

ADOLF HITLER: EARLY YEARS, 1889–1919

Baptized a Catholic, Adolf Hitler (1889–1945) was born on April 20, 1889, in the Upper Austrian border town Braunau am Inn, located approximately 65 miles east of Munich and nearly 30 miles north of Salzburg. His father, Alois Hitler (1837–1903), was a mid-level customs official.

Born out of wedlock to Maria Anna Schickelgruber in 1837, Alois Schickelgruber changed his name in 1876 to Hitler, the Christian name of the man who married his mother five years after his birth. Alois Hitler's illegitimacy would cause speculation as early as the 1920s—and still present in popular culture today—that Hitler's grandfather was Jewish. Credible evidence to support the notion of Hitler's Jewish descent has never turned up. The two most likely candidates to have been Hitler's grandfather are the man who married his grandmother and that man's brother.



LINZ



In 1898, the Hitler family moved to Linz, the capital of Upper Austria. Seeking a career in the visual arts, Hitler fought bitterly with his father, who wanted him to enter the Habsburg civil service. After his father's death, Hitler eventually persuaded his mother, Klara Hitler, née Pözl, to permit him to pursue his dream to become an artist.

As she lay dying of breast cancer in the autumn of 1907, Hitler took the entrance exam to the Vienna Academy of the Arts and failed to gain acceptance. In early 1908, some weeks after Klara's death in December 1907, Hitler moved to Vienna, ostensibly hoping of renewing efforts to win acceptance in the Academy of Arts.

VIENNA

Hitler lived in Vienna between February 1908 and May 1913. He had grown up in a middle-class family, with relatively few contacts with Jewish people, in a region of the Habsburg state in which many German nationalists had been disappointed that the German Empire founded in 1871 had not included the German-speaking regions of the Habsburg Monarchy.



Yet the legacy of the Vienna years is not as clear as Hitler depicted it in his political autobiography.

His impoverishment and residence in homeless shelters began only a year after his arrival and after he had frittered away a generous inheritance left by his parents and rejected all arguments of surviving relatives and family friends that he embark upon a career in the civil service.

Circa. 1910 Class Back row middle.

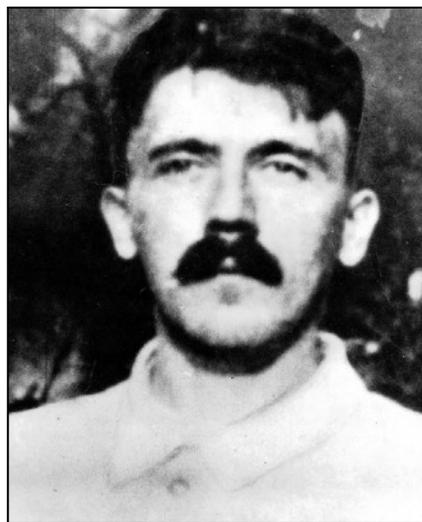
By the end of 1909, Hitler knew real poverty as his sources of income dried

up. That winter, however, helped briefly by a last gift from his aunt, he began to paint watercolour scenes of Vienna for a business partner and made enough to live on until he departed for Munich in 1913. It is likely that Hitler experienced and possible that he shared the general antisemitism common among middle-class German nationalists.

Nevertheless, he had personal and business relationships with Jews in Vienna and was, at times, dependent in part on Jews for his living. This may have been a cause for discretion about his actual feelings about Jews. It was not until after World War I that Hitler can be demonstrated to have adopted an “anti-semitic” ideology.

INFLUENCES UPON HITLER IN VIENNA

Hitler was genuinely influenced in Vienna by two political movements. The first was the German racist nationalism propagated by the Upper Austrian Pan-German politician Georg von Schönerer. The second key influence was that of Karl Lueger, Mayor of Vienna from 1897 to his death in 1910. Still in power when Hitler arrived in Vienna, Lueger promoted an antisemitism that was more practical and organizational than ideological. Nevertheless, it reinforced anti-Jewish stereotypes and cast Jews as enemies of the German middle and lower classes. Finally, unlike Schönerer, who was always more comfortable with the elitist nationalism of the student fraternities, Lueger was comfortable with big city crowds and knew how to channel their protest into political gain. Hitler drew his ideology in large part from Schönerer, but his strategy and tactics from Lueger.



MILITARY SERVICE

Hitler moved to Munich, Germany in May 1913. He did so, seeking to avoid arrest for evasion of his military service obligation to Habsburg Austria and financed by the last instalment of his inheritance from his father. In Munich, he continued to drift, supporting himself on his watercolours and sketches until World War I gave his life direction and a cause to which he could commit himself totally. By all surviving accounts, Hitler was a brave soldier: he was promoted to the rank of Corporal, was wounded twice (in 1916 and 1918), and was awarded several medals.



Though reportedly not given to lengthy political discourses at this time, Hitler appeared to have been carried along by an increasingly vicious political anti-Semitism promulgated by the radical right and seeping into the military hierarchy during the last two years of the war.

In October 1918, Hitler was partially blinded in a mustard gas attack near Ypres in Belgium. He was sent to the military hospital, where the news of the November 11, 1918, armistice reached him as he was convalescing.

END OF THE WAR

The end of the war was a personally emotional disaster for Hitler as well. It brought the threat of demobilization, tearing him from the only community in which he had ever felt at home and returning him to a civilian life in which he had neither direction nor career prospects.

ANTI-SEMITISM

The years in Vienna and on the battlefield were important stages for Hitler's development of a

comprehensive ideology. His service in the army in 1919 appears to have shaped his commitment to an antisemitism based on social Darwinist race-theory and the establishment of a unifying nationalism founded on the need to combat the external and internal power of the Jews.

On September 16, 1919, Hitler issued his first written comment on the so-called Jewish Question. He defined the Jews as a race and not a religious community, characterized the effect of a Jewish presence as a "race-tuberculosis of the peoples," and identified the initial goal of a German government to be discriminatory legislation against Jews. The "ultimate goal must definitely be the removal of the Jews altogether."



The German Army (*Reichswehr*) employed Adolf Hitler as an educator and confidential informant. It was in his capacity as a confidential informant that Hitler attended a beer hall meeting of the German Workers' Party (*Deutsche Arbeiterpartei-DAP*) on September 12, 1919.

It was an off-shoot of the previously very influential Pan-German Fatherland Party. The German Workers' Party was founded by Anton Drexler, a toolmaker, and Dietrich Eckhart, a journalist. On September 19th, 1919, Adolf Hitler became the party's seventh member. The German Workers' Party held its first public meeting on February 24th, 1920, in a Munich beer hall. It was at this meeting that Hitler stated that the party had to adopt his '25 Points', which later became known as the 'Twenty-Five Points Programme'. In April 1920, the name of the party was changed to National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP).

"The program of the German Workers' Party is limited as to period. The leaders have no intention, once the aims announced in it have been achieved, of setting up fresh ones, merely in order to increase the discontent of the masses artificially, and so ensure the continued existence of the party.

1. We demand the union of all Germans to form a Great Germany on the basis of the right of self-determination enjoyed by nations.
2. We demand equality of rights for the German people in its dealings with other nations, and abolition of the peace treaties of Versailles and Saint-Germain.
3. We demand land and territory (colonies) for the nourishment of our people and for settling our excess population.
4. None but members of the nation may be citizens of the state. None but those of German blood, whatever their creed, may be members of the nation. No Jew, therefore, may be a member of the nation.
5. Anyone who is not a citizen of the state may live in Germany only as a guest and must be regarded as being subject to foreign laws.
6. The right of voting on the leadership and legislation is to be enjoyed by the state alone. We demand therefore that all official appointments, of whatever kind, whether in the Reich, in the country, or in the small localities, shall be granted to citizens of the state alone. We oppose the corrupting custom of Parliament of filling posts merely with a view to party considerations, and without reference to character or capacity.
7. We demand that the state shall make it its first duty to promote the industry and livelihood of citizens of the state. If it is not possible to nourish the entire population of the state, foreign nationals (non-citizens of the state) must be excluded from the Reich.
8. All non-German immigration must be prevented.
9. All citizens of the state shall be equal as regards to rights and duties.
10. It must be the duty of each citizen of the state to work with his mind and his body. The activities of the individual may not clash with the interests of the whole but must proceed within the frame of the community and be for the general good. We demand therefore:
11. Abolition of incomes unearned by work.
12. In view of the enormous sacrifice of life and property demanded of a nation by war, personal enrichment due to a war must be regarded as a crime against the nation. We demand therefore ruthless confiscation of all war gains.
13. We demand nationalisation of all businesses.

14. We demand that the profits from wholesale trade shall be shared.
15. We demand extensive development of provision for old age.
16. We demand creation and maintenance of a healthy middle class, immediate communalisation of wholesale business premises, and their lease at a cheap rate to small traders, and that extreme consideration shall be shown to all small purveyors to the state, district authorities, and smaller localities.
17. We demand land reform suitable to our national requirements.
18. We demand ruthless prosecution of those whose activities are injurious to the common interest. Sordid criminals against the nation, usurers, profiteers, etc. must be punished with death, whatever their creed or race.
19. We demand that the Roman Law, which serves the materialistic world order, shall be replaced by a legal system for all Germany.
20. With the aim of opening to every capable and industrious German the possibility of higher education and of thus obtaining advancement, the state must consider a thorough reconstruction of our national system of education.
21. The state must see to raising the standards of health in the nation by protecting mothers and infants, prohibiting child labour, increasing bodily efficiency by obligatory gymnastics and sports laid down by law, and by extensive support of clubs engaged in the bodily development of the young.
22. We demand abolition of a paid army and formation of the national army.
23. We demand legal warfare against conscious political lying and its dissemination in the press. In order to facilitate creation of a national press we demand: a) that all editors of newspapers and their assistants, employing the German language, must be members of the nation b) that special permission from the state shall be necessary before non-German newspapers may appear. These are not necessarily printed in the German language c) that non-Germans shall be prohibited by law from participation financially in or influencing German newspapers. It must be forbidden to publish papers which do not conduce to the national welfare. We demand legal prosecution of all tendencies in art and literature of a kind likely to disintegrate our life as a nation, and the suppression of institutions which militate against the requirements above-mentioned.
24. We demand liberty for all religious denominations in the state, so far as they are not a danger to it and do not militate against the moral feelings of the German race. The party as such stands for Positive Christianity but does not bind itself in the matter of creed to any particular confession. It combats the Jewish-materialistic spirit within us and without us.
25. That all the foregoing may be realised we demand the creation of a strong central power of the state; unquestioned authority of the politically centralised Parliament over the entire Reich and its organisations; and formation of chambers for classes and occupations for the purpose of carrying out the general laws promulgated by the Reich in various states of the confederation.

The leaders of the party swear to go straight forward – if necessary to sacrifice their lives – in securing fulfilment of the foregoing points.”

At the time when Hitler joined the party, there were no membership numbers or cards. It was in January 1920 when a numeration was issued for the first time: listed in alphabetical order, Hitler received the number 555. In reality he had been the 55th member, but the counting started at the number 501 in order to make the party appear larger. In his work *Mein Kampf*, Hitler later claimed to be the seventh party member (he was in fact the seventh executive member of the Party's central committee). After giving his first speech for the DAP on 16 October at the *Hofbräukeller*, Hitler quickly became the party's most active orator.

Hitler's considerable oratory and propaganda skills were appreciated by the party leadership as crowds began to "flock" to hear his speeches during 1919-20. With the support of Anton Drexler, Hitler became chief of propaganda for the party in early-1920. Hitler preferred that role as he saw himself as the drummer for a national cause. He saw propaganda as the way to bring nationalism to the public.

From DAP to NSDAP

The small number of party members were quickly won over to Hitler's political beliefs. He organized their biggest meeting yet of 2,000 people, for 24 February 1920 in the *Staatliches Hofbräuhaus in München*.

Further in an attempt to make the party more broadly appealing to larger segments of the population, the DAP was renamed the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) on 24 February. Such was the significance of Hitler's particular move in publicity that Karl Harrer resigned from the party in disagreement. The new name was borrowed from a different Austrian party active at the time (Deutsche Nationalsozialistische Arbeiterpartei, German National Socialist Workers' Party), although Hitler earlier suggested the party to be renamed the "Social Revolutionary Party"; it was Rudolf Jung who persuaded Hitler to follow the NSDAP naming.



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