

## 15. Censorship

What the Nazis established for the schools and universities they attempted to establish for German society at large, by means of sweeping government regulations on media and outright censorship. The world of schools and education was only an important microcosm of the Nazis' plans for all of German society.

Joseph Goebbels, Germany's new propaganda chief, put it this way: Any book or work of art "which acts subversively on our future or strikes at the root of German thought, the German home and the driving forces of our people" should be destroyed.

The great symbolic statement of what was to come occurred early in the Nazi regime—the May 10, 1933 book burnings, just a few months after the Nazis assumed power.

In the Unter den Linden, an open square across from the University of Berlin, roughly



20,000 books were burned in a huge bonfire. Goebbels spoke at the event to 40,000 cheering spectators. Some of the authors whose books were destroyed were Thomas Mann, Albert Einstein, Jack London, Helen Keller, H. G. Wells, Sigmund Freud, Émile Zola, and Marcel Proust.

An important and sometimes overlooked fact about the book burnings is that they were not instigated by the Nazi

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such a position for himself. In speeches and newspaper articles he identified himself with Hitler's rule, going so far as to state in autumn 1933 that 'the Führer himself and alone is and will be Germany's only reality and its law.' He not only approved in principle of the Nazi cleansing, but also tried to use the new regime to destroy the academic careers of colleagues, for example by initiating a Gestapo investigation" (Rohkrämer 2005, p. 172-173).

government. Nor were they instigated by non-intellectual thugs. The book burnings were instigated by university students. The Nazi Party's *student* organization conceived and carried out book burnings all across the country—book bonfires burned brightly that night in every German university city. The professors had taught their students well.

Goebbels's official title was Minister of the Reich Chamber of Culture. The Reich Chamber of Culture controlled seven cultural spheres: fine arts, music, theater, literature, the press, radio, and films. This gave him power over all the major media in Germany and enabled him to use his formidable talent for propaganda effectively. He quickly established regulations that anyone working in any of those fields had to become a member of the Nazi party and join the respective chamber. The purpose of the regulations was, as Goebbels put it:

In order to pursue a policy of German culture, it is necessary to gather together the creative artists in all spheres into a unified organization under the leadership of the Reich. The Reich must not only determine the lines of progress, mental and spiritual, but also lead and organize the professions.<sup>33</sup>

In the realm of art, Hitler and Goebbels attempted to cleanse Germany of modern art and to replace it with “Germanic” art. Classical plays, music, and operas, as well as Hollywood B-movies were still allowed, but galleries exhibiting modern art were shut down.

Newspapers received close supervision. The Reich Press Law of 1933 prohibited editors of newspapers from marrying Jews, and required that editors meet daily with the Propaganda Ministry to ensure that no misleading stories were published. Essentially, this meant that the government told the

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<sup>33</sup>Quoted in Shirer 1962, p. 241.

newspapers what they could and could not print.

Likewise, radio was taken over in 1933 by another branch of the Propaganda Ministry, the Chamber of Radio.

The Chamber of Films took over the content of the film industry, though it left the production of films up to private firms.

In all areas of arts and culture, uncooperative editors, writers, and performers were ousted, or sent to prison or concentration camps, or sometimes killed. Those editors, writers, and performers who remained knew how they were to behave. German culture thus became an obedient tool of Nazi politics.

## 16. Eugenics

Nazi education and censorship attempted to control people's *minds*. The Nazis also controlled the *bodies* of their citizens as much as possible. Milder controls involved new public-health measures such as an aggressive campaign against smoking: the Nazis banned smoking in certain public places, ran an anti-smoking propaganda campaign, and placed restrictions on how tobacco could be advertised.

Stronger controls extended to the sex and reproductive lives of the citizens, and this takes us into darker territory—the Nazis' embrace of eugenics.

Eugenics was not unique to the Nazi regime or to Germany. As early as 1895, eugenics researcher Adolf Jost had published a book called *The Right to Death*, which called for state control over human reproduction, and many intellectuals in many countries embraced eugenics. In nature, the argument ran, only the strongest males get to mate with the females; the weaker males get to mate less frequently or not at all; this natural selection of the stronger and de-selection of the weaker serves to keep the species healthy and strengthen it.