Hitler?S Rise To Power Essay, Research Paper

Hitler’s Rise To Power

Who or what was responsible for Hitler’s rise to power? Many believe that there was only one factor for his rise to power. Some state that Hitler could not have risen to power in any other than Germany, implying that he was nothing more than a product of German culture. Others say that Hitler made himself dictator by means of his political genius. And yet still others claim that it was the weak democratic government of the Weimar Republic or Germany’s social and economic scene in the 1930’s that made the people restless and ready for a dictator to come to power. There was no sole cause for Hitler’s rise to power. There were two. The political and economic chaos of the 1920’s and the 1930’s joined forces with German culture that enabled Hitler to rise to power. Both play an equal part. Together, both reasons fit together like pieces of a puzzle, to create a unique situation for Hitler’s rise.

Hitler was in part a product of German culture. German culture stands out as particularly aggressive and racist. The values and ideas found in this culture’s history

inspired Hitler to do many things that he did and can explain in part why he felt the way he did on certain issues (Stern).

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Hundreds of years before Hitler emerged, German philosophers and artist preached an almost religious worship of the state. They discussed the idea of the master race, and created a mythology of German heroism that encouraged loyalty to the group and glorified death for the country. Hitler and many Germans like him, was an enthusiastic student of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel who argued that the State “has the supreme right against the individual, whose supreme duty is to be a member of the State.” Hegel foresaw in the early 1800’s that “Germany’s hour” would come and that the country’s mission would be to redevelop the world. A German hero would complete this mission (Landry).

Like Hegel, another German philosopher more directly portrayed the conventionality and obedience necessary for a secure State. Heinrich von Treitschke espoused that it was of no consequence what you thought about anything, just as long as you obeyed German law. Germany’s tradition also produced Friedrich Nietzsche who preached the coming of a master race and the superman who would conquer, impose a glorified state, and purify the master race. Finally, German legends were full of heroes and heroines like Hagen, Siegfried, and Brunhild, who were so superbly depicted in Richard Wagner’s opera, the Nibelungenlied. Heroes such as those, inspired Germans including Hitler, to think of themselves as larger than life and capable of bringing great glory to Germany through both life and death (Thomas, Landry, Bruch, Richard Wagner on the Web).

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In addition to German philosophers and artists, Germany, more than any other state in Europe, had a history of militarism that ran deep. Great warriors like Frederick III inspired the creation of 18th and 19th century Prussia, laying the roots of 20th century

Germany. The Prussian state was put together on the design of conquest and was lead by a cruelly disciplined army and a narrow bureaucracy that strictly followed commands without question. The classic picture of the Nazi soldier following traditional values with his fellow soldiers was born in this Prussian past that was always highly militaristic, conventional, and hungry for conflict (Frederick of Prussia).

With this aggressive past, it was inevitable that Anti-Semitism—hatred towards the Jews—would be rooted deep in German culture for centuries. Hitler was not the origin of this prejudice. Jews were looked down upon for many reasons. They were often bankers or held positions that dealt with money. Their customs made them stand out from other Germans and many Germans believed that Jews had more devotion to their religion than to their state. The Jews religion was alien to the German’s, which was predominantly Christian. German myths often glorified blonde, blue-eyed heroes—a start contrast to the usually darker colored Jew. This violent hatred of the Jews was sung in German operas, written in German philosophy and later, embraced by its leaders (Levy/Hitler). German culture is by nature racist, militaristic, and anti-Semitic. Germany was an opportune place for Hitler to come to power. This is one of the few cultures that could have produced such a hateful aggressor.

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Not only did Germany’s culture help Hitler come to power, but also Germany’s social and economic scene in the 1930’s was desperate and ready for a dictator to emerge. German people, feeling confused by the social and economic chaos of the 1920’s and 1930’s could do nothing but gravitate towards someone like Hitler. Hitler had answers for them He promised to restore order and greatness. Almost anyone could have stepped in his place, spoke the same words, and achieved the same hold over the people as Hitler did. (Stern).

First and most important, Germany experienced severe economic distress in the wake of the Versailles Treaty. Inflation brought the major crisis of this period because it caused the value of German money to fall dramatically, so much that German printing presses had difficulty providing enough paper currency to keep up with the daily rise in prices. Money was literally not worth the paper it was printed on. Many had to sell their most precious belongings to buy just a bit of food or an absolutely necessary toiletry. Those people never forgot the hardships they endured and were the first to lend a willing ear to Hitler’s passionate preaching. Bewildered and penniless, without jobs due to high prices, the Germans were open to anyone who promised to bring back social order and economic control. Hitler promised both of these things (Jochen, Effects of World War I).

Now people were left no alternative but Hitler’s dictatorship. They blamed the democrats of the Weimar Republic who betrayed them at Versailles and brought about the social and economic disorder of the 1920’s and 1930’s. The other choice was communism. To be communist during this period, however, meant that one had to identify with Russia and the radical working class who were striking throughout

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Germany and, in the eyes of most Germans, causing even greater chaos. Communists were a borderline group just as the Jews. Neither of these groups—democrats and communists—appealed to most Germans. Hitler’s tyranny filled the void (Effects of World War I).

Hitler gave the German people a reason to be proud again. He lighted the nationalistic fire inside the German people that was burnt out for so long. German pride and confidence were shattered in the war-guilt clause at the Treaty of Versailles, and the nation was seeking ways that would restore that lost pride. The German people would have supported almost any candidate who could have made them feel as Hitler did. They wanted to feel good about themselves and about their country so they opened their arms to the person who made them feel this way (Building Up German Hegemony In Central Europe 1933-1938).

Yet another important ally of Hitler was big business. Fearful of the communist worker riots exploding all over Germany and anxious to rebuild from the economic disaster of the 1930’s, capitalists saw Hitler as one politician who would not hold up business. To ensure his success, they supported him financially (Turner)

Hitler was not entirely responsible for his rise to power. He was in the right place (Germany), at the right time. Dismayed by the economic chaos of the depression and the social chaos of the workers riots, the German citizens were desperate for anyone who would bring back order. It did not occur to the German people what the price might be for allowing such a man as Hitler to rise to power (Effects of World War I, Building Up German Hegemony In Central Europe 1933-1938).

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German culture and the social and economic chaos of the 1920’s and the 1930’s answer why Hitler rose to power in Germany, why he believed the things he did, and why the German people accepted such a man with open arms. Hitler essentially was a product of the German culture that he was raised into, that stands out as particularly aggressive and racist. He came to power at a time when people were so anxious for someone to take control over the chaos and madness of the economic and social scene, that the German people did not think about the consequences of letting someone like Hitler have that much power. The German culture molded Hitler into the man he was and the social and economic situation of the 20’s and 30’s enabled him to come to power.

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