

Nazi Resurgence?

Fourth Reich may find youth susceptible

By MICHAEL MATUSZEWSKI

Mention the word "Nazi." Some people will conjure up grisly images of the Third Reich's extermination camps. Others may think of legions of blond-haired, blue-eyed Aryans goosestepping past an approving Adolf Hitler.

Mention the word to a local high school student and it is likely to inspire only a glimmer of recognition, let alone revulsion.

According to a number of local school officials as well as some university professors, high school students know little more than that the Nazis led Germany in World War II.

The Nazis, or more properly the National Socialist German Workers Party, took control of Germany in 1933. They spouted a theory of racial purity, believing they belonged to a "master race" with the right to eliminate "inferior peoples." In the case of European Jews, the Nazis came close to genocide, killing by most accounts six million of them.

The apparent ignorance of Nazism among young people has become a concern in some educational circles. One school official warned that unless Nazism is portrayed as the horror which led to the organized murder of 11 million persons, mankind will be doomed to repeat history. A Southfield school board member favors establishing a specialized course dealing with the Nazis and their atrocities.

The resurgence of Nazi-type activities here and elsewhere in the United States has underscored the question. A swastika-adorned "bookstore" has opened in southwest Detroit, as they have in other cities across the country. Several homes were defaced by the twisted-cross symbol in Oakland County's lakes area. Crosses and

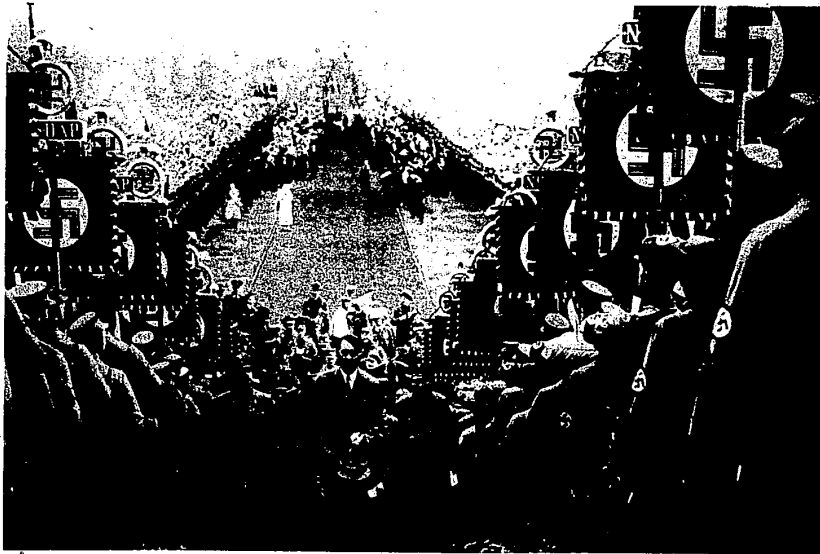


swastikas were burned on the lawns of other homes in the same area. A Westland man, recently arrested in Oakland County, was found to have hoarded World War II-vintage weapons and Nazi literature.

National magazines have reported that the neo-Nazi movement is recruiting heavily in high schools around the country. In southwest Detroit, high school students were said to have gone door-to-door distributing Nazi literature.

"If we don't remember the past we're doomed to repeat it," said Mrs. Zelda Robinson, a member of the Southfield school board.

"I feel all students right now are not really cognizant of recent history in general, and the Nazi period in particular," she said.



Flanked by legions of the elite SS and cheered by millions, Adolf Hitler strides to the platform from which he will address the 1935 Nuremberg party rally. The Nazi party, in only a decade, had grown

from a small band of street fighters to a highly organized party in control of one of the most awesome economic military machines ever seen.

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spiracy and that blacks are the tools of the Jews," he said.

A LIVONIA Bentley government and history teacher, who asked to remain unidentified, said most Bentley students have little understanding of Nazi ideas and "wouldn't quite know how to come back at it."

The recollections of a Stevenson High School graduate seems to bear this out.

He said he and his friends often talked about Hitler and Nazism—with not a little admiration.

"I wasn't a Nazi lover, but there was something cool about it," he said. He said he and his friends were attracted to the pomp, pride and militarism of Hitler's Brownshirts.

"We really got into Germany and World War II—we really got into how they wiped out cities, like in Czechoslovakia. We got into the gross side—the side that everybody knew about. You know, the murders, the party rallies at Nuremberg."

"Now it's disgusting," he added. "Trying to explain both his and his group's fascination with the Nazis, he said, 'I think we were racists. We didn't like blacks; we didn't like Jews.'"

He said this was easy because it was the kind of thinking to which he and his friends had been exposed. "You'll find a lot of people like me still at Stevenson. It's in the heart of the suburbs."

SOME TEACHERS and school officials said that while they are appalled that such attitudes exist, they are obliged to offer only a historical presentation of the facts, without letting their own opinions or morality color their teaching.

Harriet Shogrum, director of social studies for Livonia schools, said an effort is made to point out the Nazis'

social policy and their "extreme discrimination" against minority groups.

She said she "would hope" that most of Livonia's high school students could confront and resist Nazism if it were presented to them on the street.

Elinore Holland is chairwoman of the social studies department for Clarenceville schools, in parts of Livonia, Redford Township and Farmington Hills. She said, "We don't try to influence beliefs. But we do provide lots of supplemental materials for those students who want to go more in depth."

She said Clarenceville's "comparative governments" course deals with the "isms"—including Nazism.

Teachers do go into different philosophies and deal with them more in depth. They try to point out the good points and the bad and try to relate them to today's world," she said.

Mrs. Holland said Clarenceville's social studies teachers talk about Nazism but do not limit the study of racial persecution to the atrocities of the Holocaust—in which six million Jews and five million members of other ethnic minorities perished in the Nazi death camps.

"You can't say that one race or country was responsible for it all. Just look at what we did to the Negroes and the American Indians. We try to compare the Holocaust to what has happened to other ethnic groups," she said.

A NORTH FARMINGTON High School history teacher, Jerry Maxwell, approaches Nazism differently. Maxwell said, "I can't take my students to Dachau, but I can try to get them to put themselves in a certain position."

"I try to handle it to show what the Nazi party truly was. I try to show them the total Nazi brutality—the Warsaw ghetto for example. I try to

explain Hitler's 'final solution' the extermination of the Jews. Students are always interested. Its gruesome and different."

Maxwell said his students may be fascinated at first, but their opinions change. "I show them slides of Dachau and Buchenwald (two of the most notorious concentration camps). They say, 'My God, that was terrible.' They're sickened beyond belief."

Maxwell said he tries to balance his presentation by attempting to get his students to look the reasons why many Germans backed Hitler's rise to power.

"I just try to get them to understand Hitler: they don't have to like him," he said.

"I tell them that had I lived in Germany in the 1920s I might have supported Hitler. In the middle of probably the worst depression any country has ever faced, he offered the people something."

"He must have done something right. He was voted Time magazine's Man of the Year in 1936. He could be the only person ever to have single-handedly brought a country out of a depression," Maxwell said.

A BIRMINGHAM Seaholm High School history teacher said students interested in Nazism could learn about it in a number of that school's offerings.

He said the student would get a straightforward historical presentation in a course on modern European history and could pursue the subject further in an elective course dealing with the Middle East.

That course, he said, concentrates on Israel and anti-Semitism. "In order to do it justice, you have to go into the entire Jewish experience and the Holocaust," he said.

To some school officials, though, a change in curriculum, especially with the heightened general interest in the Nazis and the much-publicized activities of the American Nazis, is essential.

Southfield School Trustee Zelda Robinson said she will meet with Southfield school administrators to strengthen curriculum dealing with Nazism.

"Facing the real life situation should be emphasized. The real situations are the ones that students should be prepared for," she said. "High school students without advanced study in Nazism or the Holocaust could not successfully defend themselves against Nazi arguments, she feels."

Mrs. Robinson said she will recommend that Southfield's public high schools add a course dealing specifically with the Holocaust. Such a course is already offered by schools in Philadelphia and New York City.

ACCORDING TO a report in Psychology Today magazine, the basic attitudes necessary for a grass-roots Nazi movement in the United States are present, especially at the high school level.

The magazine reported that a high school teacher, in showing how Hitler could win over an advanced country like Germany to his program, created a miniature Nazi-like movement in only five days.

The teacher told his students that they could be part of a special "national youth movement"—the "Third Wave." The movement was based on the principles of discipline, order and elitism, much like the original appeal of Hitler's Nazis.

In five days the group grew from the original class of 20 students to more than 200. Students snapped to attention in classrooms and flashed a special Nazi-like salute in the halls.

More than 200 students showed up in the school's gymnasium to hear what they expected would be a special televised speech by the national leader of the Third Wave.

According to Psychology Today, the teacher told the students, "You're no better or no worse than the German Nazis we've been studying. You thought you were the elite—better than those outside the room. You bargained your freedom for the comfort of discipline."



Hitler may have led Germany out of the worldwide depression but he also led it into one of mankind's greatest tragedies—the Holocaust. Untold millions were imprisoned in Nazi concentration camps and an estimated 11 million people, including six million Jews, were exterminated. Some school officials fear students are not taught enough about the Nazis and would be susceptible to neo-Nazi propaganda.

