

Erasing History, Shaping Minds: The Political Struggle Over Education in Trump's America and Nazi Germany

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the parallels and differences between Donald Trump's post-2025 education policies and Adolf Hitler's Nazi-era education reforms. Both administrations sought to reshape national identity through education by implementing policy changes, ideological narratives, and structural reforms to influence educators and students (Pine, 2010; Evans, 2005). While Hitler achieved total control over education through purges and centralized mandates (Blackburn, 1985), Trump has encountered legal and institutional resistance, hindering a complete ideological overhaul (The New York Times, 2025a). However, Trump's policies, which include the elimination of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs (The Washington Post, 2025), the restructuring of university accreditation, and the promotion of a "patriotic education" framework (The Wall Street Journal, 2025), underscore his efforts to reshape American historical narratives. This paper critically analyzes whether Trump's actions represent a bid to erase history and shape American minds in a manner akin to authoritarian regimes or if his policies stem from political opportunism and reactionary populism (Mann & Heafner, 2021; Peters, 2019). The study leaves the ultimate judgment to history, echoing Fidel Castro's sentiment: "History will absolve me" (Castro, 1954). The implications of these policies on academic freedom, national identity, and future generations are examined within a broader historical and political context.

Keywords: Education policy, ideological influence, nationalism, DEI programs, Trump administration, Nazi education, patriotic education, historical revisionism, authoritarian control, academic freedom, political indoctrination, United States education reform

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Introduction

Education has long been a tool for ideological influence. Throughout history, authoritarian and totalitarian regimes have used education to indoctrinate populations and control national narratives. Examples include Fidel Castro's Cuba, the Soviet Union under Stalin and Lenin, North Korea under Kim Jong-un, China under Mao Zedong, and Germany under Adolf Hitler.

In a more contemporary setting, since 2025, Donald Trump's administration has aggressively pursued efforts to reshape American education policy. His administration has sought to eliminate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs, restructure university accreditation processes, and enforce restrictions on teaching about race and gender (The New York Times, 2025a). Characterizing DEI initiatives as "radical leftist indoctrination," Trump's policies instead advocate for a "patriotic education" framework (The Washington Post, 2025). Through executive orders and funding restrictions, his administration has attempted to ensure compliance with these new policies, yet it has faced significant resistance from states, courts, and civil rights organizations.

In historical comparison, Adolf Hitler's Nazi regime (1933–1945) weaponized education to enforce racial ideology, eliminate dissent, and indoctrinate German youth (Pine, 2010). The Nazi education system expelled Jewish and politically unreliable teachers, revised curricula to promote Aryan supremacy, and made Nazi youth organizations a compulsory part of education (Blackburn, 1985; Evans, 2005). Unlike Trump, Hitler encountered little resistance due to his absolute control over state institutions, enabling him to reshape education in Nazi Germany completely.

This study critically examines Trump's post-2025 education policies alongside Nazi educational policies, emphasizing their similarities and differences in policy goals, ideological influences, structural changes, and effects on educators and students. It raises the question: Is Donald Trump attempting to erase history and shape the minds of Americans to create his own "Reich"? Or is this merely the effort of an uninformed individual who was fortunate enough to be elected by a group of political fanatics seeking change, people who viewed him as the best alternative, shaped by the false persona he developed during The Celebrity Apprentice reality show?

I- Policy Changes and Legislative Actions Affecting Education

A- Trump (2025 and Beyond) - After assuming office in 2025, Trump issued executive orders banning federal funding for DEI programs and race-conscious admissions policies (*The New York Times*, 2025a). He directed the Department of Education to enforce these restrictions by revoking accreditation for non-compliant institutions. University administrators were given 14 days to dismantle DEI offices or risk losing federal funding (*The Washington Post*, 2025).

Congressional Republicans have advanced state-level anti-DEI policies, resulting in mass layoffs of diversity staff. Texas alone has dismantled over 35 diversity centers and eliminated more than 350 DEI-related positions (*The Wall Street Journal*, 2025). In K-12 education, Trump's administration threatened to withhold federal funds from schools that teach "divisive concepts," including systemic racism and gender identity (*The Washington Post*, 2025). These actions have prompted widespread pushback from educators and civil rights groups, who argue that such measures undermine academic freedom and hinder inclusive education. Additionally, efforts have been made to revise history curricula to present a "patriotic"

view of American history, which critics contend distorts the nation's past by minimizing discussions on slavery, racism, and colonialism. These changes align with broader attempts to reshape historical narratives to favor nationalist perspectives.

Despite Trump's aggressive push for these reforms, public resistance has significantly impeded his ability to implement them fully. Student activism, faculty protests, and legal challenges from civil rights organizations have prevented the complete erasure of DEI initiatives in many states. In response to Trump's executive orders, universities in Democratic-led states have doubled down on their commitment to diversity programs, finding alternative sources of funding to continue DEI-related efforts (*The New York Times*, 2025b). Additionally, several lawsuits have challenged the constitutionality of banning DEI programs, with courts ruling in favor of academic freedom in multiple instances (*The Wall Street Journal*, 2025). The decentralized nature of the American education system ensures that state and local school boards wield significant power, making it difficult for the federal government to impose a uniform education policy nationwide.

B- Hitler (Nazi Germany, 1933–1945) - Under Hitler, education was swiftly centralized under Nazi control. The Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service (1933) led to the mass dismissal of Jewish and "politically unreliable" educators (Blackburn, 1985; Evans, 2005). By 1935, over 20% of university faculty had been expelled for racial or ideological reasons (Pine, 2010). Teachers who remained were required to pledge loyalty to the Nazi Party and join the National Socialist Teachers' League.

The Reich Ministry of Education revised curricula to enforce Nazi racial theories and nationalism. Schools removed textbooks referencing Jewish intellectuals and anti-fascist ideas (Blackburn, 1985). The Hitler Youth and League of German Girls became compulsory organizations, replacing independent youth groups and reinforcing state propaganda (Roche, 2021). More significantly, the Nazi regime rewrote German history to justify expansionist policies and racial superiority, portraying Germany as a victim of external forces and positioning Aryans as the rightful rulers of the world. The removal of alternative historical perspectives ensured that students grew up with a singular, state-approved view of history that aligned with Nazi ideology. Unlike Trump, Hitler did not face legal challenges, organized student resistance, or independent university governance, making the Nazi control over education absolute.

II- Comparison

Both Trump's and Hitler's education policies aimed to reshape institutions to reflect a nationalist ideology, but their methods and scope differ. Trump's policy relies on funding restrictions, executive orders, and state-level enforcement, while Hitler's Nazi Germany used outright legal purges, forced membership in Nazi organizations, and strict state control over curricula (Pine, 2010). Both sought to reshape historical narratives, with Trump's administration attempting to erase or downplay controversial aspects of American history. At the same time, Hitler's government completely rewrote Germany's past to serve its ideological goals. While Trump has faced legal pushback, Hitler had complete control over the education system, enabling him to impose Nazi ideology without resistance.

Why Hitler Successfully Eliminated the Existing Curriculum While Trump Has Not?

1. The Structural and Political Context: Democracy vs. Dictatorship

One of the primary reasons Hitler was able to completely reshape the German education system while Trump has struggled to do the same in the U.S. lies in their vastly different political systems. Hitler operated within a totalitarian, single-party dictatorship, allowing him to eliminate opposition and implement sweeping education reforms without resistance. The Enabling Act (1933) dismantled democratic institutions, outlawed rival political parties, and centralized control over education under the Reich Ministry of Education (Evans, 2005). There were no independent courts, free press, or opposition lawmakers to resist his policies.

By contrast, Trump operates in a constitutional democracy, where power is divided among federal, state, and local governments. The separation of powers, judicial oversight, and First Amendment protections on free speech and academic freedom significantly limit the federal government's ability to control education. Even though Trump has used funding threats and accreditation changes to force compliance, courts and state governments have actively resisted these efforts (*The New York Times*, 2025b). Unlike Nazi Germany, where the government had absolute authority over educational content, the U.S. system allows for local control, independent school boards, and academic institutions that push back against federal mandates.

2. Control Over Schools, Universities, and Educators

Another key difference is that Hitler entirely controlled the teaching profession and restructured universities to promote Nazi ideology. The National Socialist Teachers' League (NSLB) mandated that educators swear allegiance to Hitler, ensuring ideological conformity (Blackburn, 1985). Professors and university administrators who opposed this were removed and replaced with loyalists to the Nazi regime. Schools adhered to strict state-mandated curricula that glorified the Nazi Party and emphasized racial superiority.

Trump, in contrast, does not have full control over educators, and universities remain partially independent institutions. While right-wing lawmakers have tried to ban tenure protections for faculty who teach DEI-related content, universities, faculty unions, and student bodies have resisted these efforts (*The Wall Street Journal*, 2025). Additionally, Trump cannot fire teachers en masse or force them to join a political organization like Hitler did. However, Trump has sought to influence education through indirect means, such as appointing conservative-leaning accreditation agencies that promote ideological alignment with his policies.

3. The Role of Public Resistance

A critical distinction between Nazi Germany and Trump's America is the role of public resistance. In Nazi Germany, any form of resistance, whether from educators, students, or intellectuals, was swiftly crushed. Dissenting teachers were arrested, sent to concentration camps, or executed (Evans, 2005). Propaganda was strictly enforced through state-controlled media, and students had no alternative perspectives on history or politics.

In contrast, public resistance in the U.S. has played a major role in limiting Trump's ability to impose a singular educational ideology. Student-led protests, legal challenges, and academic institutions have pushed back against attempts to eliminate DEI programs. Several universities in Democratic-controlled states have defied Trump's policies by securing alternative funding for diversity initiatives (*The New York Times*, 2025b). Additionally, courts have ruled in favor of academic freedom, blocking attempts to ban discussions on systemic racism in some states (*The Wall Street Journal*, 2025). The presence of a free press, independent judiciary, and active civil rights organizations in the U.S. has prevented Trump from achieving the level of educational control that Hitler enforced in Nazi Germany.

4. Media and Information Control

Another factor in Hitler's success was his regime's absolute control over media and information. The Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, led by Joseph Goebbels, ensured that only state-approved narratives were disseminated through newspapers, radio, and film (Pine, 2010). Education was part of a broader propaganda machine that left no room for dissenting opinions.

Trump, despite his repeated attacks on the press and academic institutions, has not been able to silence opposition media or alternative perspectives entirely. While conservative networks and social media platforms amplify Trump's messaging, mainstream media outlets, universities, and civil rights organizations continue to challenge his narrative. This divergence in media plurality and the presence of counter-narratives has made it much harder for Trump to establish complete ideological control over education in the same way Hitler did.

Is Trump Erasing History to Shape Minds, or Is He Simply an Opportunistic Figure?

One of the most pressing questions regarding Trump's post-2025 education policies is whether he is intentionally attempting to erase history and reshape the ideological foundation of American education to create his own "reich", or if his actions are simply the result of ignorance, opportunism, and political fanaticism from his base.

A- The Case for Intentional Historical Erasure and Indoctrination

Critics argue that Trump's relentless attacks on DEI programs, restrictions on discussions of race and gender, and attempts to control university accreditation and curricula reflect a deliberate effort to erase history and mold American education into a nationalist, right-wing ideological tool. Much like Hitler's restructuring of Germany's education system, Trump's policies emphasize "patriotism" over historical accuracy, suppressing narratives that highlight systemic oppression, racism, and social inequalities (*The New York Times*, 2025a).

Furthermore, Trump has explicitly called for the removal of "woke ideology" from schools, branding any critique of American history, particularly slavery, colonialism, and civil rights struggles, as "Marxist propaganda." His push for a nationally standardized, right-leaning curriculum through accreditation changes indicates that his vision for education goes beyond mere policy adjustments, that it aims to reshape the way future generations understand history (*The Washington Post*, 2025).

B- The Case for Ignorance and Political Opportunism

On the other hand, some analysts argue that Trump lacks a grand ideological plan to reshape education in a fascist mold. Instead, they believe he capitalizes on populist resentment, conservative discontent with progressive education policies, and a desire to maintain political relevance. His rise to power was largely driven by his media persona, cultivated during *The Celebrity Apprentice*, which many contend created an illusion of competence rather than actual governing skill (The Wall Street Journal, 2025). The show depicted him as a successful business entrepreneur, even though evidence suggests he was, in reality, a below-average businessman (Pruitt, 2024; Miller, 2024; *Vanity Fair*, 2024). The production team fabricated much of Trump's image, with former producers revealing that his persona was heavily edited to enhance his decisiveness and business acumen, even staging luxurious office settings to create the illusion of immense wealth (*WBUR*, 2024; *Wikipedia*, 2024).

Rather than an orchestrated effort to erase history, Trump's education policies could reflect political reactionism, a calculated effort to appeal to a base that is disillusioned with liberal policies and feels threatened by changing social norms. His attacks on DEI and academic institutions are, in this view, a populist strategy rather than a carefully planned ideological movement like Hitler's Nazi education policies.

C- Which is It? A Deliberate Effort or an Accidental Shift?

Ultimately, whether Trump's policies stem from a deliberate strategy to transform education into a propaganda tool or arise from the actions of an ignorant, opportunistic leader reacting to political trends remains a matter of interpretation. However, the effects of these policies are undeniable, intentional or not, they contribute to the erosion of academic freedom, the whitewashing of history, and the suppression of discussions on race, gender, and systemic inequalities.

The difference between Hitler's Nazi Germany and Trump's America is that Trump still faces institutional resistance from courts, educators, and civil society, preventing him from fully realizing his vision for education. Yet, if future administrations expand upon his policies and further erode checks and balances, the possibility of a state-controlled, ideologically rigid education system may not be far-fetched.

While Trump has not fully succeeded in reshaping U.S. education, his administration has made significant efforts to erase historical narratives, restrict discussions on race and gender, and reshape the ideological framework of education in conservative states. However, unlike Hitler, who had total control over the education system, Trump faces constitutional limits, decentralized governance, legal challenges, and public resistance.

The Nazi regime successfully eliminated opposition, centralized education, and rewrote history to serve its ideology, whereas Trump has had to navigate democratic constraints, state autonomy, and widespread protests. Despite Trump's efforts, student activism, faculty resistance, and legal interventions have preserved elements of academic freedom and prevented the wholesale elimination of DEI initiatives.

Looking forward, if Trump or a like-minded successor gains greater control over the courts, federal funding policies, and accreditation agencies, the U.S. education system could undergo a more severe ideological

shift. However, the resilience of democratic institutions, continued public pushback, and legal safeguards suggest that completely reshaping American education into a tool of political indoctrination remains a challenging and contested endeavor.

The combination of democratic structures, state autonomy, legal protections, public resistance, and media independence has prevented Trump from fully transforming the U.S. education system into a tool for political indoctrination. Hitler's ability to eliminate opposition and enforce a singular curriculum was a key factor in his success, while Trump faces institutional checks that limit his power. However, if Trump were to gain greater control over judicial appointments, federal funding, and accreditation agencies, there remains a possibility that his administration could exert greater ideological influence over education in the future.

The Structural and Political Context: Democracy vs. Dictatorship

One of the primary reasons Hitler was able to completely reshape the German education system while Trump has struggled to do the same in the U.S. lies in their vastly different political systems. Hitler operated within a totalitarian, single-party dictatorship, allowing him to eliminate opposition and implement sweeping education reforms without resistance. The Enabling Act (1933) dismantled democratic institutions, outlawed rival political parties, and centralized control over education under the Reich Ministry of Education (Evans, 2005). There were no independent courts, free press, or opposition lawmakers to resist his policies.

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Conclusion

The historical comparison between Donald Trump's post-2025 education policies and Adolf Hitler's Nazi education system reveals both disturbing parallels and critical differences in their approaches to shaping national identity through schooling. While Trump operates within a constitutional democracy that imposes legal and institutional barriers to total educational control, his administration's systematic attack on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs, historical curricula, and academic autonomy signals a clear attempt to influence the ideological landscape of American education. Like Hitler's efforts to create an education system that reinforced Nazi ideology, Trump's policies seek to erase inconvenient histories, suppress opposing viewpoints, and shape the next generation's understanding of national identity.

One of the most striking similarities between the two is the emphasis on patriotic education at the expense of historical accuracy. Hitler's Germany rewrote history to fit a nationalist and racially supremacist narrative. At the same time, Trump's administration promotes a version of history that downplays racial injustices, suppresses discussions of systemic oppression, and vilifies progressive movements as "Marxist communists" or "anti-American". Both leaders have sought to redefine national identity through education. However, while Hitler could forcibly remove dissenting voices without resistance, Trump faces an American political system that still allows for pushback from courts, educators, civil rights organizations, and activist groups.

The role of public resistance serves as one of the most defining contrasts. While Hitler's Germany saw little internal resistance due to strict government control over media, education, and civil institutions, Trump's policies have been met with widespread legal challenges, student protests, and defiant academic institutions. Many Democratic-led states have actively resisted federal mandates to eliminate DEI programs, and courts have ruled in favor of academic freedom on multiple occasions. The decentralized nature of American education has prevented Trump from achieving the total ideological dominance over schools that Hitler was able to impose in Nazi Germany.

Another key distinction is the extent of authoritarian control. Hitler's regime consolidated absolute power over every aspect of education, ensuring that teachers, textbooks, curricula, and extracurricular activities aligned with Nazi ideology. Trump, however, operates in a fractured political landscape where state governments, independent universities, and judicial oversight continue to challenge his authority. Nevertheless, his use of executive orders, funding restrictions, and accreditation pressures demonstrates a strategic attempt to reshape American education into a vehicle for nationalist and conservative ideology. The question remains: Is Trump deliberately erasing history to shape minds, or is he simply an opportunist riding the wave of political fanaticism? The evidence suggests that both possibilities hold merit. On one hand, Trump's persistent attacks on DEI, history curricula, and academic institutions indicate a clear effort to control the ideological narrative and align it with his administration's political goals. On the other hand, Trump's rise to power is largely the result of a reactionary movement driven by political discontent, populist rhetoric, and the amplification of his media persona, rather than a carefully planned, long-term vision akin to Hitler's educational overhaul.

While Trump's attempts to reshape American education remain incomplete, the broader implications of his policies cannot be ignored. If his influence continues to grow and if future administrations expand upon his agenda, the possibility of a more centralized, ideologically rigid education system becomes more plausible. The erosion of historical accuracy, suppression of critical perspectives, and politicization of

education create a dangerous precedent that could alter the course of American intellectual freedom for generations.

One central question emerges from this analysis: Is Trump actively working to erase history and mold American minds to create his own version of a nationalist state, or is he merely an opportunist who capitalized on a disillusioned electorate seeking radical political change? The answer is left to the reader, as perspectives on Trump's education policies are deeply divided. To his critics, Trump's policies reflect a calculated attempt to reshape the nation's historical consciousness, positioning himself as the architect of a new, controlled educational narrative that aligns with his political ideology. To his supporters, his actions may represent nothing more than a reaction to progressive educational policies, a pushback against what they perceive as leftist indoctrination rather than an outright effort to erase history.

Ultimately, the battle over education is a battle over national identity, collective memory, and the values that define a society. Trump's efforts may not have reached the level of absolute control that Hitler achieved, but the attempt to erase history and shape young minds remains an alarming and ongoing struggle. The resilience of democratic institutions, public activism, and legal frameworks will determine whether the United States can prevent education from becoming a tool of authoritarian influence, or whether history itself will be rewritten to serve the interests of those in power.

As Fidel Castro once declared, "History will absolve me" (Castro, 1954). Whether history will absolve or condemn Trump's actions remains an open question, one that will ultimately be decided by the generations shaped by the very educational system he seeks to control.

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