\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Youth in Nazi Germany\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

* Nazism may have paid lip service to family values, but its totalitarian regimentation of society weakened family ties and subverted traditional hierarchies, both in the home and at school.
* Nazism’s permanently aggrieved tone appealed to aged cohorts inclined to moralising indignation, a further sign of Nazism’s essentially adolescent sensibility.
* Hitler proclaimed at the Nuremberg Rally in 1935:

In our eyes the German boy of the future must be slender and supple, swift as greyhounds, tough as leather and hard as Krupp steel. We must bring up a new type of human being, men and girls who are disciplined and healthy to the core. We have undertaken to give the German people an education that begins already in youth and will never come to an end. It starts with the child and will end with the ‘old fighter’. Nobody will be able to say that he has a time in which he is left entirely alone to himself.

Schools

* The regime moved quickly to “coordinate” the education system. The *Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service* covered all public school teachers, which meant that Jewish and socialist teachers were purged in 1933 and 1934.
* The law applied to university professors as well. As many as 1,600 of Germany’s 5,000 university professors and instructors were forced out in the first year of the regime, only to have their roles filled by those willing to support the dictatorship.
* The NSDAP established the NS-Lehrerbund (National Socialist Teachers’ League) in 1927. As teachers scrambled to secure their positions, the League increased its membership from 12,000 at the end of January 1933 to 220,000 by the end of the year. By 1936, 97 per cent of all schoolteachers were members, and the following year, the League absorbed all the remaining professional associations.
* Local officials removed 157 out of 1,065 male secondary school heads in Prussia, 37 out of 515 male senior teachers and 280 out of 11,348 tenured male teachers. Thirty-two per cent of women heads of secondary schools in Prussia were sacked. Most of those fired were in Social Democrat or Communist-dominated districts.
* Headteachers had to be brought in from outside. This reinforced the leadership principle that teachers no longer had any input into the school's running but had to accept orders from above.
* Those Jewish teachers who were not fired in April 1933 were compulsorily pensioned off in 1935.
* A directive issued in January 1934 made it compulsory for schools to educate their pupils ‘in the spirit of National Socialism. Nazi propaganda and rituals shaped school ceremonies and daily routines.
* Schoolchildren were required to gather to listen to Hitler’s speeches on the radio and celebrate a variety of Nazified festivals. School libraries were purged of books deemed dangerous to the Reich. School noticeboards were covered in Nazi propaganda posters, adding to the general atmosphere of indoctrination.
* Not all children attended state schools. Both Catholic and Protestant-run schools were common. Increasingly, parents were exhorted to enrol their students in the secular school system. In the late 1930s, Catholic schools in Bavaria were sites of tension, as school administrators and parents pushed back at requirements to replace the crucifixes, which traditionally hung in classrooms with portraits of the Führer.

A group of people around a fire

Description automatically generated

How authoritarian were Nazi controls of schools?

Declining Standards

* Over 215,000 teachers were indoctrinated into Nazi ideology through forced retraining. Like the fare offered at other Nazi camps, it included a hefty dose of military drills, physical jerks, marches, songs and the like. It required all the inmates to wear a military-style uniform for their stay.
* Corporal punishment and beatings became more common in schools as the military spirit began to permeate the educational system.
* Students could denounce their teachers, leading to fines and prison sentences. In every school, there were likely to be some fanatical Nazis amongst the teachers, willing at any point to report colleagues if they expressed unorthodox views. “In many schools, teachers also had to put up with the presence of old brownshirts who were found jobs as caretakers or even in positions of authority over them. Two or three ‘school assistants’ were appointed to help the teachers in each school; their continual presence in the classroom was resented by many teachers, who saw them correctly as political spies. Most of them were untrained, and many were not even particularly well educated.
* Increasing numbers of teachers retired early or left the profession for other jobs. By 1938, there were 3,000 vacant posts while the 2500 annual number of graduates from teacher training colleges was inadequate to provide the 8,000 teachers needed a year. The result was that class sizes on average in all schools had increased to 43 pupils per teacher as compared to 37 in 1927, while less than one-fourteenth of all secondary school teachers were now under forty.
* At every level, formal learning was given decreased emphasis as the hours devoted to physical education and sports in schools were increased to five a week, and fewer lessons were devoted to academic subjects to make room for indoctrination and preparation for war.
* By 1939, employers were complaining that school graduates’ standards of knowledge of language and arithmetic were poor and that ‘the level of school knowledge of the examinees had been sinking for some time.
* A small number of boys (and even fewer girls) attended newly established Nazi elite schools. Nobody in future would be able to take on a leading position in the Party without first having undergone an education in these institutions. Two-thirds of the pupils at the Adolf Hitler Schools were boarders.
* The Hitler Youth determined the curriculum, focusing even more intensely on physical and military education. They did not provide any religious instruction. There were no examinations but a regular ‘Achievement Week’ at which the students had to compete against each other in every area.
* Drawing on the Hitler Youth across Germany, these schools, which were free of charge, became a vehicle of upward social mobility. The education standards were low at these “elite” schools, reflecting the anti-intellectual stance of the regime. Initially, only physical criteria, loyalty to Hitler and the national community and a will to action and sacrifice were applied for admission.
* By 1938, it had become clear a large proportion of the pupils could not grasp even the basic political ideas that the teachers were trying to transmit to them, with complaints that graduates were nowhere near prepared to take on positions of responsibility in the state or party apparatus.

Did the Nazi education reforms work?

Tertiary Education

* While the professoriate had been lukewarm toward the Nazis before Hitler assumed power, university students had been among the most ardent supporters of the NSDAP. In 1931, 60 per cent of all university students supported the National Socialist Students Association in nationwide student elections. Nazi-inspired anti-Semitic demonstrations took place at the universities all across the Reich.
* Almost immediately after the Nazi accession, students showed their support for the new regime. In October, they began to protest against Nazism’s purported intellectual enemies in a month-long campaign that culminated in a coordinated wave of book burnings in German cities. The dramatic torch-lit demonstration on Berlin’s Opera Plaza attracted the most attention.
* The plague of political denunciations that swept through Germany’s schools was especially debilitating to faculty and students. Denunciations became so numerous that in 1936, Education Minister Bernhard Rust was moved to warn students to relax their vigilance and not subject their professors to political reliability tests.
* Jews, who made up just over one per cent of the population, made up 12 per cent of all professors and a quarter of Germany’s Nobel laureates, most in physics and mathematics. Luminaries such as Albert Einstein, Max Born, Fritz Haber, James Franck, and Hans Krebs were or would become Nobel Prize winners and were unceremoniously pushed out of their positions or resigned under pressure. In all, some 15 per cent of all university professors were dismissed; by 1934, some 1,600 out of 5,000 university faculty had been forced out, roughly one-third of whom were Jews or were married to Jews. The number of dismissals in physics and chemistry was exceptionally high, including eleven Nobel laureates.
* On Germany’s campuses, members of the National Socialist German Students’ League harassed the remaining non-member students and non-conforming professors. The number of German women attending university dropped precipitously. The regime closed some university preparatory high schools (Gymnasiums) and stepped up its criticism of higher education. This all led to a decline in enrollment from 104,000 in 1931 to 41,000 in 1939. Only the numbers studying medicine increased dramatically in these years, thanks to the status of racial hygiene in Nazi Germany.
* It was typical of a self-destructive streak in Nazi ideology that infected the party and the regime it controlled. Standards plummeted, and by 1939, complaints were increasingly voiced about the poor quality of university students, who in turn complained that their work suffered because of a lack of time to study. After 1935, many were siphoned off to the army, and officers complained about the low quality of their educational preparedness.

Did the Nazi higher education policies benefit the regime?

Counter

* Many village schools were tiny, and in 1939, the majority of elementary schools still had only one or two classes. Teachers here could exercise a degree of freedom in interpreting the materials they were fed by the regime.
* Some textbook writers seem to have colluded implicitly with officials in the Ministry of Education to include a good dose of ideologically neutral material in their publications, enabling teachers whose priorities were educational rather than ideological to exercise a degree of choice.

History

Literature

Physics

Essay Writing

Physical Education

Curriculum in Nazi Germany

Mathematics

Biology

Primary Education

Hitler Youth

* As time went on, the Nazi Party, impatient with the inbuilt inertia of the state educational system, began to bypass it altogether in its search for new means of indoctrinating the young.
* In the 1920s, millions of young Germans were members of religious, political, or sporting groups. Viewed superficially, the Hitler Youth and their female analogue seem akin to a militarised version of the prohibited Boy Scouts, with a similar emphasis on clean living, competition, drill, teamwork, sport, and so forth.
* 1932, the Hitler Youth had about 100,000 members; by 1939, about 8 million German youths were part of the organisation, 90 per cent of the population. After March 1939, membership was legally binding from the age of ten, and parents could be fined if they failed to enrol their children or even imprisoned if they actively tried to stop them from joining.
* If the Nazis were going to build a new *Volksgemeinschaft,*then the 'harmful' influence of the pre-Nazi generation of parents needed to be weakened. The Nazi Youth gave children alternative, rival loyalties, which competed with the familial and allowed for the authoritative dissemination of Nazi ideas. The indoctrination included the acceptance of Nazi ideology of race, discipline and obedience.
* What quickly became the largest youth organisation in the world subscribed to the philosophy of ‘youth leading youth’, even though its leaders were part of an enormous bureaucratised enterprise rather than representative of an autonomous youth culture.
* There was an impressive admission ceremony, during which the recruit had to swear an oath of loyalty to the Führer and was then proclaimed a 'bearer of German spirit and German honour'.
* The overall effect of Hitler Youth membership was a coarsening of the young.
* Physical activities were stressed, though less so for girls who had their own organisation, ‘The League of German Maidens’. Rifle practice, hiking, endurance activities, and team building typified the militaristic style. The Hitler Youth refused to provide sex education, declaring it a matter for parents.
* From July 1936, the Hitler Youth had an official monopoly on providing sports facilities and activities for all children below the age of fourteen; before long, sports for 14-18-year-olds were subjected to the same monopoly; in effect, sports facilities were no longer available to non-members. The emphasis on sporting activities that attracted many to join the Hitler Youth also hindered full-scale indoctrination since the interest of many boys and girls went no further than using the facilities to play games.
* The possibility of holiday trips with the Hitler Youth, the sporting facilities, and much else could make the organisation attractive to children from poor working-class families who had not previously had the opportunity to enjoy these things. Some could find excitement and a sense of self-worth in the Hitler Youth.
* While much of this sounds as if it might have been fun – particularly the opportunity to fire guns or fly gliders – the wider consequences were mixed.
* There was a diminution of parental control as children began to visit their homes between school and youth activities, with parents reduced to a bed and breakfast service. Exposure to the new ideological tidings exacerbated conflict within the home, as Hitler Youth members espoused values often at variance with those of their more traditionally-minded parents. Thus, the state and the Party both undermined the socialising and educational functions of the family.
* Denunciations of parents by children were encouraged, not least by schoolteachers who set essays entitled ‘What does your family talk about at home?’ Parents were not allowed to hit a Hitler Youth member.
* The indiscipline of the Hitler Youth had a particularly disruptive effect on the schools. Its teenage activists, showered by the regime with assurances of their central importance to the nation’s future and accustomed to commanding groups of younger children considerably larger than the classes their teachers taught, behaved with increasing arrogance towards their elders in school.



How did the Hitler Youth aid the Nazis

Counter

* The constant emphasis on obedience became wearisome and ineffective.  The more it evolved from a self-mobilizing movement fighting for a cause into a compulsory institution serving the state's interests, the less attractive it became to the younger generation. Ideological indoctrination was often superficial since the leaders of the Hitler Youth groups were more often men in the brutal, anti-intellectual tradition of the Brownshirts than educated thinkers along the lines of the leaders of the old youth movement.
* Although it borrowed the style of existing youth organisations, with hikes, camping, songs, rituals, ceremonies, sports and games, it was emphatically a top-down organisation, run not by young people themselves. The organisation issued strict guidelines on the activities to be carried out. All those who joined had to swear a personal oath of allegiance to Hitler. Their training was compulsory and legally binding. Every age cohort of the Hitler Youth had a set syllabus to get through each year, covering topics such as ‘Germanic Gods and Heroes’, ‘20 Years’ Fight for Germany’, ‘Adolf Hitler and his fellow-fighters’, or ‘The People and its blood-heritage’. Specially prepared information packs told the leaders what to say to the assembled children and young people and provided further material for their indoctrination. Most hated was the military discipline, which became more pronounced as time passed. Even to its most junior levels, candidates for admission had to pass a medical and fitness test, and only then could they become full members.
* Membership in the Hitler Youth was a bullies’ charter. The formation became a cover for delinquency; they stole from farmers, got drunk, told smutty stories and impregnated underage BDM girls, who in turn argued that they were merely fulfilling the wishes of the Führer.
* Mandating membership also meant that meetings increasingly had young people present who did not want to be there, which in some locations bred dissent or apathy within the unit. There was little that the organisation could do to punish those who stayed away. As long as they paid their dues, they could not be expelled.
* Class differences continued to shape society. Working-class kids left school at fourteen for the labour force. While they were expected to be enrolled as members, they were far less likely to participate in its activities, given their work commitments.

How useful was the Hitler Youth to the Nazi regime