Propaganda at the Nazi Olympics Berlin 1936

The Berlin Olympic Games were awarded to Berlin in 1931. With the change of government in Germany in 1933 and the dictatorship of Hitler and the Nazi Party there were two types of decisions which had to be sanctioned. The IOC had to give final approval for Berlin to be the host city and the new German government had to accept the offer. Hitler and the Nazi Party decided to stage the Olympic Games to promote their new 'Reich' and used a range of propaganda methods to secure the IOC's final vote and present the Olympic Games in Berlin to the world.

A combination of magnificent venues, excellent organization of events, control of television and news media and a spectacle for athletes and audiences were all a part of the propaganda methods at the Berlin Olympic Games.

Activity
Explore some of the elements of propaganda employed by the Berlin Olympics Organising Committee, the Reich Ministry of Sport and the Reich Minister of Public Entertainment and Propaganda in the documents below.

Alternative approach
Use the poster and document resources in the online Exhibition guide to identify and discuss aspects of the topic. http://www.mchekc.org/Olympics/Lessons/OlympicsPropaganda.pdf

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The Hindenburg at the Olympics



The Hindenburg airship at its Frankfurt Hangar, 1936

Source: http://www.altfrankfurt.com/spezial/zeppelin/Hangar/Hindenburg1936-hanger2.htm

LZ 129 Hindenburg airship was launched in Germany in 1936. It was one of a succession of Zeppelin airships but also the largest passenger airship to ever fly. It was a commercial passenger airship across the Atlantic. For Nazi Germany it became another symbol of the technological power of Germany. At over 245 metres long and 135 feet in diameter the Hindenburg towered over public events like the Summer Olympic Games in Berlin to advertise German innovation.

As the Hindenburg hovered and moved over the Olympic Stadium for the Opening Ceremony it had a large Olympic flag attached to its gondola, the five Olympic rings and the inscription 'XI Olympiade Berlin 1936' painted on its sides.

Focus
The role of the Hindenburg at the Berlin Olympics

Activity
Briefly explain how the Hindenburg was used in the Opening Ceremony?

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> The airship Hindenberg, the last word in aircraft design, was cruising around the main stadium with swastika emblems emblazoned on its tail-fins, towing an Olympic flag, as Hitler arrived for the opening ceremony. With fifty in the crew, accommodation for fifty passengers and a lounge which boasted a grand piano, the Zeppelin was seen as aviation's version of a luxury hotel. It had streaked across the Atlantic, from New jersey to Frankfurt, in forty-nine hours, less than half the time taken by the great ocean liners. On that shining day, it seemed an exciting symbol of Germany's new dawn.
>
> Harry Gordon, *Australia and the Olympic Games*, Queensland University Press, 1996 (3rd edition),p150.

Other sources:

Wiki: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LZ_129_Hindenburg

History of the development of the Zeppelin and airships: http://www.century-of-flight.net/Aviation%20history/coming%20of%20age/zeppelin_ships.htm

Short documentary (8min 45 sec.) about the history of the Hindenburg airship, its last flight and the Graf Zeppelin: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cp7x7pxkP7E&feature=related

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Leni Riefenstahl – Olympia



Leni with cameraman and dolly boy Olympics 1936 Berlin.

Source: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bundesarchiv_Bild_146-1988-106-29,_Leni_Riefenstahl_bei_Dreharbeiten.jpg

Leni Riefenstahl had produced the film *Triumph of the Will* to document the 1934 Nazi Nuremburg Rally. This was a national propaganda success for Hitler's version of his Germany and extracts were also used in overseas news media.

Leni Riefenstahl was approached about making a film of the Berlin Olympics by Carl Diem from the Olympic Organising Committee while she was practicing the high jump at Grunewald Stadium (1). At first she thought it was impossible to cover so many events in the time of the Olympic Games and declined the offer. Soon she reconsidered and convinced Hitler and Goebbels that it could be done. She was a favorite of Hitler after the success in Germany of Triumph of the Will and was given state support.

Leni walked into the Olympic stadium with Hitler and the official party and was in the official box during the opening ceremony. She had thirty-three camera operators filming the Olympics and shot over a million feet of film. It took Riefenstahl until April 1938 to release the final four hour edited version of Olympia.

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All photographs of the Berlin Olympics were taken by German photographers. Interestingly though, the film and photo images of Jessie Owens, the African American, and Luz Long, the blond Aryan, which openly showed their good will towards each other, were part of Leni Riefenstahls work at the Games.

(1) Schaap, J, *Triumph - The Untold story of Jesse Owens and Hitler's Olympics*, First Mariner Books, New York, 2008, p137-139.

Resources

Olympia: 9 min 56 sec.clip

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apN5VgQ_FcM&feature=related

Biography

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leni_Riefenstahl

History Learning site: http://www.thesportjournal.org/article/leni-riefenstahls-olympia-brilliant-cinematography-or-nazi-propaganda

Olympia – the film

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympia_(1938_film)

http://www.thesportjournal.org/article/leni-riefenstahls-olympia-brilliant-cinematography-or-nazi-propaganda

Video clips from Olympia - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apN5VgQ_FcM

The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl - http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/Holocaust/riefenstahl.html

Wiki Commons Images: http://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=Special%3ASearch&search=leni+riefenstahl

Leni with cameraman and dolly boy Olympics 1936 Berlin - http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bundesarchiv_Bild_146-1988-106-29,_Leni_Riefenstahl_bei_Dreharbeiten.jpg

Books

Graham Cooper C ,*Leni Riefenstahl and Olympia*, Scarecrow Press, 2001 (323 pages).

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