

## United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

# UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM 2018 25

## Foundations of the Nazi State

Following his appointment as chancellor by President Paul von Hindenburg on January 30, 1933, Adolf Hitler began laying the foundations of the Nazi state. Guided by racist and authoritarian principles, the Nazis eliminated individual freedoms and pronounced the creation of a Volk Community (*Volksgemeinschaft*)—a society which would, in theory, transcend class and religious differences.

The Reichstag Fire Decree on February 28, 1933, permitted the suspension of basic civil rights—rights that had been guaranteed by the democratic Weimar Constitution. The Third Reich became a police state in which Germans enjoyed no guaranteed basic rights and the SS, the elite guard of the Nazi state, wielded increasing authority through its control over the police. Political opponents, especially those in the Communist Party of Germany and the Social Democratic Party of Germany, along with Jews, were subject to intimidation, persecution, and discriminatory legislation.

In the first two years of his chancellorship, Hitler followed a concerted policy of "coordination" (*Gleichschaltung*), by which political parties, state governments, and cultural and professional organizations were brought in line with Nazi goals. Culture, the economy, education, and law all came under Nazi control.

Using the Civil Service Law of April 1933, German authorities began eliminating Jews from governmental agencies, and state positions in the economy, law, and cultural life. The Nazi government abolished trade unions. Workers, employees, and employers were forced into the German Labor Front, which was under the control of Nazi leader Robert Ley. The Nazis also attempted to synchronize the Christian denominations and their affiliated youth groups, but were not entirely successful.

With the passage of the Enabling Law (March 23, 1933), the German parliament (*Reichstag*) transferred legislative power to Hitler's cabinet and thus lost its reason for being. By mid-July, the Nazi Party was the only political party left in Germany. The other parties had been either outlawed by the government or had dissolved themselves under pressure. The Reichstag became a rubber stamp for Hitler's dictatorship.

The Führer's will became the foundation for all legislation. Indeed, with the establishment of Hitler's dictatorship, the Führer principle (*Führerprinzip*) came to guide all facets of German life. According to this principle, authority—in government, the party, economy, family, and so on—flowed downward and was to be obeyed unquestioningly.

Upon Hindenburg's death in August 1934, Hitler had himself designated as both Fuehrer and Reich Chancellor. Armed forces personnel swore an oath of loyalty to him in this function. While as Reich Chancellor Hitler's personal power remained limited by the laws of the German state, as Fuehrer his personal power was unlimited and his will was equated with the destiny of the German nation.

### Further Reading

- Allen, William Sheridan. *The Nazi Seizure of Power: The Experience of a Single German Town, 1922-1945*. New York: F. Watts, 1984.
- Evans, Richard J. *The Coming of the Third Reich*. London: Allen Lane, 2003.
- Friedländer, Saul. *Nazi Germany and the Jews*. New York: HarperCollins, 1997.



Adolf Hitler, the newly appointed chancellor, greets German president Paul von Hindenburg. Berlin, Germany, January 30, 1933.

— *Federation Nationale des Deportés et Internes Résistants et Patriotes*

## History

### The structures of control in the Nazi state

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Hitler introduced many policies and measures to ensure the Nazis remained in control, once he declared himself Führer. These measures dealt with political opponents, as well as ordinary people, who suddenly found their private, social and working lives controlled by the Nazis.

#### Seven key structures

The Nazi party aimed to control every aspect of people's political, social and working lives. It maintained control through a mixture of *propaganda* [**Propaganda**: A type of advertising for an idea or cause, produced by supporters or opponents of that idea or cause. It is usually produced to influence how the people of a nation think. ] and intimidation.



Government

#### 1. Government (political)

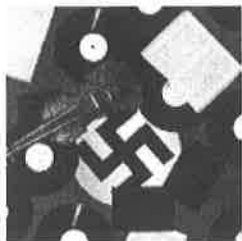
The way Hitler consolidated power in 1933-1934 meant that the Nazis had absolute control of national and local government.



Religion

#### 2. Religion (social)

Hitler believed that religion was a threat to the Nazis' control over people's minds, so he tried different ways to reduce the power of the church over people.



Culture

#### 3. Culture (social)

Hitler ordered Nazification - the imposition of Nazi values - on **all aspects** of German life.

Work

#### 4. Work (working)



Dr Robert Ley, head of the *DAF* [**DAF**: *German Labour Front* ], boasted that he controlled workers' lives from the 'cradle to the grave'.



### 5. Education and youth (working)

The lives of young people were controlled both in and out of school to turn them into fanatical Nazis.

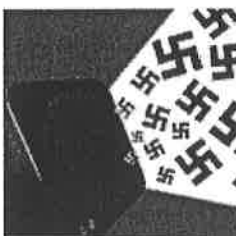
Education and youth



### 6. Terror (method of control)

Germany became a country where it was unsafe to do or say anything critical of the government.

Terror



### 7. Propaganda (method of control)

Josef Goebbels controlled the Propaganda Ministry, which aimed to brainwash people into obeying the Nazis and idolising Hitler.

Propaganda

This page summarises the main aspects of life where the Nazis took control, and the methods they used to maintain control. The rest of of this Revision Bite will look into these aspects in more detail.

## Political life

### Government

The following points allowed Hitler to gain control of the government:

- Enabling Act
- Local government reorganised
- Political parties banned
- Hitler became Führer

When you have a lot of information to remember, it sometimes helps to make up a mnemonic - a sentence or word - to remind you of what you should be thinking about for this topic. If you rearrange the points above, the first letters of each point spell out the word **HELP**.

## **Social life**

### **Religion**

The following points are examples of how the Nazis took control of religion:

Non-Nazi Catholic priests and Protestant pastors such as Martin Niemöller and Dietrich Bonhöffer were sent to concentration camps.

Jews and Jehovah's Witnesses were openly persecuted.

Hitler set up a state Reich Church, which banned the Bible and the cross.

Nazis encouraged people to revive the old Viking myths and ceremonies.

### **Culture**

The Nazis dictated what people were allowed to do in their social and private lives:

Artists had to produce acceptable paintings that portrayed Nazi values.

Jazz music was banned.

Books written by Jews were publicly burned.

Homosexuals were persecuted; they did not fit the Nazi image of the ideal family.

The Olympic Games of 1936 were a huge Nazi propaganda success.

## **Education and work**

### **Education and youth**

Measures were imposed to make sure that schools and youth associations became Nazified:

Non-Nazi teachers and university professors were sacked; teachers had to join the National Socialist Teachers' League.

Textbooks were re-written to include Nazi political and racial ideas.

History was taught to glorify Germany.

There was a concentration on physical fitness.

Girls were taught cookery; boys were taught science and maths.

The Hitler Youth was compulsory; it indoctrinated boys and prepared them for war.

The Nazi Girls' youth organisation - the BDM - was compulsory; it indoctrinated girls and prepared them for church, children and cooking.

## Work

The following points are examples of how the Nazis took control of workers lives:

The RAD (National Labour Service) sent young men on public works.

Hitler introduced conscription in 1936; most men went into the army after the RAD.

The DAF (German Labour Front) controlled workers' conditions at work.

The KdF (Strength through Joy) movement regulated their leisure time.

## Methods of control

### Terror

The Nazi state intimidated and terrorised those who were opposed to it, using:

*SS [SS: Also known as the Blackshirts. A German police/military style organisation created to serve as the personal bodyguards of Adolf Hitler. In Hitler's Germany they eventually controlled the intelligence, security and*

*police forces, and extermination of those they considered undesirable. ] and Gestapo [**Gestapo**: (Secret State Police.) A ruthless organisation that aimed to eliminate political opponents in Nazi Germany, and was responsible for the rounding up of Jews during the Nazi period and attempting to exterminate them. ]*

investigations.

Blockleiters in each block of flats and street informed on 'grumblers'.

Arrests of thousands of people terrified opponents.

Set up Nazi people's courts.

Concentration camps.

## Propaganda

The Propaganda Ministry worked hard to ensure that people were persuaded to adopt the Nazi point of view:

Mass rallies at Nuremberg.

Newspapers were censored.

People's radios were sold very cheaply, but broadcasts were controlled.

Films were controlled to make films that glorified war and pilloried the Jews.

Loudspeakers in public places blared out Nazi propaganda.

Cult of personality - Hitler's picture was everywhere, and he was portrayed as Germany's saviour.

## ~~Revision tip and answer preparation~~

### ~~Revision tip~~

~~Make up your own **mnemonics** to help you remember the sections on:~~

~~religion~~

~~culture~~

~~education and youth~~

~~work~~