Objective: To be able to analyze the main events that occurred in Adolf Hitler’s life that caused him to become the Totalitarian, Fascist and Racist leader of Nazi Germany.

Despite all that has been said, popular memory reveals that of all the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century, none was more terrifying than that of Nazi Germany. As a product of Hitler, Germany's social and political situation, and the general attack on liberalism, Nazi Germany emerged rapidly after 1933 when Hitler came to power. The Nazis smashed all independent organizations, mobilized the economy and began the systematic extermination of the Jewish and other non-German populations.

The story of Hitler is well-known -- there is an entire Hitler *industry* of book publishing these days, unmatched only by books on the JFK assassination. Why this might be the case is rather obvious. Hitler seemed to be evil incarnate. So too was Stalin. But then again, the west did not fight a war, not a hot one, at least, against Stalin. We also have more information regarding the Nazis than we do Stalin, whose regime was always clouded in secrecy. The Nazis, on the other hand, kept good records. In his now classic work, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich, William  Shirer mentions that in 1945 the U.S. First Army seized 485 tons of records of the German Foreign Office in the Harz Mountains as they were about to be burned on orders from Berlin. Such a figure, it must be added, represents only part of the whole.

Hitler was born in Austria in 1889. He dropped out of school at age 14 and then spent four years as a tramp before he left his home for Vienna to become an [artist](http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/riseofhitler/art.htm). He applied to the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts and was denied admission. He was told he had no artistic talent. Back on the streets, the tramp Hitler began to absorb a nationalist ideology. In Vienna he discovered that the Germans were a superior race of people and the natural masters of the inferior races of Europe. He also learned his anti-Semitism, racism and hatred of all Slavic people. An ex-monk by the name of Lanz von Liebenfels inspired Hitler's twisted Darwinism. Liebenfels stressed the superiority of the Germans, the inevitability of racial conflict and the inferiority of the Jews. The master race, by its very nature, had to grow. Selective breeding and the systematic sterilization of inferior races was the answer.

When [war](http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/riseofhitler/warone.htm) broke out in 1914, Hitler believed he had found salvation. The struggle and discipline of war gave meaning to Hitler's life. Life was struggle and so too was war. What better atmosphere for Hitler to further develop his nationalist and social Darwinist sentiments. But when defeat came in 1918, Hitler's world was shattered. The war had been his reason for living. What could have happened? Well, for Hitler, the Jews and Marxists had stabbed Germany in the back. Therefore, these parasitic intellectuals ought to be removed.

Back home following the war, Hitler began to make wild speeches to small audiences in the streets. He didn't care if many people heard him out, only that he could articulate his message of anti-Semitism and German nationalism. And people did listen to Hitler. And they began to take seriously what he gestured on the streets. By 1921, Hitler had become the leader of a small but growing political party. It is interesting to note that Hitler shared very little of the interests of this party, instead, he simply took it over because he needed a party of his own. The [German Workers' Party](http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/riseofhitler/joins.htm) denounced all Jews, Marxists and liberals. They promised national socialism. They used propaganda and theatrical rallies. They wore special badges and uniforms and as they marched, robotlike, through the streets of Münich, they rendered their special salute. Most effective of all their tools was the mass rally -- a rally made for mass man. Songs were sung, slogans were cast about. It was a revivalist movement, or at least it had the atmosphere of a religious revival. Hitler was a charismatic speaker and easily worked his audiences up into a frenzy.

Party membership began to grow. In 1923, Hitler launched a [plot](http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/riseofhitler/putsch.htm) to march on Münich, a plot that eventually failed and sent Hitler to prison for five years. At his trial, Hitler presented his own program to solve Germany's problems. The audience listened and he began to attract their attention. He dared utter what everyone knew all along but were afraid to express. A new wave of converts began to side with the German Workers' Party. While in prison, Hitler wrote [*Mein Kampf*](http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/riseofhitler/kampf.htm). Its basic themes were German racial superiority, virulent anti-Semitism, the concept of *Lebensraum*, or living space, pan-Germanism and the necessity of yet another war. The Nazis now had their Bible.

By 1928, the Nazi Party now had 100,000 members and Hitler had absolute control. The Nazis were still a marginal political group but world events in 1929 and 1930 produced a new mania for the Hitler program. Unemployment stood at 1.3 million in 1929. The following year, it had risen to 5 million while industrial production in 1932 fell by more than 50%. In that same year, 43% of all Germans were unemployed. Hitler now began to promise Germany economic salvation as well as military and political restitution for the "[war guilt clause](http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/imt/partvii.htm)" specified at Versailles. He focused on the middle and lower middle classes---the office workers, civil servants and teachers. These were the people who had barely survived through the period of wild inflation following World War One. These were the people who were begging for salvation.

The Nazis also made their appeal to [GERMAN YOUTH](http://www.historyguide.org/europe/youth.html). Hitler and his aides were, in general, much younger than other leading politicians. In 1931, for instance, 40% of all Nazis were under thirty years of age, 70% were under 40. This is quite different from what we would find in Stalinist Russia at the same time. National recovery, rapid change and personal advancement formed the main appeal of the Nazi Party. By 1932, Hitler had gained the support of key people in the army and in big business. These individuals thought they could use Hitler for their own financial interests. So, they accepted Hitler's demand to join the government only if he became Chancellor. Since the government was a coalition consisting of two Nazis and nine conservatives, they reasoned that Hitler could be used and controlled. And so, on January 30th, 1933, Hitler legally became the [Chancellor of Germany](http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/riseofhitler/named.htm).

Hitler moved quickly to establish a dictatorship. He used terror to gain power while maintaining an air of legality throughout. He called for new elections to Parliament and then had the Parliament building [burned to the ground](http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/riseofhitler/burns.htm). He blamed the Communists for this act thus helping to get them out of the way and out of any possible public following. He convinced President Hindenburg to sign an emergency act that [1] abolished the freedom of speech and [2] abolished the freedom of assembly. On March 23, 1933, the Nazis pushed the [Enabling Act](http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/riseofhitler/dictator.htm) through Parliament, thus making Hitler dictator for a period of four years. Communist Party members were arrested, the Catholic Center Party withdrew all opposition and the Social Democratic Party was dissolved. So it was that Germany, like Soviet Russia under Stalin, became a one party State.

In the economic sphere, all strikes were made illegal and unions were abolished. The members of professional organizations such as doctors, lawyers, professors and engineers were swallowed up in Nazi-based organizations. In the cultural sphere, the press now feel under total state control. Blacklisting became the rule, books were burned, modern art was prohibited and anti-intellectualism became the rule of the day.

Hitler promised the German people work and bread and he delivered both. As most shrewd politicians are capable, Hitler gave the people what they wanted the most. He launched a massive public works program to pull Germany out of the Depression. Superhighways, office buildings, huge stadiums and public buildings were constructed at a rapid pace. By 1936, however, government spending was now being directed almost entirely to the military, necessary for the coming war Hitler had already specified in *Mein Kampf*. Meanwhile, unemployment dropped steadily. In January 1937, unemployment stood at 7 million. Twelve months later it had fallen to 1 million and by 1938, Germany witnessed a shortage of labor. The standard of living increased by 20% and business profits were finally increasing.

What all this recovery showed was that Hitler was more than show -- he was no Mussolini who made the trains run on time. No, Hitler had accomplished something for Germany and the German people. For those Germans who were not Jews, Slavs, Gypsies or communists, liberals, non-Germans, or insane or weak, Hitler's government meant greater opportunity and greater equality. Older class barriers were replaced by individuals who, like Hitler, were rootless and had risen to the top. The Nazis tolerated privilege and wealth, but only when it served the Party. Big business was constantly ordered around thus making, once again, the invisible hand of Adam Smith, a thing of the past. Of course, you can identify a similar tendency in the United States with the New Deal and Stalin's Five Year Plans in Soviet Russia. Planning was, in other words, essential.

Although economic recovery and increased opportunity won Hitler support, Nazism was totally guided by two main ideas: *Lebensraum* and race. As Germany regained economic strength and built up its military, Hitler formed alliances with other dictators and began to expand. Meanwhile, western Europe simply sat back and tried to appease Hitler in order to avoid another World War.

War did break out in 1939 for one specific reason -- Hitler's ambitions were without limit. Stalin's Russia and Hitler's Germany rejected all liberal ideas. They tried to subordinate everything to the State. Basic human rights were subjected to brutality and to terror. Whereas Stalin, however, was content to extend his control over the Soviet Union, it was Hitler who aimed at unlimited territorial and racial aggression of a master race. Hitler made war inevitable: first with France, then with Britain and Russia and ultimately with the United States.