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The Bush Hitler Thing

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Dear Sir,

My family was one of Hitler's victims. We lost a lot under the Nazi occupation, including an uncle who died in the camps and a cousin killed by a booby trap. I was terrified when my father went ballistic after finding my brother and me playing with a hand grenade. (I was only 12 at the time, and my brother insisted the grenade was safe.) I remember the rubble and the hardships of 'austerity' - and the bomb craters from Allied bombs. As late as the 1980s, I had to take detours while bombs were being removed - they litter the countryside, buried under parking lots, buildings, and in the canals and rivers to this day. Believe me, I learned a lot about Hitler while I was growing up, both in Europe and here in the US - both my parents were in the war and talked about it constantly, unlike most American families. I spent my earliest years with the second-hand fear that trickled down from their PTSD - undiagnosed and untreated in those days.

I'm no expert on WWII - but I learned a lot about what happened in Germany - and Europe - back in those days. I always wondered how the wonderful German people - so honest, decent, hard-working, friendly, and generous - could ever allow such a thing to happen. (There were camps near my family's home - they still talk about them only in hushed conspiratorial whispers.) I asked a lot of questions - we were only a few kilometers from the German border - and no one ever denied me. My relatives had obviously spent a lot of time thinking about the war - they still haven't forgotten - I don't think anyone can forget such a horrible nightmare. Among the questions I asked:

Why didn't you do anything about the people in the camps?

Everyone was terrified. People 'disappeared' into those camps.





Sometimes the Nazis came and lined everyone up, walking behind them - even school children - with a cocked pistol. You never knew when they would just shoot someone in the back of the head. Everyone was terrified. Everyone was disarmed - guns were registered, so all the Nazis had to do was go from house to house and demand the guns.

Didn't you see what was happening?

We saw. There was nothing we could do. Our military had no modern weapons. The Nazis had technology and resources - they just invaded and took over - we were overwhelmed by their air power. They had spies everywhere - people spying on each other, just to have an 'ace in the hole' in case they were accused - and anyone who had a grudge against you could accuse you of something - just an accusation meant you'd disappear. Nobody dared ask where you had gone - anyone who returned was considered suspicious - what had they said, and who did they implicate? It was a climate of fear - there's nothing anyone can do when the government uses fear and imprisonment to intimidate people. The government was above the law - even in Germany, it became 'every man for himself'. Advancement was possible by exposing 'traitors' - anyone who questioned the government. It didn't matter if the people you accused were guilty or not - just the accusation was enough.

Did anyone know what was going on?

We all knew. We imagined the worst because the Nazis made 'examples' of a few people in every town and village. Public torture and execution. The most unspeakable atrocities were committed in full view of everyone. If this is what happened in public, can you imagine what might be going on in the camps? Nobody wanted to know.

Why didn't the German people stop the Nazis?

Life was better, at first, under the Nazis. The war machine invigorated the economy - men had jobs again, and enough money to take care of their family. New building projects were everywhere. The shops were full again - and people could afford good food, culture, and luxuries. Women could stay home in comfort. Crime was reduced. Health care improved. It was a rosy scenario - Hitler brought order and prosperity. His policies won widespread approval because life was better for

most Germans, after the misery of reparations and inflation. The people liked the idea of removing the worst elements of society - the gypsies, the homosexuals, the petty criminals - it was easy to elicit support for prosecuting the corrupt 'evil' people poisoning society. Every family was proud of their hometown heroes - the sharply-dressed soldiers they contributed to his program - they were, after all, defending the Fatherland. Continuing a proud tradition that had been defeated and shamed after WWI, the soldiers gave the feeling of power and success to the proud families that showered them with praise and support. Their early victories were reason to celebrate - in spite of the fact that they faced poorly armed inferior forces - further proof that what they were doing was right, and the best thing for the country. The news was full of stories about their bravery and accomplishments against a vile enemy. They were 'liberating' these countries from their corrupt governments.

These are some of the answers I gleaned over the years. As a child, I was fascinated with the Nazis. I thought the German soldiers were really something - that's how strong an impression they made, even after the war. After all, they weren't the ones committing war crimes - they were the pride of their families and communities. It was just the SS and Gestapo that were 'bad'. Now I know better -but that pride in the military was a strong factor for many years, only adding to the mystique of military power - after all, my father had been a soldier too, but in the American army. It took a while to figure out the truth.

Every time I've gone back to Europe, someone has taken me to the 'gardens of stone' - the Allied cemeteries that dot the countryside. With great sadness, my relatives would stand in abject misery, remembering the nightmare, and asking 'Why?'. Maybe that's why they wouldn't support the US invasion of Iraq. They knew war. They knew occupation. And they knew resistance. I saw the building where British flyers hid on their way back to England - smuggled out by brave families that risked the lives of everyone to help the Allies. As a child, I had played in a basement, where the cow lived under the house, as is common there. The same place those flyers hid.

So why, now, when I hear GWB's speeches, do I think of Hitler? Why have I drawn a parallel between the Nazis and the present administration? Just one small reason -the phrase 'Never forget'. Never let this happen again. It is better to question our government - because it really can happen here - than to ignore the possibility.

So far, I've seen nothing to eliminate the possibility that Bush is on the same course as Hitler. And I've seen far too many analogies to

dismiss the possibility. The propaganda. The lies. The rhetoric. The nationalism. The flag waving. The pretext of 'preventive war'. The flaunting of international law and international standards of justice. The disappearances of 'undesirable' aliens. The threats against protesters. The invasion of a non-threatening sovereign nation. The occupation of a hostile country. The promises of prosperity and security. The spying on ordinary citizens. The incitement to spy on one's neighbors - and report them to the government. The arrogant triumphant pride in military conquest. The honoring of soldiers. The tributes to 'fallen warriors. The diversion of money to the military. The demonization of government appointed 'enemies'. The establishment of 'Homeland Security'. The dehumanization of 'foreigners'. The total lack of interest in the victims of government policy. The incarceration of the poor and mentally ill. The growing prosperity from military ventures. The illusion of 'goodness' and primacy. The new einsatzgruppen forces. Assassination teams. Closed extralegal internment camps. The militarization of domestic police. Media blackout of non-approved issues. Blacklisting of protesters - including the no-fly lists and photographing dissenters at rallies.

There isn't much doubt in my mind - anyone who compares the history of Hitler's rise to power and the progression of recent events in the US cannot avoid the parallels. It's incontrovertible. Is Bush another Hitler? Maybe not, but with each incriminating event, the parallel grows -it certainly cannot be dismissed. There's too much evidence already. Just as Hitler used American tactics to plan and execute his reign, it looks as if Karl Rove is reading Hitler's playbook to plan world domination - and that is the stated intent of both. From the Reichstag fire to the landing at Nuremberg to the motto of "Gott Mit Uns" to the unprovoked invasion and occupation of Iraq to the insistence that peace was the ultimate goal, the line is unbroken and unwavering.

I'm afraid now, that what may still come to pass is a reign far more savage and barbaric than that of the Nazis. Already, appeasement has been fruitless - it only encourages the brazen to escalate their arrogance and braggadocio. Americans support Bush - by a generous majority - and mass media sings his praises while indicting his detractors - or silencing their opinions completely. The American people seem to care only about the domestic economic situation - and even in that, they are in complete denial. They don't want to hear about Iraq, and Afghanistan is already forgotten. Even the Democratic opposition supports the occupation of Iraq. Everyone seems to agree that Saddam Hussein deserves to be executed -with or without a trial. 'Visitors' are fingerprinted. Guilty until proven innocent. Snipers are on New York City rooftops. When do the Stryker teams start appearing on American streets? They're perfectly suited for 'Homeland Security' -

and they've had a trial run in Iraq. The Constitution has been suspended - until further notice. Dick Cheney just mentioned it may be for decades - even a generation, as Rice asserts as well. Is this the start of the 1000 year reign of this new collection of thugs? So it would seem.

I can only hope that in the coming year there will be some sign - some hint - that we are not becoming that which we abhor. The Theory of the Grotesque fares all too well these days. It may not be Nazi Germany - it might be a lot worse.

SL | Wisconsin

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