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Identifying Characteristics of a National Socialist: Germany and Alfred Wittmann.

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Identifying Characteristics of a National Socialist:

Germany and Alfred Wittmann

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Introduction

Words are often expressed and misunderstood when used in different situations. Often the speaker doesn’t comprehend the complex meaning of words or their impact. The word “Nazi” or “National Socialist” are used under various circumstances in everyday life, either to describe a person’s traits or personality, and often it is used as a derogatory insult. The real meaning behind the word is, however, commonly not known. In many parts of the world it is mostly used to describe controlling, demanding or aggressive people.

In my thesis I intend to research the meaning of the word “Nazi”. What defined a National Socialist? Hitler and the National Socialist Party ruled Germany and large parts of Europe for 12 years. Millions of people supported and followed their leader Adolf Hitler, many but not all Germans joined the NSDAP (Nationalist Socialist Party) and most Germans were actively involved in the war effort. Only a very few Germans had no association with the Hitler regime. Did this make every German a Nazi? Is every German guilty of the crimes against humanity that were committed by the Nazis in the military? Historians have supported different theories. Some argued that every German played a part in the war or in the crimes that were committed, whether it was as simple as doing an administrative job or doing nothing and looking the other way. The American Occupation Forces, on the other hand, created a different system that differentiated between Nazi leaders and a simple “Mitläufer” (follower). In my research I will compare and contrast the major historical views on Nazism and then frame my own idea of a National Socialist.
My grandfather’s life and those of many other respected Germans such as Sophie Scholl and Oskar Schindler will be used to differentiate and draw conclusions about National Socialism. My grandfather, Alfred Wittmann, was once a member of the NSDAP and a soldier during World War II. After the war however, the American Occupation Forces classified him as a simple follower and released him. Using primary sources, this research paper will attempt to re-create the story of Alfred Wittmann, his motivation to join the NSDAP, and whether we can consider him as a National Socialist or an average German. With the intention to define the terminology of a National Socialist, it will first be necessary to broadly examine the causes for the creation of the National Socialist movement during World War I and the Weimar Period including the history of the DAP/NSDAP.

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

World War I and its aftermath affected every German in a radical manner. Germany was a nation that changed its political system from one day to the other, a nation that was forced to sign the Versailles Treaty and come to the realization that the war was lost. Adolf Hitler, like many other veterans, was not able and willing to believe that Germany lost the war due to an overwhelming Allied force, but thought it happened because the German soldiers were betrayed and that the Army “was stabbed in the back” by a decaying home front.1 Thomas Childers, the author of The Nazi Voter finds clear and precise words in describing the post-War period:

1Karl Dietrich Bracher, Die Deutsche Diktatur, (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1972), 49
From its foundation during the revolution of 1918 until its demise with the Nazi assumption of power in 1933, the Weimar Republic was burdened by a series of overlapping political, economic, and social problems that gradually undermined its viability. Forced to assume the responsibility for the lost war and the hated Treaty of Versailles, the republican government was born with a profound crisis of political legitimacy that escalated steadily during the political and economic turmoil of the immediate postwar period (1919-23).²

The Weimar Republic in its deep-rooted weakness inevitably created the perfect breeding ground for extreme and often-violent anti-democratic movements such as National Socialism.

The National Socialist Movement and the closely aligned “Völkisch” (populist) movement were not an exclusive product of one party, but on the contrary were characterized by a small but broad movement. Many parties claimed to be of Völkisch origin and the representatives of the German people. These parties, such as the German Völkisch Freedom Party (DVFP), had programs with similar goals to the National Socialists. In this limited research project, however, the focus will be on the German Workers Party (Deutsche Arbeiter Partei or DAP), later called the National Socialist German Workers Party (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei or NSDAP).

On January 5, 1919, Anton Drexler and Karl Harrer founded the German Workers’ Party (DAP). Adolf Hitler, a political investigator from the army, was sent to examine the DAP and then consequentially joined the party as its 30th member. The founders of the party had already laid the framework for the ideological program when Hitler joined the movement in September 1919. Hitler nevertheless rapidly gained influence within the party, giving his first speech only a month after joining the DAP,

receiving a paid job within the party and becoming one of the most important propaganda speakers by 1920. He furthermore played an essential role in renaming the party to the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) and announcing the 25-point party program to the public. By 1921, NSDAP membership had risen exponentially and Hitler’s influence among party members continued to grow steadily. Wary of Hitler’s growing popularity within the party, the NSDAP leadership chose to coalesce with another “Völkisch” Party and therefore severely limit Hitler’s rise to power. Hitler, however, aware of his power, counteracted this decision by resigning from the NSDAP. He forced the party leadership to either accept his conditions for a return to the party, or lose the key figure in the party’s recent success story. Hitler successfully turned the NSDAP against its old leadership and seized power. As Childers notes of his power play, “According to a letter addressed to the executive committee, a special National Socialist congress was to be convened to elect Hitler party chairman and to vest in him dictatorial power over all party affairs.”³

By 1921, Hitler had become the Chairman of the NSDAP, Munich became the permanent seat of the movement and the party was ruled according to the Führer principle (military leadership structure). Under Hitler’s leadership, the party vehemently refused to merge with other Völkisch parties or to participate in any form of election. Hitler believed that the NSDAP could not become part of the “corrupted” Weimar system, but that the system itself had to be overthrown. In 1923, however, Hitler did cooperate with other Völkisch Movements and right-wing groups in a plan to forcibly overthrow the government in a “Putsch” (coup d’état). On November 9, 1923, Hitler and

³ Ibid, 47.
General Erich Ludendorff led the famous Beer Hall Putsch. The attempt to overthrow the government failed, resulting in the arrest of Hitler and his fellow party leaders. The party consequentially dissolved due to the lack of leadership and planning. The majority of National Socialists chose to limit their involvement in politics to voting in elections. A small group of NSDAP members formed and joined splinter party organizations, such as the Greater German People’s Community (Grossdeutsche Volksgemeinschaft or GDVG) or the National Socialist Freedom Party (Nationalsozialistische Freiheitspartei or NSFP). However, upon Hitler’s return to the political scene in 1925, the NSDAP was created anew and the party eventually regained its former strength and unity.\(^4\)

**THE TRADITIONAL NAZI**

From its creation to the very end of the NSDAP, people chose to become affiliated with the National Socialists for different reasons. As Childers argues, “The Nazi constituency was not socially static. It changed substantially…over time and in response to changing political and economic decisions.”\(^5\) To analyze the typical image of a National Socialist, now commonly referred to as a Nazi, it is necessary to differentiate between the variables that motivated people to join the NSDAP, to become a leader or to support the movement in another form. The early Nazis, from now on referred to as the ‘Traditional Nazi’, played an essential role in the creation of the party, its ideology and its movement.


\(^5\) Thomas Childers, 5.
What characterized the early members of the National Socialist Movement? World War I created a generation of people that were not able to cope with the change to society and the country itself. Veterans of World War I, accustomed to war and trench society, were now jobless. Many Germans failed to re-integrate into the postwar world and German society. Younger members grew up in a period of uncertainty; they perceived their existence in society as endangered. Young National Socialists failed to be successful in a time of economic uncertainty. Their daily lives were characterized by changes in the work place and profession, as well as repeated and long periods of unemployment. Karl Dietrich Bracher successfully identified the early leaders of the NSDAP as either Bavarian or foreign German radicals, 20-35 years old, members of the military or Freikorps (paramilitary groups). The party offered these members the chance to commit to a greater goal and gave an opportunity to pass the free time (caused by unemployment) with party activities. The NSDAP revived a purpose of life for these members.

On February 24, 1920 Adolf Hitler proudly announced the 25-point party program of the NSDAP to 2,000 interested listeners in the “Hofbräuhaus” (beer hall) in Munich. National Socialist party leaders designed these 25 points to be permanent cornerstones of the party and an integral part of the party’s mission. For a person to affiliate with a party suggests that they can agree with the ideology and the plans of that particular party. Social Democrats believe in their plans for Germany and the National Socialists believed in their goals for a better Germany. These 25 points were created by National Socialists

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7 Bracher, *Die Deutsche Diktatur*, 98.
8 Peukert, *Volksgenossen und Gemeinschaftsfremde*, 39
and should reflect the ideology of the individual Nazi. While it would be a fallacy to
directly conclude that as a National Socialist it is necessary to believe in all of these
points, it is possible to characterize the general beliefs of the original National Socialist.

The program can be divided into four main categories. The first three points
defined the NSDAP foreign policy goals; points four to eight were goals for Germany of
an anti-Semitic character; and points eleven to seventeen were meant to appeal to the
socialist wing of the NSDAP. Point nine and ten and eighteen to twenty-five were
concerns of national politics. In the first three points, the National Socialist demanded
that all Germans be united, the revision of the Versailles Treaty, and that surplus land be
provided for the German people. Uniting all Germans into one Greater Germany and
the revision of the Versailles Treaty, generally popular plans, were widely accepted by
many parties. Even major parties that were a part of the current government believed in
the revision of the Versailles Treaty and in uniting all Germans in one nation. The foreign
policy plan presented by the NSDAP was very brief and did not elaborate on the path or
policy to achieve this goal.

The next five points, characterized as anti-Semitic points by Eberhard Jäckel,
provide an insight into the racial and national beliefs of the NSDAP. In essence National
Socialists believed that only “true Germans” (of German blood), which excluded Jews,
should have the full rights of a citizen. The NSDAP declared their intent to create a
homogenous German Nation.

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11 Ibid.
As the name of the National Socialist Party implies, the members of the party disapproved of a capitalist or communist system, but instead created a unique system of National Socialism. This system planned to abolish incomes that were not earned by work, commonly referred to as “[t]he breaking of the slavery of interest,” the confiscation of all war profits, the nationalization of all big corporations and shared profit with big businesses. The NSDAP also demanded a land reform that would confiscate land for the common good and the ban all speculation over land. Points fifteen and sixteen proposed a plan that would support the elderly in Germany and create a strong middle class by dissolving large department stores and supporting small merchants. As part of their National Political Program, the NSDAP intended to reform the legal and education system and ensure the health of every German. The creation of a strong national military, as well as a nationally controlled press, also became part of the NSDAP program. National Socialists clearly aspired to take control of many aspects of public and private life in Germany and planned to install a strong national government.

The NSDAP Program proved to be unique in Germany with its purpose to attract a large and diverse group of Germans. As Childers notes, “[i]n spite of convulsive changes in the political and economic environment, the parties of the Bismarckian, Wilhelmine, and Weimar eras remained firmly entrenched along these lines of social, religious and regional cleavage.” The 25-point program was created to break these cleavages and to attract workers, the middle class, small companies and businessmen, and

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12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Thomas Childers, 16.
those who were attracted to strong nationalistic and anti-Semitic sentiment.\textsuperscript{16} Eberhard Jäckel, the author of \textit{Hitler’s Weltanschauung}, portrayed the NSDAP program as the collection of petty bourgeois complaints and post-war wishes.\textsuperscript{17} The original and final program presented by the NSDAP aligns with the beliefs and experiences of the traditional Nazi. The founders of the party and many of the earlier members believed in the program and its mission. By comparing and analyzing the Nazi party program and the demographics of early DAP/NSDAP members, it was possible to generate an image of the traditional Nazi.

**THE NEW NAZI**

The traditional Nazi, as the term denotes, was only of temporary duration. Hitler, the new leader of the NSDAP, changed the party, its members and its constituency in the following years before his appointment as Chancellor. Originally Hitler opposed any change in party programs. According to Hitler, other parties changed programs to gain popular support. In his eyes the political program had to be based on a worldview, a view that was not changeable.\textsuperscript{18} The program, however, was either changed drastically or never implemented in later years, casting doubt on the consistency of National Socialist ideology and its members. Hitler, the leader of the NSDAP and Nazi Germany, played a crucial role in the formation of the “New Nazi”. This process of conversion gradually commenced with Hitler’s return to the political arena in 1925.

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\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 45. \\
\textsuperscript{17} Jäckel, \textit{Hitlers Weltanschauung}, 83-88. \\
\textsuperscript{18} Adolf Hitler, \textit{Mein Kampf}, (München: Zentralverlag der NSDAP., Frz. Nachf. G.m.b.H.,1943), 414-418. \\
\end{flushright}
Hitler was released from Landsberg prison in December 1924. During his year in prison, Hitler recorded his life story and ideas in his book *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle). Showing insight into the lesson of the failed Putsch attempt, he now did not intend to take power by force but use the legitimate democratic path to power. To achieve his goal, he amended the NSDAP Party Program at his will, causing friction with parts of the traditional National Socialist base.\(^{19}\) While Hitler publicly promoted various policies to better Germany, he intended to neglect many of these plans and center his political career on the realization of his racial and anti-Semitic program as well as the acquisition of living space. From the day that Hitler joined the DAP to his death in the bunker in Berlin, he never changed these plans or ideals, and insisted on their implementation under all costs. Hitler was not willing to compromise on Germany’s racial policy or on extending the German lands to provide for its people.\(^{20}\) The original 25-point Program already demanded the segregation and expulsion of all Jews and non-Germans. He implemented these plans once in power, through acts and orders such as the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service (1933), The Reich Citizenship Law (1935), and the Nuremberg Laws (1935). His expansionist plans in Europe were revealed to his inner circle in what became known as the Hossbach Memorandum (1937).\(^{21}\) Hitler openly announced his hatred for the Jews in many speeches and even threatened, as early as January 1939, the elimination of all Jews in the event of a World War. Hitler proved to be extremely consistent and successful in achieving his racial policies. Twelve years after

\(^{19}\) Childers, *The Nazi Voter*, 120.


National Socialists took control of Germany, millions of Jews in Europe had suffered under bloodthirsty Nazi rule or died in one of the many extermination camps.\(^{22}\)

While historians to this date debate, whether Hitler fully intended to murder all Jews of Europe from the very beginning or whether the genocide evolved through a process of plans and regulations, it is clear from his early speeches and writings that Hitler planned to remove all Jewish life from Germany. *Mein Kampf*, just like many of his speeches, outlined his hatred for Jews and the threat they posed to German society.\(^{23}\) Jäckel divided Hitler’s Jewish policy into three different phases. First Hitler nullified Jewish citizenship status and therefore denied Jews the rights that every other German had. Further he pushed for Jewish emigration and later deportations of Jews from Germany. Lastly, he planned for the killing of all Jews of Europe.\(^{24}\)

Hitler was more flexible when it came to foreign policy goals, with the exception of his *Lebensraum* (living space) policy. The plan to acquire necessary living space for the German race was deeply entrenched in his belief system.\(^{25}\) From the beginning of Hitler’s political activity, he advocated the need to expand German territory. Hitler officially announced this plan in the official party program of 1920: “We demand land and territory (colonies) to feed our people and to settle our surplus population.”\(^{26}\) These words at the time could have been interpreted broadly and could have been part of one of his many empty promises. However, the words and actions that became part of Hitler’s


\(^{25}\)Ibid, 90-95.

\(^{26}\)Noakes and Pridham, eds., *Nazism 1919-1945*, 14-16.
legacy over the next 25 years reaffirm Hitler’s obsession with living space. In Hitler’s book *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle) and his second book (which was never published), he detailed his plans to find living space for Germans in the East.\(^{27}\)

Hitler, and therefore the NSDAP, took a more pragmatic approach to other foreign policy issues, sometimes because other nations denied Hitler his preferred option and other times because it proved to be advantageous for Hitler at the time. Hitler initially planned to form an alliance with Great Britain, a nation he greatly admired.\(^{28}\) This alliance never came into existence, but on the contrary, Germany and Great Britain entered World War II on opposite sides. Hitler, however, was not given a choice in this matter, as opposed to many other foreign policy decisions. He attempted to improve relations with Great Britain on many occasions, changing his position on the acquisition of overseas colonies and by signing the Anglo-German Naval Agreement (1935), which effectively promised Great Britain naval dominance. Nevertheless, Hitler’s many efforts to form a close connection with London were regularly rebuffed.\(^{29}\)

One of the most important goals of the National Socialist Party and Hitler was the unification of all Germans into one Greater Germany. The 25 Point Program of 1920 incontrovertibly demanded that all Germans live under one nation on the basis of self-determination.\(^{30}\) Hitler nevertheless broke with party policy and ideology. He created his personal plan for Germany by bending the original policy goals to his advantage. Hitler was successfully able to unite German Austrians and Sudeten Germans and many others into one nation; however, he refused to enforce this policy to the full extent. In an attempt

\(^{27}\) Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 726-758.
\(^{28}\) Ibid, 684-726.
\(^{30}\) Noakes and Pridham, eds., *Nazism 1919-1945*, 14-16.
to appease Italy, Hitler waived his right to re-unite Germans in Southern Tyrol.  

As Jäckel notes, “Neither did he grasp the opportunity which offered itself in 1940 of bringing back from Denmark to the Reich (Heim ins Reich) the Germans of Northern Schleswig, much to the bitter disappointment of the Germans in question.”

As stated earlier, the 25-Point Program of the NSDAP/DAP was designed to be non-negotiable and ideological policy to be implemented at all cost. Hitler, the creator of the popular National Socialist Movement, nonetheless did not adhere to his self-imposed rules. As Jäckel pointed out, many of the 25 points were either ignored or amended. Point 11, which demanded “the abolition of incomes unearned by work”, was ultimately abandoned after Hitler seized power in Germany. This anti-capitalist notion and the other social incentives of the Program, such as “the nationalization of all businesses which have been formed into corporations (trusts)”, “profit-sharing in large industrial enterprises”, “the extensive development of insurance for old age” and “the immediate communalizing of big department stores, and their lease at a cheap rate to small traders” shared the same fate. After a wave of criticism, Hitler publicly renounced the confiscation of agrarian land for public use (Point 17) on April 13, 1928. In addition he added to the Party Program that the NSDAP believed in private property rights and stressed that the confiscation of property shall only take effect for Jewish companies that engaged in real estate speculation. Jäckel concluded,

The state and all its aspects including the Party and its Program are only means to an end; an end, however – and this is absolutely crucial – which

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32 Ibid, 69.
33 Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, eds.
34 Jäckel, *Hitlers Weltanschauung*, 70.
is very clearly defined, namely the realization of the twin goals of territorial policy and anti-Semitism...

Jäckel perspicuously reveals in this statement that Hitler directly forced his fellow party members to follow his lead and adjust their beliefs according to his. At this point we face a predicament in clearly defining a National Socialist. Is it possible to find a definite description of a Nazi?

While it has now become a complex process to accurately define a National Socialist, it is still possible by using multiple factors. There is more than one kind of Nazi. The changes to party policy gave rise to two different National Socialists: the New Nazi that adjusted to Hitler’s changes and chose to suppress his personal beliefs or amend them in a manner that would suit Hitler, and, on the other hand, the Traditional Nazi that due to his unchangeable beliefs chose to part ways with or even on occasion oppose the National Socialist Party (e.g. Otto Strasser). The many changes to the party policies ultimately caused a large part of the Socialist Wing to leave the party, as they felt they could not be part of an organization that did not represent them accurately. On July 1930, the evolution of the party policy reached a tipping point for some of the members of the NSDAP. Otto Strasser and the left wing of the NSDAP formulated a letter, stating their intent to leave the NSDAP. This faction stated that the recent changes in foreign policy (e.g. imperial movement and domination over other nations), national policy, and, foremost economic policy were no longer pursued in accordance with the 25 Point Program. The Strasser letter specifically pointed out the many issues that the party had

\[36\text{Ibid, 81.}\]
altered or forgotten about, such as Point 17, which initially demanded the confiscation of farmland for the common good.  

In an effort to provide a clearer picture of the New National Socialist, it is important to inspect the NSDAP voter constituency and the party campaign. Whom did the NSDAP try to attract and where were they successful? How did they compare to other parties? Many Germans feared loss of status, the fight for survival, and the constant crisis in Germany that was caused by World War I and the Weimar Republic. The monarchy had aided the middle class and raised their status within society, while mostly suppressing the workers movement. This changed with the end of World War I as workers rose in prominence and power. The fight in support and opposition of left-wing revolutions became a common theme in the early Weimar Republic. Social Democrats and unions were actively included in the Weimar Republic, giving workers a chance to have their interests represented. While this proved to be advantageous to the workers, it engendered great fear among the middle class and right-wing groups in Germany. The middle class lost the privileged role it once enjoyed in the Kaiserreich (monarchy). Moreover this particular social group struggled to maintain its economic status in an era that was marked by unemployment, inflation and broad economic uncertainty. Middle class Germans’ situation appeared to slightly improve during the ‘Golden Years of 1924-1928’. “As a catchall movement of protest,” Childers stressed, “National Socialism had

38 Peukert, Volksgenossen und Gemeinschaftsfremde, 35.
39 Ibid, 35.
been unable to maintain its appeal in a period of sustained economic and political stability.\textsuperscript{40}

With the onset of the Great Depression, however, the majority of Germans returned to the chaos and desperation that they had experienced in the early Weimar Republic. Hitler spotted an opportunity in this situation, and sought to attract the disgruntled and disadvantaged population of Germany. Contemporary novels during the time, such as \textit{Little Man What Now} by Hans Fallada, provide insightful details on the daily struggles that Germans faced in the Great Depression. In 1932, Germany reported the highest suicide rate in the western world, four times larger than Britain and twice as large as in the United States.\textsuperscript{41} The political situation in Germany was characterized by polarized conflict between the different parties. Germans were disappointed in and distrustful of the Weimar Republic and the parties that participated in the government. In an attempt to find a solution many looked to the extreme and untarnished political parties, such as the NSDAP and KPD (Communist Party).\textsuperscript{42} These parties had refused to support the system (Weimar Republic) from their deep mistrust and hatred of it. From 1930 to early 1933, the NSDAP was able to report a sweeping membership gain of 719,426. The NSDAP paramilitary branch, SA (Sturmabteilung), shared a similar fate, increasing its membership from 77,000 members in 1931 to 3 million in 1935.\textsuperscript{43} This rise in popularity can be accounted for due to the extreme economic hardship, political division, and effective campaigning by the NSDAP.

\textsuperscript{40} Childers, \textit{Nazi Voter}, 127.
\textsuperscript{43} Gellately, \textit{Backing Hitler}, 16.
The NSDAP successfully marketed the use of symbols (e.g. Swastika, “Heil” Greeting, Uniforms) as an integral part of their campaign. In contrast to other German parties, with the exception of the KPD, the National Socialists also made active use of violence. Former soldiers, the unemployed and the hopeless youth were recruited to participate in the SA (Sturmabteilung).\textsuperscript{44} This paramilitary group presented members with the opportunity to violently express their discontent over the economic and political situation in the Weimar Republic. First Student Organizations were founded in an attempt to attract the future of Germany. On February 1921, the prominent Nazi Rudolf Hess founded the “NS-Studentenorganisation” (NS Student Organization).\textsuperscript{45} Subgroups were not restricted to former military men or students, but attempted to attract all professions, such as the National Socialist Teacher’s League. The party and its subgroups ensured the active involvement of its members by assigning tasks, holding meetings and taking excursions and trips. In its campaign, the NSDAP attempted to break through all social classes and become the all-encompassing party of Germans.\textsuperscript{46} With the active and successful use of propaganda, the NSDAP attempted to attract large groups of Germans. Aggressive and simple propaganda words were created to directly influence the subconscious of the target group. This extremely effective use of propaganda played an important role in the rise of the party.\textsuperscript{47}

Historical research however, has revealed that National Socialists did not succeed instantly but for many years struggled to reap the benefits of their campaign. Traditionally historians have supported the conclusion that a large majority of the fading

\textsuperscript{44}Bracher, \textit{Die Deutsche Diktatur}, 102-104.  
\textsuperscript{45}Ibid, 104.  
\textsuperscript{46}Ibid, 107.  
\textsuperscript{47}Ibid, 164-165.
German middle class supported the National Socialists by either joining the party or simply by voting for the NSDAP in the elections. This middle class was commonly composed of farmers, traders and craftsmen. Furthermore the new middle class, composed of salesmen, social services and technical personal, increasingly gave their support to the National Socialists.\textsuperscript{48} The majority of blue-collar workers, a primary target of Nazi propaganda, gradually affiliated with the Communist Party, despite National Socialist efforts to appeal to the worker’s interests. Nevertheless workers played an essential role in the rise of the Nazi party. In order to identify National Socialist supporters, it will be necessary to consider the historical circumstances that each target group faced and to assess the process of party realignment.

Even at the peak of Weimar prosperity the average farmer struggled to make a living. Farmers’ salaries had fallen 44\% below the national average. The debt of small farmers increased by 15\% from 1924 to 1928 and by a further 13\% the following two years. The precarious situation that farmers had to endure and the discontent with the customary farmers’ party (DNVP, or German National People’s Party) performance led to the creation of multiple splinter parties. While these parties listened to the demands of the farmers, the parties were unable to gain enough power to produce necessary legislation. The NSDAP was not the alternative that farmers originally searched for; therefore the party’s gains in the rural sector remained limited for a period of time.\textsuperscript{49} Childers notes, “The fragmentation of agrarian interests and concomitant erosion of traditional rural electoral loyalties between 1924 and 1929 created the necessary preconditions for the stunning National Socialist successes in the countryside.

\textsuperscript{48} Peukert, \textit{Volksgenossen und Gemeinschaftsfremde}, 42-43.  
\textsuperscript{49} Childers, \textit{Nazi Voter}, 140-150.
thereafter." With many of the small splinter parties remaining unsuccessful in the Weimar Republic, and with the NSDAP policy change in the Party Program (from social agrarian reform to the protection of private property), however, the National Socialists increasingly gained support from farmers. Farmers had become an essential target of the NSDAP campaign and propaganda, with themes such as “Blut und Boden” (blood and soil) emphasizing the importance of farmers and their values in Germany.\(^{51}\)

The old middle class in the business of handicraft and trade continued to struggle in the Weimar Republic. With the collapse of the economy in 1928, this particular sector in the Germany economy faced bleak prospects. Empirical data has confirmed that this sector faced sharp declines in terms of economic purchasing power. The number of bankruptcies continued to rise throughout Germany as the economic downturn progressed. While bankruptcies in retail trade had already increased by roughly 150 percent, the number of business failures had doubled by 1930. In 1920, the NSDAP had pledged to support the middle class by dismantling large companies and commercial centers and by giving direct support to small retailers. Embittered by the economic situation and lack of support by the Weimar Government, many looked at the NSDAP as a last hope in this dire situation.\(^{52}\)

The new middle class, such as employees in sales and clerks, also continued to struggle through every part of the Weimar Period. The ‘Golden Twenties’ did not provide economic relief. Many of the workers, especially older employees, constantly feared the threat of unemployment. Young women started to replace older workers, as they could be

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\(^{50}\) Ibid, 149.

\(^{51}\) Ibid, 150-151.

\(^{52}\) Ibid, 144.
paid less and fired easily. In 1930, in a matter of just 9 months the number of jobless white-collar employee had risen by 171 percent, concurrently with a 14 percent drop in salary.\(^{53}\) The novel *Little Man, What Now?* focused on the struggle of a salesman. The fictional story by Fallada conveys the daily struggles that white-collar workers faced to survive as the economy worsened.\(^{54}\) While Fallada did not write a historical account of the time period, he penned a story that communicates the intense struggle of the new middle class. Many diaries and notes, as well as the empirical data taken during the time of distress, confirm the desperate situation that these workers faced. White-collar support for the NSDAP, however, remained relatively limited compared to the old middle class and civil servants. As Childers notes, “The NSDAP, in fact, never developed a clearly formulated appeal to white-collar employees. While artisans, shopkeepers, farmers, pensioners, civil servants, and workers received prominent coverage in Nazi campaign literature, white-collar employees were usually treated more generally as subsidiary components of the *Arbeitnehmerschaft* or the endangered *Mittelstand.*”\(^{55}\)

Civil servants shared a similar economic fate. While legislation was passed in 1924 and 1928 to raise the salaries of civil servants, the salary had not adjusted to the continuous inflation nor did it reach the respectable level it once had in the *Kaiserreich* (Monarchy). As the economy collapsed, Heinrich Brüning, the Chancellor of Germany, executed cuts in the budget, further threatening the economic status of civil servants. On July 26, 1930 Chancellor Brüning passed an emergency decree that created a special tax of 2.5% on civil servants. The unemployment rate among civil servants, particularly

\(^{53}\) Ibid, 166-168.
\(^{54}\) Fallada *Little Man, What Now?*.
\(^{55}\) Childers, *Nazi Voter*, 175.
teachers, had already reached extreme proportions before the economic collapse in 1928.\textsuperscript{56} As Childers’ observes, “Given these mounting pressures, civil servants and particularly white collar employees appear to have been primed for radical political behavior.”\textsuperscript{57}

The NSDAP also focused on appealing to the retired middle class and blue-collar workers. While the campaign to attract the Rentnermittelstand (retired middle class) was successful, worker’s support for the NSDAP remained limited. The retired middle class consisted of retired Germans, widows, disabled veterans and small investors that relied on fixed income and savings. With the hyperinflation of 1923 and the economic collapse in 1928, retirement funds and government bonds became practically worthless. The economic situation in the Weimar Republic removed any form of safety net for small investors, savers and retired Germans. Their distrust of the government increased, as regulations, such as the Third Emergency Tax decree, failed to offer the desperately needed economic relief.\textsuperscript{58} As Childers summarizes, “The bill that emerged from these deliberations limited revaluation of private paper mark debts to 15 percent of their original gold mark value and exempted all government obligations from any revaluation until after the reparation issue had been resolved.”\textsuperscript{59} In an effort to repeal this legislation, the retired middle class formed special parties. These parties, however, were inadequately financed and organized, and lingered in a state of obscurity. The NSDAP was not able to immediately profit from the situation, as voters still largely preferred alternatives to the National Socialists. As the crisis worsened and with the disappointment in the DNVP’s

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid, 169.  
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid, 169.  
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid, 80-81.  
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid, 81.
failure to overturn the Third Emergency Tax Decree, constituents viewed the National Socialists as their last hope. The retired middle class began to defect from the DNVP and Nazi propaganda gradually attracted these lost voters. National Socialists consistently guaranteed the victims of the inflation that they would receive a “just revaluation” of lost savings and investments. By 1930, the Rentnermittelstand had become a stronger force within the NSDAP than the conservative voter.60

The majority of blue-collar workers on the other hand, a prime propaganda target of the National Socialists, were never fooled by the promises that the National Socialists made. During the Great Depression, workers in Germany also faced a lack of job opportunities and a drastic decrease in wages. In a matter of two years (1928-1930) the average wage of blue-collar workers had fallen by 11 percent. Unemployment among proletarian workers reached an apogee in 1932. This grim economic situation and the SPD’s (Social Democratic Party) association with the Weimar Republic eventually led to a plunge in SPD votes in the 1930 elections.61 Childers briefly summarized this transformation as follows: “The Social Democratic vote slipped from almost 30 percent in 1928 to 24 percent in 1930, while the Communists jumped from 10 to 13 percent.”62 Even though the National Socialists continued to target workers with propaganda, promises (e.g. programs to rebuild Germany and the breaking of the Jewish capital finance system) and through attacks on the traditional proletarian parties, workers largely chose to vote for the Communist Party in Germany. While the average blue-collar worker increasingly chose to support the KPD, many of the artisan workers supported National

60 Ibid, 162-166.
61 Ibid, 178-186.
62 Ibid, 185.
Socialists by 1930. However, the NSDAP was still able to attract a large percentage of workers that were not organized in unions and lived outside great industrial regions. The Communists had failed to engage or had overlooked these workers and therefore made them an easy target for National Socialists. As Stephen Fritz points out, “Although working class levels of support were below those of the general level of electoral support for the NSDAP, the fact that workers were so numerous in Weimar Germany meant that even a 30 percent level of support translated into a large number of voters in absolute terms.” Even though the majority of German blue-collar workers did not affiliate with the National Socialists, the workers that chose to support the NSDAP played an important role in the rising of the party.

Voter statistics reveal that National Socialists were only able to appeal to most Germans in a time of crisis. The NSDAP was able to increase their voter share by approximately 15 percent in a matter of two years. For the retired, old middle class and civil servants, the NSDAP was perceived as the last alternative. With the economic downturn most of the German middle class broke with traditional loyalties and gave the National Socialists a chance by casting their vote for them in the national elections. Childers notes, “By the summer of 1932 the NSDAP had succeeded where the traditional parties of the bourgeois center and right had repeatedly failed, becoming the long-sought party of middle-class concentration.” While many Germans directly affiliated with the NSDAP in the 1930s by joining the party or one of the sub-organizations, others did so

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63 Ibid, 178-186.
indirectly by casting their vote for Hitler and the National Socialists. Germans supported the NSDAP for different reasons. Many chose to become National Socialists solely for economic purposes while others believed in the broader Nazi ideology to a varying degree.  

Nazi propaganda manipulated a large minority of Germans to support the movement and vote for the NSDAP. The promises of a better Germany and a better economic situation proved to be irresistible to the new National Socialists. While voting for the National Socialist Party plays an important role in defining the “New National Socialist”, other aspects such as party membership, a career within the Nazi regime, and consistency of support for the NSDAP are crucial in characterizing a Nazi.

THE NAZI WITHIN THE REGIME

In a further attempt to clarify the image of a National Socialist, changes in membership in the NSDAP or any conglomerate organization will be examined. Which group of Germans joined the National Socialist Party and what was the motivation behind this affiliation? While many different social groups in Germany chose to vote for Hitler, not all of them were able to successfully profit from the NSDAP leadership. Once the NSDAP gained power in Germany, the internal structure altered tremendously.

While the composition of social groups being represented within the party had changed, the National Socialist movement remained a movement of the youth. At the end of 1934, 80 percent of the political leaders had only joined the party in 1933.  

Younger Germans were largely attracted to the NSDAP and its subordinate organizations. National

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68 Bracher, _Die Deutsche Diktatur_, 257.
Socialists were able to attract the younger generation that protested the Weimar Republic and its seemingly incompetent politicians.  

69 Over 65 percent of those affiliated with the party were not yet 40 years old and only 15 percent of NSDAP members were above the age of 50.  

70 Civil service workers (Beamte) and teachers accounted for the greatest increase in party membership. Many teachers and professors joined as early as 1933 in an attempt to show their loyalty to the new Nazi regime. Those that refused to conform were often demoted or threatened. In 1933-1934, more than 1,100 professors were fired due to the increasing pressure by the NSDAP. As the Nazi regime expanded its control over every part of the government, future teachers were forced to pass a political analysis examination.  

71 Just four years after Hitler had gained power in Germany, 63 percent of all Beamte (civil servants) in Germany joined the party.  

While the latter groups, ‘the Nazis within the Regime’, were able to profit under the National Socialist rule, many of the previous supporters, such as women, workers and farmers, were unable to improve their economic and social status within Germany. Women, who had also played an essential role in the election of the NSDAP, were not represented in the party leadership, but were confined to the traditional role of a woman. Only in the later part of World War II, as the shortage of competent and capable workers handicapped Germany, were women increasingly hired on the job market.  

72 Furthermore the majority of farmers, an important constituency in the elections of the early 1930s, 

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69 Ibid, 160.  
70 Ibid, 256.  
71 Ibid, 294-300.  
72 Ibid, 368-370.
chose not to pursue party membership after 1933. As expected the National Socialists continued to fare poorly with workers in Germany, being one of the least represented groups in party. Bracher summarized the party membership in these essential words: "The rootless middle class, of which the frustrated military and professionally dissatisfied intellectuals were also a part, furnished the mass following as well as the leadership of the NSDAP."

As Hitler took absolute control over the nation, he passed regulations and changes to the country. Many of the promises of the 1930s were not kept, but Hitler, always keen on his popularity, bribed Germans by improving the quality of life for the average German. The overall economic situation in Germany improved. Unemployment was tackled by Hitler through the many work programs and then later with creation of the military industry. *Kraft durch Freude* (Strength through Joy), one of the many programs developed by National Socialists to appease the worker, enjoyed vast popularity in Germany. While the overall situation for Germans improved, many of the constituents were disappointed by the NSDAP’s inability to improve their specific economic and social situation. The old middle class (craftsmen, traders and farmers) did not receive the promised relief. The chief industrial focus of the NSDAP lay on the improvement of the military industry, limiting the resources and aid available for smaller middle class businesses. Rural areas faced a rapid decline of employment, with the agriculture employment decreasing from 28.9 to 25.9 percent. The National Socialists attempted to

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73 Ibid, 201.
76 Fritzche, *Life and Death In The Third Reich*, 56-65
please the individual social groups, as they partially implemented regulations to provide economic relief. While the overall economic situation for Germans improved due to lending, the war industries, and the confiscation of Jewish businesses, many of the miracles that the National Socialists promised were either forgotten or impossible to undertake.\textsuperscript{77} The failure to implement the promises, however, did not necessarily lead to a rise in opposition. The middle class continued to be the strongest supporter of the Nazi regime.\textsuperscript{78} Many Germans adjusted to the new regime. They did not agree with every aspect of Nazi policy, but in turn compromised. “They identified their own prospects for a better, richer life with the fortunes of the new order; private happiness came to be deeply entangled with the public well-being of the Third Reich.”\textsuperscript{79}

National Socialists, however, did not lead all Germans into a brutal totalitarian system and war without facing major opposition. Catholics and particularly Protestants were largely in support of the National Socialist Movement in the beginning of the 1930s. While the Catholic Church and many of its members first agreed to submit to the Nazi regime, dissolving the Center Party and complying with National Socialist regulation, later many Catholics entered the opposition movement against Hitler. The Protestant Church split into two factions (\textit{Bekennende Kirche}, or Confessing Church, and the pro-Nazi German Christians, \textit{Deutsche Christen}); the Catholic Church on the other hand remained united. National Socialists were rarely able to break Germans’ traditional ties to the church, therefore created a powerful opposition group in Germany. The influence

\textsuperscript{77} Peukert, \textit{Volksgenossen und Gemeinschaftsfremde}, 100-142.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid, 104.
\textsuperscript{79} Fritzsche, \textit{Life and Death in the Third Reich}, 37.
exerted by many bishops and priests, created enough pressure on Hitler to officially stop the euthanasia program, the predecessor to the Holocaust.

While Hitler attempted to educate and manipulate the youth of Germany for his purposes, in many instances he failed to create loyal Nazis. The National Socialist Movement originally enjoyed large popularity and active engagement by the youth, however many young Germans began to rebel as the regime tried to exert more influence and control. The NSDAP intended to indoctrinate every young German through mandatory programs such as the Hitler Youth, Reich Labor Service and military service. The altered education system taught young Germans about racist and military ideals. Those that tried to avoid becoming part of the system were at some point forced to become a part of it. Nevertheless resistance surfaced, as the transformation of the Hitler Youth into a largely militaristic organization caused resentment. By the end of the 1930s, many young Germans chose not to partake in the leisure opportunities that were offered by the Hitler Youth but instead formed their own groups. As the resentment against the Nazi regime grew, young bold opposition groups formed (e.g. Edelweisspiraten, Edelweiss Pirates) that made it their mission to use force against the Hitler Youth and openly express their opposition to National Socialism.80

It is natural for people to make mistakes. These mistakes, however, could result in horrible consequences. Many Germans misjudged the danger that the National Socialists posed or chose to ignore these dangers in an effort to personally profit. After Hitler took control over Germany in 1933, many Germans decided to become a part of the movement and profit from membership in one of the many National Socialist organizations. Civil

80 Peukert, *Volksgenossen und Gemeinschaftsfremde*, 170-190.
servants intentionally and forcibly joined the party in great numbers in 1933. Younger Germans first became an integral part of the movement, with many of them acquiring leadership positions within the party and government, later many of the young Germans chose to actively oppose the regime. Part of the Catholic and Protestant Church and its members did a similar turn around and grew into an opposition group in Nazi Germany. Farmers, an important factor in the elections of the early 1930s, were largely forgotten and did not participate in the National Socialist governing process. Workers continued to actively or passively oppose the Nazi regime and its regulations. This data presents a general picture of those groups that continued to support National Socialism and that grew to be influential within the regime and those that chose to oppose the regime. The majority of Germans nevertheless chose to comply with National Socialist pressure. As Fritzsche points out, "Germans approached Nazi policies out of fear, opportunism, and careerism, as well as varying degrees of ideological conviction. The list can be extended: citizens were also lazy, indifferent, and ignorant."81 In these words Fritzsche successfully identified the complexity of identifying the characteristics of a National Socialist.

ALFRED WITTMANN

In the last part of my thesis, I will further illustrate this complexity by analyzing the life of my grandfather, Alfred Wittmann. While the historical analysis of a relative can appear to be problematic, due to the possible defamation of the individual, I will attempt to avoid this by basing the following research on primary documents in my possession and on an interview with Wittmann’s son, Dr. Lothar Wittmann. Official documents, 81Fritzsche, Life and Death in the Third Reich, 8.
such as the National Socialist membership card, denazification documents, post-war certificates and public newspaper articles, will lay the foundation of the following research.

Alfred Wittmann, the son of Johanna and Adolf Wittmann, was born on August 17, 1913 in Waldsachsen (Coburg). His parents baptized him according to their Protestant confession. Alfred’s keen interest in learning and education led him to attend Oberrealschule (Secondary School) and the Teachers Seminar in Coburg in 1934. In 1932, Wittmann decided to join the NS-Schülerbund (National Socialist Schoolchildren’s League) and in 1933, he became a member of the National Socialist Party. A charismatic teacher at the seminar convinced large groups of people to join this Nazi affiliate organization. Wittmann often described the dire economic situation and the disappointment in the current Weimar system as reasons for his actions. Many of the future teachers regarded obedience and the Führerprinzip (leadership principle) as essential values, making National Socialism an attractive alternative. Following the teacher’s seminar, Wittmann worked in the mandatory Reichsarbeitsdienst (Reich Labor Service) program. In 1937, Alfred Wittmann married Maximilie Frank, the daughter of an innkeeper. Alfred Wittmann was able to work as a substitute teacher in Upper Franconia until 1938, when he began his service in the military in Elbersreuth.

As a soldier, he served on both the western front in France and then in the east against the Soviet Union. In the last years of the war he was sent back to France. Fortunately for Wittmann, he was never required to directly fight on the front lines, but was charged with

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82 Personal Documents of Alfred & Maximilie Wittmann, 1913-1994 (in the possession of the Author)
83 Dr. Lothar Wittmann. Interview by author. Email. July 23, 2013
taking care of food supplies. Due to his close proximity to the food supply, Wittmann was able to retrieve food for Russian prisoners of war. He was caught in this act and could have possibly been sentenced to death for aiding the enemy. The company commander, however, chose only to punish this act himself and not to report it to the higher authorities. In the Soviet Union, Wittmann was a member of the regiment responsible for replenishment and supply. This regiment, unusual in character, openly voiced their opinions and criticized the lack of planning and supplies available on the Eastern Front. The war in the East, poor Nazi organization, and the lack of supplies turned Wittmann against National Socialism. A few days before the war ended, Wittmann and a friend deserted from the army and found a hiding place with a farmer. Throughout his military career Alfred Wittmann was never forced to turn his gun on another person; by chance he was able to withdraw from a shooting squad that was executing a deserter. As Germany submitted to Allied Control, Alfred was not taken into custody but permitted to return home as an essential farm worker. Until 1948 he transported herring from Hamburg to Bavaria in a truck that was provided by the Allied Troops.

In 1947, Alfred Wittmann and his wife Maximilie were required to appear in front of a denazification court (Spruchkammer) in the official process of denazification. The official denazification document stated that both Alfred and Maximilie Wittmann, despite his membership in the party and its organizations, would from then on be classified merely as Mitläufer (followers). Charges were initially brought against Wittmann, due to his membership in the NSDAP, the NS School Children’s League and the Hitler Youth.

84 Ibid.
He served as the squad leader in Hitler Youth and received a golden Hitler Youth Medallion due to his membership in the *NS-Schülerbund*.

The court investigated Alfred Wittmann in his hometown and received exculpatory evidence that served to absolve Wittmann of the serious charge of being an active Nazi. Wittmann testified that in his duty as schoolteacher, he never advocated National Socialism. He did not wish to be confirmed as the Squad Leader, but was only interested in the sports and physical aspects of the Hitler Youth. Even though a member of the Party, he stated that he never attended any meetings nor did he give any speeches promoting National Socialism. Other testimonies confirmed that Wittmann provided refuge in his house for a political victim of the regime and denied his presence in front of SS investigators. Others vouched that Wittmann further attempted to help racially persecuted individuals, when it was within in his power to do so. The court came to the conclusion that from the evidence presented and with the results of the investigation, Alfred Wittmann was neither actively engaged in nor promoted National Socialism. There was no evidence presented that incriminated him and he was therefore not placed in the category “Offenders”. The court judged that due to his minimal support and activity in the National Socialist regime, they could release him from the charges and categorize him as a follower. This ruling went into effect on December 8, 1947 and Wittmann was able to resume his original profession as a teacher in 1948.\textsuperscript{85}

As a teacher Wittmann worked first in the town of Schwarzenbach (Saale) and later transferred to Kulmbach. In 1963, he was then promoted to be the permanent representative at the Board of Education for the city Kulmbach. Just 5 years later,

\textsuperscript{85} Personal Documents of Alfred & Maximilie Wittmann, 1913-1994
Wittmann became the principal of the Blaicher School and remained in this position until his retirement in 1976. In the post-war years Alfred Wittmann also became a member of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Arbeiterwohlfahrt (Workers Welfare), an organization founded in an effort to help the socially disadvantaged and poor. As a co-founder of the Workers Welfare in Kulmbach, he became one of the leading figures and representatives at the local and regional and state level of this charity. For his selfless work he was awarded many regional awards and ultimately in 1984 one of the highest national honors, the Bundesverdienstkreuz am Bande (Federal Cross of Merit). 86

Given the basic characteristics of a National Socialist, we would have to categorize my grandfather Alfred Wittmann as a Nazi. He joined the NS-Schülerbund in 1932 and the NSDAP in 1933. As a civil servant (teacher) he was one of thousands of teachers that joined the party in its early years of power. However, as the Third Reich progressed, Alfred Wittmann realized that he disagreed with the National Socialist Government on many issues, such as the endless war in the East, the racial policies, and the treatment of prisoners of war. With small but dangerous acts of defiance (such as the feeding of POWs) and, according to the denazification report, even the act of hiding political opponents, he acted in active opposition against the organization he once supported.

While the identifying characteristics presented earlier provide a general idea of a National Socialist, it would be a fallacy to automatically classify an individual as a National Socialist based on these features. Some of the greatest members of the opposition first participated or were a leading figure in the National Socialist Government. Hans and Sophie Scholl, prominent for their active opposition movement

86 Ibid.
and ultimate sacrifice to this cause, first enjoyed National Socialism, its parades and activities. Later, as they grew up and unveiled the façade behind the system, they formed the White Rose Opposition Movement together with friends. Hans Friedrich Lenz, a priest in the Confessional Church and major opponent, was forced to serve in the paramilitary organization SS (Schutzstaffel). In an effort to weaken the opposition movement by the Confessional Church, Lenz was assigned to the Eastern Front. Even though he was forced to work in one of the many concentration camps, he did not have to make use of his gun or harm any of the inmates. On the contrary, due to his position within the concentration camp, he was able to aid the inmates, for example by delaying information of escaped inmates. Other personalities, such as Oskar Schindler and Georg Ferdinand Duckwitz, provide concrete instances when National Socialist figures turned their back on the Nazi regime and achieved an extraordinary feat in undermining the deadly Nazi policies. While it is possible to create a general image of a National Socialist, it is neither our right nor our job to judge people from the time and place a label on them merely for their affiliation with the party. On the other hand it is acceptable to judge Germans from the Third Reich by their actions and deeds. The American Occupation Force did not choose to place the general label of Nazi or non-Nazi on all Germans, but judged Germans and their Allies individually based on their involvement in the regime and their criminal activity. Five categories, such as Major Offenders, Offenders, Lesser Offenders, Followers and Person Exonerated, were created to

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87 Hans Friedrich Lenz, Sagen Sie Herr Pfarrer wie kommen Sie zur SS, (Giessen: Brunnen Verlag, 1989).
categorize the level of incrimination in Nazi Germany.\textsuperscript{88} While the effectiveness and procedures of this denazification process have often been criticized\textsuperscript{89}, the basic notion of prosecuting National Socialists in this manner appeared to be just.

CONCLUSION

The term “National Socialist,” or “Nazi,” typically coined in simple statements, has often been misunderstood and misused. It is complex and distinct in its nature. There was not one common type of Nazi in Germany, but National Socialist supporters and members evolved through time and their values with them. The Traditional Nazi founded the DAP and NSDAP and placed the original values of the 25-Point Program at the core of the party. Their “unchangeable” plan to relieve the country from the misery of the Weimar Republic and all of its negative surrounding was, however, only of temporary nature. Adolf Hitler, the leader of the NSDAP, proved to be pragmatic in most points of the National Socialist ideology. He altered and bent the program at his will, splitting apart the Traditional Nazi while simultaneously creating a powerful New National Socialist Movement. The New Nazi became a follower of Hitlerism, able and willing to adjust his or her beliefs to those that Hitler publicly announced. He was willing to be manipulated by Hitler and his propaganda team and trusted in the promises that the NSDAP made. This group was largely composed of the struggling middle class and the youth of Germany that believed Hitler to be the last hope in a desperate situation. While many more joined forces with the NSDAP and Hitler after his nomination as Chancellor in


1933, a faction apprehended the mistake they had made and chose to oppose the Nazi regime. Many Germans chose to tolerate the National Socialists for the many perceived economic and national advantages. In essence, identifying characteristics of a National Socialist can straightforwardly be pointed out. Yet on the individual level, other aspects, such as action in opposition to National Socialism as well as the level of commitment to the movement and incrimination during the Third Reich, play an essential role. The ability to identify and judge an individual from the Third Reich as a National Socialist, with the exception of the leaders of the NSDAP, can prove to be biased and condemnatory. As shown previously, some individuals were able to turn their back to the evil of National Socialism and actively oppose it.
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