

Southern New Hampshire University

The Rise of *der Führer*

The Sociopolitical Environment of Interwar Period Germany and the Hitler Cult

A Capstone Project Submitted to the College of Online and Continuing Education in Partial
Fulfillment of the Master of Arts in History

By

Ashley Paige Hollaway

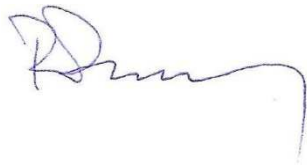
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Abstract

The presented thesis sought to discuss the cult of personality that surrounded Adolf Hitler and was functionally part of the *Führer* myth during the interwar period through a sociopolitical lens. In doing so, it addressed the public image of Hitler as he transitioned from simple orator to the head of the fascist Third Reich, through the use of propaganda and charismatic authority. Hitler had tapped into a *völkisch* belief in a heroic leader that predated the First World War and the distrust of the Weimar Republic and the agents of democracy that had, in the mind of many Germans, stabbed them in the back and surrendered them to hostile forces at the end of the war.

Dedication

For my family.

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Introduction

The discipline of history had addressed the interwar period in a variety of way. From focusing on political leaders and important generals, to the everyday lives of workers and families, historians had assessed through various lenses the history of countries between the First and Second World Wars. In the focus on Germany, many historians had focused on the nature of the Weimar Republic and Third Reich through multiple lenses. Their arguments presented by some influential historians, such as Ian Kershaw, Hans Mommsen, and Karl Dietrich Bracher, had been interested in the political, and at times social and cultural, environment of the period. The political discussion on the period had been well researched in particular regards to the National Socialist German Worker's Party (NSDAP) and the party leaders, Adolf Hitler in particular, but the discussion had focused less on the effects of the party on the German populous than the interparty conflicts and policies.¹

The purpose of this thesis was a narrowed view of the NSDAP's focus on the *Führer* myth and cult of personality that surrounded Hitler during the interwar years, 1918-1939. With one major historian, Ian Kershaw, focused on this the discipline is generally void on the topic. Kershaw himself focused on the *Führer* myth though mainly a political means, studying the propaganda, speeches, and the response of Germans to it. While mentioning the cult of personality, Kershaw's argument was centered on the nature of the party and Hitler. This thesis was narrowed further than Kershaw's viewpoint and concentrated in a newer area of study that

¹ Richard J. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, (New York: The Penguin Press, 2003), xv-xxxiv.

combines the political and social spheres of influence, described as sociopolitical this lens is meant to combine the two spheres in order to have a more rounded understanding of the topic.²

Within the following chapters, this thesis seeks to prove that the cult of personality that surrounded the public image of the NSDAP, also known as the Nazi Party, leader Adolf Hitler was influenced by the social factors of interwar period Germany and the political policies and failures of the First World War and the Weimar Republic. Central to this argument is the role of propaganda, hate, and a charismatic personality that had arrived on the German political scene at the right moment.

I. Terms

In identifying the context of the thesis, a discussion on the terms presented within this paper is important. The most major terms to the thesis were interwar, sociopolitical, fascism, propaganda, and *Führer*. With this paper previously discussing both interwar and sociopolitical as functions of this thesis, the other terms were central in the research and writing process of the thesis. The Nazi Party was a part of the fascist movement of the early postwar period, with its foundation in Italian politics under Galeazzo Ciano, and expanded upon by Benito Mussolini, himself a charismatic individual. As a new political movement in the aftermath of the First World War, fascism was defined as, “a belief in the bond of nationhood...encapsulated in the spirit and personality of common leaders.”³ While fascism was important to the Nazi Party, it is also important to note the use of propaganda within the context of the *Führer* myth. As a key component to movement, propaganda could be defined as, “the dissemination of particular

² Lawrence C. Dodd, “Interwar—Postwar Contrasts,” in *Coalitions in Parliamentary Government* (Princeton University Press, 1976).

³ James Holland, *The Rise of Germany, 1934-1941: The War of the West* (New York: Grove Press, 2015), 16.

messages of a dishonest and dangerous kind,” and for the period it was usually used by authoritarian regimes to manipulate a large number of people.⁴ As we will later discuss, Propaganda was important to the overall understanding of the cult of personality’s appeal to Germans as the interwar period progressed.

The most major function of this paper centered on the *Führer* cult that worked within the framework of Nazism. The term *Führer* was important to identifying a key point of this paper, as it was the key component in describing the relationship that Adolf Hitler had within the Nazi Party. Translated to leader, the term means much more in the context of the party, the *Führer* was described by Nazi propaganda as a, “living embodiment of the German nation, radiating strength and single-minded devotion to Germany.”⁵ As defined, this term served a large function within the sociopolitical environment of the party and later the nation as part of the propaganda.

II. Historiography

With the key terms discussed, it is important to address the historiography in connection to the thesis topic. The discussion of Adolf Hitler during the interwar period had focused on the politics and military circumstances of his actions. It was in these that historians described the reach of his charisma and the *Führer* myth, with historians some historians arguing that a uniqueness of personality or a larger, more distinctive patterning of German culture was at fault for the progress of the period. The earliest discussions on the Hitler’s personalities were in the writings of William Shirer, an American journalist during the interwar period, originally

⁴ Alan Sennett, “Film Propaganda: *Triumph of the Will* as a Case Study,” in *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 55, no.1 (Spring, 2014), 46.

⁵ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Making a leader,” Holocaust Encyclopedia, <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007817>.

published in 1960.⁶ Sadly, there were gaping holes in his writings, but several trends could be found persisting from his writings concerning the public and political perception of Hitler. Shirer described early Hitler as appearing not as an important figure in dress and manners, instead he appeared disheveled and unimpressive. This early image was carried through the historiography, including a 2012 documentary commenting on the work of an early party leader to refine Hitler's image.⁷ The discussion on the early functions of the party was described in depth by historians and sociologists; one of the earliest non-Germans was Geoffrey Pridham, who published in 1973, his text focused on the Bavarian period of the NSDAP. In doing so, he described the obscurity and eventual popularity of the small party in the German state, a place where an, "atmosphere of disquiet formed the background to the revolutionary," and problematic political and social period after World War I.⁸ Pridham described Hitler after the refinement of his personal image and held that the propaganda and rallies were similar and inspired by Mussolini's actions in Italy.

The writings of Shirer and Pridham were a decent understanding of the early historiography on the image of Hitler within German history. The number of historians on the period was numerous, but in context of the topic of this paper, the cult of personality is a limited discussion if addressed at all by historians. While one historian, Englishman Ian Kershaw, had decided much of their work to understanding the topic, others would barely note on the cult-like adoration that began as a small circle of the Nazi Party and grew to encompass a large portion of the Nazi supporters.

⁶ William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011).

⁷ *The Dark Charisma of Adolf Hitler*, directed by Laurence Rees, November 12, 2012 by Netflix, (BBC, 2012).

⁸ Geoffrey Pridham, *Hitler's Rise to Power: The Nazi Movement in Bavaria, 1923-1933*, (Endeavour Press, Ltd., 2016), Kindle Edition, Loc. 351.

III. Background History—1917-1919, War Guilt

Before addressing the topic at hand, it is important to understand the sociopolitical influences onto the interwar period. After the end of the First World War in 1918, the losing armies faced problems on multiple fronts. In Germany, there were several key issues that would go on to create the perfect storm of events that led to Adolf Hitler becoming the *Führer* of Germany. The German economy prior to the start of the First World War was not stable enough to hold a sustained war, and the War had led to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), known during the period as shell shock, in many soldiers who survived the high causality rate. The War itself had dragged on longer than any belligerents had thought it would, leaving Germany itself with morale loss on the home front, where strikes and food riots had occurred from 1915 until the end of the War. The Strife of the period would translate into the distrust of the political leaders that would lead the Country near the end of the War. While these war years would influence the interwar years in economic, social, and political ways, for the purpose of this paper the focus needed to be on the outcome of the post-War peace talks that would wound German pride deeply in the coming decades.⁹

The peace talks at the end of the First World War had a grand impact; the days prior to the end of the First World War began the problematic sociopolitical elements. The Kaiser had abdicated and a new government was formed in November 1918, called the Weimar Republic. This parliamentary republic was different for the young country compared to the Kaiser Reich that they had for a short number of decades. The Weimar Republic had begun at a time of turmoil and humiliation for Germany, where the once greatest army in the world had been all but

⁹ Mary Fulbrook, *A Concise History of Germany*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), Kindle Edition.

defeated by foreign powers and faced with civil war appearing to loom on the horizon. Days after the Republic was formed, it had signed the armistice agreement on November 11, 1918, which had some of the early demands of Germany. These demands, including the loss of land, “hardly fell short of a total submission,” to the victorious Allies, but still Germans felt slighted who had believed an illusion that the war was still somehow in Germany’s favor.¹⁰ The peace talks themselves did not begin until January 1919, where Germany was represented by a professional diplomat of aristocratic origins, Ulrich von Brockdorff-Rantzau, who had antiquated ideals of national honor, and his entourage of advisors. Germany, even with a professional diplomat, was faced with being given little opportunity to engage in serious negotiations. Instead they were delivered in May 1919 a draft of the peace treaty and Brockdorff-Rantzau delivered a scathing speech on the treatment of the German delegation.¹¹

In regards to the article of the Treaty of Versailles, while the loss of land was great, with the treaty redefining the boundaries of Germany in Article 27, the most damning in the minds of many Germans were two articles detailing the burden of war guilt and the dismantling of the majority of the German military.¹² The war guilt clause of the Treaty of Versailles, Article 231, stated:

The Allied and Associated Governments affirm and Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies.¹³

¹⁰ E. J. Feuchtwanger, “The Terms of the Versailles Treaty Led to the Rise of Nazism,” in *The Rise of Nazi Germany*, ed. Don Nardo, (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, Inc, 1999), 48.

¹¹ Fulbrook.

¹² Fulbrook; Feuchtwanger.

¹³ *Treaty of Peace with Germany (Treaty of Versailles)*, treaty document, Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/law/help/us-treaties/bevans/m-ust000002-0043.pdf>, 95.

This short clause would cause damage to German pride and cause the Weimar government to be considered weak for agreeing to the idea of Germany being the main belligerent. While placing the war guilt on Germany was expressed, it was mainly used as the reason for arguing that Germany would have the main responsibility of reparations. During the peace talks, this issue had loomed over the entire affair, and this outcome was the outcome of the belief that blame had worsened international relations during the interwar period. The international relations were strained to say the least by this, but nationally the already broken morale led to distrust in the party and government that led Germany into this disastrous path.¹⁴

The second major part of the Treaty of Versailles was Articles 159-213, which described the forced demobilization and reduction of the German military. These articles described multiple aspects of reduction in the numbers of military personnel and forces, including reducing the German military forces to 200,000 by May 1920, when the treaty went into effect and limiting the number of armaments to what Germans considered an unreasonably sum. Germany had also been forced to decommission their airplanes, tanks, submarines, and other similarly offensive weaponry. This demilitarization left Germans feeling not only betrayed, but also lacking in military power, which they had been a leading member of the international militaristic influences.¹⁵

The few years prior to Adolf Hitler entering the German political scene were wrought with war, a sense of betrayal, and the desire for Germany to reemerge as an international power, stronger than it had been before the First World War. This desire would be the basis for many conservative nationalist groups, including what would become the Nazi Party. In the profound

¹⁴ Feuchtwanger.

¹⁵ *Treaty of Versailles*; Feuchtwanger.

insecurities and broken morale of the German populous, it was the nature of the Weimar constitution that became the catalyst for the rise of the Nazis to national power. The constitution held in it Article 48 which described the powers of the German presidency and would become the most notorious section of the constitution. Article 48 gave the elected president to rule by emergency decree. Stating that, “[in] the event that public order and security are seriously disturbed or endangered, the Reich President may take the measures necessary for their restoration, intervening, if necessary with the aid of the armed forces,” and while the same article stated that it was possible for the Reichstag to annul these measures, the presidency had the means within the constitution to disband the Reichstag by decree with Article 25.¹⁶ The combination of the articles would be the basis for the later problems of the Weimar period, with the presidency of Paul von Hindenburg.¹⁷

The interwar period discussed in this text was influenced by many factors; these main points had combined to create a figurative time bomb where a single group or individual could exploit the sociopolitical environment along with the economic and cultural pressures of the period. As discussed, it was with the close of the First World War that Germany was weakened by their belligerent war time enemies. They were burdened with an incomprehensible level of debt based on the war guilt clause and their military drained and disarmed, with outlying land taken from Germany, and—through all of these problems—the German political and social spheres began to distrust the Weimar government. In this basis Adolf Hitler would enter the political fray and, with time, gain a level of popularity that would end the Republic for good.

¹⁶ *The Constitution of the German Empire of August 11, 1919 (Weimar Constitution)*, constitutional document, German History in Documents and Image, *Volume 6: Weimar Germany, 1918/1919-1933*, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/pdf/eng/ghi_wr_weimarconstitution_Eng.pdf, 3; Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*.

¹⁷ Fulbrook; Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich in Power, 1933-1939*, (New York: The Penguin Press, 2005), Kindle Edition.

IV. Conclusion—Last Words

In researching this text, the purpose had always been to describe the nature of the interwar period in such a way that described how the social and political had interacted in Germany. Regarding this, the paper that follows was researched in a wide swatch of English language sources, both native and translated, that described the Hitler cult through their own lenses and historical periods. Major debates within the discipline had persisted until the writing of this paper that informed upon their texts and interpretations. As with many discussions, this paper arrives at its informed position through these multiple historians and its own writer's position on their interpretations. Through the writings of an overarching debate between Functionalism and Intentionalism, the *Sonderweg* and *Historikerstreit* discussions of native and non-native German historians, this paper had developed an understanding of the interwar period that sought to create a rounded understanding of the sociopolitical means behind the propaganda and cult-like status of Hitler's personality and its following.¹⁸

¹⁸ Richard Bessel, "Functionalist vs. Intentionalists: The Debate Twenty Years on or Whatever Happen to Functionalism and Intentionalism?," in *German Studies Review* 26, no. 1 (2003).

Chapter 1: The Beginnings of the National Socialist German Worker's Party, 1919-1923

After the end of the First World War, Germany was left with a heavy burden of war guilt and repayments with the Treaty of Versailles. With the abdication of the Kaiser, the Weimar Republic was created days before the war ended, and a myth that Germany had been betrayed, a conservative nationalist movement began to influence the sociopolitical landscape. This created an atmosphere of national trauma and political extremism that served to fuel the overall early interwar period, added to that was the inability of the Weimar Republic to win the support of the military and civil services that had not transitioned well from the authoritarian leadership of the Kaiser Reich to the democratic Weimar Republic. In this way the foundation of the Nazi Party was formed in relative obscurity in Germany.¹



Fig 1: Adolf Hitler dressed in his army uniform during WWI.

¹ Hannah Vogt, "The Myth of Germany's Betrayal Led to the Rise of Nazism," in *The Rise of Nazi Germany*, ed. Don Nardo, (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, Inc, 1999); Richard J. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2003).

I. Foundation of the Party: Search for a Leader and Voice

While problems mounted in Germany, an upheaval of counter-revolutionary conservative movements began throughout the country. In Munich, the capital of the German state of Bavaria, the German Worker's Party (DAP) had been formed in 1919 by Anton Drexler and Dietrich Eckart. At the same time, Hitler, a soldier in the weakened German military, was sent to inform the military on the movements of the fledgling party and their beer hall meetings.² It was apparent in these early days that the party needed to have a good speaker, an orator who would work those in attendance into an agitated state. It was at one of these meetings that Hitler was noticed by Drexler and Eckart with an impassioned speech that roused the gathered crowd. Even in 1919, Hitler had a noteworthy, "rare ability to captivate a crowd with his voice," and an uncanny intuition on what people wanted to hear.³ By gaining the attention of the duo, Hitler was able to join the party, originally at the behest of his commanding officer, and became one of the star speakers of the party.⁴ At this early point, it was important to note part of the reason for Hitler to be accepted into the party in such a short time.

Firstly, there was an understanding of the *völkisch* belief in heroic leadership, not only as an aspect of the nationalist right, but also as a function of the nineteenth century ideas of, "political notions and the mythical visions of Germanic leadership associated with the romantic-conservative strain of early *völkisch*-nationalist thought."⁵ This conservative notion was an important concept in how accepting the party was towards a rebel rousing voice that Hitler had

² Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*.

³ Benjamin Carter Hett, *The Death of Democracy: Hitler's Rise to Power and the Downfall of the Weimar Republic*, (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2018), Kindle Edition. Loc. 357.

⁴ Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*.

⁵ Ian Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth': Image and Reality in the Third Reich*, (Oxford: University Press, 2001), 13-14.

introduced. Drexler was impressed by Hitler's passion in speaking against a previous speaker who argued for the separation of Bavaria from the Reich. The pan-German approach is something that would play a role in Hitler's beliefs for the party up to the start of the war, but at this early stage had no fully developed ideology at this time.⁶ With that said, Hitler had addressed at this moment something that would develop as part of the party program, and with it he had impressed the DAP.

Secondly, Eckart, a writer by trade, had described the need for a messiah of sorts; a nobody that would be able to rise up and challenge the political realities of the interwar period.⁷ Eckart was also part of a secretive occult society, the Thule Society, during this time that influenced the early party. This occult society held multiple beliefs that would later appear within the context of the Nazi Regime; of note were the ideas of an Aryan race and the use of swastika as a symbol of racial priorities. Eckart's belief used this and the same *völkisch* belief in a 'heroic' leader. This *Führer* to the people, described by the society, would become essential to the party and the cult of personality. These beliefs would take the *Führer* idea in the following years, even prior to Hitler's later perception on his central role, and shape it into a nationalist authoritarian model.⁸

This early formation of the party showed little of what would later become the Nazi expansion plan. The party in 1919, had a vague program, few members, rudimentary organizational framework, and a timid leadership. Once Hitler had joined, he became a star speaker of the party and used his oratory skills in rousing the crowds. Early party member,

⁶ Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*; Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth'*; Ian Kershaw, "Hitler and the Uniqueness of Nazism," in *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no. 2 (April, 2004): 239-254.

⁷ *Hitler's Circle of Evil*, Season 1: episode 1-4, dir. By Mathew Hinchcliffe et al., (Netflix, 2017).

⁸ Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*; Bernard Mees, "Hitler and Germanentum," in *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no. 2 (April, 2004); Pridham. Kershaw, *the 'Hitler Myth.'*

Rudolf Heß was moved by Hitler in such a way that he had become a devoted member under his leadership and part of the cult of personality. Others would flock to the propagandist and orator in the following years, but at this point Hitler and the party were seen as little more than a function of the overall *völkisch* movement.⁹

While Adolf Hitler had the voice and force of presence for the party, his behavior was not accustomed the upper echelon of German society that Eckart attempted to introduce him into; to combat this, Eckart worked on refining Hitler in dress and behavior, but most importantly as a writer, he was able to turn Hitler's impassioned, but occasionally incoherent rambles into impressive speeches. While not changing the context and nature of the orators words, Eckart in this early period was able to refine his speech, but Hitler, the star party speaker, was still viewed as a vulgar demagogue who roused the Munich opposition, but little else.¹⁰

These first years prior to Hitler's assumption of leadership were important the foundation of the party, but also to the personality cult. Hitler at this time was the party propagandist, tactician, and organizer. Hitler attempted in December 1919 to completely reorganization the party to his authoritarian inclinations, seeing the party's structure as inadequate, but he was unable to completely remove the democratic atmosphere that prevailed in the party. Also in December 1919, Hitler and Drexler worked on creating a party program that had influenced the NSDAP until it ultimate end.¹¹

⁹ *Hitler's Circle of Evil*; Dietrich O. Orlow, "The Organizational History and Structure of the NSDAP, 1919-1923," in *The Journal of Modern History* 37, no. 2 (June, 1965).

¹⁰ *Hitler's Circle of Evil*; Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth.'*

¹¹ Orlow, "The Organizational History and Structure of the NSDAP, 1919-1923."

II. Twenty-Five Point Plan

Adolf Hitler and Anton Drexler worked together to create the Party platform for the DAP to have an official program in December 1919 for the party's first staged mass meeting which had a crowded of two thousand people in attendance in February 1920. The platform they created was twenty-five points of short statements that had later been expanded upon by *Mein Kampf*, but were still vague to their nature and meaning. Among the points were a handful that would be an asset to the Hitler cult as Germans began to flock to the party in the 1920s. A point was made for the state responsibility towards civilian life, but the strict anti-Semitic and xenophobic remarks would lend to the education of Germans in the Nazi propaganda. Education, according to Hitler and Drexler, was to be reconstructed with an emphasis placed on teaching the concept of State from an early age. Education, as a function of indoctrination, had functioned importantly for the party, in a similar manner as it had in the Stalinist period of Soviet Russia.¹²

More important to the influence on the cult of personality was the argument of press censorship, in relation to what the party considered non-German newspaper and forbidding publications that were, "counter to the general good," of the belief in an Aryan nation and the Hitler cult. This idea was part of the nature of propaganda that Hitler had professed in his ideology, a tool that would influence the lay masses. Functional to the accepting of the party, was the idea of connecting the party to a religious basis in the interwar period. For this Drexler and Hitler argued for, "the standpoint of a positive Christianity," while avoiding connection to any one denomination.¹³ The final point, the need for a strong central power, was the culmination of the points and party ideology. Centralized authority, especially under a single charismatic

¹² Hett,; Robert Ley ed., "The 25 Points 1920: An Early Nazi Propaganda," trans. Paul Halsall, Avalon Project-Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy, (Lillian Goldman Law Library, 2008), <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/1708-ps.asp>.

¹³ Ley, "The 25 Points 1920."

leader, as had been discussed previously was central to cult of personality's ability to reach further than a small circle of followers.¹⁴

The twenty-five points were, "a politically expedient mixture of extreme nationalism, violent anti-Semitism," and a promise to end the Pan-German enslavement to the foreign powers.¹⁵ The cult of personality was greatly influenced by these early points as they were carried through the party's actions until the end of the Nazi regime. The influence on the German sociopolitical sphere would, as noted, continue to grow with the party. Central to this, was especially the relationship of the party to the *Führer* concept overall.

III. Hitler Leads the Party

In 1920, Hitler successfully argued for the DAP to change their name to the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (trans: National Socialist German Worker's Party), this name change effectively addressed the party's conservative affiliation. Adolf Hitler had become established in the Bavarian extremist Right as its most prominent party leader and had proved himself indispensable to the party due to not only his rebel rousing, but also his forceful presence and firebrand manner. His actions for the party were motivated by the desire for the NSDAP to be seen in a different character than the rest of the nationalist parties. To this aim, Hitler argued that the NSDAP would be, "a party of action and of the people."¹⁶ The growing ego had the effect to sway a portion of the NSDAP to Hitler's side in party arguments. This was the point where Hitler began to push Drexler and Eckart to the side.

¹⁴ Ley, "The 25 Points 1920"; Ian Kershaw, "'Working Towards the Führer.' Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler Dictatorship," in *Contemporary European History* 2, no. 2 (July, 1993).

¹⁵ Orlow, "The Organizational History and Structure of NSDAP, 1919-1923," 212.

¹⁶ Geoffrey Pridham, *Hitler's Rise to Power: The Nazi Movement in Bavaria, 1923-1933*, (Endeavour Press, Ltd, 2016), Kindle Edition, Loc. 453.

In 1921, Hitler made a power move to become the sole leader of the party, upon learning that Drexler was attempting to merge the NSDAP with another Bavarian party. This played allowed Hitler to act on his desire to lead the party, in which after giving an impassioned rant, he promptly quit the party. This was a measured ploy on Hitler's part, knowing that without his personality and followers, the party would crumble; Drexler for his part back-pedaled and conceded to Hitler's demands. The party merger was abandoned and Hitler was placed in sole leadership of the NSDAP, confirmed in July of that year. With the party in his control, Hitler received exactly what he had wanted since choosing this political path. As a demagogue, Hitler had achieved a level of success in becoming the authoritarian leader of the party with sole dictatorial powers. This would allow his propaganda stance to be held by the party and its growing branches, but also gave way to the growth of the Hitler cult.¹⁷

By this point, Hitler had gained Rudolf Heß, Ernst Röhm, and returning war hero Hermann Göring, as part of his inner circle. These men functioned well under the personality cult, while at this time only Heß was truly captivated by Hitler's personality, Röhm and Göring would function within the party understanding the charisma that Hitler exuded as their best chance to gain prominence. While this was not functionally a cult this early on, the functions of the party's adherence to the control of Hitler and his whims had begun at this point.¹⁸

IV. Orator and propaganda

For historians, 1921 was the year Hitler's career really started as the NSDAP had not only a party program, but Hitler himself had gained sole authority. Gone were the days of army

¹⁷ Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich; Hitler's Circle of Evil*.

¹⁸ *Hitler's Circle of Evil*.

service, replaced by his unlimited power in the small, but growing Bavarian party. After his conflict with Drexler over his failed party merger plot, “Hitler was able to transform the NSDAP into a fascist organization,” including an organizational structure that was focused on continuous propaganda.¹⁹ The party was to work on gaining new members and sympathizers, avoid debates with other parties, and overall had a military structure to organize the party. At this time he was occasionally called ‘*Führer*,’ though it was functionally in the same vein as Drexler’s ‘Chairman’ title, but was solely used within the party in reference to Hitler. Describing his speeches, historians had argued that this in this early period Hitler’s propaganda was similar to Mussolini’s due to his admiration of the Italian fascist movement as a structure. Adjusting his oratory focus on to some aspects of the Italian fascist propaganda style, Hitler was still focused on the belief in the heroic leadership that would be the sole leader of the German nation, leading a pan-Germanic nation to greatness.²⁰

The focus on propaganda was natural to Hitler’s belief in the party structure, and his tireless efforts had impacted the overall counter revolutionary movement leading to him standing out amongst the movement. As a competent propagandist, Hitler used his party control to efficiently create the party in his mental image; down to the party songs, uniform, and flags, Hitler sought to control every aspect of the party’s image.²¹ The work done in the early party was important to the propaganda in the coming years, but for now it had the effect of giving the growing party a meaning that surpassed the *völkisch* views of other nationalist groups. With his actions within the party, Hitler had become much more than the star orator and propagandist. As

¹⁹ Hans Mommsen, “Hitler’s Dictatorship: His Role as ‘Leader’ in the Nazi Regime,” in *Routes into the Abyss: Coping with Crises in the 1930s*, ed. Helmut Konrad and Wolfgang Maderthaner (Berghahn Books, 2013), 78.

²⁰ Kershaw, *The ‘Hitler Myth.’*

²¹ Orlow, “The Organizational History and Structure of the NSDAP, 1919-1923;” Mommsen; Kershaw, ““Working Towards the Führer;”” Marshall Dill, Jr., “The Origins of Hitler and the Nazi Party,” in *The Rise of Nazi Germany*, ed. Don Nardo, (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, Inc, 1999).

the leader of the party, Hitler had gained a position that would propel him and his followers into the highest levels of government.

V. Conclusion: The Early Days

Looking back on the nature of the early party, Adolf Hitler had a growing ego and self-promoting attitude. Hett argued that he always spoke of those early party days, “with himself as the hero, the political genius and natural leader who went his own way.”²² From 1919 until 1923, the early party was an important part of the foundation of the Hitler cult. These years would be credited with the creation of the *Sturmabteilung* (translated: Storm Division, SA), the paramilitary group that functioned as the strong arm of the party and was led at this time by Herman Göring.²³ The early interwar period had functioned as the setup for the party’s later rise, where the early rules and functions of the Hitler cult had been placed within the sociopolitical constructs. In these pre-Putsch days, Hitler functioned as the orator and propaganda head of the party, even during his time as its main head. The *Führer* myth had been created with the ousting of the former party leadership of Drexler and Eckart. The following years would cement it in history.

²² Hett, Loc. 1050.

²³ Evans, *Coming of the Third Reich*; Kershaw, *The ‘Hitler Myth’*; Orlow, “The Organizational History and Structure of the NSDAP, 1919-1923.”

Chapter 2: The Beer Hall Putsch and Landsberg Prison

As 1923 arrived, the state of Germany had been improving from the end of the first war, while inflation still had control of the country, as the years prior had the effect that the cost for a United States dollar had risen to 493 German papiermarks, in 1921-1922 it had the effect of some economic growth in the industrial sector, low unemployment and taxation rates. These were a boon to the Weimar Government, and they were able at the time to pull the German economy into a peacetime basis that was stable for the time—as not only Germany had suffered a postwar inflation. During this period, the rebel rousing of the counter revolutionaries, like the NSDAP, were losing some ground but they would continue their agitation against the Weimar government. In April of 1922 there was an international attempt in Genoa to structure the war reparation payments easier, though longer, for Germany, but in the six weeks the international forum was unable to settle a new requirement. While this would seemingly end the chance of a conservative nationalistic organization in gaining membership, the stability of the period was always threatened by the fluctuating reichmark and the political turmoil within the Reichstag.¹

By the middle of 1922, this stability changed, and by July 1923 the exchange rate had begun to spiral out of control and the German Ruhr, its main industrial area, had been occupied by French and Belgians troops for several months. The Weimar government announced a noncompliance policy with these developments that had the German currency falling further. While a newly introduced currency halted the inflation before it broke the German economy, and the troops were removed with the end of the noncompliance, it still caused a rise in the

¹ Richard J. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2003); Frederick Taylor, *The Downfall of Money: Germany's Hyperinflation and the Destruction of the Middle Class* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013).

unemployment rate that had the business and social spheres distrusting the political majority. The Weimar constitution that had carried the government since the end of the war had become problematic. Its main problem was the independently elected presidency with wide-ranging powers under Article 48, that gave the president the ability to disband the parliament as seen necessary. While it was used less under President Friedrich Ebert, the abuse of Article 48 would become more prominent after his death in 1925.²

The period of years covered in this chapter, 1923-1925, for the NSDAP these were trying times, but also filled with important details that would become important in the culture of the Third Reich and the *Führer* cult. While Hitler had achieved the position of party leader, the party had yet to gain the level of power that even closely resembled his desires. The position of the Hitler cult in these years was one of flux, where the greatest importance to note is that charisma, as it functioned with the cult-like following of Hitler during the interwar period, “exists only in an interaction between one individual and an audience.”³ This idea was important to the context of the movement’s attempt at seizing power during the Beer Hall Putsch especially.

I. Lead Up

In January 1923, the NSDAP held its annual party meeting in Munich. This gathering was vastly different than party gatherings in the years prior where Hitler had continued to attempt to consolidate the party under his complete control. At this time he had increased in self confidence and, encouraged by the actions of Mussolini in Italy, began plotting, “for an

² Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*; Frederick Taylor, *The Downfall of Money*; Simon Taylor, “Germany’s Post-World War I Economic Troubles,” in *The Rise of Nazi Germany*, ed. Don Nardo, (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, Inc, 1999); Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*.

³ *The Dark Charisma of Adolf Hitler*, dir. Laurence Rees, November 12, 2012, by Netflix, (BBC 2012).

opportunity to stage an action against the Republic.”⁴ With the uptick of party propaganda under Hitler’s leadership, the party was also taking part in the sociopolitical upheaval that brought violence to the streets as Germans began to distrust the leading politics. In this perspective, Hitler had gained a louder voice in the Bavarian nationalist movement, and the position as the honored leader of the NSDAP.⁵

While Hitler sought a way to take control of the Bavarian government, his pre-Putsch goal, it was the social atmosphere that had been the largest influence on his reasoning for beginning to plan the Putsch. With the occupation of the Ruhr close in mind, Germans had a firm reminder of the humiliation of the peace terms and Hitler was able to focus on the public’s mood. It was this ability that allowed the cult to flourish in this period, with the idea that those in control of the government had continued to betray them and that the NSDAP, and especially he, had the intense conviction to address and change their problems. For Hitler the atmosphere of this period had become a seemingly perfect storm for his demanding demeanor. The connection between the *Führer* cult and the sociopolitical effects of the hyperinflation and military occupation were notable, though for the thousands the party had flocking to its leader, there was few outside of working class that had fallen under Hitler’s charismatic presence, but those that had were spurred by the economic hardships placed on the middle class during the hyperinflation.⁶

Outside of this, there were others at work on the Putsch plot. Herman Göring was leading the SA, Ernst Röhm resigned from the army and with Göring began to encourage Hitler to act on

⁴ Geoffrey Pridham, *Hitler’s Rise to Power: The Nazi Movement in Bavaria, 1923-1933*, (Endeavour Press, Ltd), Kindle Edition, Loc. 466.

⁵ Dietrich O. Orlow, “The Organizational History and Structure of the NSDAP, 1919-1923,” in *The Journal of Modern History* 37, no. 2 (June, 1965); Pridham.

⁶ Benjamin Carter Hett, *The Death of Democracy: Hitler’s Rise to Power and the Down Fall of the Weimar Republic*, (Henry Holt and Co., 2018), Kindle Edition.

the plan. The greatest inspiration and encouragement came from Hitler's adoration of the fascist movements of Mussolini and Göring's goading. Hitler chose to act as three Bavarian state leaders met at the *Bürgerbräukeller*, one of the main beer halls in Munich; and, as Hitler was not well known, though the *Führer* cult and party membership had grown in numbers, they chose to recruit a famous war hero, Erich Ludendorff, to be a temporary face for the part. Ludendorff was an interesting choice for Hitler as a recognizable face for the party. While well respected as a war hero he was himself a similar throwback to the Kaiser Reich as a military leader, and towards the end of the war was part of the military leaders the last two years of the war. The prestige he had in the war placed him as an important figure within the conservative right and in 1920, arrived in Munich meeting the ultranationalist movement that had begun to circle around Hitler.⁷



Fig 2: Erich Ludendorff

It is noteworthy to discuss what the triumvirate, led by Gustav Ritter von Kahr, aimed to do in comparison to Hitler's plan on the eve of the Putsch. While Hitler and, by extension, his Nazis were looking to overthrow the Weimar Republic starting in Bavaria, this was not the

⁷ *Hitler's Circle of Evil*, Season 1: episodes 1-4, dir. Matthew Hinchcliffe, et al, (Netflix, 2017); Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*.

central belief of the three men that headed the state. The difference between the two was that the triumvirate was separatists at heart, believing that Bavaria needed its autonomy. This divergence in thought was central to the plot behind the nature of the attempted Putsch. This move was, therefore, less about Hitler choosing to act on his overwhelming desire to control the country. Instead, he believed that the Bavarian triumvirate might act before him with a similar take over or break from the German government.⁸

II. The Putsch

On November 8, 1923, the NSDAP enacted their Putsch. The two pronged action plan had split Röhm and a contingency of the SA was with him—including a newly recruited Heinrich Himmler—to wait for a call to take key buildings; while Göring and Heß had accompanied Hitler to the main beer hall to begin their Putsch, where Ludendorff their temporary figure head was missing in action as the Putsch began. With weapons procured by Röhm, the Nazis stormed the *Bürgerbräukeller* as the leaders held their meeting and took the hall's inhabitant hostage. Göring took charge of the hall, while Hitler took the three leaders into a side room. In this side room, Hitler announced to the three men that a new Bavarian government was to be formed under his leadership and their party would first take the state, and then march to Berlin. Röhm would work as the Bavarian Prime Minister, Ludendorff would take the military, and Hitler himself would temporarily take on the leadership of the new Reich. In doing so, Hitler had threatened death to the leaders if they chose not to support the new Nazi headed regime. During this, with Ludendorff gone, Göring had worked to calm the crowd, drinking and

⁸ Otis C. Mitchell, "The Nazis' failed 'Beer Hall Putsch,'" in *The Rise of Nazi Germany*, ed. Don Nardo, (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, Inc, 1999).

joking with the captives of the beer hall, but the crowd was becoming restless as the minutes passed. After Ludendorff arrived, he himself had become disgruntled at Hitler as he had placed himself at the head of this hastily pressed and ill formed idea of a government. After the triumvirate had agreed to work with the NSDAP in Bavaria, Hitler was called away leaving Ludendorff and Göring in charge of their respective locations. Röhm, separate from this location, had taken the army headquarters before marching onward. While this appeared to give credit to the still relatively small fascist group and had been a successful outbreak of a counter-revolution, this was not the case. No supporters, no matter the number, could assist Hitler, and his cult of personality, in obtaining the firm placement they needed at this time.⁹

Instead, this pressured move had begun to implode as Hitler left the hall; Röhm's group had been rounded by the army and pushed back. Ludendorff allowed Kahr and the others to leave the hall with little more than a promise; Göring, Heß, and the SA members there had been unable to keep the beer hall under Nazi control. With the German president, Friedrich Ebert, calling on his presidential powers under Article 48 to use his emergency powers, the German army was used as part of a police move to take control of the situation the next morning. Munich was surrounded by soldiers loyal to the Weimar constitution. This was not the end of the Putsch, as Hitler's followers had routed to make a last march through the city center towards the Ministry of War with about armed supporters. Met by the police not far from their starting point, the party linked arms, and shots were fired. At this time, Ludendorff, Röhm, and Heß were arrested, Göring was injured but escaped to heal in Sweden and gain an addiction to morphine, and Himmler returned to his parents' home. Hitler, with a bullet straying towards a supporter at

⁹ *Hitler's Circle of Evil*; Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2003); Mitchell; *The Dark Charisma of Adolf Hitler*, dir. Laurence Rees, November 12, 2012 by Netflix, (BBC, 2012).

his side rather than into his own chest, escaped mostly unharmed to be arrested days later on November 11, in the Bavarian country side. It is interesting to contemplate the sociopolitical motives behind the Putsch, with the economic stressors in place and a few thousand NSDAP members recruited, the social sphere had the chance to broaden the cult of personality with the capture of the Bavarian government in a similar fashion to Italy's fascist take over. Instead, there was a chance that the entire movement could have been ended with the death of the face and voice of the movement.¹⁰

The failure of the Putsch had a variety of effects on the party and Hitler. In the days following, it could be described as a dismal failure, "in the immediate sense that its aim of establishing a counter-revolutionary 'national government' in Berlin," had not worked in the slightest.¹¹ The party was left in shambles, and while it had sparked gossip and disappointment for many Munich citizens, it had the chance to destroy the party for good. Hitler had become a broken man in the days and months following the failed coup, but he would not remain broken for long. Instead, Hitler would turn the subsequent trial into a stage for his brand of rebel rousing. With the hindsight into the day, it is simple to underestimate the blow this had on the sociopolitical influences that the Putsch had on the overall Nazi movement. In the wake of the arrest of key members of the party, the impact that had been built for months had the chance to fade in obscurity, to be a mere footnote on the interwar period as a whole.¹²

That was not the case for the Nazis, nor for the Hitler cult; rather, it was in failure that Hitler would be pushed into viewing himself as the heroic leader Germany needed. His concept of leadership had begun to move from his role as the drummer of party propaganda to the

¹⁰ Mitchell; Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich; Hitler's Circle of Evil; The Dark Charisma of Adolf Hitler*.

¹¹ Pridham, Loc. 532.

¹² Pridham; Ian Kershaw, "Working Towards the Führer.' Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler Dictatorship" in *Contemporary European History* 2, no 2 (July, 1993); Mitchell.

Führer. Though the title had been used for him prior to the Putsch, the link between it and the heroic leader myth was not cemented until later in the interwar period. Instead, the period between the Putsch and trial had become a transitional period for Hitler, one that would go on to create the perfect cult figure for a wounded and bitter population.¹³

III. Trial and Prison

The trial for the Putsch conspirators began on February 26, 1924, with Hitler in the spotlight. As it opened, the stage was set for a dauntless tirade of his own brand of propaganda. He glorified his role in the Putsch, and the presiding judge gave him the floor to propagate as he pleased. This gave Hitler the ability to argue his personal attack on the Weimar government, while also allowing him to take the blame for the Putsch. Lasting for nearly a month, it had also posed a problem for the Bavarian authorities, if Hitler had not taken the blame or if the trial had happened in Berlin there was a chance that his knowledge of certain backers of the movement within the Bavarian political circle.¹⁴

During the month long trial, Hitler had used his oratory skills to glorify his role in the Putsch, staging his own propaganda while refusing to answer questions posed by the prosecution. In this position, Hitler was able to keep his credibility as a fanatical ultra-conservative provocateur and orator, and the Bavarian triumvirate and army would keep their anti-Weimar actions a secret from the Berlin government. During these periods, with one lengthy session at four hours, Hitler went on the attack against the government, both the Bavarian state and Weimar Republic. The timing of the trial during a campaign season lent to the publicity of the trial and

¹³Ian Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth: Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford: University Press, 2001).

¹⁴Pridham; Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: 1889-1936: Hubris* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000); *The Dark Charisma of Adolf Hitler*; Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*.

had the chance of reviving interests in the NSDAP and Hitler as a speaker. The publicity of the trial was dangerous for the Bavarian government in the role its leaders, like Kahr, had in the Putsch, which meant that by whatever means they would avoid bringing the attention of the Weimar Republic onto the trial. A sympathetic judge allowed Hitler to have a more pronounced presence in the court room, which at the time won him and his movement admirers as newspapers covered his court room speeches. All of these things lead to Hitler turning the trial into a propaganda victory from the start, with the assertion that he and his party were resolved to destroy Marxism and argued that the sanctions placed by the Treaty of Versailles at the end of the war were part of their reasoning for the Putsch. In gaining some admirers, the cult of personality would grow during the trial, with some of the sociopolitical exchanges between the court room and the state government having the effect of centering the attention on Hitler and his courtroom propaganda.¹⁵

When the trial came to a close, the accused were given their verdict at the end of the trial, Ludendorff was acquitted, while Hitler and his other co-defendants were sentenced to five years. The court chose not to deport Hitler, which in itself was odd, with the argument against his deportation that, Hitler had considered himself German-Austrian and, “the meaning and intention of the terms of section 9, para II of the Law of the Protection of the Republic cannot apply to a man who thinks and feels as German as Hitler,” had described himself.¹⁶ His voluntary service in

¹⁵ Thomas Childers, *The Nazi Voter: The Social Foundations of Fascism in Germany, 1919-1933*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Kershaw, *Hitler: 1889-1936*; Pridham, *The Dark Charisma of Adolf Hitler; Hitler's Circle of Evil*.

¹⁶ Kershaw, *Hitler: 1889-1936*, Loc. 5078.

the German army during the First World War was also a contributing factor in this court decision, and so Hitler was given a relatively light sentence in a rather plush prison cell.¹⁷

Hitler's time in Landsberg prison could have ended the cult of personality if it had been different circumstances. While the party and Hitler had been placed on the back burner by the political sphere, Hitler spent the time perfecting his political ideology at the behest of Heß, his secretary and primary support within his inner circle. Heß himself had been captivated by the cultish influence of Hitler during the early foundations of the party, through the years his dedication to Hitler became stronger. This time became a rest period for Hitler, rather than a grey and drab prison cell, Hitler's cell was akin more so to an apartment, with visitors, gifts, and other luxuries was unusual for a prison inmate; even the jailers treated the Nazi leader with respect. This reaction to Hitler's entry into Landsberg had an interesting effect on the cult of personality. While other cult figures may have fallen from an important status, this did little to tarnish the Hitler cult, which was due in part to how he had handled the trial and the sociopolitical environment of the interwar period.¹⁸



Fig 3: Adolf Hitler and companions, including Rudolf Heß at Landsberg Prison.

¹⁷ Kershaw, *Hitler: 1889-1936*; Pridham; Benjamin Carter Hett, *The Death of Democracy: Hitler's Rise to Power and the Downfall of the Weimar Republic* (Henry Holt and Co., 2018), Kindle Edition.

¹⁸ Kershaw, *Hitler: 1889-1936*; Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth'*; Pridham; *Hitler's Circle of Evil*.

Prison had also given Hitler the time to focus on the nature of his leadership, and in doing so it gave him the chance to think over the Putsch and how the party might need to be changed in order to achieve his desire for total control of Germany. This was his second time in Landsberg, but it held a different significance than his previous stay; instead of it being a drab number of years that had him hidden and forgotten, Hitler had been given the chance to remain somewhat relevant, albeit quiet figure. While his time in prison took him away from the political scene, and in turn had the party's influence dwindle slightly during the absence of their leader, it was his writing of *Mein Kampf* that would go on to make the largest contribution to the definition of his political stance. In dictating this, Hitler had created a blueprint for his later actions and detailed his demands in the lengthy text.¹⁹

IV. *Mein Kampf*

During his time in Landsberg prison Hitler would write his political ideology at the prodding of secretary and cult of personality follower, Rudolf Heß. *Mein Kampf* was the outcome of this period, a text that had brought together his personal views, beliefs, and certain lies in connection with his life; it was an autobiography that was meant to be his political manifesto at the time. Pressed by Heß to write his political ideals, it is important to understand before pressing forward that Hitler was not a skilled writer. As an orator, he had the charisma to move his supporters in words, but in writing the connection that he had in his charismatic authority was not as apparent. Nevertheless, *Mein Kampf* would become known as the Nazi Bible for it had in its pages the exact nature of his ideology. Prior to the Nazi takeover in 1933, few would finish the pages, and many who read the text at all were mainly non-Nazis in

¹⁹ Hett; Pridham; *Hitler's Circle of Evil*; Kershaw, *Hitler 1889-1936*.

Germany. Understanding this, it was easy to understand how *Mein Kampf* would become important to the narrative of the Nazi period, but it also was noteworthy for the efforts of years between his time in Landsberg prison and being appointed German chancellor. The role it played in the cult of personality is of the most important for several reason: his views on what made a German, propaganda, and his ideals on indoctrination with education.²⁰

The concept of Germaneness was important to the overall propaganda and ideology within *Mein Kampf*, as Hitler had shown, “some sensibility of the old Germanic past,” but where some would focus on multiple aspects of a racial German past, he had focused mostly Aryans.²¹ It was not odd in the ultranationalist counter movement to argue for a racist concept of German exceptionalism with the term *Germanentum* becoming a buzz word in the 1920s, Hitler himself preferred to use other means to describe his brand of German heritage. His focus on the Aryan aspect of this belief was just as important to the founding of the DAP as it was to his racial propaganda, with the Thule Society, and Dietrich Eckart, believing in a mythical bases for their foundation of what they assumed a superior race. This had, in all likelihood, influenced Hitler after he joined the party. The stress on the Aryan origins of Germany by Hitler seemed to be a rejection of part of the racist conservative movement; what was truly interesting was Hitler’s rejection of the mystification of the movement, instead he could be perceived as, “a sober man of facts,” though the racial sciences used, social Darwinism, would be reject as fact as the twenty-first century continued.²² The racial beliefs of Germaneness and its foundation in an Aryan race would become important to the Hitler cult, especially in the perception of what made the best

²⁰ Kershaw, *The ‘Hitler Myth’*; Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*; Hitler’s *Circle of Hitler*; *The Dark Charisma of Adolf Hitler*; William L. Shirer, “Hitler Writes *Mein Kampf*, the Nazi Bible,” in *The Rise of Nazi Germany*, ed. Don Nardo, (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, Inc, 1999); Evans, *Coming of the Third Reich*.

²¹ Bernard Mess, “Hitler and Germanentum,” in *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no. 2 (April, 2004), 257.

²² Mess, 267-268.

Germans. While Hitler himself did not look like the traditional Aryan—blond hair, blue eyed—in other ways Hitler became the embodiment of the leader who would bring the supposed race into their promised positioned.²³

In regards to the focus of this paper, the most important aspect of *Mein Kampf* was Hitler's discussion on the meaning and use of propaganda. Throughout the course of his political career, propaganda was a central feature in his sociopolitical focus. During the early 1920s, Hitler was the driving force of the early Nazi propaganda and had devoted his entire time, as an unemployed veteran, to this cause. It was not a stretch then that Hitler would write about the importance of propaganda within *Mein Kampf*, and would focus an entire chapter of the text to the subject. In modeling his reasoning for the successful use of propaganda Hitler had focused on two things. The first was the use of propaganda during the First World War by both Germany and the belligerent Allied forces stating that, "[it] was during the War, however, that we had the best chance of estimating the tremendous result which could be obtained by a propagandist system properly carried out."²⁴ This lesson had gone on to inspire the context of propaganda not only of *Mein Kampf*, but also within the cult of personality and its role in bringing Hitler to greater prominence. The impact of propaganda during the First World War for Hitler was reliant on the audience it was mean to, and did, reach—in *Mein Kampf*, this was described as the need for propaganda to be addressed to the mass populous. The second modeled reason for the use of propaganda was connected the audience it was meant to affect. Propaganda was meant to move

²³ Kershaw, *1889-1936*; Kershaw, *The Hitler Myth*; Evans, *Coming of the Third Reich*; Pridham.

²⁴ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Trans. James Murphy, White Wolf, 2014, Loc. 3399. Author note: In searching for an affordable and available text, there was a problem in finding a copy of *Mein Kampf* that was not reproduced by a questionable publisher. While the six copies available at the writing of this thesis were all the exact same translation from James Murphy, each had their own reproachable qualities. Of the reprints, three were from this publisher, two were unattainable for various reasons (including a 1971 and 1939 translation of the same text), and the last was a near unreadable document that held textual errors in the transition from paper text to PDF document.

the masses, bring attention to certain issues, while avoiding what the propagandist wished to ignore in favor of their own narrative. It was used, according to Hitler, at a purely intellectual level with the, “lowest mental common denominator among the public it is desired to reach,” and was meant to awaken their imagination and feelings.²⁵ This focus was certainly important to sustaining the Hitler cult until the end of the Second World War, but during his time in Landsberg prison the reach of the propaganda was lacking the impact it would achieve during the later interwar period. At this time, the concept of propaganda was central not only to political power, it was also important to *Führer* myth as ideology, and while it was not central within *Mein Kampf*, it was still an important influence in the outreach of the text, though small as it was. It was in understanding this that the last two major aspects of *Mein Kampf* would deliver the desires of the megalomaniac that Hitler was to become.²⁶

The role of women and youths in Germany was important within Hitler’s discussion. The arguments that Hitler would present in *Mein Kampf* centered on traditional gender roles and the state control of education, two of the main concepts stated in the 25 points of the Nazi program in 1920. To touch upon these again, education was discussed in point 20, stating:

The state is to be responsible for a fundamental reconstruction of our whole national education program... The plans of instruction of all educational institutions are to conform with the experiences of practical life. The comprehension of the concept of the State must be striven for by the school...as early as the beginning of understanding.²⁷

As part of this, it is important to note the level of indoctrination that would be necessary in this education. In a continuation of this, *Mein Kampf* described the need for educating the youth with

²⁵ Hitler, Loc.3467.

²⁶ Ian Kershaw, “Hitler and the Uniqueness of Nazism” in *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no. 2 (April, 2004); Kershaw, *The ‘Hitler Myth’*; Kershaw, *1889-1936*; Evans, *Coming of the Third Reich*; Hett.

²⁷ Robert Ley, “The 25 Points 1920: An Early Nazi Program,” trans. Paul Halsall, Avalon Project—Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy, (Lillian Goldman Law Library, 2008) <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/1708-ps.asp>.

the propaganda of the movement. The sense of Germaneness and Aryan superiority were important discussions within *Mein Kampf*, but in regards to the education of the youth, he described the lack of central aspects in what he believed his own education had failed—the inculcated, or rather indoctrination, of a common citizenship. Arguing the necessity of this, he also expressed the need for the state to have control over the education of the youth to ensure an uninformative application of their education. The connection between school education and the Hitler cult would be cemented later in the decade with the creation of the Hitler Youth in 1926, but at this early stage it was simply an importance of spreading the racist ideology within the sociopolitical constraints of the Nazi leader.²⁸

Women held a unique, though vastly traditional, role in *Mein Kampf*. Partially an aspect of the male dominated society and a fear of women taking work from men, and partially an aspect of the view of women as a mother, Hitler's text described women in their function as the *völkisch* maternal figure. Women were the carriers of the next generation, and in a traditional sense, they were meant to teach their children in the ultra-conservative belief that Hitler preached. In *Mein Kampf* Hitler had treated women as lesser than their male counterparts, needing to be protected and kept at home, though he did not argue outright that working women would be removed from work. Instead Hitler would argue that women were passive in many instances and argue for hygienic conditions of the working-class and protect women in the workforce. It connected with the idea of propagating to youths by its arguments against child-labor and the encouragement of traditional gender roles and physical exercise in connection to their intellectual training at schools. Later in the text there will be a discussion on the response of women to the Hitler cult, but for now it is important to note that when connecting women to the

²⁸ Hitler; Mees.

cult of personality, *Mein Kampf* was not the gold standard for the response to women acting in their interests in a practical sense. The ideology of the text was less important to the women connected to the Nazi Party, but in tying the concept of motherhood to the purity of an Aryan heritage, it is important in creating the propaganda behind to sociopolitical focus of the Hitler cult.²⁹

For historians, *Mein Kampf* had been the blueprint, along with the 25 Point Plan, for the leadership of Germany under Hitler and his party. Richard Evans described it as a heavily edited, tedious poorly sold text during the Weimar period. While well known during the present period, the text held within its pages a level of hate that would transcend the cult of personality in ideology. There was little to no doubt of what Hitler wanted after its publication, but the implementation of the plan was severely lacking. In stating his ideology, Hitler was showing his hand with limited ideas as to it would play out. The nature of his cult of personality would regard him as a masterful orator, but it was highly unlikely that many had read the entirety of the text.³⁰

V. Conclusion: Odd Sort of Victory

With the creation of *Mein Kampf*, “[it] can be argued that by 1924, the central core of Hitler’s worldview...was a conception firmly planted in his thinking.”³¹ Though within this, the concept of his position as the necessary heroic leader was not settled as the year came to a close. His time in prison had changed his perspective on the how the NSDAP would gain political power. While a coup had been successful for Mussolini in Italy, it would not work in Germany;

²⁹ Leila J. Rupp, “Mother of the Volk: The Image of Women in Nazi Ideology,” in *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda, 1939-1945* (Princeton University Press, 1978); Hitler.

³⁰ Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*.

³¹ Ian Kershaw, “Ideology and Propagandist: Hitler in the Light of His Speeches, Writings and Orders, 1925-1928,” in *Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution*, (Yale University Press, 2008), 52.

instead Hitler decided that it would be important for the party to act within the democratic government. Hitler would adjust his ideas of his role within the party, and within Germany as a whole. Where he had argued that a mythical leader would appear to save Germany, after Landsberg he would begin to argue that it was in fact himself, Adolf Hitler, which was the destined leader.³²

Though this was a political stab at the party, the Putsch had become an odd sort of victory for the NSDAP, and especially Hitler in several ways, including bringing a certain level of publicity to him prior to his imprisonment. Prison was a sort of rest cure for Hitler, with his plush cell and some level of visitors. One of the greatest outcomes from the failure of the Putsch was the idea that a takeover of Germany would not happen as it had in Italy. Instead it would take preying on the weaknesses of the democratic Weimar system and using his charismatic authority to influence the sociopolitical influences upon the elections. In the process of using the weakness of the democratic system, Hitler would need to build up his party from a splintered status in the coming years to achieve his desires. His cult of personality would have an added mystique within the period as Hitler had, for a period of years, been banned from speaking at public meetings. This period would become a strong influence on the NSDAP and on the cult of personality that surrounded Hitler during the period, but the party was in need of being rebuilt in the Putsch aftermath.³³

³² *Hitler's Circle of Evil*; Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth'*; Mitchell.

³³ Hett; Mitchell; Mommsen.

Chapter 3: Second Chance *Führer*

Adolf Hitler was released in December 1924, after a short stay in prison, serving only months of his five year sentence. His release happened weeks after the Reichstag election, with few believing that he would be able to recover from the blow to his party and with the Bavarian government failing to deport him to Austria. At this point, the NSDAP was banned from activity and much of the party members were splintered throughout the ultra-conservative *völkisch* parties. The cult of personality suffered along with the Nazi Party itself, with those loyal to Hitler's cult of personality being scattered with the rest of the NSDAP. While Heß served his jail time with Hitler, Röhm had spent the time assembling a stronger block of soldiers during this period—called a sports club while the NSDAP was banned, these men would become the blighted element of the party with the tendency towards violence in the streets.¹

The party could have ended in 1924, but as Kershaw described, “Hitler could begin his emergence from the broken and fragmented *völkisch* movement,” to lead his party once again.² This was his genesis in a way, where Hitler would begin to find in his own image the mythical *Führer* that he had described previously. His rivals within the *völkisch* movement failed in their attempts to take the Reichstag and without his charismatic leadership, the movement was doomed to splintering and failure on the local and national fronts. During the trial and his time in Landsberg, Hitler had become admired by the *völkisch* movement for his cult of personality that flooded into the period. But while he was admired, his devoted followers were largely marginalized by the *völkisch* movement. In effect, Hitler would become a beacon for the *völkisch*

¹ Geoffrey Pridham, *Hitler's Rise to Power: The Nazi Movement in Bavaria, 1923-1933*, (Endeavour Press Ltd., 2016), Kindle Edition; *Hitler's Circle of Evil*, season 1: episode 1-4, dir. Matthew Hinchcliffe, et al, (Netflix, 2017).

²Ian Kershaw, *1889-1936: Hubris* (New York: Norton & Company, 2000), Kindle Edition, Loc 5115.

movement and the ultra-conservative nationalists that had dominated the right wing political sphere. Socially, Hitler would become a cult figure outside of his own personality cult due to his Putsch and the belief that he was a step away from the Weimar government and the Marxist left. This would therefore become a period of rebirth for the Nazi Party and a booming period for the Hitler cult.³

I. Reforming the Party

After his release from prison, Hitler still had the problem of the banned party status to contend with verging on 1925. It would take a late January interview with a government leader and some meandering through the sociopolitical sphere of influence for the party to gain the ability to meet again, more importantly it would take Hitler portraying a tame politician and promises of assistance with fighting the Marxist threat. While given this chance to begin reforming the party, Hitler was still some blocks to his authority with his spoken presence being banned from much of Germany until 1927. His banning from public speech would become a boon for his cult of personality in dramatic ways, but it would cause a period of quiet years where the NSDAP would receive little mention outside of Nazi publications. During this reforming period, Hitler would steer his party towards cooperation and adoption of the democratic and constitutional methods. While a prison sentence would usually end the political career of hopeful candidates, Hitler did not suffer this fate thanks in part to his cult like status within the völkisch, ultra-conservative, movement.⁴

³ Kershaw, *1889-1936*; Ian Kershaw, "Ideologue and Propagandist: Hitler in the Light of His Speeches, Writing, and Orders, 1925-1928," in *Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution*, (Yale University Press, 2008).

⁴ Kershaw, *1889-1936*; Ian Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth: Image and Reality in the Third Reich*, (Oxford: University Press, 2001); Richard J. Evans, *Coming of the Third Reich* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2003); *Hitler's Circle of Evil*; Geoffrey Pridham, *Hitler's Rise to Power: The Nazi Movement in Bavaria, 1923-1933*, (Endeavour Press,

The greatest boon which assisted Hitler in reforming his party was his notoriety and the general perception of political myths that was entertained by Germans at the time. In the prior chapters we touched on the appeal Hitler had prior to, during and after his trial within the *völkisch* movement. What is most important in this is the role this appeal had on reforming the party and the growth of the cult of personality cult. With support from antidemocratic and secret societies, a level of myth had the chance to move a section of the population into the aims of the NSDAP and eventually the Hitler cult. The interwar period was full of totalitarian myths, with a belief not only in a necessary leader, but in an antisemitic worldview. What set Hitler apart from the rest was not only his ability to tap into the overarching disparities felt by the movement, but it would take a strong hand to reform the party into a force of presence for his political attempts at gaining a promising position in power. It was with this perception that the party would be reformed in the image of Hitler's choice that would drive Hitler's quiet years; and while Hitler did not have as many backers as others, including Ludendorff, during this period, it gave him the chance to create an image that would appeal outside of the ultranationalist movement.⁵

After his release from prison Hitler himself needed a reimagining into a proper politician, so it was necessary to create a more assertive and progressive image in how Hitler dressed. While this had been done earlier in the history of the party, this reimagining was paramount to how Hitler would come to be perceived until the end of the Second World War. It also served as part of the function of how charisma was displayed publically to not only his followers, but also the

LTD., 2016); Benjamin Carter Hett, *The Death of Democracy: Hitler's Rise to Power and the Downfall of the Weimar Republic* (Henry Holt and Co., 2018), Kindle Edition.

⁵ Dietrich Orlow, "The Conversation of Myths into Political Power: The Case of the Nazi Party, 1925-1926," in *The American Historical Review* 72, no. 3 (April, 1967); Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth.'*

world. Three choices were presented for consideration, each serving an important function in the cult of personality and towards the general German public.⁶



Fig 4: Hitler was redressed in three aspects: The *völkisch* nationalist, the technocrat, and the military leader.

The first was the *völkisch* image in traditional lederhosen, which harkened back to a German past that promised a bright future. While this would have been a perceivable respect towards a Germanic past, it was not the image Hitler wanted to present. The second was the technocrat, a modern politician dressed in such a way that had Hitler appeared as part of the Weimar sociopolitical culture. This functioned well for his refined image, presenting him as someone other than a formerly jailed, failed revolutionary—instead he was appeared as a politician, lacking the *völkisch* and militarist traits that were dangerous to the overall credibility of the NSDAP. The third image was that of the military leader, which in order to appease the Weimar government in Bavaria he chose to avoid using during his quite period. Each appearance had a functional appeal to aspects of Germany Hitler wanted to appeal to as a charismatic

⁶ Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth'; Hitler's Circle of Evil; The Dark Charisma of Adolf Hitler*, dir. Laurence Rees, November 12, 2012 by Netflix, (BBC, 2012).

authority, but for the years 1925 to 1927, he chose to appear as a technocrat that would appeal to the wealthier classes in Germany.⁷

Though the reimagining of Hitler was important to understanding the wider appeal and appeasement of the German public and political spheres, there was still the fact that Hitler was unable to speak in public until 1927 to contend with. To counter this, the party needed to have a charismatic orator capable of delivering the party propaganda in Hitler's silence. With many new members flocking to the party, though the numbers were not near their pre-Putsch amounts, the most standout orator was a young, disabled Ph.D. Joseph Goebbels, who would become the voice of the party in Hitler's silence. Goebbels himself was a capable orator and propagandist in his own right, but would fall into the Hitler cult slowly after reading about the Putsch. Goebbels began his time with the party in the Rhineland, and by 1925 he was a leading member and speaker of the NSDAP in the German North. While at first unimpressed by Hitler, after reading *Mein Kampf* he would see him in a different light. When the two met in February 1926, Goebbels was disappointed to find the two had little agreement on central party issues. At this time Goebbels received a stern dressing down by Hitler in a controlling and corrective argument and for a moment had the chance to lose faith in the cult of personality. While others would fall away after this, Goebbels was pulled further into the cult folds in April with a personal invitation to speak in Munich from Hitler. By watching Hitler berate party leaders from another northern region, Goebbels believed that Hitler was a brilliant individual due to his handling of the men—offering to ignore their slight as long as they submitted to his unconditional leadership within the party.⁸ Goebbels would become one of Hitler's most ardent supporters, like Heß, until their deaths. He

⁷ *Hitler's Circle of Evil; The Dark Charisma of Adolf Hitler.*

⁸ *Hitler's Circle of Evil*; Kershaw, 1889-1936; Evans, *Coming of the Third Reich*; Orlow, "the Conversation of Myths."

would hold Hitler atop a pedestal that none could knock him from. This was easily noted in a 1927 speech where he described Hitler's preordained mission as the great simplifier. "When Hitler speaks, the magic force of his words breaks all resistance," and those that stood against his words were against his God-given actions.⁹

The quiet years were eventful for Hitler in his effort to reform the party under his unconditional control. The mystique of his presence combined with the spectacle of a trial would become important during this period for recruitment, but in every way it was his personal charisma that would draw Germans into the party. Much as it had with Goebbels, his charismatic authority would gain followers from many of the ultranationalist parties, especially after the recruitment of Goebbels as the main orator of the Munich party in Hitler's silence.

II. Growth of the *Führer* Myth: Nazi Organizations during the Quiet Years

During his quiet period, the NSDAP would create two major sub groups under the cult of personality as they attempted to appear respectable in the eyes of the German Government. This attempt to appear respectable was more than just making Hitler himself appear as though he fit in with the politicians; it was in making the cult of personality seem a presentable group of organizations, including their paramilitary arm. While multiple groups were part of the overarching party, the groups that grabbed the most attention were the militant and youth arms of the party.

Two of the most noteworthy the *Schutzstaffel* (translated: Protection Squadron, SS) and *Hitlerjugend* (Translated: Hitler Youth, HJ) were formed by the NSDAP in 1925 and 1926 respectively. While both of these organizations had appeared prior to the Putsch, their foundation

⁹ Joseph Goebbels, "When Hitler Speaks (1928)," trans. Randal Bytwerk, German Propaganda Archives,(2016).

was not dated to the prior Putsch years. A discussion of the SS must begin with a short examination of the SA, a pre-Putsch paramilitary group discussed in the prior chapter, as the SS began as a sub group of the SA in these years. The SS functioned under the SA as the protection of the *Führer*, even after the resignation of Ernst Röhm as leader of the SA. While Röhm was gone, Hitler had Julius Schreck create the group since the brownshirts, the nickname of the SA, numbered near two thousand, but was loyal to Röhm before Hitler. The SS had several leaders though the years and would grow into a wing of the military that was responsible for a number of functions within the party. The SS was important as the militant arms of the political party, but during the quiet years it was a reasonable step for the political imaging of the party as the SS was less likely to fight in the German streets than their SA counterparts. The SS would become more important as Hitler gained political power and was able to implement Nazi reforms in place of the Weimar law, and would grown into a sectioned army of elite soldiers that would work various roles under the *Führer*.¹⁰

Although the SS was an important adult male organization, a party organization that would go on to feed into their group was formed for male youths to educate them in the Hitler cult. While not a function of the political arm of the party, the Hitler Youth organization would act as the socialization and indoctrination factor for young males as young as fourteen years old. A youth organization was not unheard of during the interwar period as it was common for their formation in Germany. These groups within the period were founded on a romanticized idealism of nationalist leadership which played directly into the Hitler myth and lead many youths to follow the cult like influence of Hitler and his NSDAP local leaders. This romanticized idealism also placed the groups at odd with the political scheming of the Weimar republic and the left-

¹⁰ Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich; Hitler's Circle of Evil*.

wing parties within it. This opposition played many youths right into the party of the charismatic orator and his cult. Much like the SS, the NSDAP youth organization was originally found in the year prior to the Putsch, but it was its rebranding and reformation in 1926 that would create the nature of the organization that would continue until the early Nazi regime. The generation that flocked into the Hitler Youth were different than the generation that controlled the government in several ways. Born between the turn of the century and the outbreak of the First World War, a group that included Heinrich Himmler, they were, “a generation of the unconditional, ready for anything,” that would fuel the Nazi Party particularly well.¹¹

The Hitler Youth had in time become a large organization under the Nazi Party, but this early on, it functioned as the indoctrinate arm in reeducating youths towards the Hitler cult. Effectively it was a propaganda arm of the Nazi Party, but also functionally an early aspect of their education program described in the 25 Point Program. This was one of the boons the party needed during this period, though it would not allow political gains, it did begin to ingrain the party into a position to influence the social organization of young men in their direction. These social ties would bear political fruit in the coming years, but it was successful enough during this period to begin to push young men into the Hitler cult. The years from 1926-1931 saw a youth revolt against the Weimar Republic that was the culmination of the feelings of the organized youths. Functionally, at least towards the upper teen membership, the Hitler Youth were important to influencing the universities in Germany. Unlike other nationalist youth organizations, even their parent party, the Hitler youths had a strange belief in socialism in this period before 1933 they, “formulated constructive policies of social, industrial, and economic

¹¹ Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, 133; Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth.'*

reform,” that aimed at restructuring the living standard of German working class youths.¹² They were a nationalist socialist youth organization that idolized Hitler with near religious conviction, but while they were able to influence some aspect of the political sphere of influence, they were more importantly an arm of educating German youths in the propaganda of the Hitler cult.¹³

The SS and Hitler Youth were not the only organizations from during Hitler’s quiet years, they were just the most well known in the post war period. Other organizations were formed to spread the propaganda and cult of personality. There were organizations to draw Germans of multiple classes into the charismatic authority of the personality cult. Included in these were trade and religious organizations, disabled veterans and civil services that connected into a web of groups that held Hitler to the highest regard as the central party leader. The least successful was an industrial trade group that could not pull membership from the Communist and Catholic trade unions, but one of the strangest was the women’s organizations. The importance of women was well documented during the period, but it was the nature of the party program and the traditional party values that set the NSDAP’s women’s organization apart from other sociopolitical groups.¹⁴

III. The Curious Case of Women

A traditional look on women was not uncommon for the 1920s; while some were breaking gender roles, other held onto the traditions of previous generations and the separation of the home and work spheres down gendered lines. The Weimar Republic had passed many laws

¹² P. D. Stachura, “The Ideology of the Hitler Youth in the Kampfzeit,” in *Journal of Contemporary History* 8, no. 3 (July, 1973), 165; Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*.

¹³ Robert Ley, “The 25 Points 1920: An Early Nazi Program,” trans. Paul Halsall, Avalon Project—Documents in Law, History, Diplomacy, (Lillian Goldman Law Library, 2008); Stachura.

¹⁴ Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*.

that challenged the traditional gender roles by giving women the right to vote and feminist elite, but even before this, women were gaining positions in the workforce. Professional positions were a significant gain for women as the professions of music, teaching, and medical gained over 110,000 women—with teaching taking the great bulk of the numbers. Though this advancement aligned with other modern nations, the *völkisch* traditions would fight against the liberation of the female sex. This was very much used as a function of the Nazi program, with the original program treating women as merely mothers of the next generation of males. It was important to the discussion of this paper that the question of the placement of women within the Hitler cult was addressed.¹⁵

The post-Pustch years did little to change the perspective of the party on the role of women. Antifeminism was a major aspect of the male party elite, with Hitler reassuring a delegation of Nazis that once in power, “every woman would have a husband.”¹⁶ Women were meant to remain in the house tending to the family affairs according to their ultra-conservative and traditional views, insisting that women were the mother of the *volk* and their importance within their party and future Reich was as mothers and wives. Party members, including Hitler and Goebbels, discussed women’s rights in a variety of disparaging ways; Hitler described it as a system of depravity, Goebbels reasoned it as causing women to lose their dignity. Instead women were meant in the eyes of the party to have their dignity and prestige as a function of their home life and the number of children, especially sons, they were able to produce. This would also function later in the regime as part of an ideal image of femininity within the Third Reich after 1933. Until then, their role in the party therefore was counter to the liberal movement of the

¹⁵ Richard Grunberger, “Women’s Roles in Nazi Germany,” in *The Rise of Nazi Germany*, ed. Don Nardo, (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, Inc, 1999).

¹⁶ Grunberger, 137.

Weimar government, but it was still an odd position for women who were close to the party. For Hitler's party, their expectations of women were narrowed and traditional. It relied on the previous generations' view of gender roles that had reflected not only sexist, but also racist ideology.¹⁷

Before discussing the cult of personality and its relation to women, this paper must first address Hitler's views on women. Where women were important in a maternal sense in his words, he considered them to be unimportant outside of the role as breeders. He relied on a misguided belief in the polarity of gender, where women were weak and emotional—in need of a male, husband or father usually, to properly live. Most importantly, German women were meant to be measured up to the ideal Aryan maternal image. At first this approach appeared inflexible, but Hitler was reasonable enough to understand that women were necessary in the workforce and that his party would be unable to completely remove women from working conditions at least during this post-Putsch period. By using this, Hitler was able to attract two different groups of women: conservative mothers and rebellious daughters. Within his propaganda, written and oratory, Hitler placed emphasis on the theme of childbirth and its relation to racial purity and longevity. His propaganda called for women to be kept from politics, but oddly women still fell under the charismatic authority he projected in such strength that there was feminist Nazis attempting to coincide both ideologies. It is easy to see that the ideology would not be able to coexist from the perspective of the cult of personality, even when arguing from a sociopolitical perspective the gendered normative of the Nazi ideology was not capable of working outside of

¹⁷ Peter H. Merkl, "Nazi Women," in *Political Violence Under the Swastika: 581 Early Nazis*, (Princeton University Press, 1975); Leila J. Rupp "Mother of the Volk: The Image of Women in Nazi Ideology," in *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda, 1939-1945*, (Princeton University Press, 1978); Grunberger; Kershaw, 1889-1936.

the demand of the charismatic propagandist who, by this time, had worked to consolidate his solitary hold on the party.¹⁸

During his quiet years, the party role for women was one of multiple paradoxes. Women were expected to refrain from politics, but they also were necessary in gaining needed votes for the party during the elections between 1927 and 1933. Women flocked into the party and a political organization, the German Women's Order (GWO), was founded in 1923 by Elsbeth Zander and was incorporated into the party in 1928. The GWO, "campaigning actively in public for the removal of women from public life: militantly anti-socialist, anti-feminist, and antisemitic."¹⁹ Zander herself was as effective as a speaker, but was, in 1926, at odds with Hitler and the GWO would collapse due to economic issues in 1931. This was the most notable pre-Chancellorship organization for female Nazis, and it marked part of the approach towards the party as politically, and socially moving, woman. While it was anti-feminist, this was not always the case, since feminists still were attempting to align the party goals with their feminist beliefs. The NSDAP's approach lacked rigidity for these and other reasons and in many ways there was no way to remove women from the public sphere, socially or politically.²⁰

The question still remains, why women would join the NSDAP for their antifeminist and ultra-conservative stance. Essentially, due to public distrust of the Weimar government and the charismatic appeal of Hitler, the party was able to gain its female membership. Women would flock to the cult of personality because Hitler was able to speak of things important to them, more importantly he was able to cross generational divides to draw in women of all ages. Their

¹⁸ Rupp; Merkl; Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*.

¹⁹ Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, 212-213.

²⁰ Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*; Rupp.

participation in the Hitler cult, “was the most important feature of the movement,”²¹ as they would become the teachers and influencers of young German children. Therefore, their connection to the *Führer* was the most important to why they were loyal to the chauvinist movement.²²

The Nazi Party, especially concerning the cult of personality, was fundamentally misogynistic in its approach to women’s rights. While they were necessary for some aspects of the work force and essential for their democratic electoral jockeying, they were still considered only important in their role as the homely matron. The mystique of power, charisma, and the stress of the interwar period economic strains and political struggles combined with the sociopolitical need for a leader who would be able to lead Germany in the image of a heroic leader. For female supporters of the party, along with their male counterparts, Hitler was very much this person. His leadership cult was their devotion to this idea and to Hitler himself.²³

III. Party’s Perception of Hitler

Women were not the only member of the cult of personality as we have seen; his charismatic personality gave Hitler leverage in swaying Germans towards his party and his cult of personality. Some supporters described meeting him, even for a moment at a rally, as like he was staring into their soul and would speak exactly what they wanted to hear. This was a major function of his charismatic authority and showed one of his main methods to gain the favor of his fellow party members and followers. Hitler was the main propaganda head of the party, approval of any plans laid with him. This was, in the eyes of his cult followers, the heroic leader that

²¹ Merkl, 136.

²² Merkl; Rupp; Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*.

²³ Kershaw, *1889-1936I*; Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*; Merkl; Rupp.

would lead Germany from the clutches of disgrace. This was not always the case during the interwar period, especially in the post-Putsch period when Hitler was unable to control the movement from prison. Thus, in 1925, Hitler had moved to push his rivals in the margins of the *völkisch* movement. The SA was placed in a subordinate role to the party and forced to break with other paramilitary groups, with Röhm leaving the party and country in protest of this movement. His main rival in the movement was Ludendorff who was becoming extreme in his vocal views, attacking not only Jews, but also Jesuits and Catholics; this gave Hitler a stronger hold in the movement as attacking non-Jews was, “a recipe for electoral disaster in Bavaria and other pious parts of southern Germany.”²⁴ In harming the reputation of Ludendorff, Hitler was able to make himself the central figure of the ultranationalist movement and, after demanding the supports of northern NSDAP leader Gregor Strasser, including Goebbels, to bend to his control, he had placed himself firmly in the control of the NSDAP.²⁵

In consolidating his power, many familiar rituals began to be used in the party. The most easily noted was the use of the Hitler salute (*Heil Hitler*) became obligatory, and by the 1926 party rally, personal oaths of loyalties were made to Hitler and the yearly parade of the ‘Bloody Flag’ was done in remembrance, for nationalist and cult propaganda, of the 1923 Putsch. During his quiet years, Hitler feared speaking in public, or for long periods of time at party only events, with the idea of deportation being a likely scenario due to his Austrian citizenship. At this time, Hitler had need of a devoted follower who had a great understanding of propaganda and could work an audience similar to his own personality. To this end, Hitler found a favorite in the crippled vestige of Joseph Goebbels who had begun to describe his adoration of Hitler in grand

²⁴ Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, 201.

²⁵ Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*; Kershaw, “Ideologue and Propagandist;” Hett, *The Dark Charisma of Adolf Hitler*.

terms in his private journal and showed his devotion clearly to his *Führer*. The cult of personality was invested in the power of Hitler with the rituals being used to show not only the mystique of the *Führer*, but also the solidarity of the movement within the Hitler cult. This in itself was indicative of the leadership of Hitler where he would focus on the propaganda and personality that would create his desires of power.²⁶

With the arrival of 1927, Hitler had been given the right to speak in from of his party again. It was also the point where the NSDAP had a new basic structure with a younger generation of nationalist pushing the older, prewar generation to the side. These youths found their main leaders as inspirational in their activism and hate, since Hitler himself was, “only 40, Goebbels 32, Göring 36, [and Heß] 35.”²⁷ These youths would, in Hitler’s mind, go on to replace the previous Nazi activists and begin to mobilize under the party program and his own brand of propaganda. Goebbels described the devotion of the Hitler cult the best in a 1927 essay:

The people have a fine sense of whether or not one is honest with them. Over the long run national instinct cannot be deceived if a man or a movement speaks differently than it acts, if it speaks differently than it thinks. There is no doubt about Hitler. One either rejects him absolutely or sees in him the only hope to reestablish the Reich. No one who has heard him has ever doubted that he believes the world view he represents.²⁸

With few in the party willing to openly deviate from Hitler’s desires for the party, it was easy for the cult of personality to flourish within the sociopolitical sphere of the interwar period. It would only take a range of even to give the cult the power victory its leader desired. In doing so it would also begin to breakdown the political structures of the Weimar Republic and its old guard leaders.

²⁶ Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*; Kershaw, “Ideologue and Propagandist;” Orlow, “Conversion of Myth into Political Power;” *Hitler’s Circle of Evil*.

²⁷ Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, 207.

²⁸ Goebbels, “When Hitler Speaks.”

IV. Public view of Hitler

In understanding the pull of Hitler's personality multiple points need to be made. First, if one did not feel like they could identify with the ideology professed by Hitler and his Nazis, then one would not feel compelled by his charisma. For Hitler, personality was the most important aspect of his propaganda and self image; this would function, in many ways, as his ability to gain loyalist in Germany and sympathizers outside of it. Second, if a person saw Hitler as an unremarkable individual, his oratory skills would have less of a pull on their personality and he would generally be perceived as either an inferior or non-threat. One foreigner described him as formless, "a man whose countenance is a caricature...He is inconsequent and voluble, ill-poised, insecure. He is the Very prototype of the Little Man."²⁹ Third, the voters of Germany at this time, while many held a belief that Germany had been stabbed in the back by the Weimar governments, they were supportive of certain powerful members and had a belief that thing could be looking up for the country as the economy began to recover and more favorable peace terms were in the works. This would have never allowed the NSDAP to flourish quickly even with supports from powerful social elites.³⁰

Hitler's new strategies in 1928, including addressing the party's attention to local governments, would bring a respectability to the party it had not previously been known for, gaining support from previous untouched populous. Party membership rose as a result, although it was not strong enough to capture a more than minor percentage of votes on the national

²⁹ David Pietrusza, *1932: The Rise of Hitler and FDR—Two Tales of Politics, Betrayal, and Unlikely Destiny* (Connecticut: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), Loc. 1256.

³⁰ Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich; The Dark Charisma of Adolf Hitler; Hitler's Circle of Evil; Kershaw, The 'Hitler Myth.'*

scale.³¹ Hitler would focus his energies on propaganda, and with Goebbels publishing party essays in *Der Angriff* (The Attack), a paper he founded in 1927, Hitler's character was addressed to Germans on the Nazi's terms. Goebbels would address Hitler as a creative genius in his essays, arguing that political leaders were required to have a level of tactful instinct and the ability to implement it with purpose. In the same essay Hitler is treated in a love him or hate him respect, with Goebbels arguing that to believe in the charismatic authority of the *Führer* would, one must see, "his powerful human form [where] we see in this man the grace of fate made visible," and a follower would need to hold to his words and ideals in order to be close to him.³² Goebbels would write in 1932 an article that described the character of a dictator, in it he described for the paper's audience a fascist leader's responsibility and personality. "A dictatorship requires three things: a man, an idea, and a following ready to live for the man and the idea, and if necessary to die for them."³³ This opening left little to the dedication Goebbels expected of others towards Hitler, but it also gave the German public a reason to view him as the inspirational leader they would need in the trying times Germany, after 1929, would face.

The main group outside of the NSDAP that Hitler would need to address his image for was the Catholic Germans whose leaders saw Hitler in a negative light. Those against the Nazis in the church leadership were still antisemitic, but saw Hitler as anti-Christian and placed the party on the same level as communist. In Bavaria, a mainly Catholic state, it would lead Catholic voters to choose progressive candidates, including the aged Paul von Hindenburg, a war hero who was a conservative candidate with a liberal backing. To combat this, Hitler would distance himself from anti-Christian nationalists and spoke to crowds of Catholics of his deep religiosity.

³¹ Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*.

³² Goebbels, "When Hitler Speaks."

³³ Joseph Goebbels, "Advice for a Dictator and for Those Who Want to Become One (1932)," trans. Randall Bytwerk, German Propaganda Archives (2000).

He would argue that Germany was in a state of spiritual distress and needed a strong leader to lead them out of it. Regardless, the party and Hitler would not be able to shake the distrust of the Catholics until 1933. Appearing anti-Christian was less of a worry for the personality cult; rather it was a sore irritation to the cult. Hitler was seen as a needed leader within the cult, a heroic leader sent by the grace of divinity to lead Germany into a promised age of prosperity. This image had the chance to appear Christ-like for some, Anti-Christ for others. At the end of it, the Catholic vote was little needed as the decade drew to a close.³⁴

V. 1929: The Year the World Fell

An international crisis appeared in 1929 after the booming economy that was enjoyed in America crumbled with the fall of the American Stock Market. German unemployment rose rapidly in the aftermath of the crisis, and the dependence of Germany on short-term loans to repay their respiration dues would mean that the stock market collapse would lead to Germany folding, like other countries torn by the war, defaulting on their loans. The inability of the Reichstag to find a solution would lead to the first presidential cabinet being appointed as a function of Article 48. The use of presidential emergency decrees, as directed by Article 48 of the German constitution, had little effect on the strained economy and social unrest. Attacks on the old elites and the liberal parties would come from multiple fronts, with both the communist and nationalist jockeying for supporters. In all of this, “a large proportion of the population seduced by the appeals of a charismatic leader,” had begun to flock to Hitler’s cult.³⁵ In this way, the Great Depression had the effect of diminishing the support for the Weimar government

³⁴ Kershaw, *The ‘Hitler Myth;’ The Dark Charisma of Adolf Hitler*.

³⁵ Mary A. Fulbrook, *A Concise History of Germany*, 2nd ed, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), Kindle Edition, Loc. 2668-2682.

would lead to the country attempting to turn away from the short democracy it had lived. This was a perfect storm of events for the party and especially for Hitler. As the 1920s had drawn to a close, and the 1930s began with an international depression, the Nazi Party, and with it the cult of personality, were making steady gains. While the party would not be in a position of power for some years after the 1929 Stock Market Crash, it was a turning point for the history of the party much in the same way the Beer Hall Putsch of 1923 had affected the organization. The sociopolitical turmoil would bring out the best and worst in humanity, and with it Germany had begun a shift towards war.³⁶

VI. The Personality Cult: Edge of Power

The years between the Putsch and 1933 were a period of growth for the personality cult. While in some respect the party would struggle, the personality cult gained key members and support organizations that would grant them a greater reach in German society. Politically, the cult of personality would provide propaganda that addressed the concerns of Germans and would draw some to their ranks. Socially, the cult of personality would influence the creation and membership of the Hitler Youth and multiple groups dedicated women. Children would increasingly become important to the party, and with it the traditional role of the maternal teacher in the home was stressed. Starting in 1927, a new form of propaganda would set the stage for the Hitler cult as the NSDAP held its first rally in Nuremberg. While not the overwhelming thrall that was depicted by Leni Riefenstahl that was filmed after Hitler became *Führer*, the 1927

³⁶ Fulbrook; Hett; Pridham; *Hitler's Circle of Evil*.

rally was a big step for the party in terms of pomp and circumstance, as well as the deliverance of party propaganda.³⁷



Fig 5: (From Left to Right) Rudolf Heß, Adolf Hitler, and Julius Streicher at eh 1927 Nuremberg Rally.

Though many leaders spoke at the rally, two stood out for the purposes of the personality cult's propaganda and influence. The first, Joseph Goebbels, addressed party propaganda and its transformation into political organization. The idea that fueled the propaganda was directed at the spread of propaganda, and the way in which it developed. As with the idea of Hitler in *Mein Kampf*, Goebbels would argue that, "Propaganda does not need to be intellectual; it must be

³⁷ Kershaw, 1889-1936; Kershaw, "Ideologue and Propagandist;" *The Dark Charisma of Adolf Hitler; Triumph of the Will*, dir. Leni Riefenstahl, 1935.

effective,” and stated in such a way that the general mass would understand the simplistic meaning.³⁸ In arguing the features of propaganda, Goebbels touched on two important concepts that had addressed the personality cult in light of the sociopolitical sphere of influence; propaganda was split in two methods, understanding and feelings, both depended on the words used to deliver the information, and the control of both was important to controlling the masses. For the cult of personality, the propaganda of feelings was the most important and influential when addressing the position of Adolf Hitler within the party. As the *Führer*, a myth of grandeur was presented, although Hitler was seen as the *völkisch* image of a leader within this same context. Hitler was the party; to be faithful to the party was to be loyal to Hitler. This was necessary as a function of the Hitler cult, as it called for loyalty to the *Führer* above all else.³⁹

Adolf Hitler had also addressed his party at the 1927 rally. His speech focused on the need of the people for a stronger government and for a living space, but also the need for a political faith and national images to bring Germans together. Stung though out his speech were tones of racial superiority, arguing that the democratic tendency of the Weimar government limited its abilities by following international demands. Hitler argued that the policies of internationalism were, “incapable of policies that could bring a rising population in line with its territory, or better said: the territory of the population.”⁴⁰ While the issue of race was important to the cult of personality, within his speech Hitler would address nationalistic idolatry, in both image and idea. “We deceive ourselves if we believe that the people want to be governed by majorities. [...] This people does not wish to lose itself in “majorities.” It does not wish to be

³⁸ Alfred Rosenberg and Wilhelm Weiß, “Goebbels’ Speech at the 1927 Nuremberg Rally,” trans. Randall Bytwerk, German Propaganda Archives (2000).

³⁹ Rosenberg and Weiß, “Goebbels’ Speech at the 1927 Nuremberg Rally.”

⁴⁰ Alfred Rosenberg and Wilhelm Weiß, “Adolf Hitler’s Speech at the 1927 Nuremberg Rally,” trans. Randall Bytwerk, German Propaganda Archive (2000).

involved in great plans. It wants a leadership in which it can believe.”⁴¹ Unity at home was the goal that Germany, in Hitler’s view, should strive to gain. This unity must continue from the personal home of German citizens, into a national sense of worth. In arguing this, Hitler would state that Germans lacked a national flag that represented the people on a whole, but with thousands behind the Nazi flag, it finally had, “a symbol of national strength and power.”⁴² The Nazi flag was tied to the party and Hitler, so in stating this Hitler was arguing for the strength of their propaganda. The concept of this sort of propaganda was not uncommon, but for the cult of personality, it was another reminder of the Hitler myth that was tied to a distinct leadership ideal that the party had pushed since the pre-Putsch days.

As the decade drew to a close, the belief that Germany needed a strong, charismatic leader to have faith in, this had been a point the party propaganda strived to show Hitler in. As the party head of propaganda, Goebbels was in a unique position to address the qualities of a leader. His central focus was on what he saw as the four man components a leader needed: character, will, ability, and luck. Character, in this regard, addresses style and behavior, and combined with will and ability, it had the chance to create a leader who would accomplish greatness. In politics he argued that they were necessary for a leader to be accepted by the masses, whereas those who lacked this were incapable to lead. The last trait, luck, was not thoroughly addressed in his essay, but easily described the happenstance behind Hitler leading the party. When Goebbels wrote this essay, it was in honor of Hitler’s fortieth birthday and not long after the Stock Market Crash, it had the briefest mention of the man himself, but had left

⁴¹ Rosenberg and Weiß, “Adolf Hitler’s Speech at the 1927 Nuremberg Rally.”

⁴² Rosenberg and Weiß, “Adolf Hitler’s Speech at the 1927 Nuremberg Rally.”

little guess as to the main inspiration for the essay. This concept was useful in understanding the charismatic authority that Hitler held at the close of the decade.⁴³

Hitler's ideology was reflected in his cult as the platform for spreading his propaganda to the masses. While the party program was addressed in broad terms and never fully flushed out clearly, it had an important function of mobilization the mass of the Nazis behind their *Führer* for better or worse. With the party amassing votes, the cult of personality was gaining traction as a function of Hitler's political strengths.⁴⁴

VII. Conclusion: Edge of Power

As Orlow described, "Hitler's deliberately schizophrenic leadership façade created a strong emotional bond between leader and followers," that would only grow stronger as the party was set have the cult leader as the German Chancellor.⁴⁵ Multiple rituals that were observed by the cult of personality had become common place in Germany after Hitler became chancellor of Germany, the most commonly seen was the Nazi salute combined with '*Heil Hitler*,' but other aspects of the Hitler cult had become commonly accepted. The underestimation of Hitler's charismatic authority and the appeal of the party during the Great Depression would lead to few seeing the strength of the party at the polls until it was too late. Nazism was Hitlerism, and its unique path was a function of its leader's sociopolitical demands and psychological understanding of human nature. His was a party of youthful energies, offering change that would address the needs of its followers in the most dangerous ways; it was also a party based on long held, nationalist ideals. The strain it placed on a national culture that was already in crisis would

⁴³ Joseph Goebbels, "Der Führer (1929)," trans. Randall Bytwerk, German Propaganda Archives (1998).

⁴⁴ Ian Kershaw, "Hitler and the Uniqueness of Nazism," in *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no. 2 (April, 2004).

⁴⁵ Orlow, "Conversion of Myths into Political Power," 916.

push it to a breaking point by 1933. The formation of organizations, rallies, and rituals were all a part of the Hitler cult. Those fanatical followers, both leaders in the party and regular German citizens, all functioned as propaganda heralds for the party. In this role, the cult was placed to influence both the social and political spheres at key points to turn the general mass towards the party's bating arguments.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*; Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth*;' Kershaw, "Hitler and the Uniqueness of Nazism."

Chapter 4: The Hitler Cult in Power

The elections of the early 1930s were an intense point for the German political landscape. With Hindenburg defeating Hitler in the presidential election after two rounds of ballots, though Hitler had gained over a third of the votes, cracks in the democracy of the Weimar Republic were more apparent. The Nazis had gained 230 seats in July 1932, and with that the Reichstag had a strong anti-parliament stance.¹ One of the main reasons for this was unpopular decrees from then chancellor, Heinrich Brüning, which were meant to combat the economic woes of the country and the mismanagement of Hindenburg's presidential reelection run. The policies implemented increased unemployment, and drove Germans into the waiting ranks of membership between anti-parliamentary groups such as the NSDAP and the German Communist Party (KPD). Brüning lost the support of the Reichstag and, after conflicts with Hindenburg, resigned his position—and with it his cabinet's—before the final Reichstag vote. The following two chancellors, Franz von Papen and General Kurt von Schleicher, fared little better. It was under the chancellorship of Papen that the ban on the activity on the NSDAP paramilitary organizations, the SA and SS, which was instrumental the affairs of the Nazis taking control of Prussia. After failing to bring the Nazis into a coalition government, and Hitler refused the president's reluctant offering of the vice chancellorship, Papen was ousted from his office via a 512-42 vote in the Reichstag. While in the move was legal, it is important to note that the move happened as Papen waited to be acknowledge with a presidential order to dissolve the Reichstag. With a great majority of the Reichstag favoring the two major opposition parties and the

¹ Mary A. Fulbrook, *A Concise History of Germany*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), Kindle Edition, 2699.

ultranationalist fascist party not moving to support the other parties, the country was facing not only economic problems, but also political turmoil.²

When Schleicher became chancellor, he had tried, “to gain support from labor unions, as well as the radical wing of the NSDAP represented by Gregor Strasser.”³ Schleicher was unable to gain Strasser’s support, with Strasser forced to resign on December 8, 1932, weeks before Schleicher himself would resign on January 28, 1933. Papen had been working in the background to smooth Hindenburg towards offering Hitler the chancellorship, with Papen assuring the president that he could control the man and Schleicher recommending Hitler for the position he now vacated. As Hitler became the German chancellor, the cult of personality gained a new level of prestige within the country.⁴

² Fulbrook; Thomas Childers, *The Nazi Voter: The Social Foundations of Fascism in Germany, 1919-1933*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press (2010), Kindle Edition; Richard J. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, (New York: The Penguin Press, 2003); Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich in Power, 1933-1939*, (New York: The Penguin Press, 2005), Kindle Edition.

³ Fulbrook, 2713.

⁴ Fulbrook; Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*.



Fig 6: Election Poster for Hitler and Hindenburg from the March 1933 Reichstag election reads, “In the deepest need Hindenburg chose Adolf Hitler for Chancellor. You too should vote for List 1.”

I. 1933 Triumph at Last

After the discussions between Hindenburg, Papen, and others to place offer Hitler the chancellorship, on January 30, 1933 offered the position most desired to Hitler. In doing so, he was acknowledging the power of the Nazi leader’s party in the Reichstag, but also did so with his presidential powers, a move that was not wholly democratic in its own right. Hitler, unlike the Italian fascist Mussolini, had not seized power; rather he had been giving the position due to the miscalculations and underestimation of political elitism within the Weimar government. Hitler had made his demands and plans clear for years, he would accept nothing less than the chancellorship and his party wanted to dismantle the democratic government. The refusal of the

lesser position of vice-chancellor in 1932 was a belief in the idea that his personality cult and charismatic mystique was tarnished by the action. In waiting for the chancellorship, Hitler was given the ability legitimately that would present him with the ability to implement his propaganda and personal ideology on a national scale.⁵

Although at first Hitler had been outnumbered by Papen's fellow conservatives, with only two of the major positions being controlled by the NSDAP, the Ministry of the Interior, occupied by Wilhelm Frick, and the Reich Chancellery with Hitler, the *Führer's* party was outnumbered, but set in key positions within and outside of the presidential cabinet. Herman Göring had been given the role as acting Prussian Minister of the Interior, giving the party control of the largest section of the country. For the cult of personality, there was validity finally for the years of struggle the *Führer* had faced and the ideas of the social memory of a strong leader was being addressed albeit slowly. Richard Bessel described this transitional period, from just before the accession of Hitler to his final ultimate take over near six months later, as a period that had political intrigue at the top and social violence from the SA at the bottom. Most importantly were the actions of Hitler in the days that followed his appointment. A third, and final, election was scheduled for March 1933 to be followed by an enabling act, something that Hitler had been adamant for in his negotiations. The February before the vote was filled with events in support of Hitler and Hindenburg, but the most influential event of the period was the Reichstag Fire in the days before the vote.⁶

⁵ Fulbrook; Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*; *The Dark Charisma of Adolf Hitler*, dir. Laurence Rees, November 12, 2012 by Netflix (BBC, 2012).

⁶ Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*; Ian Kershaw, *1889-1936: Hubris* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000); Richard Bessel, "The Nazi Capture of Power," in *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no. 2 (April, 2004).

Election fever was alive again in Germany in February 1933, with the parties collecting voter support however they could. Goebbels was in high spirits using propaganda to gain support for his *Führer* and some German voters appeared ready to give Hitler a chance as the period was still in economic strains, with a surprising amount neutral as February started. Though many Germans outside of the Nazi reach had little care, others that had heard the vague promises without falling into the membership argued that it would not take long for Hitler to fall like the other chancellors as his promises were not achievable. This general pessimism was a realistic approach for the period, but with time the attitudes of Germans were becoming more positive. The March 1933 election was preceded by certain events that would play heavily into Hitler's cult propaganda as well as strengthen the Nazi's hold on power. The level of violence and intimidation by Nazi supporters towards rivals, especially Marxists, had continued during the months under the leadership of Göring and other state leaders, but this would not damage the influence of Hitler at this time. Economically, some of the policies that had prior chancellors had approved were successful and the Nazis were ready to capitalize on this as their own successes, but it was also the vehemently anti-Marxism of most Germans that would be turned by the Nazi propaganda.⁷

Even with gains in support, there were those against the party and its rhetoric that warned of Hitler's personality cult and his power hungry nature. Arguing that Hitler would never relinquish the power given to him, these voices were no doubt correct, but in 1933 there was little stopping the Nazi *Führer* from his goals. Whatever fear Germans had of Hitler's chancellorship, they were all but ignored with a shocking event that played right into the plans

⁷ Fulbrook; Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*; Bessel, "The Nazi Capture of Power;" Ian Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth: Image and Reality in the Third Reich*, (Oxford: University Press, 2001).

and propaganda of the NSDAP. On February 27, the Reichstag was set on fire and the man arrested professing his plot was Marinus van der Lubbe, a recent Dutch immigrant and communist. Upon hearing the news from Goebbels, Hitler had rushed with Göring to the building, believing the fire to be, “a signal of for a Communist uprising—a ‘last attempt’ as Goebbels put it, ‘through fire and terror to sow confusion,’ to gain power for themselves.”⁸ While the fire was fresh in the mind of Germans, Hitler was in placed to remove his biggest rivals with the emergency decree, ‘For the Protection of People and State.’ Called the Reichstag Fire decree, it granted Hitler the ability to suppress the KPD and, “[four] thousand Communists including virtually the entire party leadership were immediately arrested, beaten up, tortured and thrown into newly created concentration camps,” due to this suppression.⁹ The violence would continue and assist in the consolidation of power under the *Führer* as they began to restore order by decree throughout the German states. The election was cast on March 5, and the Nazis had gained a 43.9 percent of the vote, with nationalist coalition partners gaining an additional 8 percent, and many non-voters of the previous years had come out to cast a protest vote for the Nazi Party. While they had only won 288 of the 647 seats, propagandist Goebbels called the vote a resounding success. Hitler had been described as the ‘People’s Chancellor,’ and his image, along with the aging Hindenburg, was used to push Hitler as endowed with the national values and the chosen hero that would bring back Germany’s strength.¹⁰

The March 1933 election was the last held in Germany until after the Second World War.

The Enabling Act was passed with a level of political maneuvering that had few against the act,

⁸ Kershaw, *1889-1936*, Loc. 10226.

⁹ Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*, Loc. 301.

¹⁰ Kershaw, *The ‘Hitler Myth’*; Kershaw, *1889-1933*; Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*; Benjamin Carter Hett, *The Death of Democracy: Hitler’s Rise to Power and the Downfall of the Weimar Republic* (Henry Holt and Co., 2018), Kindle Edition.

and Hitler speaking in the Reichstag on March 23, promising moral renewal in education, the media, and the arts, and that, he would leave the Reichstag and the presidency untouched. The Enabling Act granted Hitler a wide swatch of powers that would allow him to rule without presidential decree. Hitler would break his promise to the Reichstag and, in doing so, had become the sole person controlling Germany.¹¹

II. Propaganda: Image and the Enabling Act

The triumph of Hitler was in no doubt a great boon to the cult of personality, but the triumph was also owed to the propaganda and devotion of the supporters of the leadership cult. The Nazis were the youthful energetic party, especially compared to the aging members of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the party that was blamed for the creation of the Weimar Republic and the Versailles Treaty. The NSDAP had the greater understanding of the use of propaganda and they had used it to full effect leading up to the seizure of power. The belief in Hitler became a secular style of faith, one that described the Nazi ideology as Hitlerism. Those who created the leadership placed, “heavy emphasis on Hitler’s many-sided ‘genius’ in public...and press,” but it a danger of ignoring his humanity in front of the masses.¹²

On the eve of the seizure of power, the NSDAP was spinning their propaganda steadily against multiple parties, but the most central work could be seen in how they worked up Hitler to appear as a boon to Germany, a different chancellor than the previous others. Hitler had always emphasized the importance of personality and its connection to authority; in this his image was

¹¹ Kershaw, *1889-1936*; Kershaw, *The ‘Hitler Myth’*; Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*; Hett.

¹² Kershaw, *The ‘Hitler Myth’*, 59.

of central importance as he attempted to consolidate all power in the nation under his sole control. Ian Kershaw pointed out three central factors in how Hitler's public image was addressed. Firstly, it was a function of the interwar period belief that remained strong that the *Führer* was a youthful energetic and dynamic leader who would change the course of the Germany that the Weimar government had placed them. This was due majority to the image shift began in 1925 that turned the failed revolutionary into one of the first rock star politicians, noticed by many, but still a mystery to most followers. Secondly, those who stood outside of the part grossly underestimated the power of Hitler's personality and the effectiveness of his propagandist. Both Goebbels were masterful tacticians in the realm of propaganda and could adjust their words and actions in a relatively short period of time. This underestimation was a factor in Hitler becoming chancellor, as cabinet members, including Papen, had argued that they could control Hitler as a political pawn and in doing so uses the tools and organizations of the party to the government's advantage. Lastly, Hitler was touted as the long established conservative leadership that all but the left had embraced. Even those on the right who had not backed the NSDAP previously were swayed towards the party, apart from the previously discussed liberal and Catholic voters, as disillusionment with the government under prior chancellors had cracked the support. These three factors generated a perception of the personality of the *Führer* as the last remaining hope for a country plagued by problems, but it had to work within the democratic functions of the Weimar Republic, even in the underhanded politics of period.¹³

¹³ Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth'*; Ian Kershaw, "'Working Towards the Führer': Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler Dictatorship," in *Contemporary European History* 2, no. 2 (July, 1993); Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*.

While the image of Hitler leading up to the seizure of power that the March 1933 election would grimly start, the first major propaganda of the period had appeared to fall directly into the lap of the party. The Reichstag Fire gave way to acts that had begun the seizure of power in earnest; Goebbels had orchestrated public propaganda that addressed the Reichstag Fire as an attack by the communist within Germany to overthrow the government. In alleging this as an attack, the NSDAP could position themselves not only as a legitimate party, but also garner support for the emergency decree and the subsequent Enabling Act. At universities and on the streets, the Hitler cult would spar against the counter elements of the country, with the Enabling Act allowing for what had become a single party system. The fear of Marxist and communists controlling the country had those from the independent conservative right to the center-left leaning to lean away from the far left party, though trade unions would remain supportive of the KPD. Hitler, in his only occasion participating in a parliament debate, would smooth the nerves of those who were still on the fence in a peach to the Reichstag when presenting the Enabling Act vote arguing that the promises of 1918 were divisive lies that had ripped the country apart. Hitler understood that in order to get what he wanted his words would have to acknowledge the propaganda that the remaining member of the Reichstag parliament wanted to hear, and he had addressed that with practiced grace.¹⁴

The following spring and summer of 1933 were filled with the NSDAP influencing the sociopolitical organizations to coordinate and begin indoctrination of the German populous. The Enabling Act gave Hitler the ability to do so without consulting the president or Reichstag. Thus, Hitler to begin consolidating power into his sole control, bringing more into his cult of

¹⁴ Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth';* Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich;* Hett, *Hitler's Circle of Evil*, Season 1: episode 1-4, dir. Matthew Hinchcliffe, et al. (Netflix, 2017); *The Dark Charisma of Adolf Hitler*, dir. Laurence Rees, November 12, 2012 by Netflix, (BBC 2012).

personality, and while he was pressured to act on the racial question of his Third Reich, it would not change the strong impact the consolidation would bring to the NSDAP and Germany. The Enabling Act allowed the dismissal of scientists and professors, including Albert Einstein and Erwin Schrödinger, from prominent positions as part of the purge of the intelligentsia in order to have the education system at all levels teach loyalty to the *Führer* cult and the, now defunct, racial history and sciences that were pushed by the Nazis. Some willingly left the country in the face of the anti-intellectualism and racial violence that had broadened under Hitler's unrestrained chancellorship. Outside of the education profession, censorship would force away artists, authors, and actors who did not fit into the Nazi propaganda or opening barked at it; newspapers were censored or outright banned unless under party control.¹⁵

Though much planning had gone into the propaganda presented in the wake of Hitler's chancellorship, it was the sociopolitical realm that the Hitler cult represented much of the targeted area and assisted in transitioning the areas into supportive entities. Propaganda had always been a key tool in the NSDAP prior to their accession of power and the cult of personality had groomed a healthy obsession with the presentation of the leadership myth that had been important during this transitional phase of the interwar period. When discussing their impact it was important to understand that organizations previously under the NSDAP, such as women's groups. The most noticeable as the period went on was the Hitler Youth as it became a requirement, like other groups, for boys and young men to join. The Hitler Youth would feed into the military, including a Hitler Youth section of the SS for older teens. Hitler was a central figure for the teens, as shown by an introduction to the handbook for the 10-14 year olds, which

¹⁵ Kershaw, *1889-1936*; Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*; *The Dark Charisma of Adolf Hitler*.

stated that they bore Hitler's name, "happily and proudly, and know that this name is an obligation."¹⁶ This introduction was dedicated to an abridged biography of Hitler in which he is treated as the model they were meant to measure against. Their propaganda was meant to hold the *Führer*, in the highest regard to grow up and fight in his name for the German Reich.¹⁷



Fig 7: Propaganda posters: 1) “*Führer*, we will follow you;” 2) “We stand with the *Führer*. The oath of the German people on 29.3 (March 29);” 3) “Adolf Hitler’s youth attends community schools.”

III. Consolidation of Power: The Night of the Long Knives

The consolidation of power did not solely rest on the public's perception of the NSDAP, but also on how the military perceived the party and their militant organizations. While 1933 was a year of bringing the public to the party, the military was difficult to bring under Hitler's control, though not entirely so. The need to strengthen Hitler's control had been addressed in

¹⁶ Hitler Youth Organization, “The Life of the Führer (1938),” trans. Randall Bytwerk, German Propaganda Archives (2002).

¹⁷ Hitler Youth Organization; Kershaw, *The ‘Hitler Myth’*; Kershaw, 1889-1936; Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*.

1934 under mounting pressure on the party image that had started to stain his own public image. Reports began to arrive at Vice-Chancellor Papen's office of the brut violence of the Nazis on German streets. The overt violence of the SA was a major point of complaints for the reports, with, "Papen's press secretary Herbert von Bose was beginning to establish active contact with critical generals and senior officers worried about the activities of the SA."¹⁸ Prior to this point Hindenburg had acted as a mitigating voice between the two, but faced with illness in April 1934, the worries of the military would become omnipresent within the country. As Hindenburg retired to his estate, the military and general public had begun to criticize the NSDAP. The lost enthusiasm had begun to bring the criticism towards Hitler with fears of disorder from the SA's to the point that party leaders, including former SA head Göring and SS leader Heinrich Himmler, agreed to a purge of the less savory, and more rebellious, elements of the NSDAP. Soon after Hitler's hand was forced with Papen addressing the public on June 17, 1934, to warn against a second revolution and attacked the personality cult as culpable in its creation.¹⁹

In addressing this, Papen had given the party a measure of worry about the perception on the role of the leadership cult in the country. The concerns of the public and military would push the party into a consolidation effort against Ernst Röhm's SA and political rivals on June 30, 1934. Called the Röhm Putsch and Night of the Long Knives, this purge would had the effect of removing the most of the socialist elements, of which members of the SA argued for, from the party. With the capture of power these same members became a weakness within the party and the June morning saw the arrest or execution of many of its members. Röhm himself was given the option the next morning to either commit suicide or be executed in the name of Hitler. His

¹⁸ Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*, Loc. 559.

¹⁹ Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*; Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth.'*

death at the hands of the SS would curb the remaining socialist elements of the party. Outside of the party, political rivals, including communists were arrested, tortured, executed, or sent to the newly created concentration camps. Papen and his two secretaries were arrested, with only Papen being released and later to be demoted to the role of a German ambassador. What remained of the SA would become a subordinate organization to the SS.²⁰

Within the party, violence was a major factor in the submission of the country and was not hidden entirely from view. The SA stood as the main example of this violence and its membership, recruited by and loyal to Röhm, were an early function of the NSDAP's party violence. As the first militant arm of the movement, the SA were known for two major things within the interwar period, their uniform of brown shirts and their street gang nature that had violently clashed with the militants of the KPD on German streets. The violent extermination of the socialist sympathies within the party structure served to be a centralizing force under the *Führer* myth, for at the core of the party was a violent nature. The personality cult that surrounded the Hitler had been threatened by the Röhm's SA and for all the assistance they had in Hitler gaining Chancellorship, the threat they presented in his desire to control the German military had placed them against Hitler's desires. The Nazis had little criticism in the murders of the Röhm Putsch, with some observers arguing that the action had been too mild. Hitler had found a resurgence of cult fervor and all around return of enthusiasm for his role as the leader of Germany. Thus, the Röhm Putsch was a great boon to the propaganda of the movement and the cult of personality.²¹

²⁰ Evans, *The Third Reich*; Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth*;' Kershaw, *1889-1933; The Dark Charisma of Adolf Hitler; Hitler's Inner Circle*.

²¹ Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth*;' Bessel, "The Nazi Capture of Power."

IV. *Führer* Hitler: Germany's Sole Leader

President Paul von Hindenburg died on August 2, 1934, leaving a vacancy that Adolf Hitler was more than happy to occupy. At first Hitler had combined the position of chancellor with the presidency, but by August 19, he dissolved both positions in favor of a single title, *Führer*, claiming that, “[the] title of Reich President...was ‘inseparably united with,’” Hindenburg.²² Seemingly over a short period of time, Hitler had become the sole leadership within the Reich and in maneuvering and threatening their way, the NSDAP was the only party left in Germany. The propaganda that surrounded the leadership myth was extended in the wake of Hindenburg's death, centered on strengthening the connection of the people to their leader. The first instance of this was mere hours after his death when all members of the military were required to swear a new oath of loyalty to Adolf Hitler; weeks later it would be updated and pressed upon the civil servants as well. The oath to the *Führer* was important to understand the extent the party was attempting to control the country early in their seizure of power.²³

Hitler was cemented as the leader of Germany, but his leadership was not as smooth as the party had wanted it to appear, with some voters, up to a third in certain voter districts not approving of Hitler during the March 1933 election, remaining steadily against the party and Hitler himself in the wake of a referendum on his assumption of full power. This was a snap back against the idea that Hitler had united a divided people that the state propaganda had argued, due to the nature of the remaining economic issues. Not long before the referendum vote, Heß had spoken in terms of loyalty towards Hitler, arguing that he was the only leader able to

²² Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*, Loc. 815.

²³ Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*; Kershaw, *The ‘Hitler Myth,’* Hett.

bring the nation out of its conditions. His statements derived from a point of emotion with a strong belief in a divine providence, much as Hitler himself argued, that lead Hitler to this point as the salvation of Germany.²⁴ Most clearly was the statement that:

And surely it was providence that preserved the life of the old Field Marshall and Reich President to enable his good name and protecting hand to guard the young National Socialist government until Adolf Hitler's abilities as a leader had been proven to everyone at home and abroad, until his reputation was sufficient to assume the full leadership of the Reich.²⁵

It was with these issues that the 1934 party rally in Nuremburg had occurred. In an effort to show the *Führer* in the strongest light, his usual central role was extended and the strength of the party was expounded to the greatest extents. As with previous years, the party rally portrayed the Hitler cult in the grandest of ways, but this year it was intended to appear to the world as though the entire nation was devoted to the *Führer* and his ideals. This act of propaganda would be forever immortalized in the film, *Triumph of the Will*.²⁶

Turning to Hitler's leadership style, it was clear that his, "way of operating was scarcely conducive to ordered government."²⁷ This was made abundantly clear by his leadership after 1933. Hitler was not a bureaucrat, preferring to leave the running of the government to his inner circle on most occasions, especially as the interwar period continued. As the *Führer*, his leadership and words were unquestionable; in practice his actions as state head were few and far between after 1933. He was a symbol of action, and those who were in place to make political choices, no matter how small, within the government were part of the cult that believed in the idea that was roughly, 'what would the *Führer* do.' Even with the praise of the Hitler cult,

²⁴ Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth.'*

²⁵ Rudolf Heß, "Electing Adolf Hitler *Führer* (1938)," trans. Randall Bytwerk, German Propaganda Archives, (1998).

²⁶ Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth';* Evans, *The Third Reich in Power.*

²⁷ Kershaw, "Working Towards the *Führer*," 105.

especially the words of Deputy-*Führer* Heß, it was clear that Hitler did not have the patience or care to focus on the bureaucracy of leadership; instead he preferred the propaganda of the myth and his personal image both in Germany and internationally. Though, when Hitler chose to focus on the bureaucratic position of his role, he preferred to rule without outside influences, preferring to deal with his inner conviction in regards to his personal leadership.²⁸

Regardless of his conviction to lead the nation's bureaucracy, Hitler did not abandon his desires to control all of Germany and have his will imposed upon it. The cult of personality would spread through the country slowly in the coming years, as the interwar period came to a close it would deal dangerous blows to the social, political, and economical freedoms of those viewed as undesirables. As the sole leader of Germany, Hitler had become the central figure to the nation, under the guise of unity and nationalist progress.

V. Triumph of the Will

The most well known expression of the Hitler cult in propaganda was not presented by a party member, but commissioned by Hitler in lieu of his chancellorship. By filming the 1934 party rally, Hitler and Goebbels intended to display the spiritual unity of the Nazis to Germany and world, but in choosing the director, Leni Riefenstahl, Hitler and Goebbels were at odds. Riefenstahl had never joined the party and was a woman, Goebbels assumed that as the propaganda head he should have been given the honor. Hitler had the final say and Riefenstahl gained the commission and all necessary resources. Hitler had chosen the name of the film in reference to the triumph of his personal will and charisma. In filming with thirty camera,

²⁸ Kershaw, "Working Towards the Führer;" Heß, "electing Adolf Hitler *Führer* (1938); Hans Mommsen, "Hitler's Dictatorship: His Role as 'Leader' in the Nazi Regime," in *Routes into the Abyss: Coping with Crises in the 1930s*, ed. Helmut Konrad and Wolfgang Maderthaner (Berghahn Books, 2013).

Triumph of the Will, was a glorious creation of the propaganda of the cult of personality, with Hitler portrayed, nearly always alone and from a lower angle, as a, “flawless, almost Godlike leader.”²⁹ Riefenstahl had used a crew of 120 people and deployed new techniques, including telephoto lenses and wide-angle photography to accomplish the film. It served an altered reality that only videography could provide.³⁰



Fig 8: A Screen short from *Triumph of the Will* (1935)

Triumph of the Will portrayed Hitler and his personality in a dominant, ritualistic position. The entirety of the film speaks strongly of a propagandist style that was artistic, though not clearly veiled. Riefenstahl, herself, never described it as propaganda, though the footage filmed from September 4-10, 1934 and commissioned by master propagandist and NSDAP leader, Hitler, had in all pretenses been used as party propaganda worldwide. In the scope of

²⁹ *The Dark Charisma of Adolf Hitler*.

³⁰ Evans, *The Third Reich in Power; The Dark Charisma of Adolf Hitler; Triumph of the Will*, dir. Leni Riefenstahl (1935); Alan Sennett, “Film Propaganda: *Triumph of the Will* as a Case Study,” in *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 55, no.1 (Spring, 2014).

perspective, the film was captured to have the viewer feel as though they were part of the rally, with Hitler in the central role viewed from below. The overt political content presented was aimed at conveying, “the message of Hitler’s unchallenged legitimacy and authority over both the party and Germany itself,” and in the wake of the Röhm Putsch Hitler’s authority, “needed to be sealed in the minds of both party and nation.”³¹ It portrays the personality cult as deeply loyal and obedient to their *Führer*, and presented Hitler as the rescuer of Germany from the sociopolitical chaos of the Weimar period. In doing so it presented a select number of speeches, with the most from Hitler, that presented the party in a honorable and strong stance, removing all ideas of socialism connected to the party. The ritualism displayed in the film are similar to Christian idolatry, with the ‘bloody flag,’ the NSDAP flag present at the Beer Hall Putsch, used as a sort of blessing on newer party banners and the crowds repeatedly yelling ‘*sieg heil*,’ was intended to show a fanatical devotion to not only German and its single party, but more importantly to its *Führer*, Adolf Hitler. The mass crowds presented in the film were meant to show, on a substantially exaggerated scale, the devotion of the Hitler cult to the *Führer*. It certainly had the appearance of presenting the party in the grandest of lights, hinting at a great unity across social classes, but also showing that Germany had, ‘One People, One Nation, One Leader.’³²

VI. Olympics as a Stage

Two years prior to Hitler’s appointment as chancellor, Berlin had been awarded the honor to hold the 1936 Olympic Games. The games had been granted in a tight vote to Berlin under

³¹ Sennett, 51.

³² Sennett; Evans, *The Third Reich in Power; Triumph of the Will*.

the Weimar Republic, but with Hitler becoming chancellor and the racist ideology that welcomed into prominent government, the city hosting the games was in jeopardy. The games had been pitched to Goebbels, then Hitler, in a propaganda sense, with both seeing the potential in them, especially the Summer Games where innovations in the opening ceremony were used. The year before in 1935, the Nuremburg Laws had been approved classifying what the Regime perceived as a Jew, a person with at least 1 in 4 grandparents being deemed Jewish by heritage or faith, and prohibiting the intermarriage between Aryan Germans and Jews. Those identified as Jewish were deemed non-German and, in regards to sports, disallowed in national sports organizations. Instead, Jewish organizations were created, and many of the German athletes were of Jewish decent, leaving a large hole in the sports domain of qualified athletes for the 1936 Olympics. “The Nuremburg Laws were presented in the press as a stabilizing measure that would help the Jewish Minority in Germany to Settle down to living its own life,” but this would cause a question of morality in terms of participation in the Olympics.³³ While the idea of morality addressed, no country invited chose to miss the Olympics, but the Nazi Party chose to roll back on their openly displayed antisemitism as the games neared—though this did not affect the campaign against the cultural minorities of the Roma and Sinti.³⁴

With the ‘Olympic Pause’ in set for the two weeks of the Summer Games, the attention of the party was turned towards the propaganda of the large event. For the Nazis, the term ‘the whole world a stage,’ was far from meaningless, instead they had turned the opening ceremony

³³ Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*, Loc. 9702.

³⁴ *Hitler's Olympics*, dir Daniel Kontur, Netflix (2016); Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*; Arnd Krüger, “Germany: The Propaganda Machine,” in *The Nazi Olympics: Sports, Politics, and Appeasement in the 1930s*, eds. Arnd Krüger and William Murry, University of Illinois Press, 2003); Barbara J. Keys, “Between Nazism and Olympism: Berlin 1936,” in *Globalizing Sport*, (Harvard University Press, 2006).

into a, “stunning act of propaganda [that] would be emulated by all subsequent Olympics.”³⁵

Hitler and his Propaganda Minister, Goebbels, understood that in presenting their own twists on the opening had the chance to influence the global perspective on Germany, and did as much as they could to control the athleticism of Germans as part of their indoctrination programs. To this effect, all sports organizations were disbanded and, as stated, Jewish athletes were forced into Jewish organizations. Adult organizations were, by 1938, all subsections of the Nazi Party and had their structure forcefully changed by the party. On the first day of the Summer Games, all German youth athletic organizations outside of the Hitler Youth were disbanded, which pushed children from 10-18 years of age into the indoctrination program of the Hitler Youth if they wanted to participate in competitive sports. While national and international politics were expected, by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the party blatantly ignored the idea in favor of projecting their ideology and growing power to the world. This was easy to do as it was the first Olympics broadcasted internationally thanks to technology that the nation, under the control of Hitler, had put into the event.³⁶

All around the city, the antisemitic messages and imagery were removed, leaving Berlin virtually white washed of the ill of normally on show. Within the Olympic stadium, Nazi flags were flown beside Olympic ones and a German eagle clasping the Olympic rings in its talons was the symbol of the event. Hitler, during the opening ceremony made a grand entrance, and it was easy to note that the entire event was about Hitler and his personality cult, regardless of the international event. The most memorable, and lasting, feature of the opening ceremony was the

³⁵ *Hitler's Olympics*.

³⁶ Keys; Krüger, *Hitler's Olympics*.

lighting of the Olympic touch relayed from Greece by runners, with a silent and intense pause between the arrival of the runner and the lighting of the flame.³⁷

Although the Olympics served a pause in the Nazi power gambit, with the Rhineland being remilitarized in March between the Games, ultimately it did not change the course of German remilitarization or its charge towards war. The event displayed the Hitler cult to the world and attempted to influence international perspectives in believing that all of Germany was behind their *Führer*, and with the 1936 Party Rally soon after, this was one of the first instances where Hitler was openly displayed in a mystic sense. Soon after the Olympics were over, the party would continue and increase their abuses towards the country's Jewish population.³⁸

VIII. Conclusion: The End of the Interwar Period and the Cult of Personality

After the seizure of power, Hitler was soon in control of the national government. It would not take long for the party to begin implemented their antisemitic aims and political ideology into the lives of all Germans. While the questionable nature of the effectiveness of the indoctrination was reasonable, there is no doubt that the party was effective in strengthening the cult of personality after the 1936 Olympics. With party leaders arguing their great accomplishments as Germany had received Hitler as a leader and through his leadership had been transformed. "The German nation and its soul belong to Adolf Hitler and his party," Robert Ley would proclaim in November 1936, and there was little doubt that Hitler would not let it go

³⁷ *Hitler's Olympics*

³⁸ *Hitler's Olympics*; Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*.

without a fight.³⁹ With Hitler's leadership, his need to control every aspect had become more apparent, as did the use of violence to bring order within the nation. Hitler and the party had begun to address his personage in pseudo-religious tones, as the *Führer* he was near infallible and the image of a heroic leader.⁴⁰

In the lead up to the Second World War, the party began to expand the military, an act that went against the Treaty of Versailles. Hitler assumed that he had considered all of the possible actions, but the tension was high between military leaders, with their body split between blind trust in the *Führer* and those more pragmatic who saw the danger of going against the like of Great Britain with the declaration. Nevertheless, his political aims for the military, "depended on Great Britain's cooperation," and avoiding an early two-front war.⁴¹ A policy of appeasement would persist until the beginning of the Second World War, with the interwar period seemingly reinforcing the image of the *Führer* cult as a militaristic, ever present entity. Hitler's personality was interesting in regards to his leadership style, roughly removed from the majority of it, he instead preferred to spend his mornings in his room listening to what he called his "inner conviction" for leadership advice as no one was to appear to have influence over him. His charismatic leadership, while odd to those outside of the cult, was unquestionable to his cult of personality. The Hitler cult would follow their leader, nearly unquestionably, into whatever abyss he would take them.⁴²

³⁹ Robert Ley, "Fate—I Believe! (1936)," trans Randall Bytwerk, German Propaganda Archive, (2002).

⁴⁰ *The Dark Charisma of Adolf Hitler*; Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth*;' Keys; Mommsen; Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*.

⁴¹ Rolf-Dieter Müller, "The Military in the Totalitarian Führer State," in *Hitler's Wehrmacht 1935-1945*, (University Press of Kentucky, 2016).

⁴² *The Dark Charisma of Adolf Hitler*; Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth*;' Müller; Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*; Geoffrey Megargee, "History-World Wars: Hitler's Leadership Style," BBC (March 30, 2011).

Conclusion

The personality cult was inseparable from the personage of Hitler, especially once he had gained complete control of Germany. After the *Anschluß*, the 1938 annexation of Austria, Hitler would state, “In the Future I want to be nothing other than what I have been in the past: alerter of my people, teacher of my people, and the Führer of my people.”¹ This had described his desires since taking control of the party almost two decades prior, but also the idealism that had begun to intrude upon the practicality of leadership within the movement. The deliberate vagueness of the party platform in 1925 meant that as the party evolved and transitioned, it would remain central to the party aims. The Nazi propaganda, especially once under Goebbels had a sense of cynical dishonesty that, “received a significant boost from the cult of irrationality that drove their followers,” who rebelled against standards of rationality and saw a certain level of reason as a chronic ailment of democracy.² Hitler was viewed as a national salvation within the sociopolitical propaganda, set to lead in the idealized ethnic cleansing of not only his nation, but all of Europe. His unquestionable position within the party had him held as the sole orator of party orthodoxy, and with this he had cultivated a level of personal loyalty from his party which he had used mercilessly should a crisis arise.³

¹ *The Dark Charisma of Adolf Hitler*, dir. Laurence Rees, November 12, 2012 by Netflix, (BBC, 2012).

² Benjamin Carter Hett, *The Death of Democracy: Hitler's Rise to Power and the Downfall of the Weimar Republic*, (Henry Holt and Co., 2018), Loc. 3646.

³ Ian Kershaw, “Working Towards the Führer,’ Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler Dictatorship,” in *contemporary European History* 2 ,no. 2 (July, 1993); Ian Kershaw, “Hitler and the Uniqueness of Nazism,” In *Journal of Contemporary history* 39, no. 2 (April, 2004); Ian Kershaw, *The ‘Hitler Myth:’ Image and reality in the Third Reich*, (Oxford: University Press, 2001); *The Dark Charisma of Adolf Hitler*; Hett.

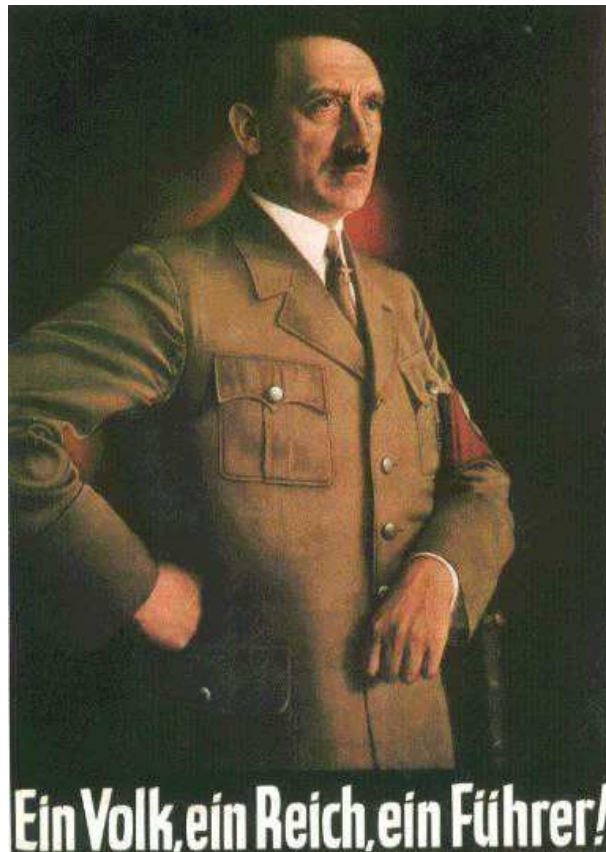


Fig 9: 1938 poster issued after the *Anschluß*, it reads: “One People, One Reich, One *Führer*.”

When looking at the effect that the rise of Hitler had on the period, it can be simple to ignore the wide range of impact that his cult of personality had outside of the political sphere of influence. The social welfare of the country aside, the function of hate and propaganda addressed the desires of a wounded populous that distrusted the democratic process and the government they blamed for their plights. Adolf Hitler was certainly a believer in providence; much in the sociopolitical scope of influences would attest to some sense of providence. While chance may have played a role in his assignment to watch the party in 1919, it was an understanding of human nature and the use of charismatic authority that would allow him to rise in the interwar period.

This thesis sought to examine the role the cult of personality that surrounded the public image of the NSDAP, also known as the Nazi Party, leader Adolf Hitler was influenced by the social factors of interwar period Germany and the political policies and failures of the First World War and the Weimar Republic. Through discussing the various events, people, and most importantly propaganda, an understanding of the Hitler cult was formed and cultivated through the various chapters. While not all Germans were part of the Hitler cult, the cult had connections within all aspects of life and no German would remain untouched by its reach.

Appendix: Interwar Germany Timeline

1918

- November 9—The abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm was subsequently followed by the declaration of the Weimar Republic.
- November 11—The First World War officially ended, an armistice between allied powers and Germany occurred at five am, with ceasefire issued at eleven am that day. The hours between saw troops withdrawal from the Western Front, with the occupation of the Rhineland taking place following the armistice.

1919

- January 5—The German Worker's Party (DAP) was formed. Among the founders were Anton Drexler and Dietrich Eckhart.
- January 18—Neggoations began for the Treaty of Versailles.
- June 28—The Treaty of Versailles was signed.
- September 12—Adolf Hitler, a corporal in the reduced Germany army, was sent to spy on the DAP.

1920

- February 24—The DAP was officially renamed the National Socialist German Worker's Party (NSDAP), though it was generally shortened to Nazi Party. At this same meeting, the 25 Points was adopted as the official party program.

1921

- July 29—Hitler, after threatening to leave the party, forcefully negotiates his way into party head. This was the official moment when the party began to call him *Führer*, though it was a title his loyal followers had used since 1920.
- November 4—The *Sturmabteilung* (SA) was formally founded as the strong arm of the party. Unofficially, they were formed in 1920 as the party militia and called brownshirts due to their uniform tops.

1923

- November 8—With rushed planning, the notorious Beer Hall Putsch happened. The aftermath would lead to the party nearly crumbling, Hitler and other leaders waiting in prison charged with treason, or hiding, while other members fled the country. Years later this event would be remembered by the Nazi Party in a ritualistic sense yearly.

1924

- February 26—The trial for the Putsch leaders began. Hitler would use the space to make himself and his movement out to be martyrs for the nationalist movement. Hitler, for his part as leader of the failed Putsch, was sentenced to five years in prison, but would only serve ten months of the sentence before being paroled. During this time He wrote *Mein Kampf*.

1925

- April 4—The official formation of the *Schutzstaffel* (SS). Unlike the SA, they wore black shirts and first became Hitler's personal bodyguard.

1926

- July 4—The reorganization and official formation of the Hitler Youth (HJ) as the male youth (14-18) part of the SA. This would spread the Hitler Cult into the influential ranks of a generation that came of age under the Weimar government and were not scared by the First World War.

1927

- August 20—The first annual party conference to be held at Nuremberg, with all subsequent annual meeting being held in the city following this. These rallies would become important to the overall *Führer* myth and the international perception of the Hitler cult.

1929-1930

- The Great Depression occurred and, in Germany, began to change the tide completely against the parties that had dominated the Weimar Republic for the majority of the interwar period.
- In 1930, the Hitler Youth was branched out to included boys as young as ten and girls from 10-18. This would function as a way to further indoctrinate the generation into the folds of the cult of personality and charismatic authority of Hitler.
- September 1930—The first major gains at the polls as the NSDAP gained 18.3 percent of the Reichstag vote, becoming the second largest party.

1932

- July—The NSDAP became the largest party after the vote for the Reichstag gave them over 37 percent of the vote. This would be the claim needed for the party to place Hitler into the Chancellery.

1933

- January 30—President Hindenburg begrudgingly appointed Hitler to the chancellorship, with Franz von Papen assuring the president that he and his allies could control the Nazi leader.
- February 3—Hitler would define the foreign policy of the party with a term that would drive their expansion policies during the Second World War with the concept of *lebensraum*.
- February 27—The Reichstag Fire occurred, which allowed Hitler to push through policies that banned the German Communist Party (KPD). This would give the NSDAP the clear majority in the Reichstag and would lead purgings by the SS on the membership of the KPD.
- March—Hitler would order a new election, similar to the ones that granted the NSDAP their position, and the results would grant more votes towards the party. The Enabling Act, a policy pushed through because of the Reichstag Fire, would allow Hitler to act without consulting the Reichstag for four years.
- April 26—With the formation of the Gestapo with members of the Prussian police under the control of Göring, the NSDAP was able to form a separate secretive police force. The party also gained control over local governments which would further establish the cult of personality into the German social sphere.

- May 10—In an act of propaganda, Goebbels encouraged the burning of 25,000 books deemed to be un-German. This would begin a worrying trend that would lead to furthering the demands of Hitler within the social sphere by Hitler.
- July 14—All other parties banned, leave the NSDAP as the only choice politically. A concept began to form that to be German meant to be a supporter of the Nazi Party, the be a great German meant to be a member of the party.
- October—Germany withdrew from the League of Nations and began the process of breaking the terms of the Treaty of Versailles.

1934

- June 30—The Night of the Long Knives, or the Röhm Putsch, lead to the death of 150 SA leaders including a member of Hitler's inner circle, Ernst Röhm. While held as purging of immorality from the party, it was also a final way to purge socialist demands from the party.
- August 2—With the death of President Hindenburg, Hitler became both president and chancellor of Germany. He would merge both positions and adopt on a national front the title *Führer*.

1935

- February -March—The Luftwaffe was established and the expansion of the German Army was announced in defiance of the Treaty of Versailles.
- September 15—The Nuremberg Laws were enacted leading to citizenship laws that would further the Aryan exceptionalism that fueled Hitler's cult status.

1936

- March—Hitler sent troops to reoccupy the Rhineland, previously taken from Germany.
- August 1—The opening of the Summer Olympics in Berlin lead to a display of the cult of personality in the propaganda of the opening ceremony. It would also cool antisemitism within the country for the period of the Olympics.
- October-November—Germany would gain allies in the form of Italy and Japan that would persist through the Second World War.
- December—Membership in the Hitler Youth became compulsory for all boys.

1938

- March 14—Hitler entered Austria, his former home, in what became known as the *Anschluss*, without resistance from Austrians.
- September 30—the Munich Agreement would give Germany the Sudetenland in exchange for peace. Less than a year later he would invade Czechoslovakia and Poland begin the Second World War.
- November 1938—*Kristallnacht*, the destruction of Jewish shops and synagogues, would begin the ramping up of anti-Jewish propaganda and violence.

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