



AP European History Seminar

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Period 4

Prompt



- Analyze the ways in which technology and mass culture contributed to the success of dictators in the 1920's and the 1930's.

Background: from conservative authoritarianism to totalitarianism



- Conservative authoritarianism regimes were an old story in Europe & radical, totalitarianism in Europe was a new & frightening development.
- A key difference between conservative authoritarianism & totalitarianism was that the totalitarian state used modern technology & communications to exercise complete political power.
- The goal was to take complete control the social, intellectual, and cultural aspects of people's lives & dictators would utilize technology & mass culture to achieve this.



Hitler, Stalin, & Mussolini

Background Information: movies & radio

- Throughout the 1920's the general public embraced movies & radio enthusiastically.
- The movie factories & stars such as Mary Pickford, Lillian Gish, Douglas Fairbanks, Rudolph Valentino & Charlie Chaplin created a new medium & a new culture.
- Movie going became a form of escapism & the main entertainment of the masses.
- Radio, which became possible with Marconi's "wireless" communication & the development of the vacuum tube, permitted transmission of speech & music, but major broadcasting did not begin until 1920.
- Countries then began to establish national broadcasting networks; by the late 1930's 3 out of 4 households in Germany had a radio.
- Soon leaders, presidents, & dictators would use this technology for political propaganda.



Marconi's radio



Typical 1920's theater

Vladimir Ilych Lenin



- Leader of Russia & the Bolsheviks, Lenin himself encouraged the development of Soviet film making, believing that the new medium was essential to the social & ideological transformation of the country.
- He utilized motion pictures as a powerful tool of indoctrination.
- Beginning in the mid-1920's, a series of epic films, the most famous of which were directed by Sergei Eisenstein, brilliantly dramatized the communist view of Russian history.



Sergei Eisenstein

Joseph Stalin



- Under Stalin, Russian culture lost its autonomy in the 1930's & became thoroughly politicized through constant propaganda & indoctrination.
- Newspapers, films, & radio broadcasts endlessly recounted socialist achievements & plots.
- Earlier experimentation with art, theater, & literature came to an end by order of Stalin.
- Art in the Stalinist era generally followed the official doctrine of socialist realism representing objects in a literal style & celebrating Soviet achievements.
- It became important for the writer & artist to glorify Russian nationalism in order to become successful.
- Russian history was re-written so that early tsars such as Ivan the Terrible & Peter the Great became fore-runners of the powerful Stalin.



Benito Mussolini



- After becoming dictator of Italy in 1922, Mussolini abolished freedom of the press.
- Mussolini had complete control of the airwaves & could reach audiences with his frequent, dramatic speeches.
- Used several popularized slogans in order to promote his fascist organizations.
 - Famous slogan of 1926: “Everything in the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state.”
- He also controlled & propagandized labor.



“the leader of all victories”

Adolf Hitler



- He was a master of mass propaganda & political showmanship.
- His most effective tool was the mass rally where he often worked his audience into a frenzy with frequent attacks on his oppositions.
- Hitler turned to a young & immensely talented woman film maker, Leni Riefenstahl for a masterpiece documentary propaganda, *The Triumph of The Will*, based on the Nazi party rally of Nuremberg 1934.
- Riefenstahl combined stunning aerial photography, joyful crowds welcoming Hitler & mass processions of young Nazi fanatics.
- This powerful documentary of “Germany’s Nazi Rebirth” was a dangerous instrument of political manipulation.
- Posters & ads promoted the VE-301 receiver “the world’s cheapest radio” in order for more people to be able to listen to whatever Hitler had to say.
- Constantly broadcasting official views & attitudes, the state-controlled media put the Nazis favorite entertainment, Hitler’s violent theatrical speeches, all over the radio.
- He used a few endlessly repeated phrases as propaganda such as “national rebirth”
- Hitler appeared to the youth by using slogans such as “National Socialism is the organized will of the youth”, which were written all over posters.
- The uniforms & the use of the swastika symbol were also a way of popularizing Hitler as well as the state.

Adolf Hitler



Hitler pictured with film maker,
Leni Riefenstahl



Ad promoting the VE-301
radio



Scene from *Triumph of The Will*

In Conclusion...



Leaders of dictatorial regimes such as Lenin, Stalin, Mussolini & Hitler were all able to use technology & mass culture to gain more power for themselves. They were able to take complete control of the media. The new availability of the radio as well as film was well-suited for political propaganda. People would tune-in to their radio or go to theater to listen & watch their radical leaders. Posters & slogans were also helpful when trying to gain popularity & glorify the state. All of this served as instruments of political manipulation and many uncertain individuals surrounded by thousands of captivated listeners, found a sense a belonging as well as hope for better times.