

*THE WAY WE SAW IT*

# IMAGES OF HATE

## VISUAL PROPAGANDA UNDER HITLER AND STALIN

IN ILLUSTRATION AND ART

A Teacher's  
Resource Booklet  
with Lesson Plans and Reproducible  
Student-Activity Assignments



**MindSparks**  
CHALLENGING STUDENTS TO THINK HISTORICALLY

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# Introduction

## Propaganda and the Totalitarian State

Human beings can be manipulated by words but the power visual images possess to arouse strong emotion makes them far more effective as tools of propaganda. Tyrants and dictators have always understood this. Kings and emperors in the past inevitably had their palaces, monuments, rituals, statues, and huge popular spectacles.

These seem sporadic and mild in their impact in comparison with the relentless, ever-present propaganda machinery of the totalitarian state of the twentieth century. The press, schools, radio, film, theater, and many other institutions were totally coordinated by such regimes and put to work in the effort to shape popular consciousness. This curriculum unit looks at the visual propaganda of two of the worst of these tyrannies, that of Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union and that of Germany's Adolf Hitler. These rulers used propaganda in very similar ways—to portray a pure and glorious people bringing a new order into being, to demonize entire categories of innocent human beings, and to focus hatred on enemies within and enemies without.

The twelve visual displays in this curriculum unit focus on all of these key aspects of visual propaganda as it was used by these two dictatorships. The illustrations are presented in four lessons. Each lesson uses three visual displays to explore one broad topic in the overall story. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

### **The Monumental State**

The images here are examples of propaganda designed to portray the state as the all-powerful bearer of what is good and noble and as the defender of the virtuous of the nation against the wicked.

### **The Pure and the Impure**

Both of these states justified their total control by picturing themselves as the revolutionary agents of a new social order and a new, superior human nature. For Hitler, that new human being was the Aryan race purified and brought to a state of perfection. For Stalin, the new socialist man would end all class division and social conflict. The propaganda of each regime was designed in part to clearly mark off the purified citizens from the impure classes or races who threatened them.

### **Enemies Within**

Each dictator needed to identify an enemy within that was devious enough to remain hidden, but with enormous power to do evil. The ability to portray an entire group of people this way through relentless propaganda paved the way for the genocidal actions of each regime.

### **Enemies Without**

In addition to the enemies within, equally relentless and evil enemies outside the nation were pictured as bent on its destruction. This aspect of each dictator's propaganda efforts kept the population in a constant state of anxiety and dependence on the all-powerful leader.

## Using Visual Images in the Classroom

Many textbooks today contain colorful visuals, but, all too often, these images function primarily to fill space or offer little educational value. They make the text more entertaining, or at least more palatable, often doing little more than providing simple pictorial reinforcement of ideas already presented in the text. In many cases, school materials pander to the visual orientation of the young while doing little to help the students master the challenges of the visual media that dominate their lives.

By way of contrast, our approach to using visual materials emphasizes their unique strengths as social or historical documents. The lessons in MindSparks booklets focus students on the visual symbols and metaphors in editorial cartoons, the dramatic qualities of certain photographs, the potential of many images to make abstract ideas more specific and concrete, the implicit biases and stereotypes in certain images, their emotional power, and their ability to invoke the spirit of a time and place. In the process, we make every effort to strengthen students' visual literacy skills in general and their ability to think critically and engage in spirited but disciplined discussions.

After using the booklet, you may wish to look at some of the many other MindSparks products using editorial cartoons, photographs, posters, and other visual images.

## How to Use This Booklet

This booklet is divided into four lessons, with three illustrations per lesson. Each lesson consists of the following:

### **A BACKGROUND-INFORMATION SHEET**

An introductory page for each lesson provides brief explanations of the three illustrations for the lesson and their relevance to the lesson's objectives.

### **DISCUSSION-ACTIVITY PAGES FOR EACH VISUAL DISPLAY**

Each page includes one image, and a sequence of questions is provided to help you plan an all-classroom discussion while examining the image. The questions take students step by step through an analysis of the visual. For students who require more support to answer the questions, you may reproduce and hand out an entire discussion-activity page in order to provide more visual support. For students who need less support to answer questions, keep the page yourself, and ask the questions of the class as a whole in order to provide a listening-and-response writing activity. In addition to these questions, one or two follow-up activities are suggested. The instructions for these activities are directed to the student. Some are individual assignments while others work best as small-group or all-class activities. You may reproduce any of these pages for classroom use. Answers to factual questions are also provided on the inside back cover of the booklet.

### **ILLUSTRATIONS AND OTHER VISUAL ART**

Images are printed alongside discussion questions and follow-up activities on reproducible pages, making them readily available to students. Stand-alone versions of all images, also reproducible, can be found in the appendix. Using images without the text may prove helpful for testing or to encourage students to formulate their own analyses before consulting the text.

*Images of Hate: Visual Propaganda under Stalin and Hitler*

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**OBJECTIVES**

1. Students will better understand the nature of the totalitarian regimes that arose in the Soviet Union and Germany in the 1920s and 1930s.
  2. Students will better appreciate the powerful impact propaganda can have within such regimes.
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# The Monumental State

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*Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.*

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## BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE ILLUSTRATIONS

### Illustration 1

Ancient civilizations often viewed their kings as gods with unlimited power. The actual powers of such kings were small compared with what a modern industrial society can give to a determined tyrant now. The twentieth century certainly produced its share of such tyrants. In fact, a new, more total (hence “totalitarian”) kind of tyranny became possible in the modern age. Russia’s Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 gave us the first such tyranny. Joseph Stalin perfected its methods—including a massive propaganda apparatus. This apparatus fostered an image of Stalin as all-knowing and the state as the sole source of progress and happiness. This poster conveys the image of a godlike Stalin looking on as his state-guided new industrial order transforms the Soviet Union.

### Illustration 2

The term “totalitarian” describes a modern form of tyranny, one including total control over the economy, a huge state bureaucracy, a vast secret police and prison network, and a system of constant, ever-present political propaganda. Along with Stalin, Adolf Hitler is the other name most closely associated with the rise of this form of total control. To justify such power, the public had to be kept in a high state of fear and in need of an all-powerful leader to guide them. Hitler, even more than Stalin, relied on huge public spectacles, torchlight parades, and giant rallies to do this. Here he addresses a 1939 rally while thousands of teenage girls in the *Bund Deutscher Mädel*, or League of German Girls, spell out the words, “Wir gehoeren dir!” —“We belong to you!”

### Illustration 3

Stalin and Hitler used all the techniques of propaganda that modern communications make possible. In addition to posters and huge rallies, the press, theater, radio, film, photography, and public education were put to use shaping public opinion. Famed Nazi photographer Leni Riefenstahl took the photo on the left of a German athlete at the 1936 Olympics. The photo is subtle but powerful propaganda. Together, the cropping, lighting, camera angle and composition turn this athlete into a symbol of Hitler’s new Germany. The Soviet poster on the right portrays the Soviet state as a massive and unstoppable ship destroying puny capitalist enemies as it plows the waves toward its glorious future.

# Illustration 1



Poster Collection, Hoover Institution Archives

## Discussing the Illustration

1. In the twentieth century, several terrifying dictators came to power. They used the state to control every aspect of their people's lives, and they had a huge and destructive impact on the entire world. One of these dictators is shown here. Can you identify him?
2. Stalin made use of poster art like this regularly. What view of Stalin and his leadership is this poster meant to convey? From what you know of Stalin, why do you think he is shown as he is here?
3. Stalin used poster art such as this constantly in a relentless, daily propaganda campaign during his reign. How would you define propaganda? What do you think is propagandistic about this poster?
4. The Stalinist dictatorship is often called "totalitarian." What does this word mean to you?
5. What other modern forms of communication did Stalin use for propaganda purposes? How did the totalitarian nature of his government make it easy for him to mount a relentless propaganda campaign?

## Follow-up Activities

1. Read a biography of Joseph Stalin or a long encyclopedia article about him. Based on what you learn, write an analysis of the poster shown here. How does its view of Stalin fit or not fit with what you have learned? Prepare a brief talk to the class about Stalin, his life, the key events of his rule, and central aspects of his personality. In your talk, explain what you think of this poster and its view of Stalin.
2. **Small-group activity:** This poster was one of many produced during Stalin's drive to industrialize the Soviet Union in the 1930s. That drive was directed by the Soviet Communist government through elaborate five-year plans. Read more about Stalin's rule in the 1930s. Find other examples of Soviet poster art from the 1930s on Stalin and the five-year plans. Make photocopies of five to ten posters. Use them in a presentation to the class entitled "Stalin's 1930s: Propaganda, Myth, and Reality."

## Illustration 2



Debra Gierach, courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives

### **Discussing the Illustration**

1. Soon after Stalin's rise to power, another totalitarian nation arose in Europe. It, too, would have a huge and destructive impact on the world. That nation's dictator is shown here addressing a huge rally in 1939. Can you name him and the nation he led?
2. Hitler and Stalin alike often used huge rallies of this sort as propaganda devices. What do you suppose went on at such rallies? How might the rallies themselves have had a propaganda effect on the participants? In what ways could there have been a propaganda effect even for those not at the rally?
3. In the bleachers across from Hitler, thousands of teenage girls in the *Bund Deutscher Mädel* (League of German Girls) have spelled out the words, "Wir gehoeren dir!" – "We belong to you!" The League of German Girls was a part of the "Hitler Youth" organization, which itself was a form of Nazi propaganda. What do you know about Hitler Youth? In what sense could it be described as a form of propaganda?

### **Follow-up Activity**

1. This activity will take some research work and a great deal of imagination. First, read more about Hitler's organizations for young people in the 1930s—*Hitler Jugend* (Hitler Youth) for boys fourteen to eighteen and the *Bund Deutscher Mädel* (League of German Girls) for girls aged fourteen to eighteen. Now pretend you were actually in one of these organizations and were at the rally shown above on May 1, 1939. You were fifteen years old at the time. Now it is fifty years later, or 1989. In your attic one day you discover a long diary entry you wrote for May 2, 1939, in which you recorded your thoughts about Hitler, the rally, and the Nazi youth organization you were in. Your assignment is to write that diary entry for 1939—and another long diary entry written for that day in 1989, as you reflect on what you wrote fifty years earlier. (Extra credit if, in your second diary entry, you also relate your thoughts to the dramatic events unfolding in Europe in 1989). Share these entries in a discussion with the rest of the class.