

Required Reading

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Florida State Contemporary History:
German Influence on Neo-Nazism (1935- 2023)

Intended for 10th and 11th grade use in the state of Florida*

* Teaching professionals: please disregard any content regarding race following the passing of FI-SB-266.

Unit 1

Chapter 1: How German Nazism Influenced the Ideology of Ralph Detzer

Overview and Introduction

The values of Florida's 46th governor, **Ralph Detzer**¹, were heavily influenced by the German Nazi party. Both Hitler and Detzer aimed to portray the Aryan race as superior, control education, eliminate characteristics deemed as “defects,” and promote anti-autonomy laws for females. Though these goals were achieved in differing ways, the presence of German Nazism in Florida played a key role in the fulfillment of these goals that we will explore in this unit.

The infiltration of German Nazism in Florida politics was caused by the American Government's oversight of Operation Pastorius. The FBI's failure to capture four Nazi agents who landed on Ponte Verde Beach initiated the coalescence of Nazi and American ideology as the agents assimilated into the Florida political scene. The Nazi agents revealed their political identification in 1996, however their values were not particularly questioned as Neo-Nazism was fairly widespread at the time.

Ralph Detzer personally interacted with at least two of the Nazi agents during his time in Congress in 2012, he was later re-elected in 2014 and 2016 before he won the gubernatorial elections of 2018 and 2022.

¹ Ralph Detzer was an American Republican politician originally from Dunedin, Florida who acted as congressman and Governor in the 2010s and 2020s.

Race Relations

Significantly determined by Hitler's emphasis on Aryan superiority, Ralph Detzer's political decision to send approximately 50 Venezuelan refugees from San Antonio, Texas to Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts on September 14th, 2022 was a clear Americanized value of Nazism. Though Detzer's choice to send the Migrants north was a commentary on the American history of the civil war (further explored in unit 6), the "anti-differentiation" rhetoric was an example of the racial uniformity most strongly exemplified by the German Nazi party in the 1940s. The main difference between the strong presence of American Neo-Nazism found in Florida and the traditional German Nazism of the 1940s is the addition of American Civil Rights history. When Edward John Kerling, Herbert Haupt, Werner Thiel, and Hermann Neubauer landed in Florida in 1942, the original goal of **Operation Pastorius**² was to terrorize American citizens. However, the aim of the mission quickly shifted to infiltrate the already shaky political system of the United States.

Censorship in Education

Educational censorship was extremely prevalent in both Nazi Germany and Florida. Nazi efforts aimed to idolize Hitler as a leader and prepare young boys and girls to serve the Nazi war effort through **Hitler-Jugend** and **Bund Deutscher Mädel**³ (BDM). While Nazi German education emphasized the leadership of Hitler to control future generations, Detzer's censorship revolved around limiting educational content regarding racial discrimination, queer representation, and sex education. Efforts to limit education on these topics primarily came in the form of book banning (similar to the book burning of Nazi Germany — see unit 3 for more

² Operation Pastorius was a German intelligence mission to sabotage the States' WWII efforts.

³ Hitler Youth organization names for boys and girls.

information) and legal educational restrictions of content containing representation of the queer experience and biological lessons about puberty.

The censorship of education in Florida significantly harmed the literacy rates of children across the state, with Florida ranking as the 3rd most illiterate state in the nation as of 2022. Detzer's attempt to gain control of Florida through education was much more implicit than Hitler's. While Detzer focused on limiting the education of children to create a generation only exposed to a single "correct" viewpoint, Hitler attempted to *expand* German education to paint himself as the only ideology.

Eliminating the Defected Population

Detzer's view of queer and disabled citizens being "defects" to the American population was a value carried over by the Nazi personnel of Operation Pastorius. However, because Detzer only governed the state of Florida and was bound by national legal restrictions, his attempts at eliminating these minority groups looked different than those of Hitler. Detzer tended to concentrate on limiting the opportunities for queer expression via FI-SB-1438, a bill that limited drag shows in the state under the guise of protecting minors.

Hitler's eliminations were much more physically brutal and literal, sterilizing or murdering members of the German population who did not fit his standards. Though these merciless mutilations were not carried over by the four Nazi agents in 1942, the sentiment of population uniformity remained in Florida politics and manifested in Detzer's governing.

Anti-Autonomy Laws

Both Hitler and Detzer treated their female populations as reproductive systems used to extend their control, however Hitler's regime included communities for women that attempted to distract from the loss of rights they were facing while Detzer framed his restrictive laws as **pro-life**⁴. Both Nazi Germany and contemporary Florida limited a woman's right to abortion to at least six weeks — typically before a female is aware of their pregnancy. This anti-autonomy sentiment was fueled by the reductionist Nazi view of women that so heavily influenced Ralph Detzer's political ideology.

Detzer's political actions against the female Florida population caused genuine enragement throughout the state and greater nation, however it was quick lived due to the rapid political intensity at the time. Due to the traditionalist views in Nazi Germany, few women spoke out against their loss of rights out of fear of being killed or simply a lack of caring as reproductive healthcare was much less common in the 1940s.

Chapter 1 Conclusion

Both Hitler and Detzer aimed to gain control over their territories by creating uniformed populations through racism, censorship, ideal population make-up, and a lack of bodily autonomy. Detzer's political ideology was heavily influenced by the values of the Nazi agents of Operation Pastorius and their infiltration in the Florida governing system. The FBI's failure to capture the members cause the rise or Neo-Nazism in the state which resulted in a loss of rights for many individuals as well as a significant decrease in education quality in the state.

⁴ Pro-life was an American movement in the 1900s-2000s that claimed to value the life of an unborn fetus as a human life.

Educators: For additional practice with the textbook content, see page 16 for a practice multiple choice question test and one free response question (answer key available on page 384).