

The Swastika & Hitler as Postal Propaganda

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After World War I and the Treaty of Versailles, the fears, hatreds, hopes, and feelings of betrayal among many Germans were reflected in the formation of new groups of political extremists, including Adolph Hitler and the Nazis.

Hitler knew that through propaganda, including postal propaganda, he might persuade Germans that the Nazi system could restore Germany's greatness, a greatness that he felt had been trashed by the Treaty of Versailles. Postage stamps would spread that message throughout the world! This exhibit is a brief look at two images used in that propaganda technique.

Because Hitler felt the subtle propaganda used in World War I had been ineffective, in the early 1930s, he and his cohorts took existing or apolitical images and slowly evolved them into tools of Nazi propaganda. The swastika symbol, 卐 or 卐, for example, a mark of divinity and spirituality in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, is today primarily recognized in the West for its use by the Nazi party as a symbol beginning in the 1930s.

In November 1933, for another example, Germany issued a set of stamps to commemorate operas by Wagner (Fig 1). The paper used for the stamps, however, had a swastika watermark. Most stamps after this date were printed on similar paper.



Fig. 1: Scott B57; commemorating "Lohengrin," by Richard Wagner, printed on paper with a swastika watermark

A visible swastika first appeared in 1934 on stamps that were frequently used for international mail; each value in the set of 11 airmail stamps (Fig 2) featured a "swastika sun" illuminating the world.



Fig. 2: Scott C52; with a swastika sun peaking out behind a globe and eagle



Fig. 3: Scott 442-443; commemorating the Nazi Congress at Nuremberg

By 1934, a growing enthusiasm for Nazism was reflected in a set issued on 1 September to commemorate the Nazi Congress at Nuremberg (Fig. 3); both stamps in this two-value set carry a striking image characterized by a "swastika sun" glowing behind a Nuremberg castle. The power of the sun was used as a metaphor for the power of the Nazis.

Beginning in January 1933, pro-Nazi postal material had shown Hitler with Frederick the Great, Otto von Bismarck, and Paul von Hindenburg (Fig 4), in an attempt to establish him as the successor "to these towering, heroic figures of the German past."



Fig 4: Scott P250; a postcard portrayed Hitler alongside Pres. Paul von Hindenburg

By the mid-1930s, however, Hitler no longer appeared alongside previous leaders; he was now the *Der Führer!* (Fig. 5). Hitler was henceforth portrayed alone as a common man who had been called by destiny to finish the work of the leaders who preceded him.



Fig. 5: Scott B140; Hitler portrayed as *Der Führer*



Fig. 6: Scott B102; An inscription beneath reads: "He who would rescue a people, knows only heroic thoughts."

Believing that "propaganda must be addressed to the emotions and not to the intelligence," Hitler created numerous "holidays" throughout the year, including his birthday on April 20th. Beginning in 1937, a new *annual* stamp was issued to mark the occasion (Fig. 6).



Fig. 7: Scott B252

Germany marked the 11th anniversary of the assumption of power by the Nazis with a stamp commemorating *Der Führer*, the swastika, and other Nazi emblems (Fig. 7).