

# 26 Twentieth-Century Monsters



**A magazine portrayed Hitler as the strong man come to deliver the German damsel in distress.**

On the very day of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's first inauguration, the day he told America that "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself," something fearful was happening in Germany. It would change the fate of the world. The Reichstag (RIKES-tahg)—Germany's congress—was deciding to give absolute government power to the German chancellor, Adolf Hitler.

Imagine a country letting its meanest, worst people take charge. Imagine giving those kinds of people the power of life and death over the whole nation. Imagine a nation where children are taught to be tattletales and tell the secret police about anyone who protests—even their parents. Imagine a nation that burns the books of its greatest writers because it fears and hates ideas and truth. Imagine a nation that kills people because it doesn't like their religion or their ideas, or because they are handicapped. That's what happened in Germany in the 1930s.

Germany no longer even attempted to be a democracy. It willingly became a dictatorship—the most evil dictatorship in recorded history. (Although the dictatorship in Soviet Russia was almost as bad.) The Germans used their intelligence and skill to create factories of death. They allowed their government to do unspeakable deeds. Some Germans did not approve, but few spoke out. To do so meant risking their lives.

But in that March of 1933, most people in America paid no attention to what was happening in Germany.

**In the Weimar Republic in Germany, the chancellor was chosen (like the prime minister in Great Britain) by his party's leaders—not by direct election. The head of the party with the most seats in the Reichstag became chancellor. Hitler's party was the National Socialist (Nazi) Party.**

**German industry and transportation collapsed after the Great War. In 1922, these women and children, desperate for fuel, were gleaning coal scraps on a mine dump heap.**





In October 1922, 4,500 German marks bought one U.S. dollar. In November 1923, the exchange rate was 4.2 trillion marks to the dollar. One woman lit the fire with marks; children played blocks with bundles of bills.



The Depression seemed more important. Adolf Hitler? He was a little man with a black brush mustache and dark straight hair that fell into his face. He strutted about raising his arm in a straight salute and shrieking his speeches. He didn't seem evil; he seemed silly.

The German people didn't find him silly. They were still angry about the war they had lost. Their leaders and historians had misled them about the causes of the Great

**During the Great War, the German leaders kept telling their people that Germany was winning. So it was a real shock when those same leaders surrendered. Somehow the Germans couldn't believe they had really lost. They felt betrayed.**

**The Versailles Treaty was harsh; but in 1918, the Germans had forced their own harsh peace treaty on Russia at a place in Poland called Brest-Litovsk.**

War. They had been told that Germany was no more to blame for the start of the First World War than any other nation. That wasn't true. But the Germans believed it; they thought the rest of the world had picked on them. They thought the Versailles Treaty—the treaty that had ended the Great War—was unfair. They were humiliated by the terms of peace. Germany was not allowed to have a large army, navy, or air force. Germany was to make large cash payments—called “reparations” (rep-uh-RAY-shuns)—to the winners to help pay back the costs of the war. Germany was made to say that it was totally to blame for the war.

Since most Germans thought they were no more to blame for the war than others, they were furious, especially about those payments. As it turned out, we lent Germany much more than they ever paid. But most German citizens didn't know that.

Germany's citizens were angry and unhappy. Their country was in awful shape economically. Soon after the war, Germany suffered a time of incredible inflation. The government began printing lots of money (partly to pay those reparations). Printing presses ran day and night. When you print a lot of currency, soon none of it is worth much. Prices in Germany rose beyond belief. In 1923, a Hershey chocolate bar cost 150,000 German marks (in the United States the same chocolate bar cost a nickel). German money was almost worthless. Buying a loaf of bread might take a bucketful of bills. People lost all their savings. They had to use up everything they had just to pay the rent. Then, after they had finally got the inflation under control, the Great Depression set in worldwide. Unemployment became a big problem.

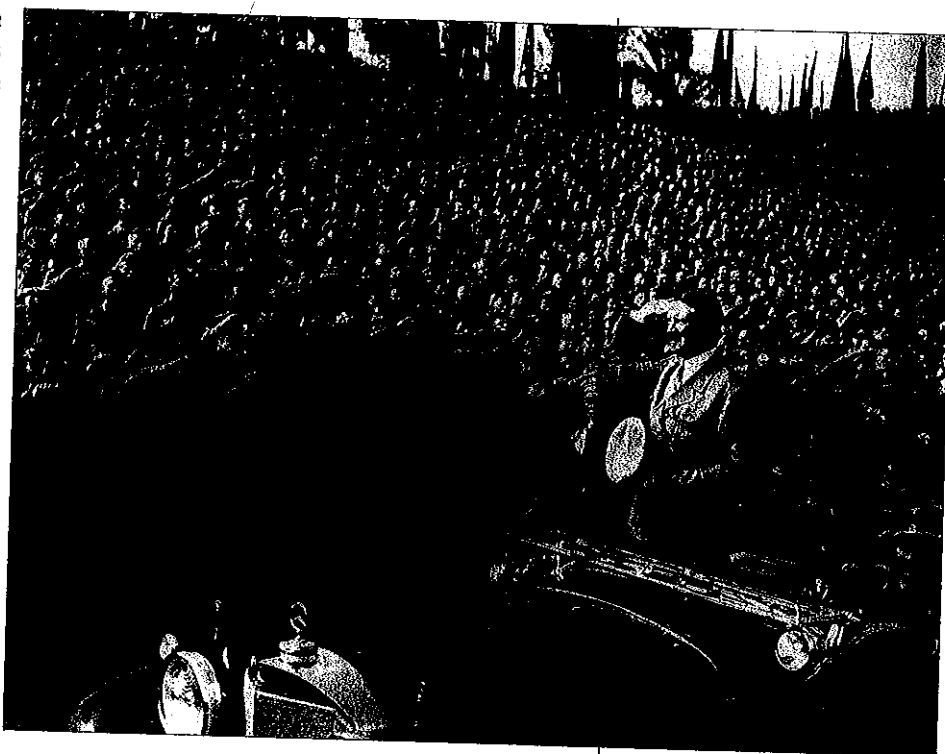
## WAR, PEACE, AND ALL THAT JAZZ

What the German people wanted was a leader: someone who could lead them out of the economic mess, someone who could make them feel good about themselves. During this Depression era people in other countries were looking for strong leaders, too. The Americans chose Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The Germans turned to Adolf Hitler.

They made a big mistake. That mistake would cost them and the rest of the world grief beyond imagining. Their leader was an evil genius who captured his countrymen and women in a web of words and convinced them that he could solve all their problems. He told them that others were to blame for Germany's troubles. He told them that Germany was greater than any other nation and meant to rule the world. He told them that other peoples should be their slaves. He told them that they must love their "fatherland"—Germany—before all else. He told them that they must not worry about right and wrong, because anything Germany did would be right. He told them that *might makes right*—and most believed him.

Hitler wasn't the only one who preached the gospel of nationalism—that loving your nation was more important than loving truth and right actions. Militant nationalism was a 20th-century disease.

In Japan, a military dictatorship took control of the nation and began stomping on its neighbors. The Japanese, too, were suffering from economic depression. They thought they needed more room for their growing population.



**Adolf Hitler, in 1938, being greeted by thousands of supporters.**

# GERMAN AGGRESSION

by 1941



**After** the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, the old Russian empire became a collection of republics called the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics—the U.S.S.R., or Soviet Union. The republics were not all Russian—they included Central Asian Muslim peoples such as the Uzbeks, the Tadjiks, and the Azerbaijanis; Caucasian peoples such as the Georgians and Armenians; and Baltic peoples such as Latvians and Estonians. These countries were supposed to be independent, but they were not. They were controlled by Russia, the Soviet Union's largest and most powerful republic. Many in America referred to the U.S.S.R. as Russia, or Soviet Russia.

They began by attacking China with a ferocity that is still hard to believe. In a massive campaign of terror, millions of civilians were tortured and killed. Just as in Germany, the Japanese rulers told the people they were a superior race and destined to rule others.

In Spain, a strongman named Francisco Franco muscled his way to power, although many Spaniards (and other



**Francisco Franco**

Europeans, and some Americans, too) fought against him.

In Italy, a pompous dictator named Benito Mussolini took control of the government. Mussolini was a bully, and, like all bullies, he picked on those who were weak. He sent Italian forces to Ethiopia. There, Italian tanks, machine guns, and airplanes attacked brave Ethiopians, who fought back with spears and lances.



**Benito Mussolini**

Russia's dictator, Joseph Stalin, killed millions of his own people—anyone who he believed might threaten his rule. His kind of government, he said, would soon conquer the world.



Joseph Stalin

Mussolini called his political movement *Fascism*. Hitler named his *Nazism*, for National Socialism. In Russia, the forces of evil took charge in the name of *communism*. These were all *totalitarian* forms of government. They were the opposite of democracy. In a totalitarian state, individual people don't matter—only the state is important.

Why did good people listen to these terrible leaders? Why did some modern nations become gangster nations? Those are questions that are hard to answer. It didn't happen here; it didn't happen in England. Were we just lucky, or did our democratic tradition give us the strength to resist the evil thinkers?

The Depression brought grave problems to the people of the United States. In 1933, hogs were selling for only 2½ cents a pound in the Midwest. One farmer had to sell all his hogs to pay his rent for a month. Another farmer sold a wagonload of oats to buy a pair of shoes. Hunger and malnutrition were serious problems in the '30s. Many Americans were angry and desperate. It is not surprising that some of them, too, listened to horrid voices. They needed to blame someone for their problems, so they paid attention to: the Ku Klux Klan; the German-American Bund (BOONT), which was inspired by the Nazis; a radio preacher, Father Coughlin, who spewed out a message of hate; and others. A few Americans no longer believed that "all men are created equal." A few wanted to throw out the Bill of Rights. But most Americans rejected the philosophies of wickedness.

Why did we escape the 20th-century virus of totalitarianism? Was it New Deal leadership? Was it our tradition of liberty and democracy? What do you think? Could it happen here?



Father Coughlin



The Bund combined Hitler worship—its salutes, rallies, and brown shirts—with perverted patriotism: Washington was the "first Fascist."



Communism was a noble, admirable, and patriotic movement. It was the only one that was in Soviet Russia. It was evil.