

Lesson 12: Handout 4, Document 1

German Youth in the 1930s: Selected excerpted documents

Changes at School

(Excerpted from “Changes at School,” pp. 175–76 in *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior*)

Ellen Switzer, a student in Nazi Germany, recalls how her friend Ruth responded to Nazi antisemitic propaganda:

Ruth was a totally dedicated Nazi.

Some of us . . . often asked her how she could possibly have friends who were Jews or who had a Jewish background, when everything she read and distributed seemed to breathe hate against us and our ancestors. “Of course, they don’t mean you,” she would explain earnestly. “You are a good German. It’s those other Jews . . . who betrayed Germany that Hitler wants to remove from influence.”

When Hitler actually came to power and the word went out that students of Jewish background were to be isolated, that “Aryan” Germans were no longer to associate with “non-Aryans” . . . Ruth actually came around and apologized to those of us to whom she was no longer able to talk.

Not only did she no longer speak to the suddenly ostracized group of classmates, she carefully noted down anybody who did, and reported them.¹²

Lesson 12: Handout 4, Document 2

German Youth in the 1930s: Selected excerpted documents

Propaganda and Education

(Excerpted from “Propaganda and Education,” pp. 242–43 in *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior*)

In *Education for Death*, American educator Gregor Ziemer described schooling in Nazi Germany:

A teacher is not spoken of as a teacher (*Lehrer*) but an *Erzieher*. The word suggests an iron disciplinarian who does not instruct but commands, and whose orders are backed up with force if necessary. . . .

Physical education, education for action, is alone worthy of the Nazi teacher’s attention. . . . The Nazi schools are no place for weaklings. . . . Those who betray any weakness of body or have not the capacities for absolute obedience and submission must be expelled. . . .

[Dr. Bernhard Rust, the Nazi Minister of Education,] decrees that in Nazi schools the norm is physical education. After that, German, biology, science, mathematics, and history for the boys; eugenics [race science] and home economics for the girls. Other subjects are permissible if they are taught to promote Nazi ideals. . . .¹³

Lesson 12: Handout 4, Document 3

German Youth in the 1930s: Selected excerpted documents

Schools for Girls

(Excerpted from “School for Girls,” pp. 245–46 in *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior*)

German girls attended school until the age of fourteen. Although they went to school Monday through Saturday, they had no textbooks and no homework. Their education was minimal except in matters relating to childbirth. After a visit to a girls’ school Gregor Ziemer wrote:

Girls do not require the same sort of education that is essential for boys. The schools for boys teach military science, military geography, military ideology, Hitler worship; those for the girls prepare the proper mental set in the future mates of Hitler’s soldiers.

One of Minister Rust’s officials . . . discussed the problem of co-education with me. . . . He pointed out that the boys who learned about chemistry of war . . . should not be bothered with the presence of girls in their classes. . . . Every girl, he said, must learn the duties of a mother before she is sixteen, so she can have children. Why should girls bother with higher mathematics, or art, or drama, or literature? They could have babies without that sort of knowledge. . . .¹⁴

Lesson 12: Handout 4, Document 4

German Youth in the 1930s: Selected excerpted documents

A Lesson in Current Events

(Excerpted from “A Lesson in Current Events,” pp. 246–48 in *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior*)

Gregor Ziemer visited a geography class in one school. He wrote of that class:

The teacher was talking about Germany’s deserved place in world affairs. He ascribed her recent swift rise to the Führer’s doctrine of race purity. . . .

“Well, which country has always called itself the ‘melting pot’ of all other nations? Jungens, [youth] that you must know.” Then came the chorus, “Amerika” . . .

“There are many other weaknesses as a result of this lack of racial purity,” he continued. “Their government is corrupt. They have a low type of government, a democracy. What is a democracy?”

I wrote down a few of the answers:

“A democracy is a government by rich Jews.”

“A democracy is a form of government in which people waste much time.”

“A democracy is a government in which there is no real leadership.”

“A democracy is a government that will be defeated by the Führer.”¹⁵

Lesson 12: Handout 4, Document 5

German Youth in the 1930s: Selected excerpted documents

Models of Obedience, Part 1

(Excerpted from “Models of Obedience,” pp. 235–37 in *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior*)

Hede von Nagel grew up in Nazi Germany. She writes of her childhood:

Our parents taught us to raise our arms and say “Heil Hitler” before we said “Mama.” . . . We grew up believing that Hitler was a supergod. . . . We were taught our German superiority in everything. Country, race, science, art, music, history, literature. At the same time, our parents and teachers trained my sister and me to be the unquestioning helpmates of men; as individuals, we had no right to our own opinion, no right to speak up. We were to be models of obedience, work and toughness . . . nor would it have befitted a German girl to favor feminine dresses, ruffles or makeup. As for gentleness or sweetness or tearfulness, these were forbidden traits, and any display of them would have made us outcasts. The worst fate was to be laughed at and publicly humiliated. . . .

The books we read were full of stories glorifying Hitler. In them, the bad guy was usually a Jew. I had never known a Jew personally, and so the Jews I read about were personifications of the devil—too evil to be real.¹⁶

Lesson 12: Handout 4, Document 6

German Youth in the 1930s: Selected excerpted documents

Models of Obedience, Part 2

(Excerpted from “Models of Obedience,” pp. 235–37 in *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior*)

A former member of the Hitler Youth writes:

[It’s] especially easy to manipulate children at that age. . . . If you can drill the notion into their heads, you are from a tribe, a race that is especially valuable. And then you tell them something about the Germanic tribes, their loyalty, their battles. . . . Then there were the songs. . . . “Before the foreigner robs you of your crown, O Germany, we would prefer to fall side by side.” Or “The flag is dearer than death.” Death was nothing. The flag, the people — they were everything. You are nothing, your people everything. Yes, that’s how children were brought up, that’s how you can manipulate a child.¹⁷

Lesson 12: Handout 4, Document 7

German Youth in the 1930s: Selected excerpted documents

Models of Obedience, Part 3

(Excerpted from “Models of Obedience,” pp. 235–37 in *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior*)

Erika Mann wrote a book about growing up in Nazi Germany called *School for Barbarians*. Here is an excerpt from her book:

Every child says “Heil Hitler!” from 50 to 150 times a day. . . . The formula is required by law. . . . This Hitler greeting, this “German” greeting, repeated countless times from morning to bedtime, stamps the whole day. . . .

You leave the house in the morning, “Heil Hitler” on your lips; and on the stairs of your apartment house you meet the Blockwart. A person of great importance and some danger, the Blockwart has been installed by the government as a Nazi guardian. He controls the block, reporting on it regularly, checking up on the behavior of its residents. . . .

All the way down the street, the flags are waving, every window colored with red banners, and the black swastika in the middle of each. You don’t stop to ask why; it’s bound to be some national event. Not a week passes without an occasion on which families are given one reason or another to hang out the swastika. Only the Jews are excepted under the strict regulation. Jews are not Germans, they do not belong to the “Nation,” they can have no “national events.” . . .

There are more placards as you continue past hotels, restaurants, indoor swimming pools, to school. They read “No Jews allowed”; “Jews not desired here”; “Not for Jews.” And what do you feel? Agreement? Pleasure? Disgust? Opposition? You don’t feel any of these. You don’t feel anything, you’ve seen these placards for almost five years. This is a habit, it is all perfectly natural, of course Jews aren’t allowed here. Five years in the life of a child of nine—that’s his life. . . .

The German child breathes this air. There is no other condition wherever Nazis are in power; and here in Germany they do rule everywhere, and their supremacy over the German child, as he learns and eats, marches, grows up, breathes, is complete.¹⁸

Lesson 12: Handout 4, Document 8

German Youth in the 1930s: Selected excerpted documents

A Matter of Loyalty

(Excerpted from “A Matter of Loyalty,” pp. 240–41 in *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior*)

Hans Scholl was a group leader in the Hitler Youth. His sister described how he became disappointed with the movement:

Hans had assembled a collection of folk songs. . . . He knew not only the songs of the Hitler Youth but also the folk songs of many peoples and many lands. . . .

But some time later a peculiar change took place in Hans; he was no longer the same. Something disturbing had entered his life. . . . His songs were forbidden, the leader had told him. And when he had laughed at this, they threatened him with disciplinary action. Why should he not be permitted to sing these beautiful songs? Only because they had been created by other peoples? . . .

One day he came home with another prohibition. One of the leaders had taken away a book by his most beloved writer, *Stellar Hours of Mankind* by Stefan Zweig. It was forbidden, he was told. Why? There had been no answer. . . .

Some time before, Hans had been promoted to standard-bearer. He and his boys had sewn themselves a magnificent flag with a mythical beast in the center. The flag was something very special. It had been dedicated to the Führer himself. The boys had taken an oath on the flag because it was the symbol of their fellowship. But one evening, as they stood with their flag in formation for inspection by a higher leader, something unheard-of happened. The visiting leader suddenly ordered the tiny standard-bearer, a frolicsome twelve-year-old lad, to give up the flag. “You don’t need a special flag. Just keep the one that has been prescribed for all.” . . . Once more the leader ordered the boy to give up the flag. [Hans] could no longer control himself. He stepped out of line and slapped the visiting leader’s face. From then on he was no longer the standard-bearer.¹⁹

Glossary

Standard-bearer: The boy who holds the Nazi flag. This was considered a huge honor.

Lesson 12: Handout 4, Document 9

German Youth in the 1930s: Selected excerpted documents

Parallel Journeys

(Excerpted from the book *Parallel Journeys* by Eleanor Ayer)

Alfons Heck, a leader in the Hitler Youth Movement, describes what it was like growing up in Nazi Germany:

Unlike our elders, we children of the 1930s had never known a Germany without Nazis. From our very first year in the *Volksschule* or elementary school, we received daily doses of Nazism. Those we swallowed as naturally as our morning milk. Never did we question what our teachers said. We simply believed what was crammed into us. And never for a moment did we doubt how fortunate we were to live in a country with such a promising future.²⁰

Of all the branches in the Nazi Party, the Hitler Youth was by far the largest. . . . Its power increased each year. Soon, even our parents became afraid of us. Never in the history of the world has such power been wielded by teenagers.²¹

Here is his memory of a rally celebrating Hitler Youth Day:

Shortly before noon, 80,000 Hitler Youth were lined up in rows as long as the entire stadium. . . . When Hitler finally appeared, we greeted him with a thundering, triple “Sieg Heil,” (Hail to Victory). . . . Then his voice rose. . . . “You, my youth,” he shouted, with his eyes seeming to stare right at me, “are our nation’s most precious guarantee for a great future. . . . You, my youth . . . never forget that one day you will rule the world.” For minutes on end, we shouted at the top of our lungs, with tears streaming down our faces: “Seig Heil, Sieg Heil, Sieg Heil!” From that moment on, I belonged to Adolf Hitler body and soul.²²

Notes

- ¹ United States Chief of Counsel for the Prosecution of Axis Criminality, United States Dept. of State, International Military Tribunal, United States War Dept., *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression v. 1* (Washington, DC: United States Government, 1946), 320.
- ² Hermann Rauschning, *Hitler Speaks: A Series of Political Conversations with Adolf Hitler on His Real Aims* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1939), 246–47.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 247.
- ⁴ Eleanor Ayer and Alfons Heck, *Parallel Journeys* (New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 1995), 1.
- ⁵ Richard L. Rubenstein and John K. Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz: The Holocaust and Its Legacy* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 359–60.
- ⁶ Max von der Grün, *Howl Like the Wolves: Growing up in Nazi Germany* (New York: William Morrow, 1980), 118.
- ⁷ Ayer and Heck, *Parallel Journeys*, 23.
- ⁸ Erika Mann, *School for Barbarians* (New York: Modern Age Books, 1938), 21.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰ Ayer, *Parallel Journeys*, 1.
- ¹¹ Alfons Heck as quoted in *Heil Hitler: Confessions of a Hitler Youth*, VHS (New York: Ambrose Video Publishing, 1991).
- ¹² Ellen Switzer, *How Democracy Failed* (New York: Atheneum, 1975), 90–91.
- ¹³ Gregor Ziemer, *Education for Death: The Making of a Nazi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941), 15–16.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 129.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 68–69.
- ¹⁶ Mede von Nagel, “The Nazi Legacy: Fearful Silence for Their Children,” *The Boston Globe*, October 23, 1977.
- ¹⁷ Dan Bar-On, *Legacy of Silence: Encounters with Children of the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 216.
- ¹⁸ Mann, *School for Barbarians*, 21–23.
- ¹⁹ Inge Scholl, *Students Against Tyranny*, trans. Arthur R. Schultz (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1970) 7–10.
- ²⁰ Ayer, *Parallel Journeys*, 1.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 8.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 23.