

## Nazi Propaganda in the USA during the Second World War

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### Abstract

Considering the huge impact that Nazi Propaganda brought to Nazi's enemies during the Second World War, this paper will discuss Nazi Propaganda in the United States particularly. The following content is divided into three dimensions, the public, the politicians and American soldiers, based on different target groups in the Nazi propaganda. Research shows that Nazis reached a wide-ranging propaganda in the United States that Nazis made huge efforts to devote leaflets and documents to constructing the positive image of Nazi Party. Another success factor of the propaganda shown in the research is that Nazis used different materials to shake American's belief when spreading propaganda, which was pointed and effective. Nazi Propaganda research focusing on countries outside Germany can provide different views for academic research about this topic and also augment the importance of Nazi Propaganda.

### Keywords

Nazi Propaganda, The United States, Target groups.

### 1. Introduction

Nazi propaganda was considered as one of the most important political strategies of the Nazi Party during the Second World War. The propaganda was first used in the Germany by the Party for inciting Germans but later became the weapon attacking enemies as well. During the war, Nazi Party tried to spread propaganda towards many of their enemies, including Britain and the USA. There are already many related studies discussing the Nazi propaganda, especially about those inside Germany. It is also widely agreed that the Nazi propaganda played an essential role in early success of the Nazism during the war. However, the previous research has not paid enough attention to propaganda outside Germany. Nazi propaganda in the USA was not only brought by Nazi Party from Germany, but also spread by the Third Reich's supporters in the USA. Unsurprisingly, there were lots of Nazi sympathizers in the USA, who were called as Hitler's American friends. Through the attempts led by both Nazi Party from Germany and Hitler's American friends, the Nazis had a wide-ranging, and apparently quite influential, propaganda effort in the United States.

### 2. Propaganda Aiming at the Public

Nazi propaganda filtrated into public cultural and religious life. Inside the USA, there were numbers of Americans who supported Hitler or fascist-style ideas. There existed political organizations like German American Bund, which claimed to support the Third Reich, as well as some public figures such as Charles Lindbergh who was considered as Nazi sympathizer. Apart from supporters from the politics, there were also other supporters called Hitler's American Friends according to Bradley Hart, a historian from America. These supporters, however, focused more on cultural or religious life of the public and tried to spread propaganda into daily entertainment life.

Concerning about the religious life, there was a Detroit Priest Father called Charles. E. Coughlin, who was one of the most popular media figures amongst the United States during the war

time.[1] He was in charge of a popular radio weekends program. In the program, he defended Nazi Germany policies towards Jewish population and criticized Roosevelt Government at the same time. But what really made his voice unique was his religious messages. According to Hart, Coughlin's popularity largely laid with Irish and German immigrants on the East Coast who were deeply influenced by the Great Depression. Therefore, Coughlin self-proclaimed as their spokesman and spread propaganda amongst the public and tried to indoctrinate the fascist-style ideas. During the war, Coughlin and other supporters from Catholic claimed to the public that "America should play no role" [1] in the World War since it was only the reaction developed in the old European World and was the fault of Jewish people. These controversial opinions arouse the attention of US government, which can be seen as the evidence that Coughlin and his followers reached a certain influence towards the public so that the government could not ignore them.

As for the cultural life, Nazi Party also made some attempts to control the public opinion through propaganda. According to *The Nazi plot to exterminate Hollywood*, written by Ross Steven, Hitler and Nazi Party once tried to assassinate film stars and studio heads in the Hollywood right before the Second World War. The killing list included many famous people such as Chaplin, Jack Benny, who had huge impact in the society. The assassination plan was raised by Joseph Gobbles, the Nazi propaganda Minister. He considered Los Angeles as the most dangerous city in America, even more than New York since Jews ruled the motion picture industry in this place and tried to spread their ideas throughout the world. [2] However, this plan ultimately failed because of prevention from the Jewish people in Los Angeles. They noticed that Nazi Germany's attempts for reaching so-called 100% purity in Hollywood, which meant Nazis unemployed many below-the-line Jewish workers back in 1935.[2] Therefore, they established an organization to collect the evidences of Nazis plans and submitted them to the government so that successfully foiled the Nazi plots. Although this propaganda plan failed, it is still reasonable to consider Nazi propaganda as a wide-ranging strategy since Nazi Party included Hollywood, the world's biggest propaganda machine, in their plan scope.

According to the two cases mentioned above, it is clear that Nazi propaganda in the USA was promoted by different groups of Nazis that some were American supporters of Nazism and some were Nazi Party in Germany. What's more, the effort they made to spread the propaganda to convert Americans to a prejudicial and hateful ideology in the fields of culture and religion was very influential since there were few forces more powerful than religion and culture when talking about the public.

### **3. Effort to Interfere Political Battle in the US**

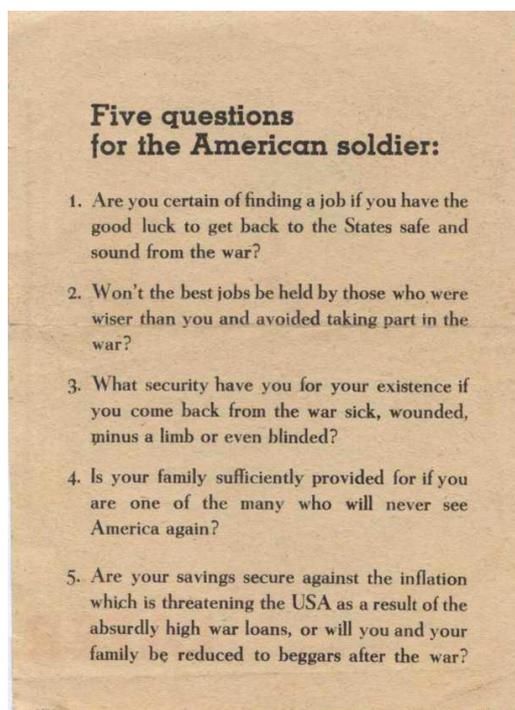
Nazis also intended to control the domestic political situation in the US through instructions directly sent from Germany. Since the government was the center of making decisions about whether to continue the war or not, congress and political battles were the targets of the propaganda. To make better strategies when conducting propaganda, Nazi Party's Central Propaganda Office sent monthly bulletins for speakers in the US as instructions. The bulletins cannot be seen as typical material of propaganda, they were more like background information or situation analysis prepared for the speakers. According the one collected in the German Propaganda Archive, *Democratic Apostles of Peace*, the context was referring to the attitudes towards war from previous and present US presidents and also American people. Looking into this guideline, the office provided some tips for the speakers. It was mentioned in the bulletin that all Americans, regardless of the political standpoint, admired George Washington, the First American president.[3] Therefore, when conducting the propaganda, it is not wise to attack the opinion of him. Conversely, America society was in fierce debates about Roosevelt's administration, that American people rejected president's plan and told their president not to

interfere in the affairs of the other countries.[3] This was consistent with Nazi's goal of propaganda, so the office conveyed this idea in the bulletin.

Compared to the propaganda towards the public mentioned before, propaganda inside the political battle of America was far more complicated and energy-consuming since it needed meticulous logic and thoughtful plan rather than printed and spread straight forward slogans or leaflets.

#### 4. Propaganda Amongst American Soldiers Through Leaflets

The Nazis had a wide-ranging and quite successful propaganda campaign inside the United States. Among all the targets of the propaganda, soldiers were at their priority. Germany tried to control and encourage American soldiers to surrender through giving out leaflets of propaganda in the frontline of the battlefields. Since these soldiers were directly involved in the cruel and bloody war where they witnessed thousands of deaths in the battlefields every day, they were even more psychologically fragile than normal people. Therefore, Nazis decided to give out leaflets with inflammatory slogans to persuade surrender.

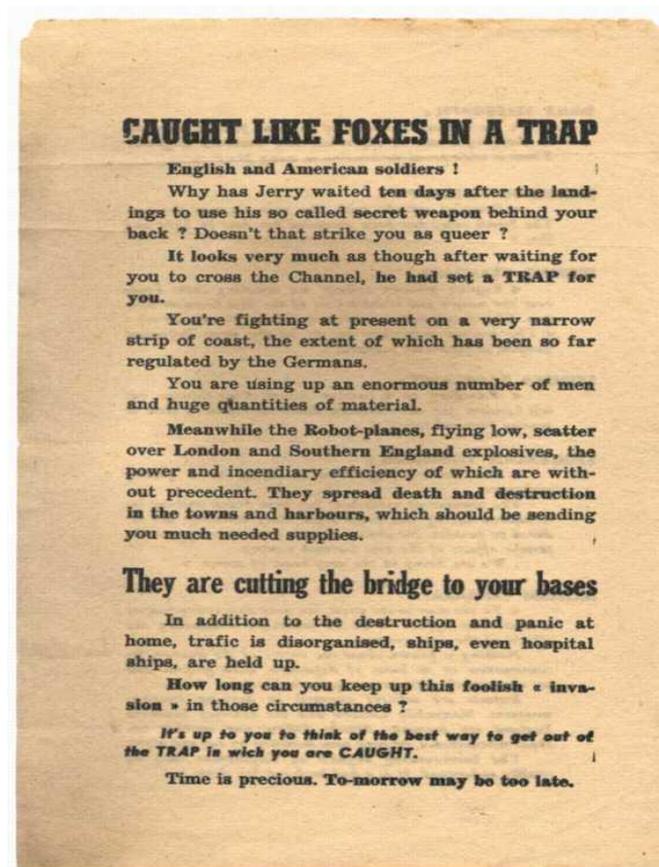


**Figure 1.** A leaflet to encourage surrender. Image available in Eric Best, "Nazi Leaflets for American Soldiers in 1944." German Propaganda Archive [4] Page copyright by Randall L. Bytwerk.

As the picture shown above, one of these leaflets printed five questions for the American soldiers, which used families to threaten soldiers by asking questions that "Are you certain of finding a job if you have the good luck to get back to the States safe and sound from the war" or "Is your family sufficiently provided if you are one of the many who will never see America again?"[4] These questions are closely related to the domestic circumstance in the United States that the country just started to recover from the great depression which led to huge economic and living problems among the normal people. Thousands and millions of families lost their jobs and suffered from the starvation. What made things worse was that during the war, American soldiers in the frontline could not access to the domestic information easily. Considering this situation, the Nazis tried to attack the point that American soldiers worried

the most by pointing out the surviving problems directly in the leaflets. Therefore, it was more likely to shake the morale of the army since the soldiers might start to worry about their own future and also the survival of their families. After asking these sharp questions, the opposite side of the leaflet Nazis incited these soldiers with slogans "Escape from the bloody business" and "This will conduct you safely through our lines"[4]. These leaflets focused on the weakness of American soldiers.

Except for the family mentioned above, the context of leaflets also covered some deceptive analysis about the war situation.



**Figure 2.** Image available in Eric Best, "Nazi Leaflets for American Soldiers in 1944." German Propaganda Archive [4] Page copyright by Randall L. Bytwerk.

As the leaflet shown above, in 1944, the Nazis tried to persuade American soldiers that the V-1 rocket will turn the tide of the war since soldiers in the frontline did not have enough information about the whole war situation. What's more, few of soldiers had the ability to analyze the war situation technically or from the strategy level. Most of the soldiers were merely obeying the orders.

According to these leaflets, it is plausible to believe that Nazi propaganda in the battlefields was aiming at persuading American soldiers to surrender by attacking their psychological weakness and brainwashing.

## 5. Conclusion

Nazi propaganda was one of the most important tools used by Nazis to attack hostile countries. By spreading propaganda in the United States, Nazis tried to convert American with their Anti-Semitism ideology and also tried to change the tide of the Second World War. Aiming at different targets, Nazis spread cultural and religious concepts to instigate the public to support Nazism.

In the political battle, Nazis tried to control key characters in the congress and also sent construction from Germany to guide Nazis in the United States to spread propaganda more effectively. As for the soldiers, inflammatory leaflets were used as weapons to shake soldiers and persuade surrender. If only concerning about the propaganda, it can be seen as a successful effort since it indeed covered the majority of the American society and indoctrinated many Nazis ideologies. Although the final outcome of the war proved the failure of Nazism, the propaganda left a profound impact in the war history. The Nazi propaganda covered so many countries and regions that the United States was merely a small part of it. However, the meaning of discussing the case of a successful propaganda effort in the US is to provide a different thinking which jumped out of the situation inside Germany and focused more on international situation when talking about the topic of Nazi propaganda.

## References

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