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Italian fascist Achille Starace stated, “Fascist education must be an education for battle.”¹ This idea of militarism as a core concept of education was integral not only to Fascism in Italy, but also to Europe’s other rising fascist movement, Nazism. The Nazis reinforced their militaristic education by creating mandatory youth organizations that promoted militarism to young German boys and girls. The twin pillars of a militaristic education system and para-military youth organizations helped Nazi officials achieve their goals by creating a generation of ready servants of the state.

Many scholars have researched the militarism that was infused into the German state education system. Lisa Pine, a scholar at London South Bank University, examined the educational system and youth groups that socialized German children with Nazi ideology and militaristic practices. She concluded that the schools and youth organizations created by the Nazis appealed to the desire of young people to become part of a larger group and to belong.² E.A. Wright, a scholar from the University of Leicester, concluded in his analysis of the German education system and youth movements that “Indeed the Nazi model...was, of itself a military” and, “Above all of them, the Hitler Youth... was ‘the school of the nation’.”³ The present study confirms the findings of both Pine and Wright. Pine’s idea that the system provided a way for German adolescents to assimilate and fit in with their peers is the cause for the effect explained by Wright that the youth groups and schools were, in essence, organizations to prepare German children to serve the State as faithful Nazi stalwarts.

German educational philosophy in the Weimar era took a more progressive stance than in either Imperial or Nazi eras. Wanting to leave the worldview that started the war behind, the

maxims of the Weimar school system were progress and reform. As one historian notes, “the Weimar years were a time of exuberant pedagogical innovation and optimistic plans to reform the stratified educational system in the name of democracy and social justice.”⁴ Educational reformers changed the curriculum by removing voluntary religious education in public elementary schools and creating a new focus on higher education preparation. However, there were conservatives who did not want to change certain topics, mainly history and geography. School reformers wanted to purge the new schools of the nationalistic textbooks of the *Kaissereich* (the era of the German Empire under the Kaiser). Some headway was made, but to Germans the rewriting of their history was an attack on their legacy as a people.⁵ The reformers were also unable to reform secondary education. German culture was still the main emphasis in secondary education in the Weimar era, with focus on German history, geography, civics, and religion. The Nazis would use this nationalistic presence in schools as a base of support for their reforms to education.⁶

In 1939, Adolf Hitler gave a speech in which he reflected on the educational changes that the Nazis had made since his ascension to power in 1933: “In my great administrative work, I am beginning with the young... Are their finer [youngsters] in the world? Look at these men and boys!... With them I can make a new world.”⁷ Starting in 1929, Hitler mobilized education officials and normal Germans to bring his vision to fruition. This started with the training of new teachers for Hitler’s educational system. He created the National Socialist Teachers’ League (NSLB) to train this new breed of educators. The membership of the NSLB was made of up twenty-to-forty year old, radicalized teachers who were both passionate about teaching and cynical of the Weimar Republic.⁸ The NSLB had no lack of eager recruits either, as support for National Socialism among university students training to be teachers was quite significant by the

1930s. The enthusiasm of these students can be seen in the swelling of the NSLB's membership to 12,000 by 1933 as graduates joined the organization.⁹ According to Pine, the NSLB had two main functions: to provide information on the political loyalty of teachers for hire and promotion, and to ensure the ideological indoctrination of teachers. To meet the second goal, one program the NSLB initiated was a mandatory training camp over school holidays.¹⁰ The NSLB would require teachers from all over the state to convene at camps to learn about history and racial studies. These seminars placed young, new teachers alongside old, indoctrinated teachers. The younger teachers would feel a sense of peer pressure, wanting to conform with the older teachers for the purpose of promotion and fitting in. This psychological need to conform would catalyze the indoctrination of the young, impressionable teachers.

The Nazis also undertook the task of "modernizing" education. They made an education system more oriented toward the state. Their plan was a top-to-bottom one, focusing on high schools first, then moving on to lower grades. The Nazis' emphasis on militarism played a key role in the modification and restructuring of schools. Before they could begin to create their own schools, the Nazis needed to eliminate the influence of the Catholic Church on education. They slowly phased out Catholic schools by enforcing stringent requirements on them and withholding state funding until they fell in line with state policy.¹¹ Textbooks were distributed by the state, and the subject of Race Studies was added to all school curricula. Physical Education was emphasized under the new regime to ensure the physical fitness of the future soldiers of Germany. German classes were also taught by recitation of Nazi mantras and slogans of the state.¹² These modifications helped the indoctrination of youth by making the Nazi ideology the normative ideology among the youth.

Nazi militarism found its way into every subject in school curricula. In some examples, the militarism was overt, while in others it was more subtle. For example, a math problem from a German secondary school textbook published in 1937 reads, “A plane on takeoff carries 12 bombs, each weighing 10 kg. The aircraft makes for Warsaw, the centre of international Jewry. It bombs the town... When it returns from the crusade... [What] was the weight of the aircraft...?”¹³ This could have easily been a simple, “A train leaves the station...” problem, and the same end of mathematics education would have been achieved. However, arithmetic was no longer the only concern. Published two years before the invasion of Poland in 1939, this textbook reveals an invasion was in the offing much earlier. One can also see a clear connection between Nazi militarism and Nazi racism. Poland, the target of this math problem, was home to millions of Slavs and Jews, whom Hitler considered racial inferiors, and, in consequence, militarily inept.¹⁴ Indoctrination in military concepts and connected ideas of race could bleed into almost any subject.

The Nazis used German nationalism regarding geography and history education to their advantage. The Nazis used geography, for example, as a method of inspiring hatred against France and the Versailles Treaty. Emphasis was placed on Germany’s territorial losses and the German speaking peoples outside of Germany.¹⁵ In these classes, the Rhineland was discussed to justify German remilitarization of the zone in 1936.¹⁶ In one specific geography textbook, published in 1943, there were sections on lands, such as Austria and the Sudetenland being “returned” to Germany. When talking about the Sudetenland, the textbook said “The Führer, Mussolini, Chamberlain, and Daladier met in Munich, with the result that German troops marched into the Sudetenland. The Sudeten area was occupied by German troops at the beginning of October 1938. They were received by the population with jubilation. Again, an

injustice was eliminated, and a piece of German territory returned to the Reich.”¹⁷ The Nazis used the subjects to justify previous aggressive moves in the midst of a war of aggression that was not going well by 1943.

Hitler himself was very supportive of the modification of physical education. The Nazis believed that the young citizens of the state needed to be healthy and strong if they should be called upon to serve. As Dr. Isaac L. Kandel, a Romanian-American scholar of education, noted in November 1935, “Physical training has been officially defined as pre-military training. Formal drill and exercises... and Military sport... lay the foundations for the national army of the future.”¹⁸ Hitler especially believed that older German boys, of grades 10-13, could be toughened by “enduring extreme heat and cold, as well as hunger and thirst.”¹⁹ These boys were sent out in military-like encampments to train them to be the next generation of soldiers.

The curriculum in the average German school was filled with aspects of militarism, but the Nazis also created special schools for military training. First among these were the *Napolas*. The *Napolas* were established to educate future top-ranking government officials and army personnel.²⁰ The students of the *Napolas* needed to have “soldierly” characters and were trained in the ideals of German militarism. These boarding schools separated young boys from their families and society and forced them into a strict, military environment, producing the ideal setting to psychologically create the next soldiers of the German Reich. These boys also received weapons training as part of their physical education, equipping them with the physical skill set to be a German soldier. The *Napolas* shaped the German soldiers, both psychologically and physically.

The second type of German specialty school was the *Ordensburgen*. The function of the *Ordensburgen* was to educate the next generation of Nazi political and military elite. There were

four of these “Order Castles” established across Germany, each focusing on a different aspect of Nazi ideology. The two *Ordensburgen* that were more militaristic in nature were at Crössinsee and Vogelsang. The *Ordensburgen* were constructed to resemble castles and inspire the feeling of knighthood within its students. This idea of mediaeval knighthood helped to establish the idea of “glory in battle,” drawing on the tales of old, such as *Beowulf* or *The Song of Roland*. At *Crössinsee*, students underwent intense military style training. Here, soldiers learned parachuting and equestrian skills. At *Vogelsang*, soldiers were instilled with the values of bravery and heroism, and some trained to be Nazi pilots.²¹ These specialty schools made the students who attended them feel as if they were set apart for something higher. This would lead them to perform to the best of their ability and to conform to the ideals set out by their instructors, so they would receive the highest positions in the military upon graduation. They sought, in a sense, to become modern knights of the Third Reich, carrying out their heroic victories to gain glory.

Overall, the education system in Germany played a critical role in introducing the Nazis’ militarism to the youth. The national curriculum was reformed to reflect the goals of the new Germany: create a generation of ready servants of the state. To do this, Nazis inserted militarism into any and all topics taught by a typical school. The Nazis also created specialty schools to train the next generation of soldiers for Germany. The *Napolas* acted as the early military academies, training soldiers in strategy, weaponry, and ideology, and the *Ordensburgen* were designed to create a new generation of knightly soldiers to carry out the Reich’s crusade across the world. The reformed curriculum and establishment of special military academies made the soldiers of the Reich professionals, but their training began long before they were enrolled in such schools.

The Nazis created youth organizations, specifically the Hitler Youth and the League of German Girls, to advance the cause of National Socialism to Germany's youth. The Hitler Youth became a political arm of the Nazi Party in 1931 by engaging in propaganda campaigns and campaigning against the Communist youth organizations in Germany. Nazi officials decreed in 1933 that all German youth should become a part of the Hitler Youth and that the Hitler Youth, other than the schools, would be the main intellectual and physical educators of German youth.²² In 1932, the Nazis created the League of German Girls after other attempts at youth organizations for girls failed.²³ Its course ran parallel, but not concurrent, with the Hitler Youth; its message was geared more towards the ideal image of a German woman. The Nazis' emphasis on militarism as a core concept of educating youth was evident in these programs.

The Hitler Youth was open to boys age fourteen and older. Psychologically, this is one of the most impressionable ages, as youth begin to discern their values and vocation. Two of the ways youth decide on their values are by looking at their peers and getting involved in social groups. Therefore, placing young boys into a social group with their peers while teaching them the values of Nazism was a nefariously ingenious plan for indoctrination. Prior to joining the Hitler Youth, children were taught to be excited about the organization; as a poem from one 1936 pamphlet reads, "The children stand at the gate by Lene's yard. Suddenly they hear: *tromp, tromp — tromp tromp...* Hitler Youth! *Heil, heil heil!*... Let's follow them!"²⁴ The militarism in the Hitler Youth can be seen in their handbooks and military drill and practice. For example, in one book associated with the Hitler Youth, a story reads, "The soldiers came back from their field exercise, and the boys came to meet them. Hansi was there, too... Now the last truck came along. Two soldiers sat in back. They looked at the little boy and laughed... One jumped down and lifted Hansi up. Now he sat between them... The big boys said: "If only we could sit there!"

Hansi rode along to the base. It was the best day of his life.”²⁵ A later chapter of the same book tells the story of young boys pretending to fight “the enemy” on the beach.²⁶ These stories glorified the German military and conveyed that young boys should act like young soldiers and desire to join the military. The Hitler Youth also helped with the war effort. The boys were often sent door to door to collect items such as newspapers, scrap metal, and other materials to supply war industries. Some boys were chosen to act as couriers and messengers within Germany. These positions were highly sought after by the boys. They were seen by other members of the Hitler Youth as almost equivalent to serving in the military. One Hitler Youth member remarked that being a courier made him feel more confident in his role of helping the war effort.²⁷ Other duties that older members of the organization were given included air raid warden and firefighters.

As the war against Germany progressed for the Allies, Hitler Youth members were called to support the war effort in a radically different way. Starting in October 1944, all men between the ages of sixteen and sixty who were physically able to fight in the war became eligible for the draft. The young men were eager to go to the front; however, they grew tired of the repetitive military exercises that they already experienced during their time in the Hitler Youth. Young men on the front were sent to dig ditches, be on the night watch, and, in some cases, fight in combat. This made the boys become sleep deprived, ill, starved, and psychologically scarred, which had a harmful effect on morale. As one Hitler Youth member turned German soldier remembers, the boys came to realize that “this was not the war of textbooks, the war of glory and heroic death, but the war of blood and gore, of terror and shame, and of bodies torn and mutilated.”²⁸ Boys as young as sixteen were forced to fight in some of the bloodiest battles of the war in Europe, including the Battle of the Bulge and the Battle of Berlin. In the end, the Hitler Youth fulfilled its role of being a para-military organization for the young male population of

Germany, but not without robbing many young boys of their innocence, and, in some cases, their lives. Because of the intense militaristic indoctrination the boys went through, many of them continued to fight after Germany's surrender. Former members of the Hitler Youth formed guerilla groups known as "*Werwolf*," to resist Allied denazification. The *Werwolf* bands actively resisted until their actions seemed to suddenly stop in late 1946. Upon capture, these boys would be forced into denazification classes to undo the years of indoctrination they endured.²⁹

The League of German Girls rose in popularity alongside the Hitler Youth. By 1936, almost half of all girls between the ages of ten and eighteen were members. The League practiced militarism, which, until the outbreak of war, was a minor part of its mission. Prior to the war, the League of German Girls' focus was on racial purity, German motherhood, and personal hygiene; however, members of the League often camped, hiked, swam, and participated in organized sporting events. Some girls were hesitant to participate in the physical fitness aspect of the program. To incentivize the girls, Bladur von Schirach, the leader of the Nationalist Socialist Youth Movements, created an achievement badge for "physical prowess." By 1940, 60,000 of these badges had been awarded nationally.³⁰ This physical fitness set up the main lesson of the League to its members: a healthy woman is needed to provide for the state in the time of war as a mother and as a servant of the state.

During the war, the League of German Girls shifted its message away from ideals of racial purity and hygienics to one of militarism. During the war, girls were utilized for sewing, mending, and washing soldiers' clothing, agricultural work, and working in armaments factories. In the first year of the war alone, over nine million girls were mobilized for agricultural work. These girls were responsible for much of the food provided to the German Army in the early days of the war. Other girls began to assist the nurses in hospitals that tended to the wounded.

Even as the war drew closer to the home front in 1944 and 1945, many girls still showed a willingness to help out in this capacity, despite the risk to their own safety.³¹ Like the boys of the Hitler Youth, many of the members of the League of German Girls saw their service as essential to the war effort.

The youth organizations left lasting psychological scars on their members. A common theme among ex-members is the idea that their childhood was stolen from them. As one survivor of the Hitler Youth remembered after the defeat of Germany, "...when the growing realization came to us that it had all been pointless and in vain, that one's friends died for nothing, that one's brother died for nothing, we were utterly embittered."³² Likewise, a former member of the League of German Girls expressed her anger by claiming, "We were cheated of our youth."³³ As previously mentioned, towards the end of the war, the youth of Germany were torn from the lives they knew to go serve the war industries, or, for some, to fight on the front lines. All former members of the youth organizations were forced to go through "denazification." In these schools set up by the Allies, German children who were indoctrinated, either in the schools or the youth organizations, were taught the principles of democracy. Outside the schools, the Allies created the German Youth Ring for the purpose of "overcome[ing] the unfortunate Hitler Youth spirit and the moral dissipation of the postwar period."³⁴ The Ring was open to all German youth and young adults to encompass and engage both former members and nonmembers of the Nazi youth organizations. The Ring helped youth develop leadership skills and a sense of political responsibility, both goals of the Allied denazification process. The youth of Germany were given a chance to redeem themselves in the postwar period by participating in the denazification process and helping to rebuild a new Germany in the postwar period.

The Nazis' systematically indoctrinated the young boys and girls of Germany. This began by training a new generation of loyal teachers that brought Nazi ideology first to secondary schools then, as time went on, younger students. Through this top-to-bottom reform, German schoolchildren would have learned about Nazi ideology and militarism in the classroom making them eager to join the youth organizations. The schools explained the theory behind Nazi ideology, but the youth organization put the ideology into practice. The youth in these organizations internalized the message of the Nazis, making them eager to serve the state in any way they can. This explains why boys as young as sixteen eagerly marched off to war in 1944 and continued the fight after Germany had surrendered in the form of the *Werwolf* guerillas. To those who were educated in Nazi schools and participated in German youth organizations, Nazism was all they knew. Nazism bound them to their peers, and gave them a sense of being part of something larger than themselves. The Nazis knew what young people desired, and used these desires to indoctrinate a whole generation of German children.

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Part 2 - Nazi Germany, Chapters 2 and 3

Notes

¹ Tracy H. Koon, *Believe, Obey, Fight: Political Socialization of Youth in Fascist Italy, 1922-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), p. 98.

² Lisa Pine, *Education in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Berg, 2010), p.140.

³ E.A. Wright, *Education, Sport, and Militarism: Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany* (University of Leicester, 1980), p. 352.

⁴ Pine, *Education in Nazi Germany*, p. 9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.14.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.14.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.15.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.24.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.52-61.

¹³ *Collection of German Education Resources* (United Kingdom, 2014).

¹⁴ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Munich: Eher-Verlag, 1925).

¹⁵ Pine, *Education in Nazi Germany*, p. 49.

¹⁶ Reinhard Müller, ed., *Deutschland. Sechster Teil* (Munich and Berlin: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1943).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Isaac L. Kandel, "Education in Nazi Germany," *The Annals of the American Academy* 182 (November 1935): pg. 160.

¹⁹ Pine, *Education in Nazi Germany*, p. 64.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

²¹ Ibid., p. 83.

²² Ibid., p. 98-100.

²³ Ibid., p. 119.

²⁴ Otto Zimmermann, *Hand in Hand Furs Vaterland* (Braunschweig: Westermann, 1943), "Hitler Youth."

²⁵ Fritz Gansberg and Herbert Wellmann, *Meine Fibel: Ein Geschichtenbuch Fur Die Kleinen Bremer* (Bremen, 1940), chapter 36.

²⁶ Ibid., chapter 42.

²⁷ Pine, *Education in Nazi Germany*, p. 110.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 111.

²⁹ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Indoctrinating Youth," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed November 01, 2017, <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007820>.

³⁰ Pine, *Education in Nazi Germany*, p. 123-124.

³¹ Ibid., p. 131.

³² Ibid., p. 113.

³³ Ibid., p. 132.

³⁴ Helen Beckert, *The Effects of Denazification on Education in West Germany*, Honors thesis, Murray State University, 2016 (Murray: Murray State University, 2016), p. 55.