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# Hitler's "Utopia": An Analysis of *Gleichschaltung* in the Third Reich, 1933–1939

*Emma Lichtenberg*

Since its establishment by Otto von Bismarck in 1871, Germany has been home to a number of fundamentally disparate governments. In just seventy-four years, the unified German kingdom was reduced to rubble after a series of political failures. While this nation's history has many high points, the lower moments tend to define Germany throughout the modern era. Without an examination of these moments, however, we are doing a disservice to historical study and analysis, which is why this essay examines the seven-year period between 1933 and 1939. Viewing these formative years through a modern lens tints the period with a darker shade. From our perspective, these were the years that Adolf Hitler, Germany's *Führer*, proselytized the nation to accept the commandments of a racist ideology—one that would have various and complicated consequences post-1945. But non-Jewish Germans in the 1930s likely saw the *Gleichschaltung* (or coordination) of society through rose-colored glasses: it was a restoration of the great nation-state, the transformation of a failed democracy into a National Socialist "utopia." In an attempt to uncover the foundations for the "acceptance" or "toleration" of racism in this utopic society, I will argue that Hitler's *Gleichschaltung* of government, the arts, the media, and private spheres of life exposes the ideological convergence of culture and politics—the intertwining of the two function as the basis of Hitler's utopic model.

UTOPIANISM AND *GLEICHSCHALTUNG*:  
UNDERSTANDING THE FUNDAMENTALS OF HITLER'S IDEOLOGY

The term “utopic” can be vague, but its basic outlines are distilled clearly by Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, describing the ideology and politics of Hitler's first *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (“National Socialist German Workers' Party,” or NSDAP) rally in Nuremberg in 1933:

Ideologies ... see in the achievement of political power only the prerequisite for the beginning of fulfillment of their *real* mission. The world “ideology” already contains the solemn proclamation of the decision to base all actions upon a particular initial position and therefore a clear orientation. Such an attitude may be right or wrong: it is the basis for the attitude to be adopted towards all the phenomena and processes of life.<sup>1</sup>

The “real” mission of the NSDAP was this utopic society—a society that has a clear and organized path that reaches all “processes of life.” A utopia, then, is defined as a society structured solely on ideological doctrine. This ideology seeps into every aspect of society until it becomes so over-saturated with it that there is no turning back—this is the thin line between the utopian and dystopian narratives. However, it is important to note that a utopia cannot ever truly be achieved: the word stems from Greek roots meaning “no place.” No society could ever be a utopia, and the creation of such a perfect and idealized society is impossible—but this did not stop Hitler from trying. Framing Hitler's ideology in a utopic narrative is not only a useful tool for better understanding the non-Jewish German population's complacency and conformity, but also for analyzing the shortcomings of such a “perfect” and racially pure society.

*Gleichschaltung*, similarly, is another word whose full semantic range might be less than immediately apparent. *Gleichschaltung* translates to English as “coordination,” but it speaks to the larger *shift* of Germany society into one gear: Nazism. From the laws that Hitler and his underlings passed to the propaganda that flooded the lives of Germans, *Gleichschaltung* essentially forced Nazi ideology onto its subjects. Joseph Goebbels, the minister of The Reich Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda—a figure we will examine in detail below—stated in his first press conference in 1933 that the major task of the new Ministry was to “establish coordination between the Government and

1 Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, *Nazism, 1919-1945: A Documentary Reader*, vol. II, *State, Economy, and Society, 1933-1939* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1985), 375 (emphasis added).

the whole people ... until they have capitulated to [the Ministry].”<sup>2</sup> Though the acquiescence of a people does not quite send a positive or utopic message, Goebbels’s statement exposes the expectant bonds between the government, the Germans, and German culture—bonds attainable only through the *Gleichschaltung* of Hitler’s ideology upon the populace.

Before delving into the Nazi *Gleichschaltung* between 1933 and 1939, it is important to note that Hitler’s utopic ideology is highly contradictory. It prided itself on restoring the Prussian values of anti-liberalism, simplicity, honor, and courage, yet at the same time wanted to do away with the “elite criteria” of birth, property, and education—three core tenets of the Prussian regime.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, replacing the ethnic, religious, social, and family ties with the idea of one national comrade went against the traditional idea of *Volksgemeinschaft* (“people’s community”) that the ideology claimed to uphold.<sup>4</sup> Lastly, the *Gleichschaltung* of the population into an anti-urban society ran counter to the vast territorial expansion of the Reich.<sup>5</sup> Though many other contradictions exist within the Party ideology, these were the first to exhibit the shortcomings of Nazism’s utopic beginnings.

Looking back on these formative years, the ideology’s blatant contradictions and disregard for realism appear almost glaringly obvious to a modern reader. It is for this reason that I set aside contemporary historiography (and personal bias) to examine only the facts of primary and secondary sources concerning the era. Through such sources, it becomes evident that Hitler’s ideology greatly mythologized the past in order to emphasize the perfection of the present and, consequently, immortalize the notion that the German race exhibited the “highest and loftiest values of human culture and civilization.”<sup>6</sup> This mythologizing is made clear in a statement by Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS, from 1937:

We [the Germans] are more valuable than the others [non-Germans]. ... We are more valuable because our blood makes us capable of inventing more than the others, of leading out people better than others, because our blood enables us to be better soldiers, better statesmen, to reach a higher level of culture and a higher character.<sup>7</sup>

2 Noakes and Pridham, *State, Economy, and Society*, 381.

3 Noakes and Pridham, *State, Economy, and Society*, 378; Gordon Craig, *Germany, 1866-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 488.

4 Noakes and Pridham, *State, Economy, and Society*, 378.

5 Noakes and Pridham, *State, Economy, and Society*, 378.

6 *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, ed. Anson Rabinach and Sander L. Gilman (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2014), 126.

7 Quoted in Eric Weitz, *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 107.

In this example, German blood is equated with an intrinsic preeminence in warfare, culture, and social advancement compared to social inferior “others.” While anti-Semitic extremism did not have as violent of consequences between 1933 and 1939 as it would shortly thereafter, countless reprehensible acts were still committed during the period. Because Hitler’s “utopia” exaggerated the prominence of *German* blood, its ideological pursuits through *Gleichschaltung* enveloped every aspect of German society—government, the arts, the media, and private spheres of life—in order to accomplish its latent aspirations for a *Judenfrei* Germany.

GOVERNMENTAL *GLEICHSCHALTUNG* FROM WEIMAR TO THE THIRD REICH:  
A UTOPIC PATH?

The *Gleichschaltung* of the German government was not necessarily a difficult process. The Weimar Republic, established 1918 as a result of World War I, was highly unpopular due to its economic and political misfortune. A humiliating marker of “national defeat,” the democracy struggled to grow and distribute wealth, which resulted in further social fragmentation and polarization.<sup>8</sup> The NSDAP was handed governmental power by President Paul von Hindenburg after all other alternatives were exhausted—the likely rationale here was that *anything* would be better than the Weimar Republic.<sup>9</sup> With the disappointments of democracy, Germans looked to a more authoritarian regime that would uphold their Prussian foundations. But Hitler’s appointment as chancellor of Germany would be only the first step toward the utopic future they desired.

While the origins of governmental *Gleichschaltung* likely emanated from the discontentment with the Weimar Republic, it is important to remember that at the time Hitler was handed power, he held only 37.3% of the German vote.<sup>10</sup> In this case, Hitler had to show the German people that he was dedicated to restoring Germany to its Bismarckian traditions—with a bit of a Nazi twist, of course. The first evidence of Hitler’s devotedness to the German people came about a month after his appointment. The Reichstag building, the home of the German parliament, was burned to the ground the night of February 27, 1933, and the crime was pinned on a young Dutch Communist

8 Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987), 276, 278.

9 Peukert, *Weimar Republic*, 280.

10 Maja Adena, Ruben Enikolopov, Maria Petrova, Veronica Santarosa, and Ekaterina Zhuravskaya, “Radio and the Rise of the Nazis in Prewar Germany,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 130 (2015): 1892.

Party member.<sup>11</sup> As general anti-Communist sentiments and persecution began to rise in Germany, Hitler stated in the Enabling Act speech (March 1933) that the “revolution” of the German people against national threats was always his intention and that their reactions “[make] it all the more necessary that the national government be given the authority that such a time requires.”<sup>12</sup> Following this heightened power of authority, Hitler then enacted a series of discriminating laws that began to structure the utopic—and racist—society.

One of the first and most discriminatory laws of the Third Reich was the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service, passed April 7, 1933, which sought to “restore a national, professional civil service”—in other words, sought to force “non-Aryan,” or Jewish/Communist, civil service employees into early retirement.<sup>13</sup> (The language used in the title of the law and even within the law itself tends to veil the true meaning behind its declaration.) The law aims to “restore” the civil service, but government employees felt they were already “guardians of the best interest of the State” and looked forward to a more authoritarian form of government where they could work free from outside “political interference”—but this would not be the case with National Socialism.<sup>14</sup> The civil service was purged of all perceivable (and unperceivable) threats to ensure the totalitarian power of the Führer. As a result, the civil service became a low-status career without any honor—a major hindrance considering that civil service jobs in Germany could range anywhere from teachers to judges. Whether Hitler was trying to even out the socio-economic classes “to provide the building blocks for the new Reich”—as he mentioned in his February Proclamation of the Reich Government to the German People—or just eliminate power from any potential threat to his own, the changes in the civil service are evidence of his interference in the bonds between government and the German people. The racial Nuremberg Laws would only further this conflict between government, Germans, and Jews.

I have discussed the concept of *Gleichschaltung* above as a tool for promoting the uniformity of a society but have commented little on the effects of *Gleichschaltung* on those who are being ousted from the utopian ideal—namely, Jews and others considered “asocials.” Though I will discuss propaganda in my analysis of media’s *Gleichschaltung*, it is worth noticing that Hitler’s speeches reveal no intention of coordinating the Jews into their lower social status: rath-

11 *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook: An Anthology of Texts*, ed. Roderick Stackelberg and Sally A. Winkle (New York: Routledge, 2002), 134.

12 Quoted in Randall Bytwerk, “Nazi Propaganda: 1933-1945,” German Propaganda Archive, Calvin College: <http://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/booklet2.htm> (accessed March 28, 2016).

13 *Sourcebook*, ed. Stackelberg and Winkle, 150-52.

14 Noakes and Pridham, *State, Economy, and Society*, 221.

er, his actions were meant to guide so-called “Aryan” Germans into the utopic society that excludes Jews without any social repercussions to non-Jewish Germans. In a speech to leading industrialists in February 1933, Hitler stated, “Human beings are nothing so little as equal, and if human beings are not led, they drop back into the most primitive ancient state.”<sup>15</sup> This “primitiveness” likely references the concept of Darwinian evolution—a pseudoscientific justification for Nazi anti-Semitism that associated strong societal advancement with a racially pure population. Should Hitler *not* lead the Germans away from Jews with *Gleichschaltung*, Aryan extinction might have been at risk. While anyone can retrospectively recognize the nonsense of such statements, there was little resistance to the regimes by non-Jewish Germans, largely due to the underlying themes of a biologically-based nationalist strength. One major event of resistance, however, came just before the Law of the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service.

The Nazis called for a one-day boycott of all Jewish businesses on April 1, 1933. Julius Streicher, the head of the Committee for the Defense Against Jewish Atrocity and Boycott Propaganda, and the publisher of the anti-Semitic tabloid, *Der Stürmer*, stated in the appeal for the boycott that Germans must show the Jews that they cannot “besmirch Germany and disparage its honor without punishment.”<sup>16</sup> While no Jews had actually “besmirched” or “disparaged” Germany, the boycott was called off by Nazis for a different reason. Nazi leaders feared the backlash against such a radical boycott with no evidence of wrongdoing. It seems at this point Germans—and possibly even ordinary members of the Nazi Party—were not “certain of the *centrality* of anti-Semitism to their ideology.”<sup>17</sup> Once the *Gleichschaltung* had effectively created complacency towards the mistreatment of Jews and the Third Reich was entirely cleared of its “impurities,” it could finally achieve its utopian standards.

The Nuremberg Laws served as means for this cleansing. Slowly but surely, the Nazi Party was beginning to strip Jews of their rights. Decreed on September 15, 1935, the laws defined German citizenship on the basis of German and kindred blood and whether or not a person was “willing and fit to serve faithfully the German people and Reich.”<sup>18</sup> This law exposes the bond between politics and people once again—the Reich will offer you citizenship *only* if you offer yourself to the Reich. In this relationship, the Germans are elevated while the others are excluded. Eric Weitz describes this shift from a politically defined community to a racially defined community as “slippage”—a term that explains

15 Quoted in *Sourcebook*, ed. Stackelberg and Winkle, 131.

16 Quoted in *Sourcebook*, ed. Stackelberg and Winkle, 144.

17 Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 30 (emphasis added).

18 *Sourcebook*, ed. Stackelberg and Winkle, 187.



how the Nazi ideological culture and government trumps individuals' political rights in these formative years.<sup>19</sup> The first regulation to the law a month later further defined a German citizen as being *not* Jewish, mixed or otherwise. The law's obsession with blood purity stems not only from the Darwinian thought that plagued the world at the time, but also this utopic society Hitler was constructing. Like a star system coming into existence, the Third Reich slowly accreted planetesimals of German complacency and anti-Semitism until they became so stable that all the remaining excess (i.e., Jews) could be blown out of the system without any consequence to the foundational structures already in place.

While non-Jewish Germans appear to suffer no indiscretions from governmental *Gleichschaltung*, the question of whether or not these discriminatory changes were felt by this majority population needs to be addressed. Joseph Goebbels stated that the Third Reich was seeking the "mobilization of the mind" to advance German society, and this preparation was enacted to condition a population ready to fight for its pure racial status—a detail I will examine in my analysis of the private lives of Germans.<sup>20</sup> Even more troubling than mobilizing the minds of society are Hitler's attempts to "depoliticize [the Germans] by turning them into passive consumers."<sup>21</sup> Hitler completely transformed Germany's economy through a series of industrialization and rearmament plans—not to mention his involvement in the replacement of free trade unions with the German Labor Front after the celebration of the Day of National Labor in May 1933.<sup>22</sup> Were Germans complacent because they were finally out of the economic turmoil of the Weimar Republic, or were they simply turning a blind eye to the dehumanization of their neighbors? It is impossible to determine the opinions and emotions of millions of non-Jewish German citizens, and while it is likely that many Germans spoke out against the Nazi regime, Milton Mayer's interview with ten former Nazis recapitulates a sentiment likely widespread: "You were sorry for the Jews ... but—weren't you glad you weren't a Jew?"<sup>23</sup>

Hitler's *Gleichschaltung* had largely achieved its aims—non-Jewish Germans for the most part did not react as their government underwent major changes. From the strict regulations on civil service jobs to the passive depoliticization of the population, Germans appeared to be happy that unemployment was at an all-time low and that their nation was growing strong once again: a racial-

19 Weitz, *Century of Genocide*, 31.

20 Quoted in Noakes and Pridham, *State, Economy, and Society*, 382

21 Noakes and Pridham, *State, Economy, and Society*, 379.

22 *Sourcebook*, ed. Stackelberg and Winkle, 152.

23 Milton Mayer, *They Thought They Were Free: The Germans, 1933-45* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 59.



ly-pure utopian Germany seemed imminent. On the outskirts of this society, however, Jews suffered injustices, unemployment, deportation, and starvation as this seven-year period advanced. For Jews in Germany (and later Austria and Poland), the years 1933 through 1939 were anything but utopic—they faced dehumanizing propaganda, mistreatment, and cruel injustices.

CLEANSING THE IMPURITIES:  
GERMAN NATIONALISM AND HIGH CULTURE

The Weimar Republic—despite its many shortcomings—was a hotbed of culture and modernization. The democracy’s liberal constitution gave creative opportunities to researchers, artists, musicians, and directors. The era to be remembered as the “golden twenties” experienced modern art in its fullest, from Expressionism to Dadaism to *Neue Sachlichkeit* (“New Objectivity”)—Weimar Germany thus came to the height of its influence just before it would fall in 1933 to Hitler’s outright rejection of modernity.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, music, literature, and even film embraced new liberal forms. The *Gleichschaltung* of the Weimar Republic’s high culture was an attempt to purge any impure Jewish or Communist influences, but the lasting result was that the government largely began to decide what cultural customs were considered truly “pure,” or German, for the rest of society.

On September 22, 1933, Joseph Goebbels created the Reich Chamber of Culture, which oversaw the Reich Chamber of Literature, the Reich Theatre and Music Chambers, and the Reich Chamber of the Creative Arts.<sup>25</sup> As Reich Minister for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda, Goebbels’s oversight of *both* branches of National Socialism leads to an interesting conclusion. In this “pure” utopian society, propaganda and the arts are one in the same—Goebbels himself stated that the arts are a “public exercise: they are not only aesthetic but also moral in nature, and the public interest demands not only police supervision but also guidance.”<sup>26</sup> Governmental guidance in culture most definitely constitutes as a form of *Gleichschaltung* that structures society. In facilitating the bonds between culture and politics and making them *one*, Goebbels highlights the National Socialist desire to weed out “degenerate” culture from the dominant culture to keep it from tarnishing the purity of a utopic Germany.<sup>27</sup> All “degenerate” creativity was “vilified as an antipode to the idealized *Kultur* that

24 Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987), 164–66.

25 Noakes and Pridham, *State, Economy, and Society*, 398. The Press and Radio Chambers will be discussed in the following section.

26 Quoted in Noakes and Pridham, *State, Economy, and Society*, 397.

27 Weitz, *Century of Genocide*, 42.

could provide a sense of order to the German present and future.”<sup>28</sup> But *Kultur* between 1933 and 1939 was never allowed fully to flourish—instead, it was left to the discretion of Nazi leaders to decide what truly represented Germany’s sense of racial and nationalistic pride.

Before examining the different chambers overtaken by Goebbels, it is important first to consider the nature of the Reich Chamber of Culture. In 1937, the Chamber of Fine Arts decreed that membership in the chamber is a prerequisite to architects, interior designers, horticulturists, sculptors, painters, etc.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, these professions were “required to join the Chamber and to unite ... in conformity with the [Reich’s] new principles.”<sup>30</sup> This *Gleichschaltung* of cultural professions guaranteed that, first, no Jews would be allowed to contribute their creativity to the Reich and, second, no artist would be allowed to produce work that stepped outside of the Reich Chamber of Culture’s predetermined boundaries. In other words, the culture of Hitler’s idealized society would be entirely controlled by government influence and interference. At one point, Nazi leaders even attempted to create a sort of pageant-cult spectacle hybrid called “*Thing-Theatre*” that sought to express the Party’s revolutionary ideology—this imposition on the *Volksgemeinschaft* was a major failure, but it led to further encouragement of “acceptable” and “pure” cultural contributions from the German populace.<sup>31</sup> The shift from praising great Jewish figures like Aby Warburg—a German Jewish scholar who avidly promoted the survival of classicism in the West—to the exclusion and defamation of such figures and subjects is drastic indeed.<sup>32</sup> Incorporating the components of Hitler’s contradictory ideology into the rejection of modern and elitist contributions to German society is a useful tool for understanding just how this cultural *Gleichschaltung* was possible.

Literature in Germany, much like art and its other cultural counterparts, flourished under the liberal tendencies of the Weimar Republic. But once Hitler came into power in 1933 and Goebbels took his place at the head of the *Reichskulturskammer*, it, too, experienced drastic changes. One victim of the Reich Chamber of Culture was the Prussian Academy of Arts—an institution that was a “pantheon of German intellectual achievement” despite its modernist and internationalist tendencies.<sup>33</sup> Its Literature Section, headed by Heinrich Mann, spoke out against the coming “barbarism” of National Socialism, and,

28 David Dennis, *Inhumanities: Nazi Interpretations of Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 330.

29 *Sourcebook*, ed. Stackelberg and Winkle, 162.

30 *Sourcebook*, ed. Stackelberg and Winkle, 162.

31 Noakes and Pridham, *State, Economy, and Society*, 409.

32 Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 30–31.

33 Craig, *Germany*, 646.

as a result, elite members were forced out and the Academy lost its prestige.<sup>34</sup> In this instance, *Gleichschaltung* is represented by a physical show of authoritarian force to purify its society. In other cases, individuals—such as the *Deutsche Studentenschaft* (the main German student body)—took it upon themselves to “act against the un-German spirit” by burning books written by undesirable authors in May 1933.<sup>35</sup> These actions offer evidence that the utopic ideology was in just a few months sufficiently pervasive that German students felt the need to eliminate the impurities from their own personal *Volksgemeinschaft*. They show that the ideological *Gleichschaltung* had taken root and would only continue to grow.

While the *Gleichschaltung* of a nation’s culture in one unified spectrum seems preposterous, Hitler was easily able to touch on all aspects of culture—including music. Germany is known in modernity for its celebrated composers, like Wagner and Mozart, but between 1933 and 1939 there was much contention over the nationalistic claim on these individuals and their music. Even prior to Hitler’s rise to power, anti-Semitism was prevalent in Weimar Germany. On one occasion, after Jewish conductors led a performance of Wagner, the *Völkischer Beobachter* (Völkisch Observer, the NSDAP newspaper) reported that “Judah” was working in every way to “destroy the last surviving and influential sites of German culture.”<sup>36</sup> While this sentiment seems highly exaggerated, other Wagner supporters stepped forward and exclaimed that such productions were “the rape of a work of art.”<sup>37</sup> The importance of blood and the value and worth of the individual’s contributions to society is made evident in the analysis by the *Völkischer Beobachter* to analyze Mozart’s “blood heritage,” since creativity was determined by such pedantry.<sup>38</sup> His heritage was later declared as unblemished by Jewish blood, thus allowing his works to (once again) be a part of German national identity. The *Gleichschaltung* of music in Nazi Germany exhibits a function that reoccurs in the different chambers. Individuals and their creative works and contributions to Germany are not always safe from being erased by the NSDAP—not even in the past. Every remnant of the past must accurately represent the idealistic utopianism of the present *and* the future. Any impure element threatens the entire system.

Film and theatre similarly mimic this system of idealistic bingeing and purging. Monumental films from Weimar Germany, like Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (1927), exhibit the uncertainties and anticipation of a new liberal future in a utopian and dystopian model, while propagandist films from the Third

34 Craig, *Germany*, 648.

35 Noakes and Pridham, *State, Economy, and Society*, 401.

36 Dennis, *Inhumanities*, 324.

37 Dennis, *Inhumanities*, 324.

38 Dennis, *Inhumanities*, 27.

Reich, like Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph des Willens* (1935), exhibit only Nazism's utopian ideology through a simultaneous praise of militarization and pastoral living. While these films are drastically different genres, they express the ideological identities of both forms of government. Other films, like *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), directed by the Jewish Carl Laemmle, were received as degrading the fallen German soldiers of World War I. In a speech on Wittenbergplatz, Goebbels declared that the film was a "cultural disgrace" and that "National Socialists would not accept this indignity any longer."<sup>39</sup> Even before the NSDAP's rise to authoritarian power, the party stood for the nationalistic identity of Germany that held views of the war experience as "sacred."<sup>40</sup> This sacredness is a piece of the utopian system that is made clear through the *Gleichschaltung* of film. Theatre, too, propagated anti-Semitic ideals. Craig states that "theatre-goers whose tastes ran to the modern theatre had a difficult time, for almost everything written during the Republic was forbidden, and most of what was written after 1933 should have been."<sup>41</sup> Nonetheless, there was a resurgence of past plays, like *The Jew of Malta* (c. 1589), in productions that over-emphasized anti-Semitic content to fit the utopian milieu of Nazi Germany.<sup>42</sup>

While theatre and films held their own propagandist roles in the Nazis' utopianism, the visual arts by far played the largest role in the *Gleichschaltung* of German high culture. All forms of visual art under the Third Reich became Nazi propaganda. Classical art and sculpture were deemed acceptable for the German utopic ideal while modernistic artworks were ousted from society. However, the Nazis did not destroy this artwork—they flaunted it. The *Haus der Deutschen Kunst* (House of German Art) hosted a traveling exhibit in 1938 entitled *Entartete Kunst*, or "Degenerate Art": the exhibit's intentions were to present modern art as the abhorrent "excrescence of communism and Judaism" and to "inspire revulsion in the visitor."<sup>43</sup> These degenerate works were meant to represent all that threatened the purity of the Germans' racial utopianism. At the *Haus der Deutschen Kunst* opening in 1937, Hitler—an "artist manqué"—declared that "[Art's] *sole function* must be to symbolize that living development" of a people.<sup>44</sup> Art then, according to Hitler, must only be representative of the racial society from which it is produced and serves no other purpose than propagating that society's ideals. Deploying art as an expression of race

39 Dennis, *Inhumanities*, 302-304.

40 Dennis, *Inhumanities*, 306.

41 Craig, *Germany*, 653.

42 Michael H. Kater, *Weimar: From Enlightenment to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 216.

43 Alan Joshua Itkin, "Restaging 'Degenerate Art': The Politics of Memory in the Berlin Sculpture Find Exhibit," *German Quarterly* 87 (2014): 395-415.

44 Quoted in Noakes and Pridham, *State, Economy, and Society*, 398-99 (emphasis added).

in the Third Reich explains the Nazis' favoring of pastoral realism in German painting and neo-classicism in German sculpture and architecture—anything modern, unnatural, or devoid of Aryan beauty and ideals was considered “non-art.”<sup>45</sup> Grouping art into “degenerate” and superior categories—as well as condemning any artist who attempted to produce modern art post-1933—is an example of the most extensive *Gleichschaltung* the Nazis ever organized. Exhibiting the artistic achievements of the Weimar era as an expression of the racial impurity existent in the utopian ideal was a means to indoctrinating German society into discriminatory conformity.

Cleansing the impurities from literature, theatre, music, and art proved to be an easier task for the NSDAP than we might now assume. The accretion of these racist cultural conventions was due to Goebbels's and Hitler's decadent imposition of what an ideal Germany should emulate and generate from its utopian core. Though *Gleichschaltung* was, in essence, conditioning German society to conform to—or even accept—the racial prejudice propagated by the political regime, there was little pushback against such ideology. What good German would choose to oppose a culture that so fervently reinforced his own? The German sense of nationalism is likely what catalyzed the cultural changes that took place between 1933 and 1939. The assurance that every aspect of culture in the utopic Third Reich was made by Germans for Germans was a valuable tool for ensuring order. With this fully coordinated order, the Nazis could reach the multitudes of Germany and further insert politics into the mass culture they invented.

#### INFLUENCING THE MASSES: NORMALIZING RACIAL PROPAGANDA AND MEDIA

The *Gleichschaltung* of Nazi Germany would not have been possible without the widespread use of propaganda and media to influence the population toward anti-Semitic complacency. The Nazis—just as they did with *Gleichschaltung* of Germany's culture—inserted themselves at every level of media. The distribution of propaganda pamphlets and posters ensured that the utopic political ideology of a racially pure nation was widespread and acknowledged. Likewise, the press, radio, and even advertising were laden with this ideology. Though this imposition would ultimately result in a dismal existence for many (e.g., Jews, enemies of the Party), the *Gleichschaltung* functioned quite smoothly. Goebbels, as minister of the Press and Radio Chambers, ensured that no action of the NSDAP would be questioned or challenged by a media outlet and that (as his title suggests) propaganda would *enlighten* the populace.

45 Itkin, “Degenerate Art,” 400.

Approximately eight months after Hitler's rise to power, a law was passed that drastically shifted the German press into the utopic model desired by the Nazis. On October 4, 1933, the Editorial Law declared that all newspapers and political periodicals must be regulated by the state and overseen by Goebbels, and, furthermore, the law identified *who* qualified as an editor under the Third Reich. The editor must possess German citizenship, be of Aryan descent, must not be married to a non-Aryan, have not lost any civic rights, and must not "weaken the strength of the German Reich, ... the sense of community of the German people, German defense capability, culture, or the economy, or ... [offend] the honor and dignity of Germany."<sup>46</sup> Because political ideology infiltrated the press as early as October 1933, in the years leading up to the start of World War II German media became saturated with the utopist Nazi ideology. Between 1935 and 1936, about "500 [or] 600 newspapers vanished, merged, or were bought," but those under new ownership retained their former titles so as not to draw attention to the readers.<sup>47</sup> Fritz Sanger, a representative of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* at press conferences, commented that:

The press conference *with* the Reich Government founded in 1917 was changed by the Nation Socialists on their seizure of political power in Germany in 1933 into a 'press conference *of* the Reich Government.' ... There it gave directives, laid down language regulations, and there were daily opportunities to give directives to the press 'to bring it in to line.' ... Before 1933, these press conferences were run by journalists and the Government was their guest; after they were run by the Government.<sup>48</sup>

This occupation of German press ensured limitations in freedom of speech so far as it challenged the Third Reich. The restrictions of such freedom beg the question: Is a society utopic if *any* of its freedoms are limited? The Nazis would answer "yes": the *Gleichschaltung* of the press shifts all non-Jewish Germans into a single, unified system that impresses their racist ideology and conformity—and Germans largely accepted it.

By 1939, 70% of German families owned a radio (nicknamed the "people's receiver") and Germany held the highest percentage of radio ownership in the world.<sup>49</sup> The placement of community radios in cafes and offices was encouraged so that speeches and rallies broadcast could have a greater "impact"

46 Quoted in *Sourcebook*, ed. Stackelberg and Winkle, 163–64.

47 Noakes and Pridham, *State, Economy, and Society*, 390–91.

48 Noakes and Pridham, *State, Economy, and Society*, 392.

49 Noakes and Pridham, *State, Economy, and Society*, 386.



than just in the home.<sup>50</sup> The *Gleichschaltung* of radio truly began after Hitler's appointment when 13% of radio personnel were dismissed—a number much higher than the civil service dismissals—but the official *Gleichschaltung* was made apparent on April 1, 1934, when German radio was renamed the “Reich Radio Company.”<sup>51</sup> At this time, listening to foreign radio or spreading its information was punishable, a move almost certainly meant to preserve the German nationalistic ideology without having foreigners taint it.<sup>52</sup> In a meeting with the Controllers of German radio (March 1933), Goebbels stated that they must “bring to the ears of the masses the new attitude in a way which is modern, up to date, interesting, and appealing.”<sup>53</sup> This “new attitude” alluded to the *Gleichschaltung* of the racial utopic ideology that was to be imposed on the Germans. By amalgamating radio's informative and entertainment properties with political propaganda, the Nazis furthered the *Gleichschaltung* of reaching the masses.

However, reaching the “masses” implies one homogenous society—which is exactly what the Nazi *Gleichschaltung* of media sought to achieve. While promoting the tenets of the Nazi political-cultural ideology through advertising would appear to be on par with the *Gleichschaltung* of the press and radio, the coordination of German advertisement took a very different path. During the Weimar years, advertising was viewed as a waste of resources. When the Propaganda Ministry was formed in 1933, many professional journalists—like those at *Seidels Reklame*—were eager for a chance to showcase the “cultural and economic importance” of progressive advertising and rally the idea of “German Advertising for German Workmanship.”<sup>54</sup> But this is not what happened. Soon after Hitler's appointment, “Nazi kitsch” exploded—swastikas and the face of Hitler and other top officials were advertised on items from playing cards to window displays—and ultimately “trivialized” National Socialism and its patriotic symbols.<sup>55</sup> After the passing of law to protect these symbols (May 1933), advertisements took on an “antiquated” look; by using Gothic script (*Fraktur*), medieval imagery, and *Völkisch* motifs, this new advertising sought to preserve “the [immutable] taste of the *Volk*.”<sup>56</sup> But as the war approached and the nation prepared for combat, advertisement seemed to “offer little” in

50 Noakes and Pridham, *State, Economy, and Society*, 386.

51 Noakes and Pridham, *State, Economy, and Society*, 383–84.

52 Adena et al., “Radio and the Rise of the Nazis,” 1897.

53 Quoted in Noakes and Pridham, *State, Economy, and Society*, 385.

54 Hartmut Berghoff, “‘Times Change and We Change with Them’: The German Advertising Industry in the Third Reich—Between Professional Self-Interest and Political Repression,” *Business History* 45 (2003): 130.

55 Berghoff, “German Advertising Industry,” 138–39.

56 Berghoff, “German Advertising Industry,” 139–40.



the context of global politics.<sup>57</sup> The *Gleichschaltung* of advertising, then, had a dramatic climax and denouement. The Nazis saw value in promoting their ideals through advertisements—what better way to reach the masses?—but they quickly lost interest because such a move could easily be duplicated by more valuable mechanisms. Yet this dissolution did not stop the rise of other propagandist pamphlets and materials.

Mass media, the arts, and even education (discussed further in the next section) served as mediums through which utopic ideology was propagandized. The dissemination of pamphlets and posters and the publishing of anti-Semitic cartoons in Nazi newspapers—like Streicher’s *Der Stürmer*—influenced the spread of racial vilification, or at least introduced it. From posters instructing Germans to “Buy German goods” to help Hitler’s re-building of Germany (mid-1930s) to grislier posters depicting the strangling of a “poisonous serpent”—sordidly spangled with the Star of David—to prevent future German misery, propaganda paraded a range of established Reich ideologies.<sup>58</sup> Randall Bytwerk states that “the closer a method of propaganda is to the masses, the more directly it reaches them,” and this reasoning suggests that the disparagement of the Jews in popular propaganda was already a common aspect of German life.<sup>59</sup> I would propose that the *Gleichschaltung* of mass media—as well as high culture—was a means of coordinating these masses into accepting the racial ideology of the regime. While they may not have been politically invested, the propagandist regime ensured that anti-Semitic ideology existed at every level of German culture, thus creating an appearance of homogeneity within the utopic society—a true representation of the *Volksgemeinschaft*.

But in the *Volksgemeinschaft*, community always flourishes over the individual. The *Gleichschaltung* of mass media—targeted at the community—made obvious the utopic ideals of the Third Reich. While the individual did not necessarily have to promote, accept, or further the anti-Semitic propaganda imposed by the NSDAP, they had very little room to reject it. A Nazi commentator in 1935 wrote that “The misplaced reverence for a singular person ... had to give way to the hitherto neglected reverence for the community.”<sup>60</sup> The Aryan nation as a whole took precedence over the emotions and opinions of the individual—and if this individual benefitted from the removal and/or ostracizing of a Jew, then they might be less likely to react to defamatory and racist propaganda. The *Gleichschaltung* of mass media achieved just this goal.

57 Berghoff, “German Advertising Industry,” 138.

58 Bytwerk, “Nazi Posters: 1933-1939,” German Propaganda Archive, Calvin College: <http://www.bytwerk.com/gpa/posters2.htm> (accessed April 4, 2016).

59 Bytwerk, *Bending Spines: The Propagandas of Nazi Germany and the German Democratic Republic* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2004), 43.

60 Kater, *Weimar*, 214.

By infiltrating every sphere of public life, the Nazis normalized a racist and totalitarian ideology in the guise of utopian perfection. The future society that Germans were promised by the Third Reich was idyllic enough to let anti-Semitic persecutions continue to develop in the years leading up to the war.

“HEIL HITLER!” IN THE HOME:

EXPLORING *GLEICHSHALTUNG* IN THE PRIVATE LIVES OF GERMANS

Family values, gender roles, and education in Germany from 1933 to 1939 are just a few examples of how Nazism infiltrated the private sphere of German lives. While Hitler and Goebbels were aware that it was unlikely that all Germans would be “true believer[s] of National Socialism,” their *Gleichschaltung* of culture and media into a single political ideology ensures that—at least publicly—the general population was unanimous in their beliefs.<sup>61</sup> Bytwerk argues that this is evidenced from the growing election percentages: the Nazi party steadily gained voters during the first eight months after the imposition of their utopist propaganda on the public, which made opposition quite difficult.<sup>62</sup> Changes in the public sphere, then, were matched by changes in the way that Germans lived their lives in private. Familial strength—both racially and physically—was emphasized, meaning that men and women were expected to fill very specific Nazified gender roles. Children, likewise, received a Nazi education through involvement in the *Hitler Junge* (“Hitler Youth”) and the introduction to propagandist materials via school curricula. This section thus takes up the effects of *Gleichschaltung* on private life in Germany and analyzes how the utopian political-cultural model impacted the average non-Jewish German family.

Racial purity—as evidenced in the Nuremberg Laws—was a major component of the *Gleichschaltung* of Nazi Germany and, likewise, was an important aspect of family. The ideal German family is just that—German. Just after a few short months in power, Hitler passed the Law for Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring (July 1933) that necessitated sterilization for hereditary mental or physical illness. This law validated the objectives of Karl Astel, professor of eugenics and hereditary science, who advocated that “racial aliens and the racially perverted Jews and degenerates” would need to be “kept in check.”<sup>63</sup> Germans, however, saw an increase in population under the totalitarian regime of the Third Reich. The emphasis on parenthood—especially motherhood—influenced the way that Germans thought about family. In a

61 Bytwerk, *Bending Spines*, 135.

62 Bytwerk, *Bending Spines*, 135.

63 *Sourcebook*, ed. Stackelberg and Winkle, 154; Kater, *Weimar*, 219.

contemporary publication about familial obligations, the function of sex is described as:

The maintenance of the life of the nation and not the enjoyment of the individual. ... If, however, the desire to have a child has been fulfilled and the continuation and enlargement of the nation has been secured by the production of a sufficient number of children, then ... there is no objection to further satisfaction of the sexual urge.<sup>64</sup>

The quasi-religious enforcement of the Nazi ideology speaks to the methods of *Gleichschaltung* in the private spheres of German life. In almost a militarization of sexual activity, parenthood became a political duty of German adults who were physically and mentally fit. Motherhood, and the gender roles created for women in Nazi Germany, easily became some of the most important undertakings in the Third Reich, since these women were charged with one great task: producing future Nazis.

Though childrearing developed into a heroic achievement for women in Nazi Germany, little else was encouraged for women by way of careers, education, or independence. In a speech to the National Socialist Women's Organization (September 1934), Hitler stated that "women's liberation" is a phrase invented only by Jewish intellectualism," and "it is not appropriate when woman forces her way into man's world."<sup>65</sup> From the emphasis on the "new woman"—who had a range of opportunities under the Weimar Republic—to the emphasis on the 3 Ks of *Kinder, Küche, und Kirche* ("children, kitchen, and church"), one might argue that the utopic ideology of the Nazi regime was oppressive to women. At the same time as this ideology presents a form of anti-liberal and retrograde oppression, however the Nazis' *Gleichschaltung* of German female gender roles was also militarized with notions of honor, thus creating a sense of nationalistic pride and duty. Women became valued contributors to the preservation of the utopic society. For example, in May 1939, the Mother's Cross was introduced to German women: women who bore eight healthy children received a gold medal, six children a silver medal, and four children a bronze medal.<sup>66</sup> With the inscription "The child ennobles the mother," these medals gave German women a new status in the Third Reich, raising not only their own perception of their roles, but also their national prominence.<sup>67</sup> Women in Nazi Germany, then, were awarded by the utopian

64 Noakes and Pridham, *State, Economy, and Society*, 454–55.

65 Quoted in *Sourcebook*, ed. Stackelberg and Winkle, 182.

66 Noakes and Pridham, *State, Economy, and Society*, 452.

67 Noakes and Pridham, *State, Economy, and Society*, 452.

ideology for upholding its racial purity—like their military husbands, they protected the *Volksgemeinschaft* from what was presented to them as the greatest threat of all, extinction.

While women's roles in the home were enhanced in the Third Reich, men's roles experienced a *Gleichschaltung* that sought to restore the former Prussian values of a simplistic, patriarchal-dominated lifestyle. In a speech at a women's exhibition in Berlin (1933), Goebbels discussed the idea that "an age in which all great idea of virtue, of steadfastness, of hardness, and determination have been forgotten should not be surprised that the man gradually loses his leading role in life and politics and government."<sup>68</sup> The Weimar Republic—and its liberalization of the "new woman"—was seen as an emasculation of men from their rightful gender roles. Hitler's goal was to give that masculinity back to German men through *Gleichschaltung* of women's roles—meaning that the "remasculinization" of men was dependent on the "refeminization" of German women.<sup>69</sup> Understanding gender as an "ever changing set of societal norms, practice, and expectations" helps clarify the contrasting roles of men and women in the Third Reich.<sup>70</sup> An emphasis on the masculinity of military prowess and attentiveness also arose during this era due to the militarized politics of the Reich and the philosophical remnants of Nietzsche's "Blond Beast"—the *Übermensch*—who presented a model of the ideal German man.<sup>71</sup> By idealizing the German man and woman, every individual had a determined role that he or she should seek to fulfill to support the racial superiority and progeny of the utopic society.

German men and women may be able to recognize the utopic benefits of Nazi *Gleichschaltung*, but German *children* had no prior memory of the "failure" of the Weimar Republic. As a result, the *Gleichschaltung* of German boys and girls—future soldiers and mothers—into good Nazis began with the *Hitler Junge*. Because children are seen as the future of any society, Hitler passed a law in 1936 declaring that "all of the German youth within the territory of the Reich shall be members of the Hitler Reich," and that they "shall be subject to education not only through family and school but also to physical, mental, and moral training to serve the *Volk* ... in the spirit of National Socialism."<sup>72</sup> By imitating respectively the masculinity exemplified by their fathers and the femininity of their mothers, German boys and girls experienced the effects of

68 Goebbels, "German Women," tr. Bytwerk, German Propaganda Archive, Calvin College: <http://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/goeb55.htm> (accessed April 4, 2016).

69 Matthew Stibbe, "In and Beyond the Racial State: Gender and National Socialism," *Politics, Religion, and Ideology* 13 (2012): 159-78.

70 Stibbe, "Gender and National Socialism," 161.

71 Kater, *Weimar*, 226.

72 *Third Reich Sourcebook*, ed. Rabinach and Gilman, 251-52.

*Gleichschaltung* in their own homes. Because children were less likely to be impacted by the *Gleichschaltung* of the civil service or German advertising, the infiltration in the home—via Hitler Youth or observed gender roles—was an important way for the Nazis to unite every individual into the whole. The cry “Your youth will not forsake you / Führer, you can place your trust in us” speaks to this importance of children in the Reich.<sup>73</sup> Without a strong Nazi youth, the utopic Reich would not be able to sustain its thousand-year reign and—as a result—would face its demise. Imitating gender roles and joining the Hitler Youth aided in the *Gleichschaltung* of children’s formative years, but it was public education that would really plant the seeds of anti-Semitic complacency in German youth.

The inherent innocence of children and their ingenuous political malleability made them prime targets for a propagandized education. Not only would this strengthen the belief in National Socialism in children, but it also served as an extra measure against any political-cultural resistance to the Reich that might exist in the home. Education, then, was the last defense against resistance. Math, grammar, history, and science classes adopted a new Nazi-approved curriculum that emphasized all the main tenets of the anti-Semitic political ideology. For example, a German primer for younger readers included a passage about a major commanding his *Freikorps* to sing a derogatory medley that ominously threatened: “Flabby hook nose worn like a seal— / Judah and sons, prepare your last meal!”<sup>74</sup> Likewise, one biology curriculum for fifth-graders stated that the “Oriental” and “repulsive” features occurring among the Jewish population was a result of “miscegenation ... [and] the fact that the Jew has incorporated stringent laws for breeding and natural selection as components of his religion.”<sup>75</sup> Teaching children anti-Semitic pseudoscience from a young age was just one—albeit significant—degree of *Gleichschaltung*. The Restoration of Civil Service also ensured that no Jewish teacher could tarnish the pure minds of Hitler’s future followers. With forces at home and at school instructing German youth the ideological racial exclusiveness of National Socialism, they were almost guaranteed to accept the utopian ideal.

Examining family roles and values and the outcome of *Gleichschaltung* on the private sphere of German life reveals the ideological foundations of the Third Reich. No nation’s government service, culture, or media would be effective if change did not occur at the individual level as well. While the public sphere and the private sphere may build upon one another, it was Hitler’s ultimate goal for a utopic society that brought about a nearly unanimous support of his regime. Acceptance of propagandist ideology at home would influ-

73 *Third Reich Sourcebook*, ed. Rabinach and Gilman, 254–55.

74 Quoted in *Third Reich Sourcebook*, ed. Rabinach and Gilman, 248.

75 Quoted in *Third Reich Sourcebook*, ed. Rabinach and Gilman, 250.

ence an individuals' propagation of this information in public and vice versa. The role of family, moreover, was essential to promoting the racist ideology, for without strong German families with a strong sense of nationalism, there could be no racially pure utopian nation.

## CONCLUSION

Though my research constitutes only a brief analysis of the effects of *Gleichschaltung* through 1939, I want to stress that this coordination continued—even increased—afterwards and especially during the war. Reminders of why the German people were at war were frequently promoted. Utopianism was the promise to the people in the pre-war years, but when the threat of danger arose, this promise lost its glimmer. Goebbels and Hitler had to make sure that Germans did not lose hope—even when the Germans were losing the war—which is why the propaganda and recurrent *Gleichschaltung* continued. The scope of my research is confined within the seven years between 1933 and 1939 because I felt that this period saw the most dramatic social and political change. Furthermore, my omission of elements which ultimately led to the Holocaust is a conscious decision to emphasize the experiences of the non-Jewish Germans in the reality of Hitler's utopian designs. The regime, through its propagandist methods, normalized outward anti-Semitism, which desensitized the general population to racist and unlawful actions against the Jewish community in Germany and conquered areas. The victims of the Holocaust experienced a fate far worse than any dystopian model could ever imagine, which is why I have framed only "Aryan" Germans within this model.

Even the utopian model I have reconstructed here has its shortcomings. A society based solely on a political ideological doctrine may become depoliticized through a complacency to such drastic changes in society during a brief period of time. One could argue that the *Gleichschaltung* of government resulted in disorder at the political level and that the censoring of mass media limits freedom in a seemingly utopic society. In the larger context of the Third Reich, however, I believe that the utopian narrative—with its racist ideology and political foundations—serves as the best tool for examining the coordination of all aspects of German life during this era.

In conclusion, Hitler's "utopia" was actually a society created through the infiltration of the political-cultural sphere of Germany, a cultural propaganda campaign so powerful that it pushed nearly an entire nation into a seeming complacency. Many Germans were, of course, aware of the atrocities the Nazi party enacted beyond their racist propaganda, but these events still transpired because, for nearly seven years, the majority was conditioned to live according to the Nazi ideology. Imagining the Third Reich as a political system intent on

homogenizing its population into a single, coordinated organism built on the foundations of racial superiority supports the model of utopianism recovered in this essay. The *Gleichschaltung* of German government ensured no political enemies (i.e. Jews and other “degenerates”) while the *Gleichschaltung* of German culture and mass media ensured no foreign threat (again, Jews and others) to the utopic society invented by the Nazi party. The *Gleichschaltung* of family and individuals was equally important in ensuring the propagation of the utopic ideology for the (imagined) future of the Reich. Framed within the Reich’s racially pure and culturally homogenous “utopia,” the population ravaged by the Great War was able to see their nation through rose-colored glasses once again.

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