

BBC Bitesize GCSE History - 20th century Germany

Episode 6 – Life in Nazi Germany – women, young people and propaganda

Announcer: BBC Sounds, music, radio, podcasts.

Datshiane: I'm Datshiane Navanayagam.

Katie: And I'm Katie Charlwood.

Datshiane: And this is Bitesize History.

Katie: This is the sixth episode in a nine-part series on 20th-century Germany in which we'll be looking at the experiences of German people during the Nazi dictatorship in the years 1933 to 1945.

Datshiane: We'll be focusing on how the lives of women and young people changed during this period and how Hitler's use of propaganda kept opposition to a minimum.

Katie: Feel free to hit pause along the way to write things down or press rewind to listen again so that those key facts stick.

Datshiane: So, over the past few episodes, we've looked at how Hitler achieved his rise to power in Germany in the 1930s. If you need a quick refresh of those events, do go back and listen to these episodes. In this episode, we'll revise the consequences of everyday life, now that Hitler has total control.

Katie: Let's start with how the lives of women changed in Nazi Germany. Hitler wanted to create a German empire that would last forever, otherwise known as his Thousand-Year Reich, to secure the future of the Aryan race. This was a concept with no scientific basis used by Nazis and other racists to describe people of white European origin.

Datshiane: Previously, in the Weimar Republic women had more independence with the right to vote, work and pursue education, but under Nazi rule women were encouraged to leave the paid workforce and focus on traditional roles as wives and mothers, supporting the idea of a strong Aryan family, and they definitely were not encouraged to go to work.

Katie: All these policies can be summarised as the three K's: Kinder, Küche, Kirche, or children, kitchen and church. Write those three Ks down in your revision notes to remember that. The Mother's Cross Awards was given to women for having as many children as they could. The Nazis also brought in the Law for the Prevention of Diseased Offspring, which forced women whom the Nazis thought unfit to be mothers to be sterilised.

Datshiane: And there was also the Law for the Encouragement of Marriage, where young couples were loaned 1000 Marks when they got married.

Katie: So, I've got this translation here of Hitler's words from 1935 in which he summarises his ideology about women. Datshiane, do you want to read it?

Datshiane: OK. So here Hitler's saying: "The so-called granting of equal rights to women which Marxism demands in reality does not grant equal rights but constitutes a deprivation of rights since it draws the woman into an area in which she will necessarily be inferior. The woman has her own battlefield. With every child that she brings into the world she fights her battle for the nation."

Katie: That may be useful if you need a source to quote from in an exam question.

Datshiane: Now, what about employment? Remember, not all woman's experiences were the same. As the Second World War progressed, many women were called upon to fill roles in factories, offices and the military, as men went off to fight, and this created a tension between Nazi ideology and the practical demands of wartime; leading to some contradictions in policy regarding women's roles.

Katie: So, that's how the lives of women were affected during this period. And remember that these policies were all brought in to help towards Hitler's ideas of a Thousand-Year Reich.

Datshiane: One example of an exam question might ask you: "To what extent do you agree with this statement? Nazi policies towards women were primarily aimed at encouraging motherhood and reducing their role in the workforce." Remember, use specific examples of Nazi policies to support your answer. Grab yourself a pen and have a think about how you might answer that. Katie, do you have any thoughts?

Katie: Oh, I have plenty. This is one of those questions asking about how much you agree or disagree with the statement, and we had some great tips on answering these questions in the Exam Skills series. It's asking for your specific knowledge, so make sure you get those key facts down and link each to the statement.

Datshiane: For example, remember the award of the Mother's Cross Medal. You should define what the medal was and that its purpose was to encourage women to have more children, and how this particular policy backs up the original statement.

Katie: Absolutely, and remember, it's important that you end your answer with whether you agree or not with the original statement. It's OK to disagree, but justify whether you do or do not, or maybe partially by using your arguments based on the evidence. Go for it.

Datshiane: So, everyday life for women had changed hugely, but it also had for younger people. Younger German boys, for example, were encouraged to join the Hitler Youth, and German girls, they could join the German League of Maidens.

Katie: For the boys, the Hitler Youth Organisation was a place where they would meet several times a week after school and where they learned how to march, fight and keep fit, aiming to prepare the boy for a future role as a soldier. And for the girls, the League of German Maidens was where they were prepared to fulfil the Nazi idea of motherhood. So, this involved things like cooking and sewing.

Datshiane: There were many young people who embraced these organisations, but we should also say there were also those who resisted, such as the Edelweiss Pirates and the Swing Youth. These resistance movements rejected Nazi control and cultural restrictions, and as a consequence, anyone found to be a member was treated harshly, with some members arrested or even executed.

Katie: Whilst the Edelweiss Pirates engaged in both cultural and political defiance, the Swing Youth rejected Nazi cultural control through their embrace of swing music and jazz.

Datshiane: Schools and education also changed dramatically for children and young people. That's because all teaching had to reinforce Nazi ideology. Even school textbooks were rewritten in an attempt to rewrite history. Education was also used as a propaganda tool by the Nazis to reinforce racist stereotypes and indoctrinate the German youth from a young age. There's evidence of this in children's books and cartoons from the time.

Katie: Nowhere more so than in the study of race, or eugenics, where students were taught that the Aryan race was somehow superior. Again, this has no basis in science, but it did feed into the Nazi propaganda and helped indoctrinate younger Germans into accepting Nazi ideas from a young age.

Datshiane: Let's have a closer look at how the Nazis used propaganda and censorship to control the population.

Katie: In the previous episode, we looked at how the SS and Gestapo used fear and terror to control the population. Some German people partly or fully supported Nazi ideas and policies.

Datshiane: In fact, propaganda was a powerful tool used by the Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, who played a central role in crafting messages that glorified Hitler, promoted Nazi ideology and targeted minorities through lies and misinformation. The regime used all forms of media (think: films, newspapers, radio posters and public rallies) to shape public opinion and ensure support for Nazi policies.

Katie: Newspapers were only allowed to print pro-Nazi stories. Films, books and plays had to portray Nazis, especially Hitler, in a heroic way. Books deemed as un-German were banned, especially those by Jewish writers. We'll look in more detail at the persecution of Jewish people and other minorities in the next episode.

Datshiane: And if you were listening to radio at the time, well, radio stations could only broadcast Nazi ideas. Cheap, affordable radios had only one station, a Nazi-controlled one.

Katie: And loudspeakers were placed in workplaces and in the street to blare out Nazi ideology. And everywhere you went, you'd see the same infamous swastika symbol and pictures of Hitler.

Datshiane: Mass rallies were organised to demonstrate Nazi and Hitler's supposed greatness, with shows including choirs, speeches and fireworks. Head to BBC Bitesize to find out more information about the extent of the Nuremberg rallies and how they were used as a propaganda tool.

Datshiane: Time for a quick recap. Three questions on this episode, five seconds to answer, here goes question 1. Katie, what were the three K policies the Nazis brought in relating to women?

Katie: Those were Kinder, Küche, Kirche, or children, kitchen and church.

[correct bell sound]

Datshiane: What was the Mother's Cross?

Katie: It was an award given to women who had large families.

[correct bell sound]

Datshiane: And finally, who was the Nazi Minister of Propaganda?

Katie: That was Joseph Goebbels.

[correct bell sound]

Datshiane: Well done if you got them all right and don't worry if you didn't. Simply press pause and listen back over again whilst we go through a quick summary of this episode.

Katie: So, Nazi policies affected the everyday lives of women and the youth.

Datshiane: Women were encouraged to stay at home and have lots of children.

Katie: And young people were indoctrinated with Nazi beliefs through the Hitler Youth for boys.

Datshiane: And the League of German Maidens for girls.

Katie: Schools were made to teach Nazi beliefs in all subjects.

Datshiane: And propaganda and censorship of the arts and media enabled the Nazis to have control over what the population were able to watch, listen to and read. In the next episode, we'll look at revision relating to one of the darkest chapters in recent history, the persecution of Jewish people and minorities and the Holocaust.

Katie: In that and the remaining episodes of this series there will be topics with distressing themes, including the suffering of millions of innocent people and some of the content may be upsetting or difficult to hear.

Datshiane: Please remember, if at any point you feel overwhelmed, take a break or speak to someone you trust. Remember, it's OK to feel emotional about these events, and it's important to approach this subject with great care and respect. Thanks for listening. Bye.