Triumph and Tragedy:

The Rise and Fall of Nazi Germany

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Through the duration of World War One, the threat of communism was becoming a prominent issue in Germany. Many conflicting interest groups saw this as a growing threat to the freedom of their country. Adolf Hitler was a man who was particularly opposed to a communist society; he believed strongly in anti-semitism, anti-communism, and nationalism. His triumph with strong political stances and unethical views towards certain groups of people lead to tragedies committed in Nazi Germany, beginning in 1914 and ending in 1949.

**Entering Politics:**

An interest in politics began when Hitler enrolled himself in the army to fight during World War I. “Hitler served throughout the Great War and won two decorations for his bravery, including the rare Iron Cross First Class” (Fogarty). After a shell explosion, he was injured and sent to recover near Berlin. Needing a scapegoat to blame the rapid decline of the city’s condition, he blamed Jews. His request to rejoin the army was granted on March 1, 1917. On November 19, 1918, abdication from Kaiser Wilhelm ensued, and the German Empire fell, marking the end of World War I and a victory for the Allied powers. Following the restoration of his vision, he gathered right-winged veterans who shared views and named it the Free Corps. The Weimar Republic became the new form of government.

Hitler was given the opportunity to investigate the activities of radical organizations, one of these being the German Workers Party. This was a combination of socialism, nationalism, and anti-semitism. Military superiors took interest in the party, believing it would rebuild the German army. Hitler was given orders to join the party by Anton Drexler, thus, his active political career had begun. Hitler was praised in this party after he demanded that the Treaty of Versailles be revoked. Germans didn’t agree with the terms of the treaty because it blamed Germany for World War I, forcing Germans to pay reparations, lose large amounts of lands, and have the navy reduced. “Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party led a coalition group in an attempt to overthrow the German government” (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum). On November 8, 1923 at 8:00pm, Strong Arm members and other members of the Nazi Party surrounded a beer hall. In another Munich hall, Ernest Röhm was addressing 2,000 SA members. The failure of the Beer Hall Putsch landed Hitler in Landsberg prison.

His trial for treason began in February of 1924. Pleading guilty to the Beer Hall Putsch, he earned five years in prison. Hitler, falling into a deep depression, began to write his book, Mein Kampf. He was released on December 19, 1925. Once loyalty to Bavaria was pledged, the restrictions against the Nazi Party were lifted. The restrictions against Hitler’s ability to publicly speak continued. To get around this, he would speak to small crowds and parties in Munich, hoping to recruit more members. Joseph Goebbels helped Hitler set up Nazi Party propaganda. He began working on a second volume of Mein Kampf subtitled, “The National Socialist Movement,” and it was published in December 1926. For the first time, he conveyed the idea of lebensraum (need for territory). This idea would hold a significant impact for Europe in the years to come. The ban on public speaking was lifted March 1927. “The world-wide depression… gave Hitler and the Nazi Party a tremendous boost” (Giblin). Chancellor Heinrichs Brüning’s conservative economic policy was doing nothing to bring Germany out of the depression. Elections for the Reichstag were quickly approaching, resulting in campaigns focusing on the economic slump. Six-million Germans voted for the Party, receiving 18.3% of votes and gaining 107 seats in the Reichstag.

**Road to Chancellor**

The growing Nazi Party could no longer be ignored by the German government; a meeting between Hitler and President Hindenburg was scheduled for October 1931. “Hindenburg told a colleague that Hitler didn’t have the stuff to become Chancellor” (Giblin). He sought out support from Germany’s leading industrialists. Hitler claimed the Nazi party could cure the depression. These statements were addressed at his speech in Dusseldorf. He then went on to explain the party’s policies: elimination of labor unions, freedom for businessmen to manage their affairs as they saw fit, and a program of public works and rearments.

In February of 1932, President Hindenburg confirmed that he would run for reelection. The Nazis knew they’d have to enter a candidate into the race; Hitler knew he was the perfect choice, he also knew that the position of President held less power than the role of Chancellor. Six weeks later, Goebbels convinced him to run against Hindenburg. Goebbels aided Hitler in campaigning. The strategies included dropping leaflets from planes, mailing 50,000 propaganda disks, projecting sound movies, and publicly speaking at least once a day. “The Reich will never be destroyed if you stay united and loyal” (Giblin). Despite this, Hindenburg won the election with the majority vote of 53%, while Hitler only received around 30% of votes. A runoff election, was held and Hindenburg won again.

The government began to lose faith in Chancellor Brüning, and he was asked to resign. He was replaced by Franz von Papen. During this time, Hindenburg dissolved the Reichstag and new parliamentary elections were scheduled. Hitler began to heavily campaign, focusing on confronting communism. “This lead to armed clashes between the SA men and communist demonstrators” (Giblin). After results were calculated, the Nazi’s claimed another victory, having 37.4% of votes and 230 seats - more than any other party.

**Gaining power**

Hitler demanded to be chancellor and establish a dictatorship. He proposed this idea to General Kurt von Schleicher who responded surprisingly well to his request, but was only offered vice chancellorship. “Hitler rejected this suggestion outright when Schleicher conveyed it to him” (Giblin). The newly formed Reichstag had no confidence in Papen, and he resigned. Hitler was then asked by President Hindenburg to help develop a new government, but he refused; General Schleicher was chosen instead. When Hitler turned down the offer of becoming vice chancellor again, the position was offered to Gregor Strasser who was later denounced as a traitor. By January of 1933, Schleicher was failing as Chancellor and resigned. Papen was offered the position but declined. On January 30, 1933, the Third Reich was created as Hitler was sworn in as Chancellor.

In February of 1933, a communist campaign was launched against the Nazis. “Workers to the barricades! Forward to victory!” (Brustein). Disappointed with the lack of a revolt, Marinus van der Lubbe decided to take action. On February 27, 1933, Lubbe set fire to the Reichstag. Political policemen informed Hitler that it had been done as a protest. He viewed this as the beginning of a communist uprising, though Lubbe denied any connection to the communists and insisted that he worked alone. Despite this, Hitler ordered that every communist and social democrat be shot and anyone associated with them be jailed.

Hitler proposed a decree that gave him ultimate power to protect against Reds, and it was passed without any oppositions. This decree had provisions that took away the civil rights given by the Weimar Republic which were free speech and press, sanctity of home, privacy of mail and telephone conversations, and the freedom to assemble organizations. Because the fear of communism was so strong, the sacrifice of these liberties was easy. The decree went into immediate effect as Schutzstaffel and Strong-Arm members joined police to ensure the new decree was not being broken. They started to raid areas where communists and other leftists were known to meet, over 3,000 were placed into protective custody.

As a result, the party was given an advantage in the next parliamentary elections, taking place in 1933. There was little to no resistance when communist posters were taken down and replaced with signs for Nazi promotion. Few questions were raised when leading industrialists invested thousands of dollars into propaganda. The Enabling Act was granted, allowing Hitler ultimate power over Germany. Many democrats disagreed with this, saying that it would end the democracy in the Reichstag, but when the votes for the act were counted, they totaled 441 in favor and 94 opposed. April 1, 1933, a boycott of Jewish businesses began; though it only lasted three days, it was the beginning of a slow demise for the Jewish population. Then, on April 7, 1933, The Law Against the Overcrowding of German Schools forced Jews out of school. The Night of Long Knives commenced on June 29, 1934, when Röhm, Kurt von Schleicher, and hundreds of other members of the Nazi Party were executed by Hitler. This purge was legalized on July 13, 1934. “Military Leaders agreed to combine the presidency and chancellorship into one position” (Hornberger). President Hindenburg died on August 2, 1934, giving Hitler complete power and essentially establishing a dictatorship.

**Discrimination and Extermination**

The Nuremberg Laws were passed on September 15, 1935. “Between 1939 and 1941, Jews were systematically deprived of their property and their ability to work” (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum). The first law, The Law for Protection of German Blood and Honor, forbade the marriage between a Jew and German or any other extra marital relationship. The second law stripped Jews’ citizenship. Only Aryans could receive a “Reich Certificate of Citizenship.” They didn’t get protection of law and courts, meaning the SS could arrest them without reason. They couldn’t own land or vote. Jews found a small break from public pressure when the Olympics of 1936 were held in Berlin, and the repressive acts and discriminatory treatment of Jews were exposed in newspapers around the world. Because of this, Hitler and Goebbels halted anti-semitic propaganda. On March 7, 1936, with an army stronger than ever, he entered a demilitarized zone of Germany called the Rhineland, breaking the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. The exclusion of Jews quickly progressed into more violent forms of protesting such as book burnings. In these protests, Nazis would proclaim cultural dominance by burning books owned or written by Jews.

Thousands of Jews began to be forced into concentration camps. Those who weren’t in camps were in labor camps or ghettos. This began to go into effect heavily when the Night of Broken Glass occurred on November 9, 1938. On this night, German synagogues were burned and windows of Jewish establishments were smashed. “Thousands of Jews remained interned in concentration camps following the mass arrests in the aftermath of Kristallnacht” (The Holocaust Encyclopedia). Starting in September of 1939, thousands of Polish-Jews were forced out of their

homes and into ghettos. Due to high poverty rates, high unemployment rates, overpopulation, and widespread starvation, ghettos were full of deadly diseases such as typhus. Towards Hitler’s “Final Solution” every Jew was marked with a yellow star through the Holocaust and the years prior.

By this time, Germany occupied the western half of Poland where German police took away property and placed Jews into ghettos. Those who suffered from disabilities became another target of Hitler. The Euthanasia Program began in the fall of 1939. Seventy-thousand Germans who were institutionalized for disability or mental illness were gassed to death. The supposed end of the program happened in August 1941, though the mass killings continued in secrecy and an estimated 275,000 people were killed by 1945. Hitler’s empire continued to expand. By 1941, he conquered Denmark, Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxemburg, and France. Jews and gypsies from across the region were placed into ghettos. The Soviet Union was invaded June 1941, and mobile units terminated 50,000 Soviet-Jews. In August, 500 Soviets were gassed using Zyklon-B, prompting the SS to place a large order of this chemical from a German pest control firm. Mass transports from ghettos to concentration camps began in late 1941. Those considered useless: sick, weak, old, and young, were sent first. The first mass gassing at camps took place on March 17, 1942 at Belzec. “There is no other way out but to die” (Wolfgang). Five more mass killing centers were created in Poland, these were Chelmo, Sobibor, Treblinka, Majdanek, and Auschwitz-Birkenau. Only Jews endured mass gassings, but thousands of others died at the hands of starvation and disease.

**A New Life**

On July 23, 1944, the concentration camps were liberated. “The wounds of the Holocaust were slow to heal” (Fogarty). Many had no family or place to go home to. Because of this, the 1940’s saw a large influx of immigration rates. Many Jews found it nearly impossible to return home because they had been denounced by their German neighbors, and their property had been seized.

The Nuremberg trials of 1945-1946 were created by the Allied powers to punish those responsible for the atrocities that took place in Nazi Germany. “Judges from the Allied powers… presided over the hearings” (The Nuremberg Trials). Twenty-four leaders of Germany faced with of aggressive war, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. Twelve were sentenced to death and many pled guilty to the crimes they were accused of. Other trials took place to sentence those who took part in the Holocaust. Many high-level government officials and business executives weren’t charged for their role in this event, facing little to no prison time. Simon Wiesenthal helped track down Adolf Eichmann, and he was executed in 1962, found guilty at his trial in Israel. Verdicts were given on October 1, 1946. Hess, Walther Funk, and Raeder, were sentenced to life in prison. Doenitz, Schirach, Speer, and Nueratn faced 10-20 years.

Many Jews tried to enter Britain, but very few immigrants were let in. They weren't offered resources like counseling, government grants, or welfare. Restrictions were put onto the types of jobs they were allowed to have. Others tried fleeing into Palestine, but the area was under British control. The Jewish brigade took place when Palestinian Jews fought the British army and helped survivors enter Palestine. Seventy thousand people attempted this between 1945 and 1948, leaving by boat, they were more than likely stopped by Britain because of immigration quota. They would then be sent to detention camps in Cyprus. On July 11, 1947, the ship, “Exodus” departed with 4,500 survivors aboard from Marseilles, France. Once captured, they were sent back to Germany. “US president Harry Truman put pressure on the British Government to admit 100,000 Jewish refugees into Palestine” (Quill). On May 14, 1948, Israel was formed as a state and Jews were permitted. This meant freedom from European DP camps and detention camps in Cyprus.

The triumphant reign of Adolf Hitler led to the tragic cost of millions. This was an eye-opening reality for many people who lived through these events. This was a turning point for world history that had left a lasting impact, still affecting people in today's current world. The aftermath of these events will continue to shape the way society functions.

**Annotated Bibliography**

**Primary Sources**

Hitler, Adolf, 1889-1945. Mein Kampf. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999. Print.

Adolf Hitler’s book, Mein Kampf, provides information on the beginning of Hitler’s hatred towards the Jewish race. The book also gives background for many of his ideas that shaped Germany, like Lebensraum.

Greene, Joshua and Kumar, Shira. Witness Voices From the Holocaust. New

York: The Free Press, 2000.

The book gives first hand quotes from victims of not just the Holocaust, but the causes and effects pre and post war. Despite its publication in 2000, the books multitude of quotes has led to the belief that this is a primary source. This was used mainly for short term; this source helped me understand the severity of crimes committed in Nazi Germany.

“Judgement of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East.” *Library of Congress.* 4 June

2014. Web. 29 October 2018.

Library of Congress was very useful in finding information on the outcome of not only the Nuremberg Trials, but also others that were conducted in order to sentence others who took place in war crimes outside of Germany.

“Nuremberg Trials.” *Library of Congress.* 4 June 2014. Web. 29 November 2018.

The source provided great information from a very reliable source. It was specific on the crimes that people were being tried for. It also gave an insight of how many people were responsible for either the Holocaust, or World War Two.

**Secondary Sources**

Benz, Wolfgang. The Holocaust a German Historian Examines the Genocide.

New York: Columbia University Press, 1995. Print.

The book was written by a German scholar who was reflecting on the legacy that the Holocaust had on Germany. It was detailed in the sense of having much information on certain parts of short term.

Bessel, Richard. Germany 1945. New York: Harper Collins, 2009. Print.

This book was rich with information on the role Germany played in World War Two. It spoke about the Holocaust and how Germany responded to the Allied powers.

Brustein, William. The Logic of Evil. The Social Origins of the Nazi Party.

1925-1933. New Haven: Yale University Press New Haven and London,

1996. Print.

The book gave specifics on the events of the Reichstag fire. This furthered development of the event. The source was most useful in writing the main points of the paper.

Childers, Thomas. The Third Reich. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017.

Print.

The book, The Third Reich, was very useful in the event of the paper. The Third Reich was created after Hitler was sworn in as Chancellor, the book explained just what happened during this time.

Cross Giblin, James. The Life and Death of Adolf Hitler. New York: Houghton Mifflin

Company, 2002. Print.

This book was very specific towards everything I needed for my topic. I used this source the most consistently throughout the duration of the writing process. It was extremely useful in every aspect of research. It was especially helpful in writing trigger.

O’Reilly, Bill. Hitler’s Last Days the Death of the Nazi Regime and the world’s

Most Notorious Dictator. New York: Henny Holt and Company, 2015.

Print.

The book talked about how the war ended and how Hitler’s life ended as well. It moved short term along and helped bring in the long-term effects this experience had on Germany.

**Secondary Websites**

Chase, John. “A Rippling Effect of the Holocaust.” *The Harvard Gazette*. 17

June 2010. Web. 25 October 2018.

A professor at Harvard University looked into the lives of Holocaust survivors, and how they lived their lives. Post liberation life proved to be just as hard as life in camps.

Douillard, Andy. “PTSD and Holocaust Survivors.” *UCSB*. 5 December 2005.

Web. 25 October 2018.

This source discussed the mental wounds that survivors suffered. Not only the physical damage but emotional damage was discussed as well.

Fogarty, Richard. “Adolf Hitler.” *American History, ABC-CLIO*. 2018,

American History. Web. 18 September, 2018.

This is an internet article about the life of Adolf Hitler. This was used throughout research. This helped me understand how Hitler became a public figure.

Fogarty, Richard. “World War 2.” *American History, ABC-CLIO*. 2018. Web. 18 September.

2018.

This internet article gave a broad timeline of World War 2. I used this for my background information. This explained the sequence of events that took place

Hornberger, Jacob. “How Hitler Became a Dictator.” *The Future Freedom*

*Foundation*. 1 March, 2004. Web. 9 October 2018.

The internet article, “How Hitler Became a Dictator” was quite broad on most of the material it covered other than the Night Of Long Knives. This helped move forward with event.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. “Beer Hall Putsch.” *Holocaust*

*Encyclopedia*. Web. 29 January 2019.

This was very specific on the timeline of the Beer Hall Putsch and the events that took place. It heightened my understanding of how the Putsch failed.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. “German Jews During the

Holocaust.” *The Holocaust Encyclopedia.* 2008. Web. 9 October, 2018.

This was a very useful internet article, It was quite informative on how Jews lived during

the time of the Holocaust.

United States Memorial Museum. “The Nuremberg Race Laws.” *The Holocaust*

*Encyclopedia*. Web. 10 January 2019.

This source covered a section of short term, the Nuremberg Laws. These laws stopped Jews from being able to do many things, they also deprived them from basic human rights.

United States Memorial Museum. “The Nuremberg Trials.” *The Holocaust*

*Encyclopedia*. 2010. Web. 1 November 2018.

This reference gives specific information on the duration of the Nuremberg Trials. It was especially informational on the timeline of events. This was used in the progression of long term. This helped determine how Nazi criminals should be tried for their actions and the lasting effects it has on Germany.

Quill, Aegis. “Holocaust Survivors Tell Their Stories.” *The Holocaust Explained*. The Wiether

Library for the Study of the Holocaust. 2003. Web. 9 October, 2018

The website in particular was helpful. The article was also quite specific on the true atrocities that were committed by Hitler and the Nazi Party.

Quill, Aegis. “How Did Survivors Rebuild Their Lives?” *The Holocaust*

*Explained*. The Wiether Library for the Study of the Holocaust. 2003. Web. 9 October, 2018.

The website that this article came from was specific on the events of the

time period. It focused on how Jews recovered after the liberation of camps in Nazi Germany.

Weller, Karina. “What are the Nuremberg Trials and Why do they Matter Still

Today?” *Rights Info*. 26 September 2016. Web. 30 October, 2018.

This is an internet source that gives a fairly broad overview of the outcome of the Nuremberg Trials. This helped to get a better understanding of what happened during that time. This has proved to be a great addition to long term.

Williams, Sandra. “The Impact of the Holocaust on Survivors and Their Children.” Sandra

Williams. 1993. Web. 25 October 2018.

This article was a source used mostly in long term. It was specific on how and what the survivors suffered from; ranging from mental illness to death because of homelessness.