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The Nazi Curriculum
Educating the Youth in Nazi Germany in the 1930s

Introduction

On January 6th, 1934, Walter Ettinghausen, a German teacher, wrote to the journal *News Paper*, describing how a Nazi German teacher conducted a lesson on race science. A young Jewish girl was called to the front of her classroom to be inspected by her classmates. The teacher asked the class to point out the features that distinguished her as Jewish. The students took turns listing her features; One student called out, “the nose” while others chimed in, “the curly black hair” and another, “the sallow skin.”¹ As the young Jewish girl stood frozen before her classmates, her teacher expressed disappointment when the other students could not come up with one more distinguishing feature. When no one could point it out, the teacher taught them a core concept of race science. He asked them, “can’t you see her deceitful look?”²

During the Third Reich, Nazi officials refocused every aspect of education to enforce a curriculum that denounced Jews while favoring so-called “Aryan” Germans. Math, science, history, and even physical education broke free from traditional methods of teaching, and the Nazis rebuilt new, racially motivated pillars of education. Hitler, in his autobiography, *Mein*

¹ Walter Ettinghausen, *News Letter* (1934), in *They Shall Inherit the Earth*, ed. Otto Zoff (New York: The John Day Company, 1934), 49-50.

² Ettinghausen, *News Letter*, 50.

Kampf, written during his time in jail and published in 1925, made the prediction that he could persuade the German youth to follow his idea of a *Volksgemeinschaft*, or a people's community.³ The *Volksgemeinschaft*, in Hitler's ideal world, would consist only of "pure Aryan" Germans willing to contribute and sacrifice for the good of their community while excluding those who were considered parasites that were supposedly harming and causing all of the problems within the community. Within the *Volksgemeinschaft*, according to the historian, Jill Stephenson, "the national community would be defined as much by those who were excluded from it as by those who were its members."⁴ Only Germans who were deemed "valuable" would be accepted in the *Volksgemeinschaft*, a calculation that depended heavily on race. Stephenson explains that, "the national community was conceived as the collective body of 'valuable Aryan' Germans who would live and work in harmony together under the leadership of the Nazi Party."⁵ How did Nazis recreate a curriculum that could teach the idea of the *Volksgemeinschaft*? What were they teaching the German youth during the Nazis' time in power to instill a belief and emotional need for a *Volksgemeinschaft*?

From 1933 to the present day, historians and other scholars have been debating the role of education in Nazi Germany. Historians agree that education in Nazi Germany was centered on race, with Aryan Germans considered the "highest quality" and Jews being treated as less than human. As the Jewish Politician and Economist Frieda Wunderlich wrote in *Education in Nazi Germany* in 1937, "no longer is [German] education conceived as the training of men and women to be competent and free characters, able to form their own judgments and to confront

³ Urvashi Goutam and Urvashi Gautam, "Pedagogical Nazi Propaganda (1939-1945)," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* vol. 75, (2014): 1018.

⁴ Jill Stephenson, "Inclusion: building the national community in propaganda and practice," in *Nazi Germany*, ed. Jane Caplan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 99.

⁵ Stephenson, "Inclusion," 99.

new situations in a new way.”⁶ German youth were no longer taught how to think freely and form their own ideas based on their findings and research. Instead, students were taught the pseudo-intellectual discoveries of Nazi scientists and theoreticians. In *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, the scholar Anson Rabinbach and his cohorts point to the theoretician Ernst Krieck, one of the pioneers of the Nazi curriculum, as he began his race studies on biology.⁷ Jill Stephenson makes the connection to how Nazi education also distinguished ideal gender roles for German women. Stephenson states, “the reform intensified the trend that had been evident from 1933 of discouraging girls in senior schools from studying some subjects which would equip them for university entrance, instead focusing on home economics and foreign language.”⁸ Nazi education created an atmosphere where students were led to believe they had a role in society based on both their gender and race, with an emphasis on race as the main aspect of a valuable citizen.

Other scholars have identified the absorption of teachers into the National Socialist Teachers League as being a key factor in the Nazi educational system. In Claudia Koonz’s *The Nazi Conscience*, she describes the *Gleichschaltung*, or Nazification, of schools. Koonz states, “in early 1933, regional, religious, and subject-oriented teachers’ associations fused into a single National Socialist (NS) Teachers League.”⁹ Koonz goes on to show the rapid expansion of teachers involved in the NS Teachers League, stating, “by 1937, 97 percent of all teachers belonged to the Nazi Teachers League.”¹⁰ With the overwhelming majority of teachers in the NS

⁶ Frieda Wunderlich, “Education in Nazi Germany,” *Social Research* 4, no. 3 (1937): 348, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40981568>.

⁷ Anson Rabinbach, Sander L. Gilman, and Lilian M. Friedberg, *The Third Reich Sourcebook* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 390.

⁸ Stephenson, “Inclusion,” 113.

⁹ Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: First Harvard University Press, 2005), 133.

¹⁰ Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience*, 135.

teachers league, students had little chance of getting an education that was not transformed by Nazi officials. Expanding on educational *Gleichschaltung*, Stephen Pagaard wrote in *Teaching the Nazi Dictatorship: Focus on Youth*, “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.”¹¹ Students were indoctrinated by teachers that had become part of the Nazi party and their educational milieu was composed of everything relating to the Nazi party. Pagaard goes on to examine each subject, especially history, which he claims was Hitler’s favorite subject. Pagaard states, “history... was 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.”¹² By emphasizing the stab-in-the-back theory, the idea that Germany would have won World War I if it was not for Jewish collusion within Germany, students were taught not to trust their fellow Jewish citizens.

Together, these historians demonstrate how hard Nazi officials pushed education towards inculcating the ideal of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. However, one statement from Frederic C. Tubach, a German scholar born in 1930, stood out. In his examination of a speech given by Hitler in *German Voices: Memories of Life During Hitler’s Third Reich*, Tubach writes, “[Hitler’s] ultimate goal was to turn an entire generation into robots.”¹³ Although true in some instances, I believe this statement goes too far. For the youth to be considered robots, they would have to show no feelings. However, Nazi education was designed to create emotions of hatred,

¹¹ Stephen Pagaard, “Teaching the Nazi Dictatorship: Focus on Youth,” *The History Teacher* Vol. 38, No.2 (2005): 191-192.

¹² Pagaard, “Teaching the Nazi Dictatorship,” 193.

¹³ Frederic C. Tubach and Sally Patterson Tubach, “German Voices: Memories of Life During Hitler’s Third Reich,” (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 40.

fear, disgust, and belonging within the *Volksgemeinschaft*. Hitler and other Nazi officials turned their backs on traditional education focused on individualism and critical thinking and recreated a curriculum focused on race, anti-individualism, and gender roles because they believed they could shape a future generation of Nazis with an emotional desire for a *Volksgemeinschaft*.

Coordinating Education

The National Socialist party took many of the ideas from the Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, or the DAP, and the guidelines the DAP established in 1919. Although the later National Socialist Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, or NSDAP/Nazi Party, did not adhere to every aspect of the DAP's guidelines, they tweaked the plan and reinforced many of the main ideas. The beginning of the DAP guidelines state that for the party to be able to function, it would need to be led by people who are willing to sacrifice personal goals and only focus on improving the nation.¹⁴ Hitler would later come into this position as the leader of the Nazi party and continue to employ the beliefs of the DAP's guidelines. Within the guidelines, the DAP claims, "in the future, the competitive position of an individual country shall be determined not by the lowest wages but by the diligence and efficiency of its workers."¹⁵ The DAP made it clear that to create a flourishing German nation, it was up to the people to come together and work towards a united goal. Later, the guidelines state who they are fighting against. The guidelines target usury and inflation, with the goal of removing individuals who make money through unconventional means and do not contribute to the betterment of the German nation. The authors of this document do not hide

¹⁴ "Guidelines of the German Workers' Party" (1919), in *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, ed. Anson Rabinbach, Sander L. Gilman, and Lilian M. Friedberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 41.

¹⁵ "Guidelines of the German Workers' Party," 41.

antisemitism, instead, they specifically mention Jews as enjoying luxuries that they obtained by greedily exploiting other Germans. By stating, “[Jews] control and rule us with their money,” the DAP guidelines immediately create the need for removing Jews from Germany since they are ones causing all the problems.¹⁶ These ideas would later culminate in the DAP’s 25-point plan.

The DAP’s Twenty-Five Points laid the groundwork for the future Nazi German curriculum. This foundational Nazi ideological composition, written in 1920, is indicative of the antisemitic, anti-individualistic, and gender-oriented education that would later flood German schools. In the fourth point of the plan, the platform states who can be part of Germany and who should be excluded. Only those with “German blood” could be part of the nation, while Jews were prohibited.¹⁷ The tenth point focuses on contribution to the community. This point states, “it must be the first duty of each citizen of the state to work with his mind or with his body... within the frame of the community and be for the general good.”¹⁸ The platform explains to Germans that one of their most important duties is to contribute either intellectually or physical work towards creating a better future for Germany. Meanwhile, the twenty-first point calls women to action. This point requires the standard of living to improve, which the platform believed could be accomplished if they could provide services to mothers in need and increase birth rates in Germany.¹⁹ Together, these points show the deep-rooted beliefs in antisemitism, anti-individualism, and the importance of gender roles that would shape German education in the Third Reich.

¹⁶ “Guidelines of the German Workers’ Party,” 41.

¹⁷ German Workers’ Party (DAP), “The Twenty-Five Points” (1920), in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) 124-125.

¹⁸ German Workers’ Party, “Twenty-Five Points,” 125.

¹⁹ German Workers’ Party, “Twenty-Five Points,” 126.

To teach National Socialism, Nazis believed schools needed to be purged of any teacher that would not adequately be able to teach such ideals. In *Nazism, 1919-1945* Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham examine the turning point in schools when Nazi leaders purged “undesirable” teachers from their positions. Nazi officials identified “undesirable” teachers according to their acceptance of National Socialist ideology along with their ancestry and their willingness to teach National Socialist values. Continuing on Koonz’s identification of the NS Teachers League that teachers were coerced into, Noakes and Pridham explain, “the main functions of the NS [Teachers League] were, first, the provisions of reports on the political reliability of teachers for appointments and promotions and, secondly the ideological indoctrination of teachers.”²⁰ Not only was the NS Teachers League responsible for identifying which teachers fit into the Nazi ideological system, they were also tasked with the responsibility of educating teachers on how to teach like a National Socialist. One member of the NS Teachers League stated the goals of the league, as follows: “[German youth] must be consciously shaped according to principles which are recognized as correct and which have shown themselves to be correct: according to the principles of the ideology of National Socialism.”²¹ By forcing teachers to join the NS Teachers League and undergo training in how to be a Nazi certified teacher, the new curriculum was enhanced as the ideal pedagogy that permeated German schools.

With a plan laid out and teachers conforming to the NS Teachers League, many students had no where to turn for education besides Nazi educators. Even if “pure Aryan” Germans resisted Nazi education and refused to return to school, they were considered outcasts. Historian Detlev J. K. Peukert identified a young German that attempted to escape Nazi education. Peukert

²⁰ Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, *Nazism 1919-1945* Vol 2 (Exeter, Great Britain: University of Exeter Press, 2000) 237.

²¹ Noakes, *Nazism*, 238.

wrote, “boarding-school pupil Peter Bruckner was able to elude the demands of National Socialism until about 1937-38 and, at the cost of becoming a loner, to hold his own non-conforming identity.”²² Nazi teachers and German students labeled Bruckner as an outcast since he did not conform to the feelings being taught in German schools. Bruckner was not able to escape Nazi education as it eventually intertwined with physical education and sports, showing that as Nazi education spread throughout each subject, students had less opportunities to engage with the aspects of education they enjoyed without receiving National Socialist ideology and learning the emotions Nazi’s wanted to instill in them. As Bruckner began engaging in Nazi-imbued physical education, he wrote about the feelings of accomplishment associated with improving his physical strength and appearance.²³ Bruckner, although a resister of Nazi education at first, eventually succumbed to the overwhelming presence of National Socialist ideology within education.

Creating Hatred and Disgust: Race and *Volksgemeinschaft*

Under National Socialism and Nazi ideology, one of the main factors pivotal of educating the youth was to alter their perception of race and create hatred and disgust towards those deemed as “racially inferior.” As mentioned earlier, Ernst Krieck was at the forefront of racial science theories. Rabinbach describes Krieck’s vision as, “the notion of society as an organic whole in which each individual was to be educated for his or her ‘natural; place in society, following the model of breeding animals for their appropriate functions.”²⁴ Krieck believed that

²² Detlev J.K. Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life*, trans. Richard Deveson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 147.

²³ Peter Bruckner, “Untitled Memoir,” in *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life*, trans. Richard Deveson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 147-148.

²⁴ Rabinbach, *Third Reich Sourcebook*, 390-391.

as animals were bred for specific purposes based on their preferred qualities, so too could humans. The purpose behind this was to show the desirable qualities within the ideal Aryan German and compare them with the undesirable qualities of their Jewish counterparts. Krieck continued to show his desire to educate Germans on race in a speech he gave to doctors, stating, “no doctor, however well versed in the technical aspects of medical science, is a good doctor unless he first realizes and discharges his duties to the political-racial philosophy of the new Germany.”²⁵ By emphasizing that a good doctor is one that understands their “duties to the political-racial philosophy,” Krieck shows that as the youth are trained to identify and hate people of the Jewish race, so too should doctors. By educating the youth and encouraging hatred towards Jews as part of the new German political-racial philosophy, future German doctors would be able to carry out their Nazi duties of distinguishing Jews as “racially inferior.” Krieck’s plans for recreating a new German education were so widespread that even the *New York Times* included an article on him that made it to the fourth page of a 1933 newspaper. When speaking of the new German education Krieck stated, “[teacher’s] foremost task is to form the will and character of their students.”²⁶ This quote continues to show how the new German education focused on shaping the youth to believe National Socialist ideology and to create a generation that identify their character and will as Nazis. The concept of race within schools continued to be developed and taught within multiple subjects. Meanwhile, another pedagogical intellectual, Herman Nohl, was working on altering the curriculum to teach the youth the value of serving the nation rather than working towards their own individual gain.²⁷ When the Nazis intertwined the ideas of individuals having a predetermined place in society with the belief that “worthy”

²⁵ Ernst Krieck, “Medicine and Philosophy of National Socialism,” *The Journal of Higher Education* 7, no. 5 (1936): 280, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1974357>.

²⁶ Ernst Krieck, “Heads German University,” *New York Times*, May 24, 1933, 4.

²⁷ Rabinbach, *Third Reich Sourcebook*, 390.

individuals needed to contribute to further strengthening their ideal society, a new form of education was born.

Nazi ideology seeped into the new Nazi curriculum and educators created an environment that fostered hate and disgust to people of “inferior” race, especially within the subjects of biology and history. Noakes and Pridham acknowledge the core concepts that Nazi educators taught when teaching biology and race, stating, “it was designed to emphasize the natural law of selection and the qualitative differences between the various races.”²⁸ This corresponds with Krieck’s idea of teaching race by highlighting “natural” places in society. With pseudo-intellectual discoveries of the “Aryan” race being pure and more desirable than Jews and other outcasts, Nazi educators could expand on the natural law of selection, claiming Aryan Germans were designed to fit within a *Volksgemeinschaft* because they were born with the aspects of a pure human. The 1938 German Central Institute of Education’s guidelines stated, “insight into the permanence of the hereditary characteristics and the merely contingent significance of environment facilitates a new and deep understanding of historical personalities and contexts.”²⁹ By framing history around “hereditary characteristics” and “historical personalities,” teachers could reinforce emotions of hatred towards Jews by instilling the belief that Jews were responsible for many of Germany’s past struggles. This is particularly emphasized when educating the German youth on why Germany lost World War I. By blaming the Jews and saying they stabbed Germany in the back, educators taught German youth that Jews should be despised. The hereditary characteristics were also associated to Jewish traits mentioned in Ettinghausen’s ideal class on racial science. Nazis believed Jews could be identified by

²⁸ Noakes, *Nazism*, 243.

²⁹ Noakes, *Nazism*, 244.

hereditary characteristics, such as their noses, curly hair, and sallow skin.³⁰ In 1935, a Nazi teacher brought a copy *Der Stürmer*, a propaganda laden magazine targeted at youth, into school and hung it on the wall so he could point to such features and teach his class what hereditary characteristics to look out for.³¹ Historical personalities could be attributed to the Jewish population and history lessons could then be structured to show that any historical German struggle or calamity could be attributed to the Jews. Nazi educators reshaped the teaching of history and biology to create hatred in the German youth because of the “burden” Jews place on Germany and their historical tendency to ruin the *Volksgemeinschaft*.

With race in the spotlight, German educators were able to further establish why “pure” Germans should feel pride in themselves and hate the “racially inferior” Jewish Germans. German youth of all ages took biology classes structured to show them how to feel about different races. Historian Lynn H. Nicholas identifies a typical description of races in Germany comprised of, “Nordic, Dinaric, Alpine, Mediterranean, and Eastern/Baltic.”³² This lesson taught Germans that the Nordic or Aryan race was the best, in both looks and character. The teacher also had students identify the different features of each race and examine eyes, lips, chins, noses, faces, heads, and body shapes. Students were then expected to assign “spiritual and intellectual” aspects to each race, further highlighting the Nordic/Aryan German as superior, with countless flaws in the “inferior” races.³³ This lesson was designed to instill the belief in the Aryan German youth that they are indeed superior to every other race and create hatred for those that are not as pure as they are.

³⁰ Ettinghausen, *News Letter*, 50.

³¹ “*Der Strümer* as Instructional Material in School Lessons (c. 1935),” *Images – Gender, Family, and Generations*, German History in Documents and Images, accessed November 30, 2022, https://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=2057.

³² Lynn H. Nicholas, *Cruel World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 85.

³³ Nicholas, *Cruel World*, 85.

Another biology lesson, intended for fifth graders, blatantly underlined antisemitic attitudes that had been present for centuries. In a particular lesson plan on “the psychological qualities of the Jewish soul” the teacher is expected to show fifth graders, “the features of Near East Asian and Oriental races that are so repulsive to us as Germans have increased substantially among the Jewish population.”³⁴ Within this lesson, teachers show that Jews call themselves “chosen ones.” However, the lesson states they should be referred to as the “world public enemy” because they are incapable of getting along with any group outside of their race. This lesson goes on to teach the German youth that Jews do not contribute to strengthening the nation, instead they engage in practices that only benefit themselves such as being merchants and traders. A key takeaway point from this lesson is stated as follows: “the spirit of [Jewish] thought is critical, corrupt, and corrosive, never constructive.”³⁵ Once again, Nazi educators instilled the belief in the German youth that Jews could never fit into the *Volksgemeinschaft* due to these features.

To increase hatred towards “inferior” races, teachers began to single out individuals and exclude them from class activities. In Berlin, a young Jewish boy named Klaus Scheurenberg attempted to join in with his fellow German classmates to give the Nazi salute, a daily activity during morning assembly. Klaus’s gym teacher noticed the Jewish boy performing the Nazi salute and proceeded to beat him in front of his classmates. Klaus’s teacher used this opportunity to teach Klaus and his classmates a race science lesson. His teacher exclaimed, “you’re a German? You’re a *Saujude*.”³⁶ Klaus and his classmates were taught that because Klaus was not

³⁴ Otto Steche, Erich Stengel, and Maxim Wagner, “School Subject: Biology” (1942), in *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, ed. Anson Rabinbach, Sander L. Gilman, and Lilian M. Friedberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 404.

³⁵ Steche, “School Subject: Biology,” 404.

³⁶ Nicholas, *Cruel World*, 83.

part of the “pure Aryan” race and instead a Jew, he was not a real German. He was not allowed the same privileges as other Germans and he could not engage in the same simple tasks as his fellow peers. This was not an uncommon occurrence. In another instance, two Jewish girls wanted to join a Mother’s Day celebration and sing for their mothers along with their German classmates. Their teacher told them they were allowed to attend the festival, but she also said, “since you are Jewish, you are not allowed to join in the songs.”³⁷ Nazi teachers excluded Klaus and the two Jewish girls from participating in basic activities in front of their German classmates which created a feeling of belonging and exclusion that German youth would carry with them and utilize to exclude Jews from other aspects of life that Germans could enjoy.

The hatred that Germans felt towards the “racially inferior” is evident in the writing of soldiers during the war. Karl Fuchs, a German soldier born in 1917, reflected on his education of mixed-race relationships. While stationed in France, Fuchs wrote many letters to his wife, explaining his situation while also reflecting on what he learned in school. Fuchs wrote, “the most terrible sights are the Negroes who walk arm-in-arm with white French women and who sit with them in the street cafes. I just can’t approve of that.”³⁸ Fuchs reflected on one of the many lessons he learned in race science classes and the importance of same race marriage. Fuchs cannot approve of mixed-race marriage because of his German education reflecting upon marriage between Germans as being one of the most important aspects of creating the future *Volksgemeinschaft*. German education taught Fuchs to feel disgust when observing a “pure” race mixing with an “impure” race. This reflection highlights the aspects of education that adult Germans believed years after their education.

³⁷ Nicholas, *Cruel World*, 84.

³⁸ Karl Fuchs, “A German Soldier’s Letters from France” (1940), in *The Nazi State and German Society*, ed. Moeller, 116-117.

Eugenics and “Undesirables”

To teach ideas of eugenics and “undesirables” to the German youth, math lessons were altered to instill emotions of disgust towards the “undesirables” that were wasting German resources. In a math textbook, one question was structured around the cost of providing services for a, “mentally ill person,” “a cripple,” and, “a criminal.”³⁹ The question goes on to ask the student to identify how much it costs to provide services for these “undesirables” and to compare that number with the amount of marriage loans that could be funded with that same amount.⁴⁰ This lesson fits the Nazi agenda in two ways. The first way is by identifying the aspects that create the undesirable German; mental illness, physical handicaps, and criminal activity. Secondly, this highlights the importance of desirable marriages, as the student is required to state how many married Germans could receive money for fulfilling their duty of marrying other desirable Germans and producing pure offspring. Nazi officials believed they could alter math lessons, just as they altered biology and history lessons, to fit the Nazi agenda and promote the ideas of a *Volksgemeinschaft*.

In many cases, Nazi educators achieved their goal of instilling the emotion of fearing “undesirables” in the German youth. Melita Maschmann, a German memoirist born in 1918, reflects on her education in *The Nazi State and German Society*. In Maschmann’s *A German Colonizer of Poland in 1939 or 1940*, she thinks back to a map she studied in primary school. Maschmann states, “only a frightened little girl sat on the patch of blue that meant Germany. On the yellow patch, just next door to the right, a sturdy little boy was crawling on all fours

³⁹ Noakes, *Nazism*, 245.

⁴⁰ Noakes, *Nazism*, 245.

aggressively in the direction of the German frontier.”⁴¹ At a young age, Maschmann was taught that German birth rates were much lower than neighboring nations. Maschmann recognized the baby in a neighboring nation crawling aggressively towards the German baby. She, and other German youths, could tell that the German baby was in great danger. To Maschmann, this map instilled the belief that, “Poles were a menace to the German nation.”⁴² Maschmann based her feelings towards non-Germans and “undesirables” from this lesson, which was also reinforced in her race science classes in her later years in school.⁴³

The Nation and Anti-Individualism

Another goal of Nazi education was to teach the youth the value of the nation and its corollary. Noakes and Pridham emphasize the Reich Minister of the Interior’s December 1934 provision that stated, “the principal task of the school is education of youth in the service of nationhood and State in the National Socialist’s spirit.”⁴⁴ This shift completely changed the meaning of education in the sense that education traditionally encouraged the youth to think for themselves while also honing their strengths and improving on their weaknesses. Now they were being taught to disregard their individuality and instead focus on creating a stronger nation. Lessons were formed to reinforce emotions of pride in one’s community rather than pride individual accomplishments.

There were many unique ways in which Nazi educators pushed ideas of anti-individualism and feelings of communal pride, such as the use of a “school garden.” Historian

⁴¹ Melita Maschmann, “A German Colonizer of Poland in 1939 or 1940” (1963), in *The Nazi State and German Society: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Robert G. Moeller (Boston/New York: RR Donnelley & Sons Company, 2010), 114.

⁴² Maschmann, “A German Colonizer,” 114.

⁴³ Maschmann, “A German Colonizer,” 114.

⁴⁴ Noakes, *Nazism*, 242.

Lisa Pine claims, “the school garden was to be a true ‘community garden’ for the entire school, where each child participated for the benefit of the whole school and community.”⁴⁵ By emphasizing the idea of a “community garden,” Nazi educators introduced young Germans to the idea of contributing to the national German community. Within the garden, German youth learned lessons of responsibility and the requirement to serve the nation.⁴⁶ These ideas show the German youth that they by working together and putting effort into creating a stronger community, everyone that is a part of the community will benefit together. This encouraged the youth to not only worry about their own economic standing, but to think about their community first. Without a strong community garden, the shared harvest would not be able to sustain everyone. However, if everyone rose to their duty and contributes time and effort into creating a flourishing garden, the entire school would enjoy the harvest. By contributing to the community garden, Nazi teachers encouraged the German youth to put aside their own desires and work towards satisfying the desires of the whole community.

An integral part of teaching anti-individualism and emphasizing pride in service to one’s community was presented to the youth by highlighting war heroes’ accomplishments for their nations even after their deaths. A song intended to be sung by German youth in the third to sixth grade titled “To the Flag” shows how the Nazi flag gives German soldiers strength, and even if the German soldier dies in battle they will be remembered for their duty and live on in German people’s memory. The last two lines stated, “hail to the men, full of grace, to all who have fallen in the shade of your face.”⁴⁷ The shade of your face here means under the Nazi flag, and this song inspires German youth to honor the brave German soldiers that die fighting for their nation.

⁴⁵ Lisa Pine, *Education in Nazi Germany* (London: Bloomsburg Publishing Plc, 2010), 44.

⁴⁶ Pine, *Education in Nazi Germany*, 44.

⁴⁷ Baldur Von Schirach, “To the Flag” (1942), in in *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, ed. Anson Rabinbach, Sander L. Gilman, and Lilian M. Friedberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 401.

By honoring those who fought bravely in the past, Nazi teachers encouraged young German boys to follow in the footsteps of the soldiers that were willing to give everything they could to fight for Germany. This idea was enhanced even more so in the 1940s, as Germany was engaged in war. In Nazi politician and academic Kleo Pleyer's writing on *Volk in the Field*, he identifies the aspects of war that strengthen the German and weeds out the weak. Pleyer wrote, "by demanding the utmost from every individual man and forcing him to subordinate himself to the higher order of the community, war creates values and hierarchies that are essential to the existence of *Volk*, state, and Culture."⁴⁸ Pleyer highlights the German war hero; the hero who is willing to rise up to fight, putting his life on the line because it is his duty to give all he can for the betterment of the German people.⁴⁹ Nazi educators gave praise to the German man willing to fight for his country and his willingness to make sacrifices for the good of Germany.

Physical education was another tool Nazi officials used to strengthen ideas of contributing to a community rather than focusing on the individual. Nazi officials believed they could engage the youth in physical activities structured around team work to encourage German youth to work together as a team in competitions. Nazi physical educators believed, "we have the opportunity to guide the youth away from the 'I' sports of past times to the 'We' sports of the National Socialist state."⁵⁰ Along with the community garden, this emphasized the need for working together rather than focusing on the individual, as a team activity needed equal participation from each member of the group if it was to work to its fullest extent.

German soldiers expressed the feelings they were taught from anti-individualistic education during World War II. Walter Knappe, a German born in 1916 and recruited in 1939,

⁴⁸ Kleo Pleyer, "Volk in the Field" (1943), in in *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, ed. Anson Rabinbach, Sander L. Gilman, and Lillian M. Friedberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 465.

⁴⁹ Pleyer, "Volk in the Field," 465.

⁵⁰ Pine, *Education in Nazi Germany*, 63.

pointed out when he was working with unskilled soldiers from the Hitler Youth, “only too well could I understand their crazy enthusiasm; they went to their doom in the belief that they were fighting for Germany. The willingness of the soldiers to make sacrifices was unlimited.”⁵¹

Knappe experienced the war firsthand as a soldier in the front lines fighting Russians in Berlin. Although the squad he was fighting with was lacking military training and ammunition, they were not lacking dedication to Germany. Despite their disadvantages, they eagerly fought back until they were forced to retreat, showing their emotional dedication to the Führer and the *Volksgemeinschaft*.⁵²

Educating Young Women

With education placing a major emphasis on race and anti-individualism, Nazi leaders also saw a need for education that enforced ideal gender roles in the *Volksgemeinschaft* in a way that created a feeling of pride in women. In biology courses, girls learned that one of their most important duties are to hone their “mother instinct.”⁵³ As birth rates were low in Germany and Nazi officials believed they needed to encourage Germans to give birth more frequently, girls were taught that if they could get married and raise a family, they would be proud by performing their ultimate duty to their nation. They took classes where Nazi educators taught them how to care for their family. Classes focused on how to raise babies, how to administer first aid, and, as Lisa Pine puts it, “preparation for girls’ roles as future housewives in relation to both the domestic and the national economy.”⁵⁴ Additionally, girls learned the value of a healthy diet,

⁵¹ Walter Knappe, “There was no spirit, no sense of pride,” in *Voices from the Third Reich*, ed. Steinhoff, 485-486.

⁵² Knappe, “there was no spirit,” 486.

⁵³ Pine, *Education in Nazi Germany*, 44.

⁵⁴ Pine, *Education in Nazi Germany*, 44.

what foods are rich in nutrients, and what to avoid, such as alcohol and tobacco.⁵⁵ Here, education is once again veering off the traditional path of encouraging all students to pursue a higher education and improving themselves in their own ideals. Nazi educators instead enforced ideas of gender roles, with women contained to the domestic sphere and tending to “motherly duties.”

Nazi officials instilled the feeling of fear of women’s emancipation when it came to educating women. This was in accordance with Hitler’s view on the advancement of women. In 1934, Hitler claimed, “the word *women’s emancipation* is merely an invention of the Jewish intellect, and its meaning is informed by the same spirit. The German woman never has any need for emancipation during those times when Germans are truly leading the ‘good life.’”⁵⁶ Hitler displayed his view of women, showing that he believed they should only fulfill their duty as mothers and caretakers. By claiming women’s emancipation was a term created by Jewish intellectuals, Hitler created the idea that women’s emancipation was a façade put in place to stifle the growth of Germany. Hitler’s idea culminated in the creation of the Reich Association for Multiple Offspring Families, an association targeted at educating women in their “proper” role of procreation of Aryan Germans.⁵⁷ Nazi educators instilled the belief in women that they needed to conform to their gender role to strengthen the *Volksgemeinschaft* and the national family.

Conclusion

One of the Nazi’s main goals was establishing the belief in National Socialism in the youth that would persist until adulthood. Kurt Meyer-Grell, a German pilot born in 1921, states

⁵⁵ Pine, *Education in Nazi Germany*, 60.

⁵⁶ Rabinbach, *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, 488.

⁵⁷ Rabinbach, *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, 488.

in the *Voices from the Third Reich*, “National Socialist ideology was impressed on us children systematically – indoctrination so thorough that ten years after the war’s end I still thought like a National Socialist, even though I’d learned about the atrocities.”⁵⁸ In this case, Hitler had achieved his educational goal. Even after Germany had lost World War II and Nazis had committed countless war crimes, some adult Germans retained Nazi ideology.

Nazi officials recreated every aspect of education during the Third Reich in the attempt to create a future generation that felt the emotional desire to create a *Volksgemeinschaft*. German youth learned from a young age the pride associated with being part of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, who to be disgusted with, who to hate, how to be a honorable martyr that sacrifices for their community, and what their predetermined role within the community pertained to. By adhering to what they learned, Nazi educators inculcated German youth with the idea that “Aryan” Germans were of the highest quality of humans, while Jews and people with disabilities and illnesses were resource wasting parasites that should be feared and loathed. With the new Nazi curriculum in place, Nazi educators were responsible for encouraging the youth to absorb National Socialist mentality and foster an emotional bond between the German youth and the ideal *Volksgemeinschaft*.

⁵⁸ Kurt Meyer-Grell, “I sat down on a bench across from that bust of Hitler, and I began to weep bitterly” in *Voices from the Third Reich: An Oral History*, ed. Johannes Steinhoff, Peter Pechel, and Dennis Showalter (Cambridge: De Capo Press, 1994) 394-395.

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