

Historiography of Nazi Germany

Intentionalists vs. Functionalists

You'll do research and debate one of two questions regarding Nazi Germany from the point of view of either an intentionalist historian or a functionalist historian.

The two questions with their positions are:

1. Where did Nazism come from?
 - a. Intentionalist: The Nazi Party and its ideology were manifestations of Hitler's own political beliefs.
 - b. Functionalist: Ordinary Germans saw Hitler as a man for the times, projecting their own hopes, fears, and ambitions onto Hitler.
2. What was the nature of Hitler's government?
 - a. Intentionalist: Hitler was a very powerful ruler who operated in line with a 'master plan'; it was always his intent to start a war in Europe and exterminate European Jews. The lack of organization was meant to encourage competing interests.
 - b. Functionalist: The Fuhrer was a "lazy dictator" who possessed absolute power but lacked the energy or attention to use it much. He was reactive and unable to produce new ideas.

Your job is to find information from the readings to back up the claim you are given. Your group will put forth two representatives to debate in front of the class. Other members of your group may support your representatives with evidence and analysis as needed during the debate.

Evidence & Analysis:

1. Where did Nazism come from?

Definition of Nazism: the body of political and economic doctrines held and put into effect by the Nazis in Germany from 1933 to 1945 including the totalitarian principle of government, the predominance of especially Germanic groups assumed to be racially superior, and supremacy of the führer.

a. Intentionalist: The Nazi Party and its ideology were manifestations of Hitler's own political beliefs.

- i. Germans "master race" need for living space "lebensraum" fuehrer is supreme
- ii. Responsible for the atrocities of the holocaust
- iii. Wrote the Mein Kampf (My Struggle) goals for Germany (4 Principles of Nazism)
 - 1. Racism & Racially pure Aryans
 - a. Antisemitism
 - b. Believed they were the only breed capable of providing Germany with the best culture, art, and technology
 - c. Nuremberg Laws
 - i. 1935 laws defining the status of Jews and withdrawing citizenship from persons of non-German blood.
 - 2. Lebensraum
 - a. Entitled to more land.
 - b. This meant using the force needed, Germany began to take over parts or whole nearby countries
 - c. Also used to get back lost territory taken in the Treaty of Versailles
 - 3. Hitler Youth
 - a. Nazi party controlled employment, teachers in school and made textbooks and courses
 - b. All young people had to take part in Youth Groups
 - c. Boys- Hitler Youth - fitness, military
 - d. Girls - League of German Maidens - homemaking skills
 - 4. Violence
 - a. Violently attempted to eliminate the Jewish population and other minorities who he believed had backstabbed them at war
 - b. Through ghettos and concentration camps
 - c. Forced labor and torture
 - d. Killed 6 million Jews and 9 million minorities
- iv. Reichstag Fire
 - 1. February 1933; the Reichstag was set on Fire by a secret order of Josef Goebbels; called a communist plot; Hitler convinced president Hindenburg to suspend all civil rights for Communists, socialists, liberals, and trade unionists

v. Enabling Act

1. Enabled Hitler to get rid of the Reichstag parliament and pass laws without reference to parliament

b. Functionalist: Ordinary Germans saw Hitler as a man for the times, projecting their own hopes, fears, and ambitions onto Hitler.

2. What was the nature of Hitler's government?

a. Intentionalist: Hitler was a very powerful ruler who operated in line with a 'master plan'; it was always his intent to start a war in Europe and exterminate European Jews. The lack of organization was meant to encourage competing interests.

i. Character

1. He had the active support of the powerful German officer class and of millions of everyday citizens who voted for the National Socialist German Workers' (Nazi) Party and hailed him as a national savior in gigantic stadium rallies
2. Hitler, a mesmerizing public speaker, addressed political meetings in Munich calling for a new German order to replace what he saw as an incompetent and inefficient democratic regime.
3. His personality was what the Germans wanted in order to escape the post WWI humiliation
4. The ultimate aim of the Nazi Party was to seize power through Germany's parliamentary system, install Hitler as a dictator, and create a community of racially pure Germans loyal to their führer

ii. Economic Crisis

1. People were poor and mad at Weimar Government so they started to side with extremist groups
2. Ruhr Valley

iii. Politics

1. Reichstag had too many groups that had different opinions making it near impossible to agree on things and get things done (And the people wanted things to change fast rather than slow).
2. Higher-ups within the German government that wanted him to be a puppet Chancellor greatly underestimated him (His competitors did not take him seriously).
3. KPD and SPD were too focused on the left (Communist/Socialist) which left the right (Nazis) with little to no competition.

b. Functionalist: The Fuhrer was a “lazy dictator” who possessed absolute power but lacked the energy or attention to use it much. He was reactive and unable to produce new ideas.

- i. Hitler did not work long hours, loathed paperwork and had no interest in overseeing projects in any detail.
- ii. He was reactive and unable to produce new ideas, relying instead on advisors and acolytes in his inner circle
- iii. In this interpretation, much of the Nazi transformation which occurred in Germany in the mid- and late-1930s was not the work of Hitler, but of others ‘working towards the Fuhrer’
 - 1. This basically means, doing what they believed he would want them to do.