'. Jews were responsible for the out break of the First World War, and for the war's catastrophic outcome, namely German collapse in 1918."[11]Hitler felt that Jews were responsible for the problems of the German people and singles them out in society as the clear target for aggression, blame, and peoples of " less racial quality"[12]. Because of their " inferior qualities" Hitler began racial purging. Throughout the course of the war millions of Jews, gypsies, handicaps, Christians, and homosexuals were killed. This act known to the world as the Holocaust is one of the world's largest and most well known acts of genocide.

The mindset of Hitler and the Nazi are vastly misunderstood to solely be an ideology of cruelty, however, is often overlooked as an ideology of love as well. Although the actions taken by the Nazi's during the war were nothing sort of barbaric, it united Germans with a sort of emotional and powerful love for each other and their country- a romantic feeling they had not felt before. What was happening at the time in Germany gave Aryans a sense a true pride and overwhelming love for their country. This sense of unity and German pride was in my opinion what fueled the atrocities and gave Germans their aggressive nature in World War II. Knowing the new attitudes that were adopted by society we must assess its affect on German towns, German children, and German families to see just how far into society the ideology and practice of Nazism entered.

To the young generation living in Germany at the time Hitler's policies made war seem normal and violence seem legitimate. " The National Socialist youth policy aimed to secure the younger generation's total loyalty to the regime and their willingness to fight in the war that lay ahead."[13]Hitler youth, as they came to be called, was filled with a large percentage of both boys and girls all at fairly young ages. At first it was expected of children to join Hitler youth but as time went on it seemed to be a group that children voluntarily joined; " many did not regard membership in Hitler Youth compulsory."[14]Hitler youth wore uniforms like the soldiers did that was a sort of mark to their allegiance. Uniforms in general are a symbol of power and when many people where the same uniform is a bond that joins you under a common denomination. The children that wore these uniforms felt empowered by them and were known to be rebellious and often engage in conflicts with authority such as teachers, clergymen, and their parents. Hitler tried to use the youth in the cities as a gang for his voice. However, in the countryside, where the towns were small and less effected by big city ideologies new groups formed such as the Edelweiss Pirates and Swing clubs. [15]

The presence of girls in these youth clubs was crucial to a changing younger society, one that was clearly different from that of their parents. Girls could escape the typical ' house wife' role that their mothers could not escape. They were able to do activities with boys and ones that previously boys were only allowed to do. Although on many levels it was restricted, these groups undoubtedly proved in many practical day-to-day respects, to be a modernizing force in society.[16]Modernizing society created a gap in

ideology between the youth and the generation of their parents. One example of these new differences can clearly be seen through the interactions between boys and girls in these youth groups.

" The presence of girls at the evening get-together and on the weekend trip into the countryside gave the adolescence a relatively unrestricted opportunity to have sexual experiences. In this respect they were much less prudish than their parents' generation, particularly the representatives of Nazi organizations with their almost obsessive fixation on the representation of sexuality. Nevertheless sexual life in these groups was no doubt much less orgiastic then contemporary authors of official reports believed, or wanted others to believe, when they sought to construct a trinity of delinquency out of (sexual and criminal) degeneracy, (anti-organizational and anti-authoritarian) rebellion, and (political) opposition."[17]

These changes in society amongst the youth of Germany were one direct effect of Nazism in both big cities and in small towns. Some towns, although they were small, provided perfect centers for the accumulation of Nazi ideals. In towns that were dominated economically by railroads, it was easy to spread Nazi culture. These small towns were high in numbers around the railroads so this is a clear example of the Nazi's used a part of the economy to spread their ideas to the German people.

A key part in any German family as well as families all over the world then and today- mothers (and women in general) are a vital part of the " glue" that holds it together. Family, in the Nazi's eyes, was where women should contribute their energy and that they should maintain themselves in the

private sphere of society. " It is generally safe to say that in the Nazi view women were to be wives, mothers, and homemakers; they were to play no part in public life, in the legislature, the executive, the judiciary and armed forces."[18]These roles were enforced to make sure the German birth rate, which was already on a decline, would not continue to decline. Women supported the Nazi's and whatever group their husbands or brothers were in, in the same way women have always supported men during war: " providing food, making and mending uniforms, …or making a flag bearing the Party's symbol."[19]

Women and mothers greatly contributed to the war effort in a physical way as well as in an emotional one. Mothers and wives made a vital contribution to Nazi power by preserving the illusion of love in an environment of hatred and were said to make the world a more pleasant place to live in for the community. And although society at the time did not want to condemn women for cruelties in the same way as men, truth was that women were just a violence and unspeakably cruel as the men. " Over time, Nazi women no less than men, destroyed ethical vision, debased humane traditions, and rendered decent people helpless."[20]Not to generalize, there were a large group of women who did live up to these loving standards and worked to make sure Nazi ideology was not the only ideals left in their towns, children, and culture. " And other women, as victims and resisters, risked their lives to ensure Nazi defeat and preserve their own ideals."[21]

When the war was eventually over the social impact of Nazism had come full circle. Images of masses of soldiers marching to demonstrate Nazi might and rallies spewing Nazi ideals were now mere memories. Now, it was individuals

alone, devoid of what once made them a force scrambling to save their own lives. It demonstrated classic aspects of human nature gone awry, the desire for a cause greater than the individual and the need for a feeling of belonging to an institution with a sense of purpose. It is clear now in retrospect, that the ideals that the Nazi party held dear, almost to the level of doctrine, were twisted, cruel, unethical, and barbaric. The " gang" mentality was perhaps never so clearly demonstrated in history. As was so clearly displayed in Nuremburg, few, if any, that were put on trial, admitted to the acts they were being accused of. Stripped of all that made them powerful, they were reduced to mere individuals, attempting to save themselves: No impassioned speeches, no recitation of ideological dogma, only the pleas of men and women destitute of what once made them powerful.

The Nazi Revolution: Fourth Edition. Ed. Mitchell, Alan. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997.

The 100- A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History: Seventh Edition. Ed. Hart, Michael. New York: Citadel Press, 1994.

Kershaw, Ian. ' The Hitler Myth: Image and reality in the Third Reich' in David F. Crew (ed.) Nazism and German Society 1933-1945, London, 1994.