Part III: Personalities in the Twentieth Century

Percentage of course time: 25%

Principal focus: Through the study of a modern personality, students gain an understanding of the role of the individual in a period of national or international history.

Outcomes

Students:
H1.1 describe the role of key features, issues, individuals, groups and events of selected twentieth-century studies
H1.2 analyse and evaluate the role of key features, issues, individuals, groups and events of selected twentieth-century studies
H2.1 explain forces and ideas and assess their significance in contributing to change and continuity during the twentieth century
H3.1 ask relevant historical questions
H3.2 locate, select and organise relevant information from different types of sources
H3.3 analyse and evaluate sources for their usefulness and reliability
H3.4 explain and evaluate differing perspectives and interpretations of the past
H3.5 plan and present the findings of historical investigations, analysing and synthesising information from different types of sources
H4.1 use historical terms and concepts appropriately
H4.2 communicate a knowledge and understanding of historical features and issues using appropriate and well-structured oral and written forms

Students learn to:
- ask relevant historical questions
- locate, select and organise information from different types of sources, including ICT, to describe and analyse relevant features and issues
- assess the impact of the personality on twentieth-century history
- analyse the contribution of the personality to the period in which they lived
- account for and assess differing perspectives and interpretations of the personality
• evaluate the usefulness and reliability of sources
• present the findings of investigations on aspects of the personality, analysing and synthesising information from different types of sources
• communicate an understanding of relevant concepts, features and issues using appropriate and well-structured oral and/or written and/or multimedia forms including ICT.


Principal focus: Through the study of Albert Speer, students gain an understanding of the role of this personality in a period of national or international history.

Students learn about:

1  Historical context
• rise of the Nazi party and the personal charisma of Adolf Hitler (Covered in Part 2: Germany)
• development of the Nazi state after 1933 (Covered in Part 2: Germany)
• Nazi war effort to 1945
• Nuremberg War Crimes Trials

2  Background
• family background and education
• introduction to Nazism and his reasons for joining the Nazi party

3  Rise to prominence
• early work for the Nazi party
• appointment as ‘First Architect of the Reich’
• the ‘Germania’ project and the new Reich Chancellery
• work as Armaments Minister

4  Significance and evaluation
• relationship with Hitler
• involvement with anti-Semitic activities in connection with the Germania project – the question of the ‘Jew-flats’
• use and abuse of forced labour
• knowledge of and links with the concentration camp system
• reaction to Hitler’s ‘scorched earth’ policy in 1945
• the significance of Speer’s work as Minister for Armaments and War Production to the overall German war effort
• evaluation: for example, the ‘Good Nazi’?

If Hitler had had any friends, I would certainly have been one of his close friends.

Albert Speer, 1946

Individuals in Modern History – Albert Speer, Frappell, 2002.

Albert Speer wrote:

“Today, almost forty years later, I grow dizzy when I recall that the number of manufactured tanks seems to have been more important to me than the vanished victims of racism.”
• family background and education

Speer’s Early Life

Berthold Konrad Hermann Albert Speer was born on 19 March 1905, the second of three sons. His father, Albert Friedrich Speer, was a successful architect and property owner, while his mother Luise Mathilde Wilhelmine Hommel was the daughter of a prosperous businessman. The family was very wealthy and lived in a well-appointed apartment in Mannheim, a town near the French–German border. Their apartment was lavishly furnished with French and Indian furniture, hand-embroidered curtains and crystal chandeliers. The family owned two cars (a touring car for summer and a sedan for winter) and employed a cook, a kitchen maid, chambermaids, a butler and a chauffeur. Albert and his brothers were cared for by a French governess and attended an exclusive private primary school.

Albert was nine years old when World War I began in 1914. When the expected ‘quick victory’ of the war did not eventuate, both warring sides were faced with a cruel war of attrition. For the German home front, this resulted in serious food and fuel shortages. The food shortages were compounded by poor harvests in 1916 and 1917, which in turn led to rising prices and a growing black market. City-dwellers, particularly those with no farming relatives in the country who could supply them with food, were the hardest hit. Around 700 000 city people died from starvation and hypothermia in 1917. Although wealth enabled the Speer family to purchase what food was available, it could do little to overcome the actual scarcity of that food, so they too were affected by the food shortages. In his memoirs, Erinnerungen (1969), Albert Speer related how his family endured the so-called ‘turnip winter’ of 1917–1918, during which his mother Luise developed a talent for devising new turnip recipes. Then in mid-1918, Allied air raids began over Mannheim and Albert’s father decided to move the family to their summer house in Heidelberg, a town south of Mannheim.

Albert excelled at school, particularly in mathematics. Confident of his mathematical abilities, Albert wanted to study the subject at university, but his father discouraged the plan and recommended that his son follow in his footsteps and become an architect. So in 1923, Albert Speer commenced architectural studies.

Outline Speer’s background, how was it different to Hitler’s?

Explain how his family was affected by World War I. Would you say it was a typical German experience of the war?
Albert Speer Chronology

1905 Born in Mannheim.
1927 Qualified as an architect.
1931 March Joined the Nazi Party.
1933 May Redesigned Goebbels’ office.
1934 Placed in charge of Beauty of Labour movement.
1934 Created his ‘cathedral of light’ for the Nuremburg party rally. Filmed by Leni Riefenstahl in Triumph of the Will.
1942 Feb. Appointed Minister for Armaments and Munitions to replace Fritz Todt.
1943 Sept. Appointed Minister for Armaments and War Production.
1943 Oct. Attended Posen Conference where Himmler made explicit the ‘Final Solution’.
1945 March Began to resist Hitler’s ‘scorched earth’ policy.
1945-1946 Imprisoned by the Allies and then put on trial at Nuremberg.
1946-1966 Served 20 years in Spandau prison.
1969 Published German version of Inside the Third Reich.
1981 Died on a visit to London.
1990s Subject of a spate of books examining his life and war guilt.

1. When did he join the Nazi Party?
2. What might attract a well educated, middle class man to the Nazi party?
3. When was his first major appointment?
4. Did he ever resist Hitler?
5. How many years did he serve in prison?


When Albert Speer commenced his studies in architecture in 1923, he could not know that his future lay with the relatively unknown man who in a few months’ time would lead the ill-fated Munich ‘Beer-Hall’ Putsch. Adolf Hitler formed a close friendship with the young Speer and propelled him into positions of power and success, first as his premier architect and then as Nazi Minister of Armaments. Speer’s architectural designs for the Nazi Party included the Nuremberg Nazi Party Rally site and the new plan for Berlin. From 1942, when he became the Nazi Minister of Armaments, Speer deftly reorganised the armaments industry, and dramatically increased German armaments production.

Individuals in Modern History – Albert Speer, Frappell, 2002.
**Spee’s Training:**

- **family background and education**

Speer enrolled in the School of Architecture at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology. His decision to study locally at Karlsruhe, rather than at one of the more prestigious Technical Institutes, was dictated by the inflation crisis of 1923. Speer recorded in his memoirs that his monthly allowance quickly proved inadequate for his requirements, with a student meal costing over half a billion marks during the height of the crisis. The crippling price rises, which spelt hunger and destitution for many Germans, didn’t prevent Speer from enjoying the finer things of life; he attended the theatre occasionally (with tickets costing between three and four hundred million marks). The Speer family’s wealth rescued them from the difficulties they encountered through the hyperinflation period.

As an astute property investor, Speer’s father was able to sell family property assets for American dollars. Although the properties were sold for an outrageously low price, it made the family financially viable again. Subsequently, Speer’s monthly allowance, which amounted to 16 American dollars was more than ample for his needs.

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**Webquest:**


*Will the real Albert Speer please stand up?*

“It is up to you, the historian, to seek and unravel the truth as a result of your research, reading and investigations.

This webquest will lead you on an individual quest through a range of resources, readings and websites to your truth.”

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Individuals in Modern History – Albert Speer, Frappell, 2002.
**Early Influences:**

**Heinrich Tessenow**

In 1924, when inflation stabilised, Speer was able to transfer his studies to the more esteemed Institute of Technology in Munich. The following year, Speer transferred again, to the Institute of Technology in Berlin-Charlottenburg, where he came under the tutelage of Professor Heinrich Tessenow.

As an architect, Tessenow was philosophically mid-way between modernism and traditionalism. As a founding member of the *Deutsche Werkbund*, he promoted the native German craftsmanship ideal and advocated simple design suitable for mass production. He invented and patented a wall construction system in 1909 and designed a housing estate for factory workers at Hellerau, near Dresden. But he was also influenced by the monumental neo-Classical Greek style, which he used on occasion.

Tessenow was deeply affected by the horrors of World War I. Consequently, he came to reject the notion of the *metropolis*, the machine age and *internationalism*, and opted for a return to small-town life. He saw the spirit of the German peasantry as the true untainted life-force of the nation. Architecturally, Tessenow began to advocate simple, regionally-based design, *organic forms* of architecture and natural building materials. He was the co-creator with Paul Schultze-Naumburg of the *Heimatstil* design (homeland style) for mass-housing projects. The *Heimatstil* house was distinctive for its whitewashed walls and pitched sloping roof, reminiscent of the traditional German peasant house.

- introduction to Nazism and his reasons for joining the Nazi party

**Speer AND Nazism**

From around the time of Speer’s graduation in 1927, the German economy began to falter. Accompanying this downturn was the floundering of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and increasing support for the German Communist Party (KPD). This alarmed many middle-class Germans, who believed that the communists would instigate a Russian-style revolution. Into this void of political uncertainty stepped Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party. The Nazis promised to revive the German economy, restore German racial pride and counter the threat of communism. These policies found favour with many middle-class Germans. After the Reichstag elections of September 1930, the Nazis became the second largest party in the Reichstag, behind the SDP, with 107 seats.

Are any of these ideals similar to Nazism?

- Return to pre-WWI Germany.
- Born in socialism, over taken by extreme nationalism.
- Influence and power of the collective over the individual.

BUT Professor Tessenow never supported the Nazi party.

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*Individuals in Modern History – Albert Speer, (Frappell, 2002)*
Although Tessenow never agreed with Nazism, many of his students did. They invited Speer to a Nazi student rally at which Hitler was to speak. Speer claimed to have been uninterested in politics as a young man. Nevertheless, he attended the student rally, which was held in a Berlin beer-hall. It was December 1930. Hitler entered the hall to the applause of the students. To Speer’s surprise, Hitler was dressed in a neat blue suit, rather than in the brown uniform of the Nazi Party posters. Speer was even more impressed when Hitler began his speech. He did not shout excitedly, as Speer had thought he would, but spoke persuasively and soberly about his vision for Germany. Speer claimed to have been deeply affected, not only with Hitler’s proposed solutions to the threat of communism and his renunciation of the Treaty of Versailles (1919), but also with the man himself.

A few weeks later, Speer attended another Nazi rally. This time, the rally was presided over by Joseph Goebbels, the future Nazi Minister for Propaganda. Speer was disturbed at the way Goebbels whipped the crowd into a fanatical frenzy, playing on their hopes for economic revival and blaming the Jewish community for Germany’s misfortunes. Although Goebbels’ performance offended Speer’s middle-class sensibilities, he was unable to shake the impression Hitler had made on him. Speer joined the Nazi Party the very next day, and became member number 474 481.

Why did Speer, a well-educated, middle-class man, join the Nazi Party? Was it their strong stance against communism? Was Hitler’s charisma an important factor, as Speer claimed? Certainly, in the Reichstag elections of 1930, a significant proportion of the Nazi Party vote came from people with similar economic backgrounds to Speer, people who traditionally voted for the conservative German National People’s Party (DNVP) or the German People’s Party (DVP). By 1930, the middle class was becoming increasingly convinced that Hitler’s anti-communist stance and solutions for Germany’s economic plight would prevent the possibility of a Russian-style revolution.

The middle class also endorsed the Nazi Party’s thorough opposition to the directives of the Treaty of Versailles. Hitler’s alliance with Alfred Hugenberg, the leader of the DNVP, to oppose the 1929 Young Plan’s renegotiation of the Treaty of Versailles proved a highly successful strategy for the Nazis. It made Hitler respectable in the eyes of the middle class and encouraged wealthy DNVP-voting industrialists to support the Nazi Party financially. Political credibility, an improvement in the Nazi Party’s image and Hitler’s personal magnetism made the Nazi Party appear to be a viable political option. These factors were enough to override any of Speer’s concerns about anti-Semitism or fanaticism, and convinced him to put his faith in the Nazi Party.

Summary questions:

- When did Speer join the Nazi Party?
- Where and when did Speer first hear Hitler speak?
- Which Nazi leader did not impress Speer?
- What were two factors that may have overridden Speer’s faith in the Nazi Party?
- Where did Speer train to be an architect?
- Who was his main influence while training?

Outline the reasons why Speer joined the Nazi Party.

Was Speer a typical Nazi voter?

Was he a typical Nazi Party member?

Anti-Communism deeply influenced many well educated, middle class families. This led many to the Nazi Party, as members, in the case of Speer, a loyal servant to the leader.

The consistent place of the Treaty- at the core of all Nazi promises- is also behind much of Speer’s commitment to the Nazi ideal.