History's Most Evil Men: Adolf Hitler And Joseph Stalin

History is full of miraculous stories involving advancements and victories, but a majority of the time it is unfortunately filled with brutal war and unethical people. Over time, more and more deeply evil humans have leadership positions and have begun to run their countries a bit differently than before. Two men that are looked back on and considered some of the most evil people ever, Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin, were both born with similar circumstances and used propaganda to control their nations; however, they led their countries in their own, distinct ways. According to Alpha History, these dictators both feared and hated the other but were very similar in a multitude of ways ('Hitler and Stalin').

One prominent reason for their comparability is their similar experiences in childhood. Born in 1879 Joseph Stalin was born in a peasant village in Gori ("Joseph Stalin"). The website continues to say that his father, Besarion Jughashvili, was an alcoholic and frequently beat young Joseph ('Joseph Stalin'). The article continues to state his mother wanted him to become a priest and enrolled him in the local school where he excelled but later dropping out for some speculated reasons. During his time in the church, he began to secretly read articles on the "Communist Manifesto" written by Karl Marx, which sparked his interest in starting a revolution in Russia against the monarch ('Joseph Stalin'). Similarly, Adolf Hitler was born on April 20, 1889 in a small Austrian town. He dropped out of secondary school because he did not want to grow up to be like his father Alois, who was a civil servant. Young Adolf had a passion for art, but when he traveled to Vienna for the Academy of Fine Arts, he was rejected ("Adolf Hitler"). As the article "Adolf Hitler" continues to state, "Lonely, isolated and a voracious reader, Hitler became interested in politics during his years in Vienna, and developed many of the ideas would shape Nazi ideology" ('Adolf Hitler'). A young Hitler saw the cruelty of war when he joined the military and fought in the first World War, in which Germany lost, and he realized a new power must bring Germany to power ("Adolf Hitler"). Overall, the childhood of both Hitler and Stalin were unfortunate events that sculpted their views and thinking into adulthood (Dube).

Not only is their early life similar, but how they used propaganda also has similarities. According to "Adolf Hitler," after his service in World War 1, Hitler returned to Munich, Germany. There, he started the formation of National Socialist German Workers Party or the Nazi Party ('Adolf Hitler'). In order for him to gain a following of radical ideas, he used the defeat of Germany in World War 1 and through propaganda ("Nazi Propaganda"). The website Holocaust Encyclopedia states, on the topic of propaganda, "Propaganda also encouraged passivity and acceptance of the impending measures against Jews, as these appeared to depict the Nazi government as stepping in and 'restoring order'" ('Nazi Propaganda'). The article goes on to state that films filled with propaganda were made such as "The Triumph of the Will," which glorified the Nazi party and Hitler himself ('Nazi Propaganda'). As Germany ascended into a dictatorship, it began to control everything; another article on Nazi propaganda states, "The Nazi Propaganda Ministry, directed by Dr. Joseph Goebbels, took control of all forms of communication in Germany: newspapers, magazines, books, public meetings, and rallies, art, music, movies, and radio. Viewpoints in any way threatening to Nazi beliefs or to the regime were censored or eliminated from all media" ('Nazi Propaganda'). The article goes on to say that Hitler was able to control everything the common people saw, and he distorted their opinions by feeding them biased opinions on other races and religions ("Nazi Propaganda").

Stalin, like Hitler, also used propaganda to control what people saw. For instance, according to the website Historyplex, “Especially, in the USSR, Stalin received massive media attention, and soon enough he began being portrayed as the 'all-knowing leader' by the Soviet propagandists” ('Stalinism and the Use of Propaganda'). To control everyone, Stalin wanted to really touch in with the next generation by making a youth group. The website Parcast explains this idea by saying, “Young Pioneers, a national youth group organization for children ages 10 to 15, taught members to fight the enemies of socialism. Although membership to the organization was neither mandatory nor automatic, almost all children in the Soviet Union belonged to it” ('9 Ways'). The article then goes on to show the censorship used in the Soviet Union saying, “Immediately after coming to power, the Communist Party suppressed all newspapers that opposed them and kept unfavorable stories from being published, especially crimes against humanity i.e. massacres, famines and nuclear disasters occurring on Russian soil” ('9 Ways'). Both leaders used propaganda to their advantage and manipulated their countries with it.

After their similar childhoods and use of propaganda, the similarities begin to dwindle, as Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler led their countries in different ways. To begin, Joseph Stalin wanted to convert the poor country of Russia into an industrial powerhouse. According to the website History, “His development plan was centered on government control of the economy and included the forced collectivization of Soviet agriculture, in which the government took control of farms. Millions of farmers refused to cooperate with Stalin’s orders and were shot or exiled as punishment” ('Joseph Stalin'). This development plan led to widespread famine amongst the people which lead to the deaths of many poor people. In order to Russia the industrial powerhouse Stalin wanted, he sent citizens to forced labor camps called the Gulag. The website Gulag History states that during Stalin’s reign as leader, people in labour camps were forced to do “unskilled, manual, and economically inefficient” ('Introduction: Stalin’s'). Stalin also wanted an almost complete control over his people, and on the website History the author explains that he convinced citizens to spy on each other and empowered the secret service named KGB ('Joseph Stalin'). The topic of the KGB is explained in the article “KGB:” “Its primary role within Russia and the satellite republics of the Soviet Union was to quell dissent, by first identifying dissidents promoting anti-Communist political and/or religious ideas and then silencing them.” So, using very violent methods, Stalin was able to kill thousands by having those with different ideas silenced by the KGB. The KGB didn’t do all of his work though as Stalin was able to keep his power by killing those who were against him. The website Revelations from the Russian Archives states that, “REPRESSION AND TERROR: STALIN IN CONTROL,” “Stalin had eliminated all likely potential opposition to his leadership by late 1934 and was the unchallenged leader of both party and state. Nevertheless, he proceeded to purge the party rank and file and to terrorize the entire country with widespread arrests and executions”('Repressions and Terror'). Stalin was able to make Russia an industrial powerhouse by silencing everyone who could be a potential threat to him. Hitler also was able to control his people, not to become an industrial leader but to have his citizens believe in what becomes the Aryan Master Race. The article “How Was Adolf Hitler So Persuasive?” talks about how he approached his goal, stating that his main way of keeping support was to not talk to the people individually but to treat people as a whole. He thought that people on their own were smart and could think for themselves, but as a group people were dumb and controllable (Wilmoth). Like Stalin, Hitler was able to take out the competition around him. The website History explains a time Hitler displayed this during Hitler’s run for chancellor of Germany: his followers killed multiple political leaders that opposed his ideas in what is now called Night of the Long Knives (“Night of the Long”). The article continues to explain that not only were people who opposed his ideas were also killed, but Nazi followers who Hitler believed could be

potential enemies in the near future ('Night of the Long'). Hitler also used concentration camps to incarcerate those Hitler believed to be a threat to his cause. The website The Holocaust Encyclopedia discusses the uses of the concentration camps: “To incarcerate people whom the Nazi regime perceived to be a security threat. These people were incarcerated for indefinite amounts of time. To eliminate individuals and small, targeted groups of individuals by murder, away from the public and judicial review. To exploit forced labor of the prisoner population. This purpose grew out of a labor shortage” ('CONCENTRATION CAMPS'). Hitler had these labor camps in which thousands were killed and even more put to work. Unlike Stalin, these camps didn’t hold people who were citizens of Germany necessarily, but they kept anyone Hitler deemed not suitable to live amongst him. In contrast to Stalin, Hitler only discriminated against certain groups whilst Stalin held everyone accountable to be the best citizens for his country.

Regarded as some of the most evil humans to ever be born, Hitler and Stalin both had to deal with similar circumstances. Both grew up in non ideal situations and manipulated the population with propaganda. Although they differ slightly in how they govern their people, it does not matter whose ax is bloodier than who’s, but what really matters is how teachers will teach this history. George Orwell stated, on the topic of propaganda and history, “‘The most effective way to destroy people is to deny and obliterate their own understanding of their history’” ('Propaganda Quotes'). This quote ties into how Hitler and Stalin were able to take over, and how teachers must accurately represent this information so that brutal dictators never rise to power again.

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