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De-demonize

TIME
The Weekly Newsmagazine
ADOLF HITLER
By George Seldes
 November 11

Explanations for what made Hitler tick: Psychic trauma, oedipal complexes, disturbed adolescence, suppressed homosexuality, neurological medical problems, insanity, and schizophrenia.

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Hitler: The Rise of Evil (2003); Director: Christian Duguay; Screenwriters: G. Ross Parker; John Pielmeier

- [Hitler: Rise of Evil - Childhood](#)

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Physical appearance: “unprepossessing”

Personal habits: “repetitive, conservative, ...quirky. ... fixed daily routines, was near teetotal and (from the early 1930s onwards) vegetarian, did not smoke or drink coffee, and had a fetish for cleanliness which saw him washing with abnormal frequency. He needed little sleep, read avidly and widely (though unsystematically), and possessed an extraordinary memory for factual detail. He monopolized conversation with opinionated views on a wide range of subjects. On anything connected with history, art, and architecture, he considered himself particularly expert. He was also especially interested in medicine and biology. His reliance upon his self-learning went hand in hand with an utter contempt for ‘intellectuals’ dependent upon a formal education. There is no doubt, however, that, though his knowledge was half-baked, one-sided and dogmatically inflexible, he was intelligent and sharp-witted.”

(Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: Profiles in Power*, 1991, 16-17)



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Max (2002); Director: Menno Meyjes;
Screenwriter: Menno Meyjes

- [Max and Adolf talk Art](#)

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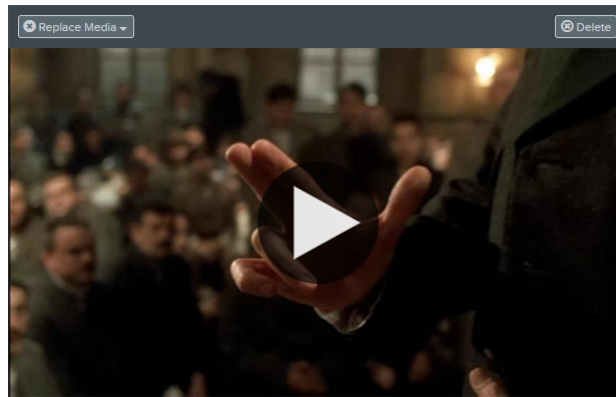
Charismatic Leadership Qualities



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Hitler: The Rise of Evil (2003); Director:
Christian Duguay; Screenwriters: G.
Ross Parker; John Pielmeier

<https://bupmediasite.passhe.edu/Mediasite/Play/d75060d38ef14153a3505880a3b96d211d>



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Propaganda & Rhetoric: Skills and Magnetism



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Volksgemeinschaft
(national community)
& *Volksgenossen*
(racial community)

Race is part of the definition. All Germans were expected to contribute to the bloodstream of the nation.



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13 Minutes

**NOT ALL
TERROR!**

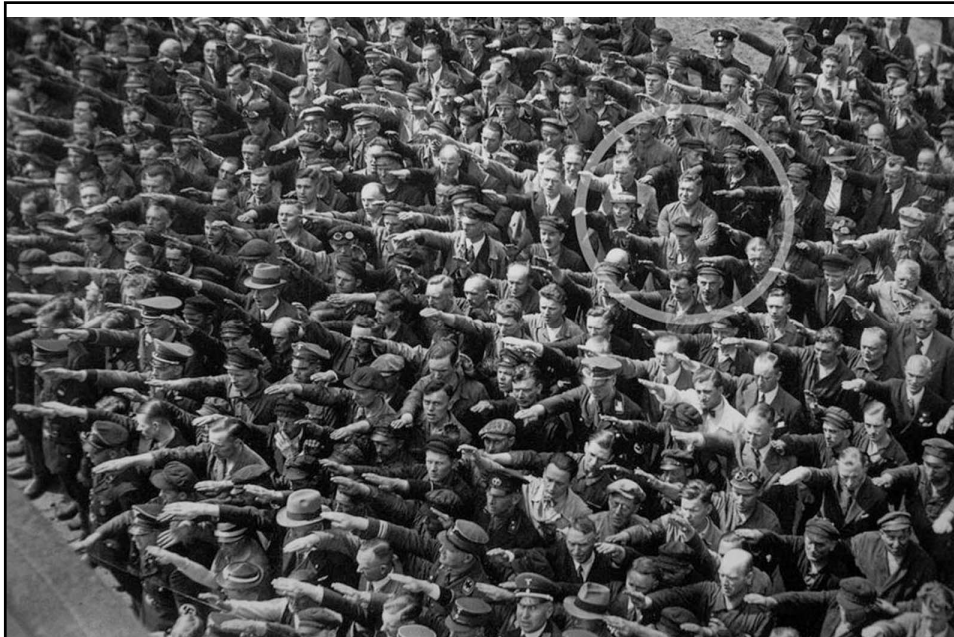


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Perception of Extraordinary Power



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Source: <https://rarehistoricalphotos.com/august-landmesser-1936/>

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Unanimity and Conformity

“Heil Hitler!” illustrates both the coerced and self-assertive aspects of the national revolution in January 1933. It raises questions about the illusory nature of acclamation: since once everyone said ‘Heil Hitler!’ the greeting no longer reliably indicated support for the regime. But much of the power of Nazism rested on the appearance of unanimity, which overwhelmed nonbelievers and prompted them to scrutinize their own reservations. Each raised arm undermined a little bit the ambiguous relations among neighbors and built up a little more the new racial collective of National Socialism.” (Peter Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich*, 2008, 24)



Mortal Storm



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Charismatic Community: “Henchmen” or “inner circle”

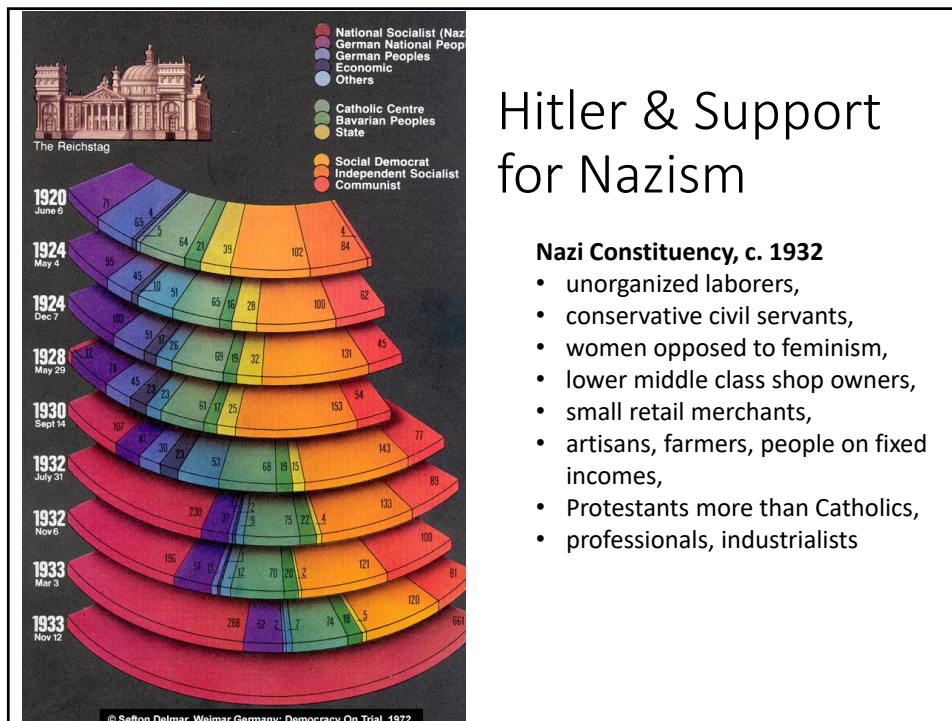
- **Rudolf Hess:** “spoke of ‘the power of personality’ radiating ‘something that puts those around him under its spell and spreads in ever-widening circles.’”
 - **Hans Frank** upon witnessing a Hitler speech: “positively spellbound”.
 - **Josef Goebbels** having read *Mein Kampf*: “Who is this man? Half plebeian, half god! Truly Christ, or only S. John?”
 - **Hermann Göring:** “He saw in him ‘the rare union ... between the most acute logical thinker and truly profound philosopher and the iron man of action.’”
- (Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: Profiles in Power*, 1991, 33-34)

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Testimonials from SA in 1934

- "From this moment, I am born again, I am intoxicated."
- "One thing is certain: from that day on [when I first met Hitler] I had no other purpose than to fight for him until victory was won."
- "I had found myself, my leader and my cause . . . I had given him my soul."

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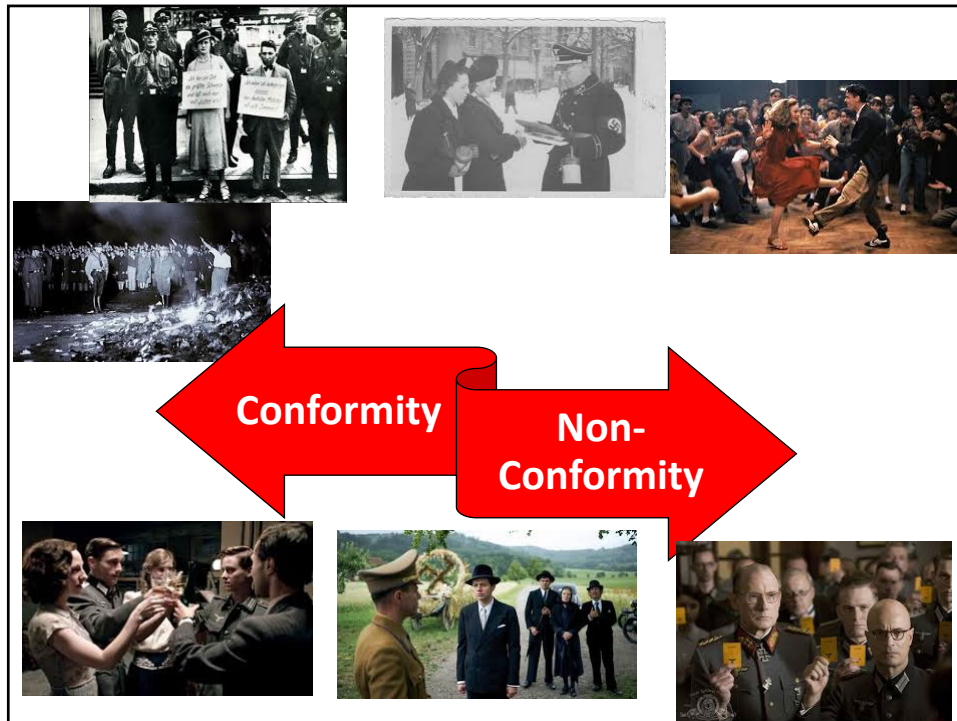


Hitler & Support for Nazism

Nazi Constituency, c. 1932

- unorganized laborers,
- conservative civil servants,
- women opposed to feminism,
- lower middle class shop owners,
- small retail merchants,
- artisans, farmers, people on fixed incomes,
- Protestants more than Catholics,
- professionals, industrialists

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Hitler and “Ordinary Germans”

“As a vast project for social, political, and racial renewal, National Socialism offered the German people a range of ways in which to participate. Germans approached Nazi policies out of fear, opportunism, and careerism, as well as varying degrees of ideological conviction. The list can be extended: citizens were also lazy, indifferent, and ignorant. These various motivations need to stay in view. However, National Socialism exerted strong pressure on citizens to convert, to see the credibility of the people’s community, and to recognize on another as ‘racial comrades.’ The Nazis designed institutional settings, especially in community camps through which millions of Germans passed, to produce this conversion. What this means was that individuals debated for themselves the whole question of *becoming* – of becoming a national Socialist, a comrade, a race-minded German, of remaining true to the old or joining the new. They grappled with questions about the importance of fitting in, the convenience of going along, and the responsibilities the individual owed to the collective.”
 (Peter Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich*, 2008, 8)

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13 Minutes (2015); Director: Oliver Hirschbiegel; Screenplay: Léonie-Claire Breinersdorfer; Fred Breinersdorfer

- [Family Attends Nazified Festival](#)

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Hollywood's Challenges

- Caricature
 - Overstate monstrosity
 - Overstate anti-Semitism
 - Humanization risks normalizing or developing admiration
 - Demonstrate the complexity of historical events, Hitler's charisma, multiple German perspectives
 - Individual characters must represent thousands/millions
- } Why would the Germans follow?



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Playing Hitler in *Max*

- [Noah Taylor plays Hitler in Max](#)

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HITLER: THE RISE OF EVIL

Made for Television Mini-Series
 CBS, Sunday and Tuesday nights at 9,
 Eastern and Pacific times; 8, Central time.
 18 & 20 May 2003

Directed by Christian Duguay;
 Written by Mr. Pielmeier and
 G. Ross Parker

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“The Scottish actor, best known for his roles in *Trainspotting* and *The Full Monty*, is outstanding in this very risky role of the infamous Austrian-turned-German leader.

Where Carlyle succeeds is in making the viewer uncomfortable and very often nervous. His performance is a manic masterpiece as he justly delivers a madman whom is never far from the brink. From his searing, beady eyes, to his marching stride and spittle-punctuated speeches, Carlyle never lets you forget that Hitler was inhuman.”

Dana Gee, “Actor’s manic masterpiece,” *The Vancouver Province*, 18 May 2003.

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“What Carlyle's portrayal lacks, however, is an inkling of what could possibly have led millions to elect Hitler as their leader. In fact, it's hard to understand how Hitler could have persuaded even one of his henchmen -- from Rudolf Hess to Hermann Goering -- that he was capable of leading anything but a goose step straight to the nuthouse. In a phone interview from Toronto, Duguay acknowledges making a movie about Hitler was daunting.

"It's a dangerous area," he says. "Any film about someone who starts from nowhere and rises, there is the danger people think we were glorifying him."

Duguay says filmmakers were "sensitive" to possible fallout from the movie and were careful to put the madman in an appropriate context. "We need to understand it was not him alone who put himself up there, there were people who were responsible for putting him up there," he says. "There were many points at which he could have been stopped.”"

Liane Faulder, “No sympathy for Hitler in mini-series on dictator’s rise,” *The Edmonton Journal*, 17 May 2003

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“The real reason this project was so contested a year ago when it was first announced was something else: few trusted network television to produce a biography that would be historically accurate and emotionally responsible. Television’s inherent need to simplify and overdramatize could not possibly match the sensitivity of the subject, skeptics feared. It turns out that they were right, for the wrong reasons. **"Hitler: The Rise of Evil"** is historically accurate (with some minor exceptions) and it is emotionally responsible. It is not, however, great television. The filmmakers worked so hard to be tasteful and responsible that they robbed their film of suspense, drama and passion. Viewers can learn details about the political intrigue of a devastated Germany after World War I, and perhaps better understand the strains within Hitler's National Socialist Party before 1933. They can learn that twisted relationships with women preceded his love affair with Eva Braun. But the horrifying consequences of his ascent and the broader historical conflicts clashing around him are only hinted at, making the portrait of Germany from 1914 to 1933, when he became Reich Chancellor, interesting but rarely engrossing.”

Alessandra Stanley, “Architect of Atrocity, the Formative years,” *New York Times*, 16 May 2003

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“Actually, John Pielmeier's script never tries to suggest why a native Austrian with dreams of being a painter instead became the man who turned Germany into a fascist genocide machine. Hitler is presented as a full-blown psychotic from the start. And yet, we're somehow supposed to buy that he had a charisma that could make the masses support even the most crushing abuse of civil rights.

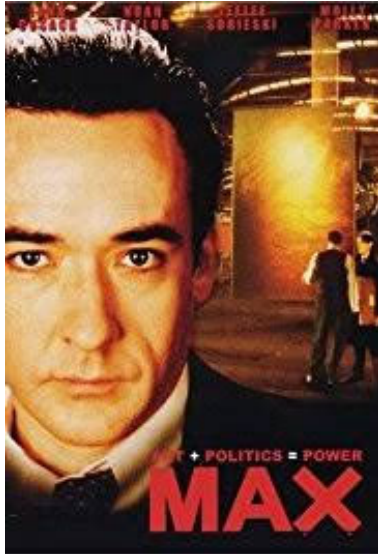
It's unbelievable, especially since star Carlyle (best known as the well-meaning dad in "The Full Monty") has been encouraged to crank the overacting dial to 11. When he's not practicing creepy poses for his speeches, he's literally spitting food and foaming at the mouth, or sexually menacing his niece (the fine Jena Malone, wasted here). By comparison, Carlyle makes Begbie, the scary thug he played in "Trainspotting," look like Mr. Rogers. When CBS announced plans to film "Evil," protests followed from those worried that the miniseries would try to humanize Hitler. Not a problem here. The network apparently heeded those early concerns, in the worst way.

Don't get me wrong. It might have been equally wrongheaded to pin Hitler's motivations on easy Freudian psychologizing: He didn't get enough love, say, or he wet his bed. But in its refusal to view Hitler as anything but a monster, "The Rise of Evil" is nothing more than a political puppet show with swastikas. The citizens of Germany seem to be deaf, dumb, blind and delusional for following him.

The miniseries backs away from suggesting what we would rather not contemplate: that Adolf Hitler was, at least at some point of his life, a human being like everyone else, whose personal history intersected with Germany's in a fatal way.”

Steve Murray, “Caricature of a monster; ‘Hitler’ no history lesson,” *The Atlanta Journal*, 17 May 2003

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Max

Director: Menno Meyjes

Writer: Menno Meyjes

2002

Theatrical Release, British

Fictional account of Hitler as tortured artist; Max Rothman, art dealer and artist, mentors Hitler. Both men are veterans of the Great War.

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"Portraying him not simply as a murderous madman, but as someone with conflicted ideas and conflicting emotions, as much a product of his times as of his delusions.

Portraying Hitler as anything other than a monster, Cusack acknowledges, is something of a risk.

"I sympathize with people who find it uncomfortable," the actor says over the phone from Louisiana, where he's wrapping up work on the screen adaptation of John Grisham's *The Runaway Jury*. "But I don't think it's helpful to look at (the period) in an artificial way. I think it's important that you look at it in a complex way, to see what he did and stop it from happening again. That's the intention."

In the movie, Hitler is portrayed as a man constantly looking to blame his shortcomings on others; thus, his hatred of the Jews, which he insists is not a prejudice on his part, but simply an acknowledgment of the facts (an argument bigots have been making for centuries). Of course, that philosophy becomes problematic when his biggest benefactor turns out to be a Jew. But as Hitler slowly realizes his talent as a painter is not going to sustain him, he begins to take comfort in other types of expression. Speaking at National Socialist rallies, in front of large crowds, he relishes his newfound ability to enthrall people through the power of his voice.

"He did not shy away from (a career as a painter)," Cusack says. "He turned away and ran. He found that he did not have the command (over his art) that he found in other areas."

What's more, Hitler "realizes something even more important: What he says isn't nearly as important as how he says it. The same tortured emotions he had been trying to put on canvas, he can now convey through the timbre of his voice. Demagoguery and propaganda prove quite the rush."

Chris Kellenbach, "No act of madness to make Max," *Edmonton Journal*, 11 April 2003

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“Taylor's Hitler is a German Everyman, still smarting with envy and frustration over the war. A vegetarian who neither drinks nor smokes, Hitler uses anger as a kind of narcotic. Lacking his trademark mustache but with a shaggy wave of hair and a face constantly contorted with rage, Taylor cuts a Brechtian figure, half cartoon and half demented artist, whose creative frenzy blooms only in public expression.”
The Hollywood Reporter, 11 September 2002

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“Surprisingly, the Hitler character isn't a disconnect. Played by a young Australian actor, Noah Taylor, he's all wiry energy, dark and gloomy power, will, twitchy idiocy and seriousness. Meyjes even plays him for comedy -- and hate me for laughing, but it was amusing to see the greatest murderer in history earnestly concerned with the plight of caged birds.

The dynamic between **Max** and Hitler is similarly comic, though there's no evidence it was meant to be so. **Max's** cosmopolitan confidence is continually irked at the smoldering anger and one-pointedness of Hitler. (Something like, "Hitler, always with the politics! Give it a rest!") **Max**, though utterly fictitious, at least feels somewhat authentic: He is like much of the European intelligentsia of the '20s and '30s, viewing the Austrian gloomy Gus with the bad teeth and the absurd ideas as an amusing figure, kitschy even, but essentially harmless.

The dramatic fulcrum of the film is the issue of artistic talent: Did Hitler have any? The movie pretends he did, and makes a great deal of **Max's** seeing "something" there and encouraging the young man to go deeper into himself to find that "authentic" voice. There seems to be an unstated corollary: If only he'd found a way to tap his fury and turn it to creative means, things didn't have to turn out the way they did. But the film doesn't quite play fair, in that the art it uses to represent Hitler's work isn't; it was done by a professional artist.”

Stephanie Hunter, 'Max': Tenderizing Adolf," *The Washington Post*, 7 February 2003

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