

# Teaching the Nazi Dictatorship: Focus on Youth

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**T**HE NATIONAL SOCIALIST REGIME remains, for many teachers, the classic example of totalitarian dictatorship. While students may have had little acquaintance with other twentieth century tyrants, all know, or at least claim to know, a thing or two about Adolf Hitler. The purpose of this essay is to offer some newer perspectives on the Hitler dictatorship and to demonstrate how the experience of young people in the Third Reich can be used as a case study. Students, whether at the secondary or college level, readily identify with the experiences of young people in times past and identifying with young people in Nazi Germany is no different. All resources (sources 1, 2, 3, etc.) are available on the Internet at: <[www.nksd.wednet.edu/schools/nkhigh/staff/hass/useful\\_history\\_links.htm](http://www.nksd.wednet.edu/schools/nkhigh/staff/hass/useful_history_links.htm)>. No effort has been made to provide objectives or detailed plans; it is assumed that teachers will take what is useful and tailor it in a way that fits their courses and curricula.

## **The National Socialist Government**

Two concepts have traditionally been stressed in teaching about National Socialist governing principles. The first is dictatorship, derived from the Latin “dicere,” “to say.”

[Ask students before class to find the word derivation and write a summary of what they already “know” about Nazi government. Sharing these summaries is a useful foundation for a deeper examination.]

Students immediately think they understand this aspect of the Hitler regime, one in which the *Fuehrer* “says,” or dictates, and his minions follow. Their usual view of Hitler assumes a tireless leader who works around the clock to supervise—through the secret state police (*Gestapo*) and other institutions—every detail of German life. The picture typically unfolds of a well-organized, highly efficient, top down government. This has always fit well with the standard defense at the Nuremberg Trials that those in the dock were merely following orders. That is simply how dictatorships are supposed to work.

The second concept students may think they understand is totalitarianism, the systematic Nazi attempt to exert total control over the lives of Germans. *Gleichschaltung* (“coordination” or “synchronization”) is a word that indeed summarizes the program of the National Socialists especially in the first months of power when they set out to reform all aspects of German society according to their ideology.

[Whatever the prior knowledge of students, a useful visual means of conveying this is through the chart, Source 1. Have students, in pairs, find and list as many areas of German life as possible that were affected by *Gleichschaltung*.]<sup>1</sup>

This chart, by a powerful visual impact, conveys the idea of a well-ordered government machine in which all revolves around Hitler as power radiates outward. The appearance fits the traditional picture of totalitarian dictatorship. Students can readily identify areas of youth, education, the legal system, labor, agriculture, the press, and even medicine as areas dictated by the Nazi leadership. These areas and many others were apparently organized according to the will of the *Fuehrer*. Nothing appears to have been left to chance as Hitler and his lieutenants attempted to exercise complete power over Germany in their efforts to realize the dictator’s *Weltanschauung* (“worldview”) (see Source 2). Students may also share a commonly held view that dissent in any form was stifled and that concentration camps were an essential part of totalitarian Germany, 1933-45. Everything was supposedly coordinated; everything was synchronized. Different drummers were imprisoned or executed and there was no different beat to march to.

How accurate, though, is this traditional picture? In some respects, and certainly in theory and aims, it is very accurate. There has long been abundant material available to teachers covering the Nazi impact on

everything from big business to women.<sup>2</sup> Using these well known sources, instructors can present students with an overview of the National Socialist power network, for example, the abolition of opposition political parties, the control of the media, the coordination of the Protestant churches and the accommodation with the Catholics, the oath of loyalty expected of the *Wehrmacht*, the replacement of labor organizations with the German Labor Front, and the control of leisure activities and the arts. When such information is presented, however, students should be warned not to lose sight of the fact that even in such a totalitarian state, individuals were faced with choices. They should be told that while many ordinary people embraced the Nazi program, others only tolerated it, and still others resisted. The controversy surrounding Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* has, if nothing else, increased scholarly interest in the role played by individual Germans in strengthening and perpetuating the National Socialist regime.

### **Gleichschaltung and German Youth: Curricular**

Now let us turn to German youth as a case study in Nazi totalitarian aims. Young people, Hitler well understood, were the key to German greatness in the future. In 1933 he said:

I begin with the young. We older ones are used up. We are rotten to the marrow. We are cowardly and sentimental. We are bearing the burden of a humiliating past, and have in our blood the dull recollection of serfdom and servility. But my magnificent youngsters! Look at these young men and boys! What material! With them, I can make a new world.<sup>3</sup>

At the Nuremberg rally of 14 September 1935, he proclaimed, "What we look for from our German youth is different from what people wanted in the past. In our eyes the German youth of the future must be slim and slender, swift as the greyhound, tough as leather, and hard as Krupp steel."<sup>4</sup>

Under the Nazis the educational system of Germany was overhauled in line with the *Fuehrer's Weltanschauung* and with the intent of indoctrinating German youth with National Socialist theories and with Hitler's personality cult. The whole school culture was altered to reflect authoritarian and nationalist principles. Erika Mann estimated, for example, that school children said "*Heil Hitler*" approximately fifty to one hundred fifty times every day. During the war, an additional greeting among students was "*Gott strafe England*" ("May God punish England").<sup>5</sup> The swastika, pictures of Hitler, and Nazi slogans were ubiquitous in the school environment. The atmosphere was authoritarian and teachers were

expected to demonstrate enthusiasm and support for the Nazi party and its ideals. Rita S. Botwinick provides a vivid example of how rough things could be for an educator who had the courage to challenge the party line. Officials in the town of Winzig brought Rektor Johannes Spieler to task for sympathizing with Jewish children, for taking meeting minutes with an allegedly anti-Nazi tone, for refusing to fly the swastika from the flagpole after 1932, and for replacing signs reading “Shut the door” with others asking students to “Please, close the door.”<sup>6</sup>

In the field of education, the Nazis were early dedicated proponents of the “modern” notion of curriculum integration as all subjects were *gleichgeschaltet* in order to conform to National Socialist views on nationalism and anti-Semitism. Hitler’s *Weltanschauung* permeated every area of a German youth’s school day, but particularly in the fields of history, geography, biology, athletics, and the new subject of *Erblehre und Rassenkunde*, or inheritance and racial science. A few examples can suffice.

[Have students divide into five groups. Assign to each group a different set of sources listed below relating to the Nazi curriculum and distribute the handout on Nazi stereotypes of Jews (Source 3). Groups should examine the sources and be prepared to report back to the class through a spokesperson. The group reports should include: a) a brief summary of the contents of the source, b) an explanation of which stereotypes, if any, are used, and c) an analysis of how the sources reflect Nazi ideology and illustrate *Gleichschaltung*:

1) the suggested syllabus for history teachers taken from *Der Nationalsozialistische Erzieher* (*The National Socialist Educator, the Nazi journal for teachers*), Source 4,<sup>7</sup> and the excerpt from the German Central Institute for Education’s official instructions on history teaching, Source 5,<sup>8</sup>

2) the recommended teaching themes from Julius Streicher’s racist magazine, “Der Stuermer,” Source 6,<sup>9</sup> the statistics on the spread of Jews in various countries and cities from a geography curriculum chart from Walther Jantzen, *Die Geographie im Dienste der national politische Erziehung* (*Geography in Service of National Political Education*), Source 7,<sup>10</sup> and the cover of the report of the National Sozialistische Lehrerbund (Nazi Federation of Teachers), Source 8,<sup>11</sup>

3) the “Table of Contents” from curriculum writer Alfred Vogel’s 1937 book, *Erblehre und Rassenkunde fuer die Grund- und Hauptschule* (*Hereditary and Race Science for the Elementary and Main School*), Source 9,<sup>12</sup> a quote from Otto Rauscher’s 1942 *Volk und Leibeserziehung* (*Volk and Physical Education*), Source 10,<sup>13</sup> and the photo of the school courtyard, Source 11,<sup>14</sup>

4) a 1938 contrast of National Socialism and Jewish Bolshevism, from Konrad Olbricht and Hermann Kaergel, *Deutschland als Ganze. Der Erdkunde Unterricht in der Volks- und Mittelschule (Germany as a Totality: Geography Instruction in the Elementary and Middle School)*, Source 12,<sup>15</sup> and a page from Julius Streicher's anti-Semitic "Der Stuermer," (Source 13),<sup>16</sup> and

5) an excerpt from a mathematics book, Source 14,<sup>17</sup> a daily schedule for a girls' school, Source 15,<sup>18</sup> and two examples from the textbook, *Kleine Erb- und Rassenkunde (A Handbook on Heredity and Race Science)*, by Erich Meyer and Werner Dittrich, Source 16.<sup>19]</sup>

One final area of education is worth special focus: children's literature. Of Hitler's most dedicated anti-Semitic followers, none was more enthusiastic in his race hatred than Julius Streicher, whose publishing house, *Der Stuermer*, went to great lengths to create anti-Jewish propaganda for young people. Included in these efforts were two books for the young: *Der Giftpilz* ("The Poison Mushroom") by Ernst Hiemer and *Trau keinem Fuchs auf gruener Heid, und keinem Jud' bei seinem Eid* ("Trust No Fox on the Green Heath, and No Jew Upon His Oath") by Elvira Bauer. These can provide today's students with graphic examples of Nazi propaganda.

[For homework assign each student one story from either *Der Giftpilz* (Source 17) or *Trau keinem Fuchs* (Source 18). Students can become acquainted with probably the best website devoted to German propaganda, "The German Propaganda Archive," the work of Randall Bytwerk of Calvin College. The translations are in English and the stories appear in full color. Each student should be prepared to analyze one story/page when the class meets. They should use the same handout on anti-Semitic stereotypes that they used for other curriculum areas. For class, make sure you have the website available for viewing by the entire class. Choose a handful of stories from each book, depending on time available, and have the selected students highlight main points of German educational propaganda. n.b. Students should be advised that it is important to handle such racist sources carefully.]

History, Hitler's favorite subject, was completely re-written to focus the attention of youth on the greatness of Germany and on the correlation between Germany's defeat in World War I and the influence of Jews. (In fact, the Education Minister, Bernhard Rust, established a Reich Institute for the History of New Germany in Berlin in 1935.) The clear emphasis in the history curriculum was on German nationalism and on the destructive influence of the Jews and other racial enemies. Anti-Semitism permeated every aspect of the "new" history. Geography lessons also reflected

racism and focused on such themes as the need for German living space (*Lebensraum*) at the expense of the Slavs and the Jews, the spread of the Jewish population, and on contrasts between allegedly superior and inferior peoples. Racial studies focused on issues of supposed racial differences between peoples (from “superior” Aryans to “inferior” Gypsies, blacks, Slavs, and Jews), the critical necessity of maintaining German blood purity, and discrimination against “undesirable” elements in the population such as homosexuals and the disabled. Even mathematics was influenced by the Nazi drive to integrate its ideology into every area of a pupil’s study, as students were expected to calculate the trajectories of artillery rounds or the ratios between various types of military aircraft. Physical education was increased in a concerted effort to create a generation “slim and slender, swift as the greyhound, tough as leather, and hard as Krupp steel.” And that generation was bombarded with Nazi ideology and anti-Semitic stereotypes even in children’s stories.

### **Gleichschaltung and German Youth: Extracurricular**

The Nazis were able to build on a robust tradition of right-leaning youth movements in Germany. Quite outside the confessional youth organizations (Protestant and Catholic) and those attached to political parties (Young Communists and Young Socialists), all of which were paralleled by similar groups in other countries, the Free Youth Movement (the *Buende*) in Germany was unique. The *Buende*, as Walter Laqueur has explained, represented more than simply a rebellion of middle class youth against the bourgeois respectability of parent and home. These nationwide groups were noted for their strict discipline, collective life, and rightist ideological focus on leadership, racism, and hostility to democracy. Leaders might have been in ideological agreement with much that the Nazis stood for, but they were nonetheless suspicious of Nazi youth, who they regarded as ill disciplined, inclined to violence, and too involved in party politics.<sup>20</sup>

Hitler, for his part, despised these *Buende* groups as weak and quickly moved to outlaw, dismantle or intimidate the many youth organizations in Germany. He proceeded to expand the *Hitlerjugend* (Hitler Youth), now reorganized under the leadership of Baldur von Schirach. Von Schirach hailed from an aristocratic, cultured, and cosmopolitan Berlin family. His mother was an American; in fact, two of her ancestors had signed the Declaration of Independence. He joined the Nazi party as an eighteen-year-old in 1925 and studied German culture and art history at the University of Munich. He was a dedicated anti-Semite and quickly found himself in Hitler’s inner circle and was placed in charge of recruit-

ing and organizing young people. At twenty-one he became the leader of the Nazi *Deutscher Studentenbund* (Federation of German Students) and in 1931 was appointed as the party *Reichsjugendfuhrer* (National Youth Leader). With Hitler's appointment as Chancellor, von Schirach immediately set out to apply the principles of *Gleichschaltung* to German youth. Despite his effeminate manners and boyish, "soft," appearance, he found himself in the position of directing Hitler's efforts to create a generation swift, tough, and hard.<sup>21</sup>

Young boys were organized into the *Deutsches Jungvolk* (German Young People, informally called *Pimpfe*), older boys into the *Hitlerjugend* (HJ), young girls into the *Jungmaedelbund* (Federation of Young Maidens), and older girls into the *Bund deutscher Maedel* (BDM, Federation of German Maidens).

BOYS—*Deutsches Jungvolk*— Age 10-14  
 BOYS—*Hitlerjugend*— 14-18  
 GIRLS—*Jungmaedelbund*—10-14  
 GIRLS—*Bund deutscher Maedel*— 14-18

Not surprisingly, membership grew dramatically from a few hundred thousand to about six million by 1936. In December of that year the "Hitler Youth Law" was decreed. It stated, "The future of the German people rests on the young. All German youth must therefore be prepared for their future duties. ... The entire German youth, outside of the home and the school, are to be educated physically, spiritually, and morally in the spirit of National Socialism for the service of the nation." The law provided that von Schirach report directly to Adolf Hitler.<sup>22</sup> By the outbreak of World War II, considerably more than ninety percent of German youth were members.

The Nazis were not content to control the school day and leave the rest of the week to chance. The overriding goal was to continue the indoctrination process begun in school by controlling youngsters' free time in order to mold a generation loyal to the *Fuehrer* and prepared to be his instrument. In fact, despite the Nazi rhetoric about restoring family values, the party's demands on young people and their parents often meant less parental control than ever.<sup>23</sup> Youth in these organizations were taught that the state was more important than the individual or the family, and were even encouraged to report disloyal parents. The structure was patterned after the military, complete with ranks and promotion, and was

built on aggressive competition between individuals or groups, while at the same time creating the cohesion of comradeship which characterized

military life. Winning or succeeding were the only things that mattered. Parade ground drilling, arduous but effective, was used to drum discipline into young minds. The full panoply of war—military music, drums, flags, banners and marches in which thousands of youths paraded as one—were employed to create a mass mentality infused through and through with patriotic fervor.<sup>24</sup>

Emphasis was placed on the ideals of service, blind obedience, camaraderie, paramilitary drills, and physical fitness. Ideology occupied the central place and afternoons and evenings were spent in indoctrination sessions on Nazi concepts of nationalism and anti-Semitism and on reciting slogans such as “We are born to die for Germany” and “Youth must be led by youth.” Activities, thus, included courage and endurance tests, campouts, hiking, singing patriotic songs, team-building, rigorous physical training, boxing and wrestling competitions, map and orienteering instruction, field exercises, and target practice, in addition to practical service activities such as helping out with the local harvest, tree planting, and learning trades. Laqueur has noted the contrast between the *Buende* and the *Hitlerjugend*.

The Hitler Youth adopted many of the outward trappings of the youth movement, but differed from the *Buende* in essential respects. It adopted their uniform and organizational structure (group, tribe, and *gau*); it had its banners, sang many of the movement’s songs...and played war games. But whereas the primary concern of the *Buende* was with group life and the education of individual character, the Hitler Youth was mainly a training center for future members of the S.A. or the S.S. While the *Buende* retreated into the seclusion of woodlands, or went on long and adventurous journeys abroad, the principal task of the Hitler Youth was to impress the public by ostentatious parades through the streets of big cities. The youth movement engaged in mock fights and war games; a knife was part of the scout’s equipment, but it was not to be used to wound or kill. The Hitler Youth, on the other hand, took part in frequent street fights in which weapons were freely used.<sup>25</sup>

Activities for the girls in the *BDM* and *Jungmaedelbund* also centered on ideology and physical fitness, but emphasized the preparation of girls for their future roles as wives and mothers. The Nazi motto for women was “Kinder, Kirche, Kueche” (children, church, kitchen). Corresponding to these Nazi ideas on the position of women in society, girls learned domestic skills. Their groups nevertheless wore uniforms, were structured in a military-style hierarchy, and, short of the paramilitary training, engaged in many of the same activities as their male counterparts.

[A recommended activity that I find very useful in helping students to understand the Hitler Youth is a Powerpoint slide presentation (Source 19) of photographs of young people in the boys' and girls' organizations. The one I use includes dozens of photos that capture German young people of the 1930's and 1940's "in time." Seeing real teenagers in real activities promotes historical awareness in a way possibly more effective than verbal description.

Again depending on time, I suggest a few other ways to encourage students to personalize history. One is through a short, but excellent, video, "Heil Hitler: Confessions of a Hitler Youth." In it, a former member of the Hitler Youth, Alfons Heck, tells the story of how he became a loyal and enthusiastic Nazi against the backdrop of documentary footage of Hitler Youth activities. Teachers might also wish to supplement the film with excerpts from Eleanor H. Ayer's book, *Parallel Journeys*, which contrasts Heck's experience with that of his contemporary, Helen Waterford, who was interned in a concentration camp.<sup>26</sup> Another effective strategy is to ask students to read eyewitness accounts. I include (Source 20), an account that I translated from a website co-sponsored by the Deutsche Historische Museum in Berlin. The sources in this website are part of the "living virtual museum online" (LeMO) and can be found at: <[www.dhm.de/lemo/](http://www.dhm.de/lemo/)>. This could be read as homework and discussed in class as a concluding exercise. It raises the all-important question of the possibility of resistance and dissent in a dictatorship, the last theme of this essay.]

### **Newer Perspectives on the Nazi Regime**

Recent scholarship suggests that the tight organization and "well-oiled machine" for which the Nazis are famous simply do not apply to the Hitler regime.

[Put the following quotations on the board and solicit student observations:

"In the twelve years of his rule in Germany Hitler produced the biggest confusion in government that has ever existed in a civilized state...he systematically disorganized the upper echelons of the Reich leadership..."

—*Otto Dietrich, Hitler's press chief*

"He disliked the study of documents [and]...took the view that many things sorted themselves out on their own if one did not interfere."

—*Fritz Wiedemann, personal staff*

Discussion will contrast these views with the highly centralized organizational structure illustrated in the government chart discussed at the beginning of the unit]

Government in Germany, 1933-45, was extraordinarily chaotic and confusing. Perhaps the most surprising aspect for students to grasp today is Hitler's amazing lack of interest in serious governmental work, meetings, administration, and bureaucracy. His daily routine involved very little dictating on the Stalin model, particularly when he was away from Berlin in the Obersalzberg, Bavaria. The Propaganda Minister, Josef Goebbels, is credited with fabricating the widespread propaganda image of the tireless *Fuehrer*, strong and efficient.

[Bring students back to Bytwerk's website on Nazi propaganda (Source 21). For homework, ask them to analyze the *reliability* and *utility* of this *Winterhilfswerk* (winter relief) booklet as a primary source for historians. These two aspects are the recurring themes of document analysis in my classes. Reliability has to do with the trustworthiness of the document as a source of objective truth. Put another way, is the document believable? Does the author have any reason to exaggerate, lie, or omit truthful information? Utility, on the other hand, has to do with the usefulness of a source in helping historians to gain a clear picture of a given historical period. Obviously a terribly unreliable source, such as this annual piece for the *Winterhilfswerk*, can be extremely useful to historians and to their understanding of how the Third Reich manipulated words and images in the service of their cause. Discuss the image of Hitler that the words and images convey. How does this contrast with the accounts of Dietrich and Wiedemann above? This typically leads to a good discussion on the problem of conflicting sources. The solution, clearly, is to gather more sources.<sup>27</sup> Now show the students the typical daily schedule of Hitler at the Berghof in the Obersalzberg (Bavaria), Source 22, and discuss their impressions.<sup>28</sup> Finally, have students read the account by Hitler's architect and armaments minister, Albert Speer, which shows total contempt for Hitler and his "work" habits (Source 23).<sup>29</sup> The larger passage from which this selection is taken also shows the ability of top Nazis, especially Goebbels, to denigrate Nazi competitors and to manipulate Hitler and his policies. Perhaps the discussion can return to student preconceptions about the Hitler dictatorship and to questions of comparative reliability and utility.]

How, then, was Germany actually governed under this supposedly totalitarian tyrant? Studies of the Third Reich in the 1950's and 1960's put Hitler's dominating personality at the center of analysis. This "intentionalist" school of historians is best exemplified by Hugh Trevor Roper, who portrayed the dictator as "the complete master" of Germany who consistently carried out the *Weltanschauung* outlined in his autobiography, *Mein Kampf*. Alan Bullock agreed that Hitler was in complete control of the Nazi state, but altered the "intentionalist" interpretation to allow for Hitler's flexibility and pragmatism in making policy.

By the 1980's a new interpretation had appeared, sometimes called the "structuralist" or "functionalist" approach. Historians such as Martin Broszat emphasize Hitler's disinterest in the day-to-day operation of the Nazi government, and depict Hitler as a "weak dictator." They portray him as having far less control of the Nazi state than had been assumed and, indeed, as being incapable of creating an efficient government. Most important in this regard is the work of Ian Kershaw, who has demonstrated convincingly that Hitler did, in fact, very little "dictating."<sup>30</sup> Rather, he set the tone for the regime, made his wishes known, and then allowed those below him in the hierarchy to create policy and make decisions in line with what they interpreted to be Hitler's wishes ("*mit dem Gedanken des Fuehrers arbeiten*," or as it is sometimes put, "work towards the *Fuehrer*"). A cursory reading of *Mein Kampf* is enough to demonstrate Hitler's fascination with the concept of struggle; he applied this principle to government of the Reich. In other words, he did not actually conceive a policy and then dictate the details of its execution. Instead, he made general guidelines clear, then left it to the next level of administration to sort out the details. Whether it had to do with the Jews or euthanasia, with government of the eastern territories or economics, second level Nazis were given great latitude on policy and Hitler typically sided with whomever seemed the most radical and the strongest.

To understand this fully, students should be acquainted with the concept of the "dual state." In effect, the German government and the Nazi party were operated at the same time and along parallel, but often conflicting, lines. Typically, more than one functionary was appointed to essentially the same job and policy was carried out according to the law of the survival of the fittest. Jurisdictional infighting was the rule rather than the exception. The circular organizational chart provides numerous examples of the dual state.

[Have students return to Source 1. Ask students to find examples of dual functions, i.e., two different functionaries from party and state assigned to the same job responsibility. As guidance, you might ask them to find who was in charge of police, labor, foreign policy, culture, finance, economics, law, and race. From this chart and instructor presentation, the identifiable conflicts are Ribbentrop and von Neurath in the area of foreign policy, Himmler and Frick in the area of police, Goering and Schacht in the area of economics, and Seldte and Ley in the area of labor. The chart provides numerous examples. No fewer than five men—Lammers, Bouhler, Bormann, Hess, and Meissner—organized Hitler's work in the Berlin Chancellery. In the struggle for control of economic assets in the East during the war, Himmler and Goering competed fiercely. The egos and influence of Goering, Goebbels, and Himmler all played a part in the

*Kristallnacht* (“Night of the Broken Glass”) pogrom of 1938. And there was significant animosity between Propaganda Minister Goebbels and Rosenberg, the editor of the Party newspaper, the “*Voelkischer Beobachter*.” Perhaps among the most frightful of examples not shown is that of the rivalry and competition between Frank, Greiser, and Forster in “working towards the *Fuehrer*” in Nazi-occupied Poland.]

There was little love lost between the top Nazis and they fought it out among themselves for access to the *Fuehrer* and the execution of policy. The whole government was permeated with the spirit of competition and struggle. This was far from the well-ordered machine carrying out the carefully orchestrated policies of the tireless leader that has become the stuff of the Hitler myth. Goebbels, as it turns out, succeeded in fooling not only his own generation, but subsequent generations as well. It should be noted that Karl Dietrich Bracher has recently contributed fresh material to the historical debate about Hitler’s role. While accepting the contradictory and overlapping nature of the regime, he has portrayed it as a deliberate Hitler policy to “divide and conquer” and maintain supreme authority. It was, in other words, intentionally chaotic.

The education of youth provides a another splendid example. Who was actually in charge of education in the Third Reich? The old view had Hitler dictating and a carefully organized hierarchy carrying out the decrees. The reality, however, was much more complicated than that and, therefore, is illustrative of Nazi chaos. Rust was the official Minister of Education. Von Schirach maintained control of the *Hitlerjugend* educational mission. Streicher had significant informal influence on curriculum, as we have seen, through his publishing firm, *Der Stuermer*. Robert Ley also had Hitler’s confidence on educational issues and was charged with organizing the “elite” Adolf Hitler Schools (but they were so bad, according to Albert Speer, that the Party elite refused to send their sons and Bormann actually sent one of his sons to one as a punishment!). Phillip Bouhler of the Chancellery took a keen interest in curricular matters and had as much access to Hitler as anyone. According to him, he was personally directed (while with Hitler on one of those walks at the Berghof) to write a primer for schools on the history of the party, *The Struggle for Germany: A Reader for German Youth*. He acted, furthermore, essentially as the chief Nazi schoolbook censor. Alfred Rosenberg, a top Nazi ideologue, held numerous positions, but probably his longest title was “Representative of the Fuehrer for the Supervision of the Entire Intellectual and Ideological Schooling and Education of the National Socialist German Workers Party.” So who was in charge? Was it Rust, von Schirach, Ley, Streicher, Bouhler, or Rosenberg? The answer: all of the above, and each saw it as his duty to ascertain what Hitler wished and

carry out that will, always looking for opportunities to denigrate competitors and ingratiate himself with the *Fuehrer*.

[A Powerpoint slide presentation of photographs of the top Nazi officials mentioned in this paper helps put some faces on these characters, Source 24.]

One final word is necessary on the operation of the Nazi government. Everyone knows how important the Gestapo was in terms of maintaining an atmosphere of terror. The usual view has been one of Gestapo agents everywhere, watching every move of every German. History teachers today would be well served to familiarize themselves with the work of Robert Gellately.<sup>31</sup> He has demonstrated convincingly and surprisingly just how few Gestapo agents were needed to keep ideological order in Germany. For the administrative region of Lower Franconia, for example, only twenty-eight agents were needed to monitor a population of one million, and all but six of them were assigned to the city of Wuerzburg. How did they manage, given what appears to be an enormous task and a severe shortage of manpower? Gellately has shown that the ordinary citizenry proved to be enormously helpful in terms of conforming to the demands of the regime and spying on one another. The main job of the agents, as it turns out, therefore was to sort through denunciations. This is an aspect of the Third Reich that has definitely been misunderstood.

### **The Limits of Totalitarianism in Nazi Germany: Youth Resistance**

The Nazi assault on all opposition groups created an atmosphere in which there was no public forum for dissent or protest. Nevertheless, totalitarianism was not only difficult for the Nazis but, indeed, ultimately unattainable. One hundred percent control of all aspects of German life could not be achieved, although not for want of trying. Resistance was dangerous but not impossible in the Third Reich and it occurred on many levels. Depending on the level of resistance, though, the punishments could be fines, imprisonment, work camps, or death.

[Ask the students to compose their own definitions of resistance. Once the results are discussed, ask them to differentiate and define defiance, dissent, opposition, and resistance. Are they all part of the same principle? How are they different? Should one consider the first three as resistance? Should resistance be defined narrowly as organized action actively working against the regime, or should the definition be broadened to include more spontaneous, limited activities that might even include refraining from doing something? If a German did not resist was he by definition a

collaborator? Have the students discuss these critical issues. The discussion may include such things as refusing to join the *Hitlerjugend*, deciding to buy from a Jewish shop despite the official boycott of 1 April 1933, assisting a political dissident, refusing to attend a parade, distributing anti-Nazi leaflets at school, organizing a revolt in a labor camp, sabotaging government equipment, reading a forbidden book or listening to forbidden music, failing to denounce a neighbor, attempting to assassinate Hitler or a lesser Nazi official, or shielding a Jew from government attack. The discussion might well turn to the question of the difficulties faced in a police state. A final aspect of this issue is that of motivation for resistance. Here class discussion could focus on disillusionment, emergency (an individual or group under direct attack), and principle.]

Robert Ley tried to mobilize all of the workers into the German Labor Front and to win them over with such things as new cafeterias (Speer's "Beauty of Work" program, part of the larger effort "Strength Through Joy"), but that did not stop disaffected workers from eating their lunches on the usual orange crates in protest. The Nazis attempted a nation-wide boycott of Jewish shops in April 1933, but the response was less than enthusiastic and the party leaders never tried it again. Protestant leaders may have caved in almost completely to the demands of *Gleichschaltung*, but that did not stop some brave pastors, Martin Niemoeller most prominently, from speaking boldly from their pulpits. The hasty Concordat with the Vatican might have achieved great results from the Nazi perspective, but Bishop Von Galen of Muenster spoke out notably on the issue of euthanasia and Nazi eugenics policies. And there was always a handful of brave teachers like Johannes Spieler of Winzig, who had the courage to speak and teach their convictions regardless of the professional and physical consequences. The ultimate case of resistance often cited is that of the July 1944 failed plot to kill Hitler, led primarily by Claus von Stauffenberg.

Here again, young people provide a unique case study. They afford an opportunity to explore the possibilities and dangers of resistance in Nazi Germany. Although youth were special targets of Nazi propaganda, they, like their parents, made choices as to whether, or to what extent, they would cooperate with the regime. Three separate youth movements are worth noting: the *Edelweisspiraten* (Edelweiss Pirates), the *Weisse Rose* (White Rose), and the *Swingjugend* (Swing Youth).

[A few days before this unit on youth resistance, have one third of the students do preliminary research on each of these three aspects of youth resistance during the Third Reich. On the appointed day, have the students in each group meet together and compare notes. Perhaps one member could serve as the facilitator, one as the scribe, and yet another as the

presenter. Each group should prepare a brief presentation, the purpose of which is to teach the rest of the class about what they have discovered. What follows here is a brief summary of the activities of each of the resistance groups since the material is not widely known. The best resource upon which to draw, though, is Detlev Peukert's *Inside Nazi Germany* or, more succinctly, his article on youth in Richard Bessel's *Life in the Third Reich*.]

Most teachers have not heard of the Edelweiss Pirates, yet they represent a classic example of resistance in the Third Reich.<sup>32</sup> They were very loosely organized cliques or gangs of teenagers primarily in the lower Rhine that represented an entire youth subculture. Some were disaffected *Hitlerjugend*; in fact, the branch in north Duesseldorf had fought before 1933 on the side of the Nazi *Stuermabteilung* (S.A., or "brown shirts") against communist youth groups. Some members had been dismissed from the *Hitlerjugend* for minor infractions, while others had become disillusioned as the fun, "Boy Scout" atmosphere was increasingly overshadowed by ceaseless paramilitary marching and drilling. Other Pirates were nonconformists who opposed the regime from the beginning. Most, contrasting with the pre-Nazi members of the *Buende*, came from working-class families. Some groups were highly territorial and even fought each other in the early years after the Nazis attained power. What they had in common was an antipathy toward the Nazis and a desire, akin probably to teens of any era, to organize their own leisure time free from adult direction. This brought them into clear conflict with the Nazi policy of *Gleichschaltung* and these groups were labeled as political opponents and banned. In fact, their slogan was "Eternal War on the Hitler Youth." The Edelweiss Pirates were locally organized and usually met spontaneously in small groups, sometimes on street corners, sometimes in the woods, often with some females along (which was frowned upon by the authorities, who kept the branches of the *Hitlerjugend* strictly separated by gender). (See Source 25) They took on names such as the Kittelbach Pirates (in the Duesseldorf suburb near a creek of that name), the Navajos (Cologne), and the Roving Dudes (Essen). The generic name of Edelweiss Pirates applied to all and came from the Alpine flower emblem that they wore. A *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (RSHA, Main Office for Reich Security) report of March 1943 described their distinctive style of dress: "white socks, short Lederhosen, a colorful travel shirt, a neck scarf, and an Edelweiss badge."<sup>33</sup>

Much of their activity was peaceful and consisted simply of "hanging out," hiking, camping in tents or in a local farmer's barn, and playing guitars—usually not the German *Volkish* music approved by the Nazis. The aforementioned RSHA report remarked negatively on the fact that

many times “youth of both genders camp and bathe together fully naked.” But of greater concern to the authorities was the fact that these “wild” groups often clashed with *Hitlerjugend* patrols (especially with the *Streifendienst*, a type of HJ field police) in the woods, in parks, and in railroad stations since they “somehow oppose everything that that the *Hitlerjugend* stand for.”<sup>34</sup> Indeed, a favorite Navajo song was very hostile to the Nazis:

Hitler’s power may reduce us  
 And we still lie in chains,  
 But one day we will be free again  
 And we will smash the chains.  
 For our fists are hard,  
 Yes, and our knives are drawn.  
 The Navajos are fighting  
 For the freedom of youth.

On the other hand, as one Edelweiss Pirate put it, “We were not against the HJ. We only wanted the HJ to leave us alone.” Nonetheless, the Gestapo proceeded to organize a dragnet and broke up ten groups in Duesseldorf (283 youths in all), ten more groups in Duisburg (260 youths), four groups in Essen (124 youths), and four groups in Wuppertal (72 youths). In all, three hundred twenty were taken in for questioning and one hundred thirty were arrested. Upon release, it was customary for the police to shave their heads.<sup>35</sup>

During the war, as more groups became militant, some going so far as to engage directly in sabotage and attacks on government installations, Heinrich Himmler ordered a crackdown. Things took a particularly violent turn in 1942 when Helmuth Hubener was arrested and charged with distributing anti-government pamphlets that called attention to Nazi war crimes. This sixteen-year-old was executed by guillotine while other gang members were given lengthy prison sentences. On 25 October 1944 thirteen Edelweiss Pirates were publicly hanged in the working class Ehrenfeld district of Cologne. Among them was Bartholomaeus Schink, sixteen-year-old leader of the Navajos.

Better known than the *Edelweisspiraten* are the resistance activities of the *Weisse Rose* (White Rose) movement led by Hans and Sophie Scholl in Munich. This resistance organization centered on students at the University of Munich and is best remembered for its anti-Nazi protests and the distribution of anti-Nazi pamphlets. Hans, a former member of the *Hitlerjugend*, had become disenchanted with that organization, with the Hitler regime in general, and, as a soldier in the east, with what he felt to be the criminal activity of German forces there. He, his sister, and other

students bravely attempted to spread the truth. Many members of the White Rose, including Hans and Sophie, were executed in 1943.<sup>36</sup>

Lastly, mention should be made of the music protest movement of the *Swingjugend* (Swing Youth). These young people rejected the *Volkisch* music encouraged by the party in favor of American style jazz. Like the Edelweiss Pirates, the Swing Youth represent a movement of youth rebellion against authority. Listening and dancing to the music of Duke Ellington and Django Reinhardt was a way of rejecting Nazi values. It was American (the enemy) and not German; it was associated with a “racially inferior” minority (the authorities called it *Negermusik*); and it openly flaunted sexuality as opposed to family values. Swing Youth prided themselves in being “sleazy,” but, like the Edelweiss Pirates, they had their own distinctive form of dress and appearance: long hair, dancing shoes, stylish jackets and scarves, and usually an umbrella regardless of the weather. Girls cast off their *Dirndls* in favor of looser clothing and heavy makeup. In contrast with the Edelweiss Pirates, the Swing Youth tended to be upper middle class. This was, in part, because they needed the wherewithal to purchase phonograph recordings since, much of it banned by the Nazis, the music was unavailable on the radio. In addition, they needed the funds to purchase the stylish clothes and gain admittance to the swing clubs, and some understanding of English lyrics was necessary. The Nazi leadership was annoyed and perplexed by this movement that frustrated their efforts at *Gleichschaltung* and, although somewhat tolerant of the movement before 1940, cracked down on the ringleaders and principle swing clubs during the war. Hundreds of Swing Youth were jailed or spent time in work camps because of their preference for jazz and things American.<sup>37</sup>

Whether out of principled hatred for the Nazis, the desire to get out from under adult control and supervision, the attraction to American music, or disillusionment and dissatisfaction with the National Socialist youth organizations, young people resisted the Hitler regime and they did so in large numbers. The usual image of all German youth marching lockstep to the regime’s beat simply no longer holds. The Nazi aim of mobilizing all German youth under the banner of the swastika proved ultimately impossible. Resistance was certainly the most dangerous business in Germany during the 1930’s and many young people paid for their opposition with their lives. Yet they have left a legacy of courage that can be a source of inspiration for students today. In the most difficult of times many young people held to their convictions and opposed tyranny.

The Third Reich is an area of the curriculum that fascinates students and, hence, teaching it is made easier by the fact that motivation is not a difficulty. If one approaches the era from the standpoint of youth, the path

is made smoother still as it is automatically an approach with which students today can identify. Equipped with current knowledge and some practical tools, teaching the Nazi dictatorship can be rewarding and successful.

## Notes

1. Adapted from "Das Nationalsozialistische Herrschaftssystem" in *Fragen an die deutsche Geschichte*, Deutscher Bundestag Referat Oeffentlichkeitsarbeit (Bonn: 1993).
2. See, for example, Henry Ashby Turner, *German Big Business and the Rise of Hitler* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) and Jill Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society* (London: Barnes and Noble Books, 1975), but any bibliography taken from a solid work on Nazi Germany can serve as a useful guide. An excellent source that has stood the test of time is Richard Bessel's *Daily Life in the Third Reich* (Oxford: 1987), which includes articles on youth, rural life, and industrial workers, among others.
3. Brenda Ralph Lewis, *Illustrierte Geschichte der Hitler Jugend, 1922-45*, (London: Amber Books, Ltd., 2000), p. 7.
4. Quoted in John Laver, *Nazi Germany, 1933-45*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1991), p. 42.
5. Erika Mann, *Zehn Millionen Kinder: Die Erziehung der Jugend im Dritten Reich*, (Amsterdam: im Querido Verlag, 2002), pp. 24-25.
6. Rita S. Botwinick, *Winzig, Germany, 1933-46: The History of a Town under the Third Reich*, (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1992), pp. 47-59.
7. Nr. 42/1934, cited in Jochen Herring et al. *Schueleralltag im Nationalsozialismus* (Dortmund: Paedagogische Arbeitsstelle, 1984), p. 269.
8. Quoted in Laver, p. 44.
9. From 1935, translated in Gregory Paul Wegner, *Anti-Semitism and Schooling Under the Third Reich*, (New York: Routledge Falmer, 2002), p. 42.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 151.
11. Historisches Archiv der Stadt Koeln, "Machtergreifung und Gleichschaltung: Koelner Schulen 1933-35," (Cologne: Stadt Koeln, 1991), 4.2.
12. Wegner., p. 77.
13. Wegner., p. 178.
14. Historisches Archiv der Stadt Koeln, 5.2.
15. Wegner., p. 155.
16. Historisches Archiv der Stadt Koeln, 11.2.
17. Quoted in Laver, p. 44.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
19. Historisches Archiv der Stadt Koeln, 11.1.
20. Walter Laqueur, *Young Germany: A History of the German Youth Movement*, (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1984).
21. Von Schirach moved on in his career in mid-1940 and his successor as Reich Youth Leader was Artur Axmann.

22. *Reichsgesetzblatt* 1936 I S. 993.

23. All Germans, regardless of age or profession, were expected to join the requisite party organizations and it sometimes reached ridiculous lengths. A contemporary joke lampooned the situation. A father comes home and finds no one there. A note on the table informs him, "I'm at the Nazi Women's League and will be back late. Mother." He leaves a note: "I'm at the party gathering. I'll be late. Father." Next home is the son, who leaves a note: "I have night training with the HJ which will last until tomorrow. Fritz." Finally comes Hilda, the daughter, who writes, "I'm off to the night gathering of the BDM. Hilda." When the family finally reunites it is 2 o'clock a.m. and thieves have robbed them of everything they own, but not before leaving a note: "For making this theft possible, we thank our Fuehrer. Heil Hitler! The Thieves." Related in Mann, pp. 30-31.

24. Lewis, p. 31.

25. Laqueur, p. 194.

26. Source: Zenger Video, 10200 Jefferson Blvd., P.O. Box 802, Culver City, CA 90232-0802; 1-800-421-4246. #TL338V-J4; 30 minutes (credits: HBO, 1991). Also see Eleanor H. Ayers, *Parallel Journeys* (New York: Atheneum, 1995).

27. The photographer, Heinrich Hoffmann, was Baldur von Schirach's father-in-law. Hoffmann's book, *Hitler wie ihn keiner kennt* (1935) contains a classic photo that shows Hitler with Blondi and looking very much "the man of destiny." For great effect, though, contrast this with the best photo I think I have ever seen: one of Hitler snoozing, in Laurence Rees, *The Nazis* (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 58-59.

28. Adapted from Frank McDonough, *Hitler and Nazi Germany*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 29.

29. Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich: Memoirs*, (New York: Macmillan, 1970), pp.121-126, 130-31.

30. Ian Kershaw, "Working Towards the Fuehrer," *Contemporary European History*, vol. 2, Issue 2, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

31. Robert Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

32. For further reading see especially Detlev J. K. Peukert's *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life* (New Haven: 1987) and R. Blair Holmes and Alan F. Keele, *When Truth Was Treason: German Youth Against Hitler* (Chicago: 1995). See also Alfons Kenkmann's "Navajos, Kittelbach- und Edelweisspiraten: Jugendliche Dissidenten im "Dritten Reich" in Wilfried Breyvogel, *Piraten, Swings und Junge Garde* (Bonn: Verlag J.H.W. Dietz Nachf. GmbH, 1991). A great eyewitness work is Kurt Piehl, *Latscher, Pimpfe und Gestapo: die Geschichte eines Edelweisspiraten* (Frankfurt: Brandes & Apse Verlag, 1988). Intermediate German teachers could use Alexander Goeb's *Er war sechzehn, als man ihn haengte* (Munich: Verlag Klett Edition Deutsch GmbH, 1985).

33. Angela Genger, *Verfolgung und Widerstand in Duesseldorf, 1933-45* (Duesseldorf: Landeshauptstadt Duesseldorf, 1990), p. 105.

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.*

36. Inge Jens, "Die Weisse Rose," in Breyvogel's *Piraten, Swings und Junge Garde*.

37. Rainer Pohl, "'Schraege Voegel, mausert euch!': Von Renitenz, Uebermut und Verfolgung Hamburger Swings und Pariser Zazous," in Breyvogel.