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**THE NAZI LEGACY: RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS
IN THE MODERN WORLD**

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***The Nazi Legacy: Rights and Freedoms in the
Modern World***

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The Twentieth Century saw the upsurge in totalitarian regimes that would later provide historical lessons enabling Western societies to understand and value their individual and collective liberties. This essay discusses how Adolf Hitler's Third Reich reconstructed Western perceptions of rights and freedoms, subsequently propagating a moral standard evident in contemporary values and popular culture.

The Third Reich's suppression of liberties and systematic persecution became the reference point for oppression that contemporary societies used to prevent future atrocities, demonstrating the significance of historical events in both understanding and securing individual rights and freedoms. Modern Western civilisation has framed and compared contemporary atrocities and suppression against Adolf Hitler's regime, where Nazism became a topical subject examining the extent to which people can rationalise their inhumane behaviour towards others. The impact of the Third Reich on the development of contemporary Western values and social institutions was significant. Indeed, the Reich's atrocities and imperialism reconstructed Europe's old-world values, prompting their prioritisation of broader human rights and liberties. Subsequent national consciousness movements highlight how the fight for autonomy and human rights gained traction amidst the socio-political climate following World War II (WWII). By undermining Europe's moral authority, committing what historians and contemporary societies consider morally reprehensible acts, the Reich expedited decolonisation. Moreover, Hitler's institutionalisation of National Socialist ideologies capitalised on Germany's pre-existing prejudices. This is particularly topical among academics examining how modern societies attach moral frameworks to the Reich to reduce the likelihood of future mass-scale atrocities. Indeed, popular culture villainises Nazism, attempting to prevent contemporary oppression by upholding the Western moral narrative. The Third Reich's oppression propagated the West's moral authority by reconstructing their perceptions of liberty, underlining the importance of historical understanding in preventing future atrocities.

The Third Reich's racist imperialism undermined the Allies' perceived moral authority and precipitated the West's post-war emphasis on liberty and human rights, underlining the historical basis of the contemporary focus on unity and freedom. Post-war historiography interpreted and framed WWII as a conflict inherently "anticolonial and anti-racist" in nature (Davidson, cited in Myrice 2015), attaching a moral superiority to the Allies as the Western socio-political landscape changed. A notable emergence included President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill's Atlantic Charter. Issued on August 14, 1941, it stated that Allied powers would:

respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live ... [and establish a] peace which will afford to all nations the means of dwelling in safety within their own boundaries ... [and the] assurance that all men in all lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want (*Atlantic Charter* 1941).

The Charter is often "cited by historians" as a fundamental step towards the "formation of the United Nations," an organisation representing human rights and liberties (Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum n.d.). Historiographical interpretations of the Charter illustrate

how post-war attempts to provide a moral justification for the War affected retrospective analyses of Allied motivations. Indeed, at the 1948 Hague Congress of Europe, Nazi Germany's systematised persecution instilled within the attendees the notion that a "European Court of Human Rights should be established," a "movement" initially spurred by the desire to bury the "collaborationist and genocidal aspects of the old world" (Plowright 2007, pg. 157-160). It was in WWII's immediate post-war period that "the new Europe was formed" and many "hopes, aspirations, prejudices and resentments first took shape" (Lowe 2012, p.376). The Treaty of Rome typifies this, establishing the "European Economic Community" that is largely considered a foundational basis of the European Union (Eur-Lex 2017). Historians interpreted these treaties and the Union as typifying post-war Europe's blurring of racial and national barriers, functioning to prevent further large-scale destructive warfare and atrocities. The West's post-war focus on human rights and unity resulted from the Third Reich's imperialism and persecution, representing their goal of preventing further mass-scale atrocities and reinforcing the significance of historical understanding in ensuring contemporary liberties.

The West's post-war moral framework demonstrates that historical understanding expedites change, where the focus on human rights and liberties functioned to prevent future mass-scale conflicts and created a political climate that precipitated national consciousness movements. As conflicts erupted in countries where "nationalists resisted the restoration of European hegemony," most notably in "French Indochina and the Dutch East Indies," Allied commanders suggested that the colonial officials "concede sufficient local autonomy to avert conflict" (Hastings 2012, p.658). Although the French and Dutch rejected this advice, the Allies' shifting anti-colonial attitudes reflected Edward Murrow's (cited in Lowe 2012, pg. 67) claim that the "old values, old prejudices, and the old bases of power and prestige" were incongruent with the West's post-war values and society. Historiography suggests that by upholding the Western moral narrative and rejecting the Reich's hegemonic conquests, Europe gradually recognised that refugees and colonised peoples could not be "forcibly repatriated" and governed "without endangering their life and freedom" (Citroen 1951). This increasingly open-minded attitude of Western nations expedited national consciousness movements. As Harold Macmillan described, post-war Africa was indeed characterised by a "wind of change" and "growth of national consciousness ... [blowing] through the continent" (Chalton and MacArdle 2016, p.143). The United Nations additionally "reformed and ... re-labelled" the League of Nations' mandate system to Trust Territories, eroding the power of colonial nations by enabling Africans to "state any grievances" against them (Myrice 2015). These new-world values endorsing autonomy and condemning racial

persecution highlight how historical understanding contributed to the desire to prevent future atrocities and uphold the Western moral narrative, facilitating national consciousness movements promoting civil liberties and human rights.

Historians emphasise how the Reich's institutionalisation of National Socialist ideologies capitalised on anti-pluralist trends, revealing how certain social environments foster alienation and cautioning of legitimate oppression within modern Western civilisation. Although the "persecution of the Jews is a historical commonplace" (Plowright 2007, p.93), Hitler's persecution at such an immense scale evoked significant discourse surrounding the Reich's legitimisation of Nazi ideologies. Germany's hostility toward foreigners paralleled Britain and France's in the late-nineteenth century, shifting as the "rhetoric of eugenics and racial hygiene" politicised in the early twentieth century (Kennedy 2004). Hitler's regime extended the Weimar Republic's "model of cultures as homogeneous and independent wholes," legitimising the most "brutal forms of Western colonialism" (Wenning 2020). Historians implicate various factors in the Reich's institutionalisation of Nazi ideologies, where surveys revealed that "everyday relations between Jews and non-Jews in Germany deteriorated steadily from 1933 onward" (Evans 2006) despite Jews being well-assimilated into German society (Plowright 2007, p.94). Propaganda, "most successful when it conformed with [Germany's] pre-existing prejudices" (Bartov 1994), was imperative to the Reich's institutionalisation of National Socialism. Carr (2004) underlines how the broader German fear for their "sovereignty" caused them to "embrace" ideologies they would otherwise reject. The "uncertainties" of the Weimar Republic created opportunities for "corporatism and populism" across the political spectrum (Black 2018), facilitating and systematising the alienation of social outsiders. By highlighting how Hitler systematised and institutionalised National Socialist ideologies, historians defined oppression in an effort to prevent contemporary authoritarianism. Conversi (2010) underlines the emergence of "mass political participation" in the twentieth century, highlighting how the Holocaust reflected "dominant" contemporary "trends" through the "rise of rapidly modernising nation-states in the West" that succeeded the "demise of multiethnic empires." By accentuating pre-existing prejudices as pillars enabling Hitler's regime, historians facilitated Western discourse focusing on race, human rights, and suppression, hence promoting awareness of contemporary oppression.

Historical learnings from the Reich's institutionalised atrocities and Nazi ideologies were instrumental in the development of current human rights and liberties, a historical reference used to prevent future mass-scale oppression. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union,

historiography examined how “stick-and-carrot policies” provide “insights on modern societies in general,” investigating the totalitarian capacity to “attract and bind people” (Spode 2004). As the century progressed, historians emphasised the plurality of modern democracies, a direct response to the comparatively homogeneous state that Hitler and other authoritarian dictators, such as Joseph Stalin, established. Kugler (2019) argues that historical empathy emphasises “differences between the present world” and Hitler’s old-world prejudices, postulating that this is “essential to the health of pluralistic democracies.” Carr (2004) supports this notion, stating that the “perceived psychopathology of some national Other” enables “barbarous ideologies” to “manifest themselves” into society. He draws parallels between Germany and the United States’ myths, where Manifest Destiny and the Bush Administration’s War on Terror were arguably “iteration[s] of apocalyptic and Manichean worldviews” (Carr 2004). Western societies’ emphasis on human rights and liberties directly responded to the Reich’s institutionalisation of Nazi ideologies and atrocities, illustrating how Nazism was critical to the contemporary effort to prevent further atrocities.

Historical academia and remembrance additionally responded to the impact of the Reich on human rights and liberties, illustrating the continued post-war effort to prevent similar mass-scale atrocities. Sierp (2020) examines the Munich Documentation Centre for the History of National Socialism as a model typifying how the amalgamation of “respectful remembrance and critical interpretation” of atrocities reveals the increasing desire to add “a moral framework to the narration of terrible historical events.” As the War moves from history “offered within the individual memory” to that “provided by collective memory,” historiography and commemoration sites stress the significance of remaining critically aware of the Reich’s atrocities to avoid repeating them (Black 2018). By keeping WWII historically topical through academia and remembrance ceremonies, historians seek to create a “moral public that will work to prevent future violence, intolerance and hatred” (Sierp 2020). Post-war society desperately “need[s] its Nazis, and for its Nazis to be evil” (Carr 2014), framing their ideologies and policies within a moral framework that functions to help prevent totalitarianism and future atrocities structured along social differences. Scholarly discourses and critical remembrance emphasise human rights and liberties by highlighting the Reich’s legitimisation of atrocities and National Socialist ideologies, typifying the contemporary effort to prevent totalitarianism and mass persecution through historical understanding.

Post-war Western popular culture characterised the Third Reich with depraved archetypes, utilising the Reich as a moral benchmark demonising totalitarianism and mass-scale persecution to

prevent contemporary oppression. Archetypical Nazis epitomise “the most prominent function of Nazism, ... posit[ing] our ... moral superiority to what we would like to think of as a historical aberration and a nightmare” (Buttsworth & Abbenhuis 2010). As Nazism proliferated post-war Western popular culture, the Reich became synonymous with evil and humanity’s capacity for misdeeds. Hollywood’s antagonists, fundamentally opposed to Western values, typify this, where historiography reveals the villainization of Germans and, throughout the Cold War, Soviets. Utilising the conventional ‘good’ versus ‘evil’ narrative within popular culture, Western societies upheld their moral and militaristic superiority to Fascism, Communism and Nazism. Throughout America’s domestic and international turmoil, namely the “McCarthy era, civil and women’s rights struggles,” and international conflicts, Nazi stereotyping was particularly effective (Aube 1998). Mass media condemned “racism, imperial belligerence” and “authoritarianism ... to attack enemies of the state” while reinforcing the West’s moral superiority (Johnson 2010). However, contemporary representations of Nazis and Nazism are contentious within historiography, where the Reich has lost historical accuracy. Johnson (2010) encapsulates this, stating how Nazis ranging from “feminazis, crypto-Nazis, safety Nazis, Nazis in *Schindler’s List*, ... [and] Nazis in *Inglorious Basterds*” define the “moral position of evil” without anything “constant to define them.” Despite this, Hitler’s totalitarianism, fundamentally antithetical to Western democracy, and mass-scale persecution moulded a society that “contextualised its ethics to become more open-minded” (Johnson 2010). As popular culture demonstrates, Nazism epitomises the ‘evil’ oppositions to Western culture and ethics, demonstrating how depictions of history functioned to prevent contemporary reincarnations of the Reich while upholding the Western moral narrative.

The Third Reich, through its mass-scale persecution and hegemonic ambitions, precipitated a war that would ultimately reconstruct Europe’s values. The Reich’s aggressive imperialism shifted Europe’s old-world values, enabling the establishment of international organisations and policies advocating for broader human rights, the move towards decolonisation, and the growth of national consciousness movements. The systematisation and institutionalisation of Nazi ideologies in German society encouraged historiographical discourse examining how similar values could potentially emerge in contemporary society. Popular culture, by villainising Nazism, was an important medium used to demonise Nazism while simultaneously upholding and glorifying the Western moral standard. The Third Reich’s impact on contemporary values is evident today in the liberties within Western democracies, where the global response to Hitler’s oppressive regime highlights the enduring significance of historical understanding in securing contemporary rights and freedoms.

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Critical Annotation: This source analyses how Hitler achieved cultural Nazification using national myths and racial scapegoating, examining how this suppression of civil liberties similarly manifested within modern societies despite the contemporary demonisation of Nazism. Although this article broadly informed the thesis of this essay, its investigation into the relationship between contemporary ideologies and Nazism developed key arguments regarding the West's cultural and moral reliance on the villainization of Nazis.

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Critical Annotation: This dissertation critically examines how Nazism has become ubiquitous in ethical arguments within American culture, investigating its political usage and highlighting how the term 'Nazism' has become synonymous with evil. Although this source was not relevant to this essay's discussion of Western post-war values, it informed central arguments regarding how the demonisation of Nazism in popular culture upholds the Western moral narrative and condemns the suppression of civil liberties. Written to fulfil the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy and published by the University of Massachusetts, this source indicatively has a high level of reliability.

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