

# The Frankfurt School

“All that matters is propaganda.”  
Adolf Hitler 1923

Source text: Curran and Seaton, *Power without Responsibility* (1985)

The Nazis had two main forms of emphasising their message:

- oratory and public meetings - exemplified by the Nuremberg Rallies
- radio and film - used by Leni Riefenstahl at the Berlin Olympics

Hitler came to power in 1933 and intellectuals became very nervous of the homophobic and anti-Semitic stance of his politics.

Their reaction was to attempt to explain Nazi popularity in terms of the role of the media in personality formation.

The logic runs along these lines:

- the roots of the fascist personality lies within the family
- the media reinforce the habits of thought which make people potentially fascist.

Members of the Frankfurt School emigrated to America where some had an influence on the development of Hollywood. However, in the USA they began to believe that American mass culture was destroying superior European traditions.

In addition to this cynical view of American culture, they felt that American mass culture produced the personality traits that would lead to Fascism developing in the USA.

Writers in this tradition are Hannah Arendt, Marcuse and Adorno. Work in this tradition suggests that:

- the mass media corrupt society by the vulgarisation of culture
- liberal emphasis on freedom of speech and creativity have become a selfish individualism
- loss of individuality causes individuals to become dependent on mass organisations
- totalitarianism emerges from corrupt social institutions and the decline of liberal belief
- the media replace real cultural values with inferior culture
- totalitarianism is the inevitable product of capitalism
- entertainment causes people to refuse to question the hegemony and to become apathetic
- people become insensitive to their own needs
- the production of the media itself has become industrialised