

History

The Rise of Adolf Hitler

by AJ Powell | 1 Comment | 20 min read

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There is no doubt that Adolf Hitler was arguably one of the most evil men in history, but there is equally no doubt that his actions, and the actions of the Nazi's, carry with them some of the most important lessons to be learned in modern history as well. Hitler was the byproduct of poverty from a young age that created a strong desire for a need to belong within him, but it was military service – of all things – that gave him a sense of purpose in life and began to turn his life for the better. Yet, it is after Germany lost WWI – combined with the selfish, vengeful, hateful, and spiteful demands of the French enclosed within the harsh treatment of Germany imposed by the Treaty of Versailles – that we see exactly how the bitter life that followed soon drove Hitler's retreat into a state of resentment fed by hate. Combining his talents for speaking with his drive and motivation, Hitler began to scale the political ladders, eventually taking over the whole German government and throwing the world into yet a second Great War...

This is a historical analysis that discusses the life and events surrounding the rise of Hitler up to WWII. In reading this analysis, it is important to ask, what lessons can we learn from this period of the past that we might see repeating themselves today, why are these lessons still so very important, and what lessons can we

take with us on our own path? We will discuss this bit of history for the purpose of discovering such thoughts, and we will start by asking three particular questions for which to guide the analysis:

1. What experiences helped to shape Hitler into the man he became prior to WWII?

1. How did Hitler's public speaking ability help propel him into politics?

1. How did Hitler work to shape the Nazi party and ultimately take complete control over Germany?

Now, these questions are guides, and the reason is that, upon conclusion of our assessment, we will ask a series of entirely new questions designed to prompt critical thinking, and then use this new knowledge to apply towards our own advancement of self-improvement.

Upon conclusion of this analysis, take a few moments to carefully consider the questions at the end, **then share your thoughts in the comments below** so the community may benefit from open discussion.

The end of the first Great War created a sinkhole in the world. Economically, recovery was nearly beyond reach due to the collapses of infrastructure, banking, markets, and trade. Millions of lives had been displaced due to the destruction of war, loss of financial capabilities, and loss of loved ones. And foreign relations among many of the world's powers entered into a fog of suppression, mistrust, miscommunication, and misunderstanding. The stability of the world had suffered greatly due to the aftermath of the conflict, and as Europe's preoccupation created its exit from the world stage of support during those few years, the rest of the world saw fit to find ways to do without. Internally, the struggle of European life after was so multifaceted, that too many players than could possibly be accounted for now contributed to the realities of hardships the people faced, regardless of national boundaries. Yet through it all, Germany saw the worst of it. The people suffered at the grip of imposition enforced by the [Treaty of Versailles](#), the occupation by France, exponential inflation and currency collapse, and the lack of control to do anything about it all. It was this struggle that stirred the awakening to come. The world now had a new problem, it just didn't know of him yet.

Born in a small village on the Austrian-German border in 1889, Adolf Hitler, the son of a blue-collar family, was already on a track to an unsuccessful life by an early age. He lost his father by the time he was 14, dropped out of school at the age of 16, and lost his mother when he was 19. Aspiring the life of an artist, his application to Vienna's Academy of Arts was rejected, and without an education or direction in life, he soon became homeless, sleeping in guesthouses and peddling postcards he made for meager sums. Not well read, and with a narrow view of the world, Hitler's relations at the time were limited to other anti-Semitic vagabonds. He never really learned how to communicate with others, and couldn't hold down a regular job for very long. Yet this was all soon to change.

Still dreaming of art fame, he moved to Munich in 1913, but as he quickly discovered, the grass certainly was not greener on the other side. His life was just as miserable and just as unsuccessful. However, this is all very important to take note of, because everything up to this point had set him up for a pivotal moment of change. Only a year later, in 1914, World War One broke out, and the now 24-year-old Hitler, whose life had been a miserable failure, took hold of the opportunity to provide any change which might be positive... he joined the Army.

For the first time in Hitler's life, he found a measurable meaning. Within the ranks of the Bavarian regiment, he quickly established a reputation as a quality soldier. Twice he was recognized for bravery and service – he was awarded the Iron Cross 1st and 2nd classes – and as a front line soldier, he finally found the community and personal value he longed for. It was the structure and camaraderie of military service that impressed upon him the most as he developed his first deep friendships and grew to admire all that military life had to offer. In the greatest sense, military service life (its order, structure, and idealisms) was the change that altered Hitler, on such a foundational level, that we could say it made him into a new person all together. He

became driven, disciplined, and motivated to success. He found *home* in this life, a place of belonging, all the things his previous ineptitudes could never reach. But it was not to last, for the war was soon to end, and his newfound life was to be pulled away.

Germany was defeated by 1918, and with the new Treaty's impositions placed firmly against the German military – and indeed, nearly all other aspects of German society and life – Hitler's sense of home was destroyed. He simply couldn't admit the loss of the war and took the entire event as a personal attack on the very structure he now cherished so much. We can safely say that, because of his lack of understanding at the time, lack of formal education, limited worldviews, and previously instilled misplaced blame for world affairs on minority groups (Marxists and Jews), that Hitler was simply incapable of moving on. His attachments eventually led him to accept a position as an internal spy for the Army. As early as 1919, [then] Corporal Hitler was used by the previous German military to promote the establishment of secret military units, which were intended to escape the Hundred-Thousand-Man-Army count enforcement. As has so frequently been recognized in nearly all accounts of Hitler since, it was his eloquent ability with words that made him perfect for the job.

It was not as if Hitler's original intentions were to join the political stage, but in the course of his duties as an intelligence operative, he – for some reason – took interest in a minority political party newly founded on the Munich scene. He became a member of the German Workers' Party, and due to his talent as a public speaker, quickly assumed the lead role within a few months. He changed the name of the organization to the National Socialist German Worker's Party (Nazi, as it was read), and began the development of a fusion of nationalistic and socialist idealisms in the forms of Patriotism, Comradeship, and Unity. To further the party's political advances, he established his own private army – the Sturmabteilung (SA, or Storm Troopers) – who protected party members during events, while attacking other political parties at the same time. As a result of the ensuing chaos carried on throughout the region, his actions were largely under the radar, and the party soon took on the area's most dominant position.

During the night of November 8th-9th, 1923, Hitler – obviously impressed by the actions of Mussolini a year prior – now attempted to take over the government within the city of Munich, and was swiftly put down by Bavarian military and police forces. The infamous Hitler-Ludendorff-Putsch (A.K.A, the Beer Hall Putsch), saw roughly 2,000 Nazi party members march on the city center led by Hitler, Generalquartiermeister Erich Ludendorff, and other Kampfbund leaders, confronted with gun fire and arrests. 16 Nazi members and four police officers were killed, and Hitler was tried for treason two days later. His sentence was five years, of which he was released less than a year in, and during those few months, he found plenty of time for reflection and thought. He served out his sentence engrossed in collecting his ideas, which eventually led to the creation of his memoir, *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle).

In a vulgar recreation of the world into his own point of view, Hitler theorized that politics were nothing more than a clash of racial tensions, the struggle of the majority versus the minority, the strong and the weak. To him all races were not created equally, "Aryans" were above all others, and the German race of Aryans was the elite. His beliefs, of course, were the results of his childhood combined with the life changing events of the military service. His views of life as an endless struggle were most certainly derived from his wartime experience attachments. As a result, he believed that war was an absolute necessity, and that national leadership demanded a strong military. Communism, the idea of dictatorship, and Judaism were the enemies of all Aryans (much to the ironic dictatorship he created), and Bolshevism ideas took the central role in his efforts to champion his message. Germany lay in ruin after the war, the people strangled in economic and financial collapse, and the blame of Jewish forces became the anti-Semitic propaganda Hitler used to rally the masses.

After Hitler's exit from prison, he went right back to work. He managed to gain the legalization of the Nazi party, reestablished his control over it, and even setup yet another political paramilitary organization, this time the elite Schutzstaffel... the historically vile "SS", headed by Heinrich Himmler. Yet his efforts might have been in vain as the '20's marked the height of the depression. Despite the implementation of the Dawes Plan, by 1929, Germany had 1.3 million unemployed, 4.3 million by 1930, and over 6 million people were unemployed by 1932. [Of course, this was almost all due to the impositions enforced upon Germany by the Treaty of Versailles] Amazingly enough, what we see is that the massive amount of hardship created in the

wake of the Great Depression actually increased favor of radicalism as a result. Further aiding the efforts of Nazi influence, was the death of Gustav Stresemann in 1929. Stresemann carried a large amount of influence within the German People's Party, and with his death, came a widening gap between the left and right political sides that only a year later saw the total disintegration of the previously standing political coalition.

These events marked a transition in the weight of the people's political sides. Elections were held in 1930 that saw a large increase in Nazi Party gains. Previously, Hindenburg, whose agenda was the return of a monarchist government, appointed Heinrich Brüning as chancellor. Brüning was a true authoritarian who, in nearly pure Napoleonic fashion, attempted to gain power at the use of constitutional clauses. However, as Hindenburg's first presidential term came to a close, and his reelection characterized by a 36.8 percent tail from Hitler's side, Brüning was eventually seen as a failure and dismissed in May of 1932.

From this point on, Hitler's rise to power was nearly assured. Hard leftist nationalist extremism continued to gain popularity, and the Reichswehr generals soon came to view the Nazi's as a potentially valuable asset that could become incorporated into the Army should the day come when the Treaty of Versailles be dissolved. Additionally, even though Hindenburg was also getting older, his influence towards retaining authoritarianism remained, and was strongly supported. Both Conservatives and Nationalists feared the people might be swayed to leave so long as the economy remained in the tank, and that the chance for the redemption of the monarchy might be missed because of it. These factors eventually lead to Franz von Papen's attempt to reform the coalition with the National Socialists by conceding to their demands that Hitler should become chancellor. Of course, it was not as if they didn't maintain some restrictions. Only two other Nazi's were allowed to become members of the cabinet at the time, Wilhelm Frick and Hermann Göring, and Papen, himself as the vice-chancellor, was to maintain a presence at all meetings with Hindenburg. These terms were eventually accepted (along with a number of others) and supported by the president, and on the 30th of January, 1933, Hitler was appointed as Chancellor of Germany.

That night the Nazi Party threw a massive celebration of Hitler's rise to the position. They marched throughout the government quarters of Berlin in a massive torchlight parade. Like Mussolini's March on Rome years prior, the current powers had no idea what had transpired due to their horrible decision. The thoughts of using the Nazi's as tools to further their own means had quickly dissipated as if memories of a dream. The Hindenburg officials clearly didn't understand Hitler at all, no more so, of course, than they understood the people following him. Hitler's message was one of "Change" (HMMMM... wonder where we have all heard THAT one before...), a new direction that the people saw as a way out of the misery that had become their lives. Hitler's true aim was absolute power, and right back to the thoughts expressed in his memoir, the expansion of Germany, the attainment of fulfilling his Natural Law of politics. At this time, Hitler was yet still a minority in the political standings, but make no mistake, he would not let such things stop him from achieving totalitarian control.

Surely Hitler still had a lot of obstacles in his way. His government was a coalition – in which he was the minority – Germany was still at the mercy of the Treaties of both Versailles and Locarno, and even the German Army – a key factor in his ultimate plans – was limited to 100,000 total troops. Yet instead of seeing these things as setbacks, he used them as tools for his own gain. The coalition was portrayed to the advantage of his party's image as moderate and conservative, aligning him with Hindenburg (who, quite frankly, didn't even care for Hitler). As a result, not only was he able to find favor on the political front, but the popular front as well. These actions aided him in averting bureaucratic roadblocks to some extent, and gaining the favor of current military leadership. Furthermore, the "conservative" notion gained his party increased financial backing and support. The Nazi's enjoyed serious advantages with Hitler at the helm. They were able to use the government to their advantage, printing for propaganda purposes, and even that same constitutional article Brüning frequented – Paragraph 48 – saw much use for emergency decrees to limited oppositional parties. But through it all, these were meager compared to the following sequences of events that ultimately enabled Hitler to remove all that blocked his path.

On the night of February 27th, 1933, the Reichstag was set ablaze by a Dutchman named Marinus van der Lubbe. The Nazi's quickly blamed Communists, and on the 28th, the government issued a series of emergency decrees that stood until the end of the second Great War. To combat Communist acts in the future, all basic rights such as personal freedoms, freedom of expression and opinion, freedom of assembly

and association, privacy of post and communication, and the inviolability of property were suspended. The number of crimes punishable by death was increased, and even the spreading of rumors or false news was now considered treason against the state. Finally, the Reich was given the authority to assume total power over the government if deemed necessary. The following election period sat the Nazi's at 44 percent of the total popular vote. Hitler no longer had any need to pretend to be conservative, and therefore, no longer had any need of the conservative alliance either. His true aim was finally achieved. Hitler was now about to show his true colors, as an extreme leftist dictator. With his totalitarian control of the nation, and the now extreme fascist leftist policies he imposed, he now began making his final moves.

Through the use of threats, Hitler gained the acceptance of the Enabling Law on March 23rd, which gave all legislative and executive powers over to the total control of Hitler's government. What this move essentially did, was legalize Hitler as the Dictator of Germany, but the transformation was not yet complete. Hindenburg was still the president, and as such, maintained a position higher than Hitler himself, and even though the Communist Party was now condemned, Hitler was still confined within Germany's multiparty system. Attacking his opponents within the government one at a time, Hitler destroyed the Social Democratic Party through the use of its trade unions, the Catholic Center Party through the use of the Vatican, and the German Nationalist Party through the use of the creation of new departments, administrative positions, and pressure tactics. On July 14th, the government officially proclaimed that the Nazi Party was the only official political party in Germany, and Hitler had succeeded in effectively ending the multiparty system and taking full authoritarian control.

From this point forward, the Nazi Party inserted itself into nearly all facets of German life. From the press to universities, from medicine to the law, Nazi views, involvement, and proclamation soon became the prerequisite for continued activity in everyday life. Of course, this was a members only club, the likes of which Jews were not invited. Even though the impression was there from the start that the Jewish people would be able to carry on as normal, this was slowly phased out. Veteran exemption status was dismissed, organized associations that controlled professions were not open to Jews, and Jews were denied admissions to schools and universities. But the true realization of anti-Semitic policy came to fruition finally during the Nuremberg Laws of September 15th, 1935.

The Nuremberg Laws deprived Jews – and anyone with “Jewish Blood” – of German citizenship, restricting marriage between a non-Jew and a Jew, forced all Jews to wear the yellow “Star of David”, and denied Jews the right to employ non-Jewish female servants. The Nazi's enabled a systematic policy of terror that – through the use of police control and further emergency decrees – gave law enforcement the right to arrest and keep in custody anyone suspected of disloyalty to the state (hmmm.. also sounds vaguely familiar to some recent revelations...). Nobody was safe, and it was not uncommon for people to simply disappear, never to be heard from again. With the formation of the Gestapo (the Secret Police), who devoted itself to ferreting out the enemies of Nazism – to include arrest, torture, and detention without due process – the terror was nearly complete.

Though all of this was happening, Hitler himself was not anxious to create distrust amongst senior leaders. He knew he needed the support of the Army for his plan, and this was complicated by conservative activities and conservative political figures that might try to end Nazism before Hindenburg's eventual death. Thus, on the 30th of June, 1934, Hitler led actions against Röhm and other senior SA leaders who had by now stood in his way. Surprising them in a small summer resort in Bavaria, he had them all executed without trial and blamed the whole thing on the discovery of “homosexual activities”. The SA, it seemed, was full of anti-Nazi adversaries, who, under the care of Göring, were all executed. This included two of Papen's secretaries who were conservative spokesmen. Papen himself was placed under house arrest. All Hitler had to do at this point was wait, and on August 2nd, Hindenburg died. Hitler immediately combined the offices of president and chancellor without a single objection, and the seizure of power was complete...

Of course, in retrospect, understanding who Hitler was, the circumstances of his early life, and the social struggles of the times, are monumental to understanding just how he came to power prior to World War Two. Hitler's life was turned onto an entirely different path thanks to his service during WWI. His actions as a government spy, eloquent way with words, and flair with public speaking made him popular, setting him up for entrance into the political arena, and his slow, methodical creep onto the world stage had been so

meticulously executed, that one could suggest it to be accounted as a work of art in and of itself. As he played to the drum of resentment that resonated within nearly every German of the age – using the cry of “Change!” as his battle cry – his popularity eventually secured him a seat of power. All he really had to do was wait, and the same methods saw the elimination of any and all opposition. Hitler used the German constitution to his advantage to declare emergency laws from his own office, and used secret police to spy on his own people, to detain them without warrant or due process, and even torture and kill those who opposed him. Once the single party system had been secured, there was no stopping Hitler. Nothing but time stood in his way of ultimate power, and much to the horrors of the world, another German march across an already destroyed continent was only just around the corner...

Questions to Ponder:

1. Why is this important to history?
1. Why is it important to understand how Hitler gained power?
1. Why is it important to understand how Hitler used the nation, popular ideals, and law to further his advance to power?
1. What lessons can we learn from these past events that apply to our advancement of “Globalized Leadership”?
1. How do you think you could apply those lessons to your own professional environment today?
1. Can you think of events in recent history that share similarities found within this analysis?
1. What are the effects?

Post YOUR replies in the [comments section below](#) so the community can discuss these thoughts openly.

References:

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