

*How successful were the Nazi's in presenting a positive image of Germany at the 1936 Berlin Olympics?*



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## Introduction

*The 1936 Berlin Olympics were held during the rule of Adolf Hitler, who had risen into power in 1934 and faced a lot of pressure from the countries inside Europe because they questioned their idea of a dictatorship.*

*During the period between 1932, year in which the venue for the 1936 Olympics was decided and when the Games started in August 1936 there was a very big focus on using the Olympic Games as a mean of propaganda to attempt to show a positive image of Germany to the rest of the world and also to the people inside Germany.*

*Throughout this essay I am going to analyze the ways in which Hitler attempted to create this positive image of Germany and how successful it was on displaying it. The idea is to understand how they managed to use the Olympic games and turn them into a political advantage that gain control over Germany and the start of the World War.<sup>1</sup>*

*The Berlin Games were a huge opportunity to ease the tension that Hitler's regime was creating at that time, attempting to postpone any further political or social problems as far as possible. This was of great importance because the Games would draw peoples attention from the Nazi Party and the problems that Germany was facing at the time. The idea was to remove any growing opposition in order to make them stronger as a political party and to be as less criticized as possible.*

*Hitler's idea was to show the greatness of Germany throughout the Games and what it meant, having in mind that it was a huge internationally scaled event that generated a lot of publicity and income.*

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<sup>1</sup> This idea was that Germany and Hitler himself used the Olympic Games as a distraction for the people and secretly begin their schemes of taking control of Western Europe. (what would later become the start of the World War II by the invation of Poland.)

*By analyzing in depth the way in which the Nazi Party attempted to accomplish their aims there is a better understanding on why the Olympic games were so successful and why they helped Nazi Germany to reduce the political tension and confrontations that they were facing.*

## Nazi Germany

*Adolf Hitler had risen into power in 1933 becoming president of Germany. His administration was a total dictatorship ruled by him and under the name of the NSDAP (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei) or most commonly known as the Nazi Party. He believed in the idea of the superiority of the Aryan Race, fact that made him more determined to make it the only race within Germany and to spread it throughout Western Europe.*

*Nazi Germany was very criticized by the other European countries, which were in disagreement of the dictatorship that Hitler had established. For this reason Hitler had to commit to show a positive image of Germany despite the untruthful reality that disguised beneath, so he could ease the pressure from other countries. It was key to remove as much pressure as possible because it was easier to run a country without outside and inside pressure, also because it left out the possibility of an invasion from opposing countries against the Nazi Party.*

*The way in which he tried to achieve this was by the use of an extreme propaganda during the 1936 Berlin Olympics. This was a great opportunity for Hitler to show that things inside Germany were positive and that his administration was not as terrible as everybody thought. Of course this was purely superficial because the only aim that he had was to make the other countries believe this idea and not to see the truth beneath it.*

***'As an example of Nazi festivity, the XIth Olympiad was exceptional because its intended beneficiaries were foreigners as well as Germans. The hundreds of foreign journalists, businessmen, and diplomats invited to the 1936 Games had their judgement skewed (a predictable consequence of festivity) by what they experienced there.'*<sup>2</sup>**

*This extract reflects what was intended to happen during the Olympiad, the idea of the excitement and the festivity overcoming the threat and tension that was growing inside Europe by that time. The distraction that the Berlin Olympics was going to generate was the perfect window that the Nazis needed to keep on going with their schemes under the table.*

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<sup>2</sup> Extract from "The Nazi Olympics" by Richard D. Mandell. First British edition 1972 by Souvenir Press Ltd. Preface, xi

*This idea of hiding the true nature of the Nazi regime was not only for the other countries in Europe but also it was very important inside Germany itself, so as to eliminate opposition and to increase the support towards the Government, if there is no support in the people inside Germany there is no control of the party.*

*Before there was any sort of preparation, the Nazi Germany had to overcome one more problem before it was definite that the Olympics were held in Germany. This was the idea of the Anti-Semitism present in Nazi ideology, which was complete opposite to the International Organizing Committee (IOC) of an International friendship and integrity of races. Because of this Germany was made to enable Jewish and Negroes to be part of the Olympic Games and to be members of the Olympic teams, including and specially the German Team.*

*Although Hitler tried to not allow the Black people and the Jews not to compete, some of the other nations boycotted against his ideology and succeeded in avoiding this and letting these people participate. To ensure that he was not challenged again on holding the Olympics in Berlin, Hitler added a key member to the German team, a German woman, Helene Mayer, who had a Jewish father. It was key because it showed that the German team was not being racist and did not segregate any worthy member despite their race or religion. At the same time, the party removed signs stating "Jews not wanted" and similar slogans from the city's main tourist attractions.*

*This idea of not showing any sign of Racism had to be accepted unconditionally if not there was a big possibility that the IOC would move the Games from Germany, so there was no room for denial. Although it was very difficult considering that Hitler and most of the Nazi party members were extremely racial and Anti-Semitic, however they managed to ignore their instincts and put the realization of the Games as their priority.*

## *The use of Propaganda*

*To accomplish this difficult task of showing a positive image of Germany, there was a necessity of lots of propaganda. The way in which propaganda had been used prior to Nazi Germany was medieval compared to what lay ahead. The person in charge of Propaganda in Germany during Hitler's regime was Joseph Goebbels. Goebbels was appointed the Minister for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda in 1933 after he played a key role in Hitler's campaign. He was in control of everything, every single thing that was said, read, listened or seen within the media was strictly under his control, and this covered radio, newspaper, cinema, arts and other forms of expression.<sup>3</sup> The success of the Olympics was not only helpful to reestablish the greatness of Germany but also was an important point on 'the establishment of an evil political regime....'<sup>4</sup>. This success is linked directly with the extreme display of the Nazism and its ideology. They managed to display an excessive amount of propaganda with the help of the Minister for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda.*

*Goebbels was a visionary, he completely revolutionized the way in which propaganda had been used over the years. He was able to control the media in such way that nothing could be published or displayed without his approval, and everything that was being published had a big connotation for the public. This was a very important factor because it was a way of 'washing peoples brains' into believing whatever they were being told by the media. The advantage that Goebbels brought was that people actually started to support the Government and the Olympic Games, showing pride in their country and supporting their teams in*

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<sup>3</sup> 'Goebbels's deeply rooted contempt for humanity, his urge to sow confusion, hatred and intoxication, his lust for power and his mastery of the techniques of mass persuasion were given full vent in the election campaigns of 1932, when he played a crucial role in bringing Hitler to the centre of the political stage. He was rewarded on 13 March 1933 with the position of Reich Minister for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, which gave him total control of the communications media - i.e. radio, press, publishing, cinema and the other arts.'

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/goebbels.html>

<sup>4</sup> 'The Nazi Olympics' Richard D. Mandell, page 82

*stead of complaining against the Nazi Party. Also in this way he managed to eliminate all political opposition and to create a big Jewish isolation.*

*However, despite this power that he now had, he didn't realize how useful the Olympics would be for the Nazi's until he received one of the Olympic organizers, Theodor Lewald<sup>5</sup> a German member of the team that saw the greatness of this opportunity. He explained Goebbels the propaganda potential that the Olympic Games had. 'Goebbels understood well that having power was only half of the problem: you also had to win the heart of the people.'<sup>6</sup> He did this because he recognized quickly that Goebbels was a very intelligent and skillful man and saw a lot of potential in him, he just put him in the right direction, for the benefit of the Regime.*

*Once there was a clear idea of the importance that had to be given to the Olympics, there were two main strategies that were set up from the start: to assure propaganda within Germany to achieve a political support from behalf of the people and to break the cultural isolation of the Reich's government by propaganda abroad. There was a Propaganda Committee formed to ensure the success of these functions, both under the supervision of the Chairman called Haegert. His function was to keep Goebbels informed of all matters related to the Olympic Games. This Committee worked as part of the Organizing Committee (OC) chaired by Lewald and Diem.*

### *Inside Germany*

*The new techniques that were used in propaganda was very helpful to achieve the goal of showing a positive image of Germany. There was a big display of the swastika all over Germany and there were huge parades and presentations to spread the Olympic spirit all over Germany, especially to the more rural areas of the country. The Olympia-Zug or Olympia Caravan was a significant attempt to communicate the excitement of the Olympic Games to the Germans. It was designed*

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<sup>5</sup> *As the Nazis initially thought the Olympics did not share and is not known to the Olympics, Lewald founded even before Hitler's appointment as Chancellor, the organizing committee (OC). Due to the fact that so far only as Reich President Hindenburg was a patron of the games, Lewald sought a dialogue with [Adolf Hitler](#). On 16 March 1933 it came to the audience with Hitler, in which he requested permission for the holding of the Olympic Games. Furthermore, also the [mitanwesende propaganda minister was Joseph Goebbels](#) impressed by the advertised Lewald propaganda effect of the games, so it guaranteed him a special Olympic Committee Propaganda.*

<sup>6</sup> *'The Nazi Olympics: Sports, Politics, and Appeasement in the 1930s' edited by Arn Kruger and William Murray. Published in 2003 by the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois. page 20*



to describe the spiritual significance of the upcoming Olympiad to the rural Germans. *‘The caravan itself consisted in four immense, Mercedes Benz diesel trucks. Each flew two swastika banners from poles set in holders at the side of the windshields. Each truck hauled two trailers (Making twelve units in all) that were as wide and as high as the road regulations at the time allowed.’<sup>7</sup> It was basically meant to be an exhibition of the Olympic Games, admission fees were very low and affordable and even in some cases free of charge, no German was to be left out of the Olympic Games. The idea of this caravan was to travel to very isolated locations where propaganda is out of reach and overwhelm it with the excitement that the Games should encourage.*

*Another big display of was the transportation of the a 30,000 pound bell from Bochum to Berlin, a trip of over 300 miles which reflected the coming of the games throughout its journey. In the bell there was an engraving which read: ‘Ich rufe die Jugend der Welt’<sup>8</sup> which translates to ‘I call the Youth of the World. The journey took several weeks and it meant a great excitement to every place it passed by, it was cheered by the schoolchildren and saluted by SS and SA people all the way. This showed that there was an increasing support towards the Nazis by the German people.*

*The arrival of the Bell also anticipated another part of the theatricality of the Olympiad, which was the Olympic torch relay from Olympia to Berlin. ‘This was the idea of Carl Diem, and for the past year the timetable for the 2000-mile run, which would involve 3075 runners, had been worked out in great detail.’<sup>9</sup>*

*The games were also a chance to introduce new ideas within propaganda, a full range audio-visual propaganda. This was the introduction of live streaming of sport coverage on television, it was the first live coverage of any sport. Also, since television was relatively a novelty on those years<sup>10</sup>, there was a more significant breakthrough that was more accessible to the people: new short wave radio transmitters which were originally intended to enable German people from South America to be able to follow the news of the Games, but it was afterwards used for*

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<sup>7</sup> ‘The Olympic Games’ by Richard D. Mandell. page 123 second paragraph.

<sup>8</sup> Berlin Games by Guy Walters, published in Great Britain in 2006 by John Murray (Publishers)

<sup>9</sup> Berlin Games by Guy Walters, published in Great Britain in 2006 by John Murray (Publishers) – page 143. First paragraph.

<sup>10</sup> *Electromechanical broadcasts began in Germany in 1929, but were without sound until 1934. Network electronic service started on March 22, 1935, on 180 lines using telecine transmission of film, intermediate film system, or cameras using the Nipkow Disk. Transmissions using cameras based on the iconoscope began on January 15, 1936. The Berlin Summer Olympic Games were televised, using both all-electronic iconoscope-based cameras and intermediate film cameras, to Berlin and Hamburg in August 1936. Twenty-eight public television rooms were opened for anybody who did not own a television set. The Germans had a 441-line system on the air in February 1937, and during World War II brought it to France, where they broadcast from the Eiffel Tower.*



*propaganda by Hitler himself giving public speeches to be transmitted in every radio and in every public space in order to have people listen to it everywhere.*

*'Inside Germany the Olympic Games of 1936 can be considered one of the emotional Highlights of the Nazi period' ... 'There was almost complete approval. The German people liked their Olympic Games'<sup>11</sup>*

*There was a big success with the interior propaganda, it was a complete sell out. For most Germans that is the way they wanted to be seen, as good organizers open to the world and racially tolerant, having in mind that they had to allow Jews and Negroes to compete in the Games in order for them to happen, not all people were racists. The importance of the propaganda was completely shown by the reaction of the people inside Germany, as they cheered and attended the events or even listened to them in the radio, almost every German was following the games frantically.*

### *Outside Germany*

*Before the Olympic Games, propaganda abroad was mainly destined to Germans living in Austria because the Government wanted them to come to Germany, but now there was an importance to attract something more than German-speaking neighbors. There was an economical importance to propaganda outside Germany as well, since there was a big expectancy of foreign currency to be spent at the Games because it meant more income for the country. The idea was to attract as many visitors as possible in order to make it an economic success, however the Nazis realized that the investment on imports was going to be much bigger than the actual foreign income that the Games would produce. The idea of having to invest in food imports was basically that they needed to show the well being of the country. This was because before the Olympiads the food was not being imported but was only national products.*

*The main propaganda problem was the Jews, they represented a big problem in international propaganda, since they had to be included in order to show a positive image, a race-tolerant Germany had to be shown in order to gain support internationally. However very little was made in that subject by the Germans because they were intentionally denying Jewish people to compete in the German Teams, under the false excuse that there were trials of physical and moral aptitudes that proved that the Jewish competitors were not the best choice and therefore they were cut off the teams. Although they could not completely exclude*

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<sup>11</sup> 'The Nazi Olympics: Sports, Politics, and Appeasement in the 1930s' edited by Arn Kruger and William Murray. Published in 2003 by the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois.

*them because of the fear of being sanctioned by the International Olympic Committee, that was their intention.*

*The ceremony in Vienna of the Olympic torch relay was used by the Austrian Nazis to show their strength to the Austrian people. Also the torch relay was a mean of international propaganda since it covered five countries before it reached Germany, so there were Nazi ceremonies in every country that the torch went through, and each ceremony was an excuse to create a propaganda campaign out of it.*

*When the games started, each international team had a carefully selected bilingual student to help them through any language complications they faced. The teams were hosted in the Olympic Village for the first time in Germany, since in the Winter Games there was no village and the international competitors privately housed, so in Berlin there was a sense of integrity and unity between the competing countries since they were all living in the Village together.*

## The Games

*The overall atmosphere of the Olympic Games by July 1936 was completely positive, there was a huge amount of spectators from all over the world that had come to watch the XIth Olympiad. The numbers were a complete record, the amount of people that had attended at the Opening Ceremony was incredible, never in the history of the Modern Olympic Games there had been such big attendance.*

*It seemed that the propaganda that had been laid on this Games had been successful enough to bring so many people together, despite their nationality, race or ideology, everybody was extremely excited for the Olympic Games, there was a true sense of sporting spirit in the air.*

*Huge displays of red swastikas were present all over the stadium and over Berlin. The games themselves were the most important stage of the Propaganda campaign, since the Nazis were trying to show a positive image of Germany, they needed to perform extremely good once the foreigners were in Germany. 'We drove for forty minutes at little more than walking pace through the streets of the city,*

*lined with dense crowds from which went up an increasing roar of 'Heil! Heil! Heil!' (...). All ages and types of people wore the same expression of ecstatic delight'<sup>12</sup>*

*People were climbing over each other just to catch a glimpse of the Fuhrer before he arrived at the Olympic Stadium on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 1936. Crowds of hundreds of thousands queuing at the entrance of the Stadium, all of them in a complete state of excitement and cheerfulness.*

*There was an enormous opening ceremony that included the arrival of the teams to the Stadium, the raising of the Olympic flag, 20,000 doves released into the air, the Olympic flame start and of course the standing salute of the many young masses that cried all together 'Heil Hitler!' with a standing ovation. It was a complete show of propaganda and entertainment. There was a general content with the ceremony and nobody could hide their delight towards it.*

*During the entire duration of the games the constant show of the swastika and the strength and well-being of the Germans was continued and it reflected on the results that the German team was achieving, having in mind that Germany was not one of the strongest teams, unlike the United States which had been generally winning the most medals since the first modern Olympiad in 1896. The German team had achieved an overall quantity of 101 medals including a total of 38 Gold Medals, leaving behind the USA with only 57 medals in total.<sup>13</sup>*

## Conclusion

*The 1936 Berlin Summer Olympics were not only a complete success in the terms of organization and structure of the Olympiad, but also it meant an enormous propaganda campaign for Nazi Germany and Hitler's regime. The Olympics were used as a way to show a positive image of Germany not only for foreign countries but also for the Germans living under their regime, Hitler wanted people to believe that things were positive and better with the Nazi regime.*

*Despite some complications and investment that had to be done in order to allow the Games to happen, the results were extremely positive, not only Hitler*

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<sup>12</sup> 'Berlin Games' Guy Walters. The Opening, page 185

<sup>13</sup> Numbers based on the chart of the 1936 Summer Olympics in <http://www.databaseolympics.com/games/gamesyear.htm?g=11>

*managed to show a positive image of Germany to the people but also he manage to focus the worlds heads on the Olympics and not on his political plans, in this way he reduced opposition and gain supporters, having a positive feedback from most newspapers all over the world once the Games came to an end.*

*The all in all idea of the success that the Berlin Olympic Games had brought is based on the perfect planning that was in place, there was little left to chance and there was extreme caution with what was displayed where. It would be fair enough to say that the Olympic Games were the prime of Nazi Germany, since the entire duration of the games there was a complete state of happiness and excitement, and all of the doubts and confrontations that the Nazis faced were forgotten for those two weeks and positive statements replaced the critics that Nazi Germany had afterwards.*

*There is very little to criticize about the 1936 Olympic Games, if none at all, the Berlin Games where complete successful and they managed to accomplish Hitler's main objectives. The success of the games was determined by the reaction of the public, which was completely positive from almost every point of view and it meant a great advantage to Germany for the next years before World War Two starts.*

*The key to the success of the Berlin Games was on the perfect use of propaganda by the Propaganda Committee and Goebbels himself. They managed to create an idealistic scenario for the foreign countries that attended the Games, which portrayed the well being of Germany and their strength.*

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