HITLER AND NAZISM

I. Purpose and overview of lecture

A. Generally to look at aspects of Nazism that are less well known, or that have most interested scholars in the field

B. To explore the relationship of Italian fascism and German nazism

C. To begin an exploration of the personality of Hitler, to be supplemented in subsequent lectures
   1. Interest in Hitler has developed into a kind of "Hitlermania," with scores of biographies

D. To explore a related topic: the extent to which Hitler's victories may be said to reflect the will of the German people, or somehow a culmination of German history

E. To follow Hitler's rise to power up to mid-1930s

F. Two specific topics will be left mostly for future lectures:
   1. Hitler and anti-Semitism
      a) To be covered in the lecture on the Holocaust
   2. Hitler's role in the origins of World War II

II. The Young Hitler and early Hitlerian "fascism"

A. As noted in the last lecture, Hitler was a great admirer of Mussolini
   1. And that admiration lasted right up to the end of his career

B. Yet Hitler was in many regards a different kind of man

C. To begin with, his background was significantly different from that of Mussolini
   1. His father was an Austrian customs official, thus a member of the provincial petty bourgeoisie, loyal to the Habsburg monarch and the existing order of things
   2. Mussolini's father was a working man, associated with anarchism
   3. Similarly, Hitler had nothing to do with organized politics in his youth, until around his thirtieth birthday

D. He at first dreamed of being an artist or an architect
1. But he repeatedly failed to get into the university in Vienna
2. Thereafter led a life of a ne'er-do-well vagrant during the years of his life that he might normally have been at the university (his early twenties)
3. Sometimes he earned money by selling his paintings and sketches on street corners
4. But by almost any definition, he was a failure, a drop-out, whereas Mussolini in the same prewar years had gained considerable prominence in the Italian Socialist Party
   a) (I will return to look more closely at this part of Hitler's life when considering his anti-Semitism)

E. While the socialist aspect of fascism was obvious, the socialism in nazism had a much less obvious basis in Hitler's early life
   1. Indeed, according to passages in Mein Kampf, he was, even before WW I, someone who had little sympathy for the organized, social-democratic workers he encountered in Vienna
   2. His sympathies were rather with the anti-Semitic, populist mayor, Karl Lueger
      a) He might be said to fit with striking accuracy into the image of the "new mass man"
         (1) He was a member of the new urban "mob," a man without firm convictions or clear social position
         (2) He was thus a prime candidate for the new ideologies of racism, anti-Semitism, frenzied nationalism, etc.

F. When the war broke out, he was in Munich, where he had gone in 1913, at least in part in order to evade the Austrian draft
   1. Still, he served with distinction at front, in the German army
   2. Indeed, there is much evidence that here for the first time he found some sort of meaning to his so-far ill-focused, most disappointing life
      a) For him the Fronterlebnis (experience at the front) was ennobling
      b) Again, such was often the case with those who
survived the war—not all hated it, and many found it in some way ennobling

III. The Shock of the Post-war World, founding of NSDAP

A. Hitler was in the hospital when news came of the Armistice, Germany's defeat, the revolution overthrowing the monarchy (autumn 1918)
   1. Germany's defeat seems to have come to him, as to many other soldiers, as a trauma, an unspeakable tragedy
      a) That Germany had lost was psychologically impossible for him to accept

B. His horror and indignation grew as the terms of the Treaty of Versailles become known in early 1919

C. His first real job, after he left the hospital was as a propaganda expert for the army
   1. He became associated with the so-called Freikorps, which repressed revolution in many areas of Germany in 1919 and 1920
   2. The Freikorps had obvious parallels with the fasci di combattimento in Italy at the same time
      a) They helped bring down the communist regime in Munich, murdered Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, etc.

D. Foundation and evolution of the DAP, NSDAP
   1. It is in these activities that Hitler comes into contact with the DAP (German Workers' Party), which was both a socialist and extreme nationalist organization, one of many small groups that were forming at this time
   2. A number of its organizers had had experience in the social-democratic movement (though none were so prominent as Mussolini had been)
   3. Within a year it changed its name to NSDAP, suggesting these proletarian, socialist aspirations (the added NS refers to “National Socialist”)

E. Here, too, were some interesting parallels with Mussolini’s first experiences
   1. The DAP and NSDAP sought to organize members of the working class, but it found much greater support among
the lower-middle class, the Mittelstand

2. Similarly, it tended to attract veterans like Hitler, street brawlers, radical idealists of various sorts, sometimes a semi-criminal element, drifters and unemployed—and finally reactionary generals, wealthy right-wingers, etc.

3. Hitler, too, began to experiment with methods of mass recruitment
   a) He found that he could “speak”, move large audiences
   b) He and those around him, too, begin to use symbol, slogan, color, fanfare—as in both Italy and Russia
   c) There was, similarly, the "anti" emphasis—resentment, appealing to frustrations and hatred through simple explanations
   d) This party, too, avoided a coherent ideological program—in other words, it incorporated inconsistent, even contradictory appeals to various groups
   e) To the rich and the poor, worker and bourgeois, Christian and secular, farmer and city-dweller, intellectual and low-brow

IV. The Beer Hall Putsch

A. The NSDAP was even less successful in gaining a popular following than Mussolini's movement had been in the immediate postwar period

B. There were many reasons for that, but the most important was that the new Weimar Republic proved itself better able to crush its enemies, both on the right and on the left than was the Italian monarchist government
   1. In so doing, the leaders of the new republic reassured the middle and upper classes more effectively than was the case in Italy—at least temporarily
      a) However, this was a nuance, since there certainly were many in Germany who detested the Weimar Republic
      b) Many supported efforts to bring it down

C. The Kapp Putsch in March 1920, and Hitler's Beer Hall Putsch in November 1923 were two such efforts
1. But both ultimately failed; the government was at least strong enough to bring them down (with the support of a general strike in the case of the Kapp Putsch)

D. The lessons Hitler learned: It was necessary to get broader support, to bring down the liberal state through legal methods

E. Hitler in jail, *Mein Kampf*

   1. Hitler spent less than a year in jail—a year that more resembled a vacation than punishment
   2. He had many visitors, admirers, presents, etc.
   3. He spent much of his time dictating *Mein Kampf* (“My Struggle,” a rather strange autobiography)
   4. Here, supposedly, he put down his ideas, his Weltanschauung
      a) However, it is a confused and contradictory work, which at first attracted little attention—and most of that as ridicule

F. He struggled to rebuild his party, again with only limited success

V. Hitler the politician

A. It is not often appreciated how Hitler, once he got out of jail, and especially in the late 1920s and early 1930s made genuine efforts to appear "respectable"

   1. He tried to shake the earlier image of a ragged, raging street orator—a “drummer” (*Trommler*)
   2. Instead, he tried to appear more statesman-like
      a) And he began to see himself as the much-awaited savior of German politics
      b) Before he had suggested he was merely one of those awaiting such a savior)
   3. His efforts at appearing moderate even extended to toning down his anti-Semitism, which his advisers believed drove away voters, especially the more moderate ones
      a) It still remained a part of his program, of course, but he notably avoided it when speaking to certain audiences

B. Tendencies within the party
1. Striving for respectability meant toning down not only the more vicious kind of anti-Semitism but also playing down the socialist tendencies in the party.

2. The socialist wing was especially strong in Berlin and in the industrialized Ruhr.
   a) The problem was, on the one hand, to attract urban-industrial workers, while, on the other, reassure property-owners, capitalists, etc.

3. The southern, "reactionary" wing was especially strong in Bavaria, with its large numbers of peasants.
   a) Here anti-Semitism was more central, especially as expressed by Julius Streicher and Der Stürmer.

4. The party bureaucrats.
   a) In some regards party functionaries were a restraining force, who were mostly looking to future political perquisites—careerists.

5. The SA, or Brownshirts.
   a) This was a revolutionary wing in a rather different sense—brawling, anti-establishment, hoping to take over the privileged positions in society and to replace the army.

C. Which of these wings represented Hitler's own position?

1. This question really touches on some fundamental problems—perhaps the most fundamental problem—in interpreting nazism, the Third Reich, and the Holocaust.

2. And we come back as well to the issues of personality in history.

3. What did Hitler really believe in, and how decisive were those beliefs in what happened?
   a) In a related way, how much had Hitler planned everything out?
   b) Was he a masterful planner or rather a lucky opportunist?

4. These are questions, it might be noted, that have been asked about Stalin as well.

5. Whatever his innermost convictions, he proved himself adept at manipulating these various factions, of letting each one think that he sympathized with them.
VI. The Machtergreifung

A. How Hitler came to power offers some interesting answers to the question, What did he believe?

B. We do best to look at the various aspects of the question as they arise, for the evidence is relatively clear in regard to the earlier issues
   1. That is, the evidence for a kind of lucky opportunism in Hitler's coming to power is persuasive

C. First of all, of course, Hitler benefited from the world-wide depression, which hit Germany harder than any country
   1. The mass unemployment, the hopelessness, turned the NSDAP from a fringe party to a major one
   2. On the other hand, Hitler and his lieutenants proved masterful in recruiting the masses at this time
      a) More successful than any other party, including the also masterful Communist Party, or KPD

D. However, the story is by no means one of Hitler marching from victory to victory, even to a growing popularity
   1. The party did achieve some dramatic gains, and its propaganda undoubtedly helped to bring down the Weimar Republic
   2. But the republic itself disintegrated from within
      a) Indeed, liberal democracy ceased to function after 1930, almost three years before Hitler assumed power

E. This is not quite the same thing that happened in Russia, for the society and structures of the state in Germany still remained intact
   1. Nazi popularity rose to a startling 107 seats, (from 12) in Sept. 1930 and finally to a high of 230 seats in July, 1932
      a) This made the NSDAP the largest party in the Reichstag, but still not a majority party (37%)
      b) And then the party's support fell significantly in Nov. of 1932, from 37% to 33%
         (1) Many believed that it was the beginning of the end for Hitler and his party—the contradictions were beginning to tell, the
many promises impossible to fulfill

F. Again, it was in large part luck that Hitler was then offered the office of chancellor, in a coalition government that had a majority of non-Nazis in the cabinet.

G. This was thus not really a "Machtergreifung," which must be considered a Nazi propaganda term
1. There was certainly no mounting the barricades, or even a clear violation of legality
   a) It was nothing like the Bolshevik seizure of power
   b) It was rather much more comparable to how Mussolini had started
2. And even after Hitler became chancellor, the process was more one of "salami tactics" than a decisive confrontation
   a) Hitler moved on his opponents, one by one, starting with the Communists
   b) Even in this instance, one can suspect as much inspired improvising as a clear plan

H. Reichstag fire of Feb. 23, 1933 is revealing in many regards:
1. It was widely believed at the time and for many years afterward that the fire was the result of a Nazi plot or plan
2. But most recent studies have concluded that it actually took the Nazis by surprise—inducing panic Hitler for a while
3. Yet they were able to use it then, charging it to the Communists, as part of a Communist efforts to seize power
   a) In other words, rather than a clearly set out plan, there was inspired opportunism on the part of the Nazis

I. The process of eliminating opponents in Germany's state and society continued throughout the 1930's
1. As with Mussolini in Italy, Hitler by no means had a free hand from the beginning, and he was often close to failure
2. There remained throughout the thirties elements that were not completely under Hitler's rule
   a) At first, president Hindenburg, for much longer the old military elite, the Catholic Church, elements of
the state bureaucracy

3. However, in Germany the process of developing into a totalitarian state went much farther than was the case in Italy, and more quickly after Hitler formally became chancellor

   a) Within a few months Hitler had a one-party state, and had routed his most determined enemies

   b) His popular support was undoubtedly stronger, his methods more thorough and brutal

J. Yet, a key point should not be overlooked: The NSDAP never achieved a majority support in free elections, though it came close

   1. Even those held in early March, after the Reichstag fire, gave the Nazis only 44%

      a) And of those it is by no means clear that all accepted or even understood Nazi goals and ideology

      (1) And there continued to be a huge turnover in Nazi Party membership

   2. On the other hand, one could hardly conclude that the remaining 56% were all committed liberal democrats

      a) A large proportion were Communists, and at the other end were many who were, for example, extreme nationalists and anti-Semites who were formally not Nazis but hardly model liberal democrats

VII. The Nazi "Revolution"

   A. Here, as with Mussolini, one must separate rhetoric from reality, propaganda from what really happened

   B. Just as the party leaders wanted to project a sense of drama, so here they wanted to persuade Germans that something substantial had changed

      1. But in fact Germany's economy and society remained substantially as they were before

         a) There was no redistribution of property, no significant changes in class relations across the whole of society

      2. Indeed, a stronger point can be made: Even Hitler's
promises to the threatened Mittelstand were not really kept
a) That is, the anti-modernist element in nazism, the promise to protect the little man, simply faded in competition with the demands of modernization
b) And that meant that the little man lost out to the large industrialist
c) Or, in Marxian terms, the Law of Concentration continued

C. Indeed, this was initially an issue among part of Hitler's followers, who awaited a Nazi revolution and complained bitterly that it did not occur

1. In particular, the S.A., Hitler's Brownshirt followers, clamored to take over positions in the economy and in the state

2. One of Hitler's most decisive, and ruthless acts, within a year and a half of his assuming power, was to purge them
   a) This was the infamous "Night of the Long Knives," when his loyal SS, under Heinrich Himmler, purged the restive leaders of the SA (June 1934)

3. That act, too, while bloody and brutal, tended to reassure a lot of German society
   a) That is, the revolutionaries around Röhm were disturbing to the German bourgeoisie, the law-abiding and respectable part of society
   b) More important, Röhm's demands that he be allowed to absorb the military were utterly unacceptable to the old-line officers

   (1) Hitler understood that he could not really oppose those officers, and thus he moved ruthlessly against his oldest comrades

D. Again, this underlines the sense of Hitler responding to various crises, not always being in control—and certainly not planning each of his major moves in any clear way

1. There is an irony, too, to the fact that his most violent act in the first years of his reign were against his own close followers

VIII. A "psychological revolution"?
A. There was no social revolution, but it is possible to speak of other kinds of revolutions, in particular one in the minds of most Germans

B. This is a much less tangible arena, yet it certainly cannot be disregarded

C. That is, most Germans believed that a kind of social revolution was taking place, even if it was not occurring to a significant degree
   1. Even the Mittelstand that could not keep up any better than before was swept up in the illusions of the period
      a) There was a feeling of a new pride, a new determination, a new era beginning

IX. The Golden Years (1934-38)

A. This term suggests the years when Nazi successes seemed greatest, and when the price to be paid for them not yet evident

B. It refers as well to a central reality: The initial Nazi years saw an improvement in the country’s economic situation

C. It is certainly not true to assert that Germans rallied to Hitler because of pure illusion, or because he somehow hypnotized them
   1. Things became better in Germany from a material standpoint
   2. And the constant strikes, violence in the streets, confusion and chaos, were brought to an end

D. There were other accomplishments as well
   1. Hitler reasserted Germany's international prestige
   2. Germans felt that once again that they could hold their heads up
      a) Here was a politician who would no longer accept the humiliations of the past
   3. Perhaps the crowning achievement of this was the remilitarization of the Rhineland in March 1936
      a) It was a move of great daring and also one that fundamentally changed relationships between nations, immeasurably strengthening Germany
      b) Hitler's popularity soared
      c) He had taken a great gamble, against the advice of
his generals, and won

d) Here was another kind of fatal progression: the belief in Hitler’s infallibility, the sense that the Führer somehow knew best

4. But this takes to the issue of diplomacy, the origins of WW II, appeasement—a future lecture

[thin out some of the above and work in Hitler’s actions against the Jews, so that I won’t have so much to fit into the Holocaust lecture]