

Did the Nazis succeed in winning the hearts and minds of German youth?

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

SOURCE 14.1 Members of the Hitler Youth (HJ)



You will not be surprised at Hitler's views in Source 14.4 on the ideal characteristics of a Nazi youth, nor that he would have viewed the boys in Source 14.1 with pleasure. Virtually from birth, German children were to be brought up as good National Socialists and loyal followers of Hitler. However, you may be surprised that the young men in Source 14.2 also lived in Nazi Germany. This is an early indication of an important theme in this chapter that, although the Nazis had a great deal of success with youth, they certainly did not have it all their own way. This chapter investigates the extent of the Nazi impact on young people through the following subsections:

- A** How did the Nazis use youth movements to inculcate their values? (pp. 278–9)
- B** In what ways was education used as propaganda? (pp. 280–5)
- C** Alternative youth (pp. 286–7)
- D** Was Nazi youth policy successful? (pp. 288–9)
- E** Review: Did the Nazis succeed in winning the hearts and minds of German youth? (pp. 290–1)

SOURCE 14.2 'Swing' youth from a 1941 book on youth criminality



SOURCE 14.3 A Hitler Youth report on a Hamburg music festival in February 1940

The dance music was all English and American. Only swing dancing and jitterbugging took place. At the entrance to the hall stood a notice on which the words 'Swing prohibited' had been altered to 'Swing requested'...

The dancers made an appalling sight. None of the couples danced normally; there was only swing of the worst kind. Sometimes two boys danced with one girl; sometimes several couples formed a circle, linking arms and jumping... and then, bent double, with the top half of the body hanging loosely down, long hair flopping into the face, they dragged themselves round practically on their knees. When the band played a rumba, the dancers went into a wild ecstasy. They all leaped around and mumbled the chorus in English... They all jitterbugged like wild animals. Frequently boys could be observed dancing together, without exception with two cigarettes in the mouth, one in each corner.

SOURCE 14.4 Hitler (quoted in *Hitler Speaks* by Hermann Rauschning, 1939)

In my great educative work I am beginning with the young. We older ones are used up... We are rotten to the marrow. But my magnificent youngsters! Are there finer ones in the world? With them I can make a new world.

My teaching is hard. Weakness has to be knocked out of them... A violently active, dominating, intrepid, brutal youth – that is what I am after... It must be indifferent to pain. There must be no weakness or tenderness in it...

I will have no intellectual training. Knowledge is ruin to my young men... One thing they must learn, self-command!

FOCUS ROUTE

As you read this chapter, note down points to help you with the following structured essay.

- a) What were the aims of Nazi youth and education policy?
- b) What methods did they use?
- c) How successful were they in achieving their aims?

SEMINAR

You may like to study the topics in Chapters 14 and 15 in a rather different manner.

Divide into groups of three or four. Each group should choose to study either Youth or Women in Nazi Germany.

Read the appropriate chapter, making notes on:

- a) Aims of Nazi policy
- b) Nazi methods
- c) The effectiveness of Nazi policy.

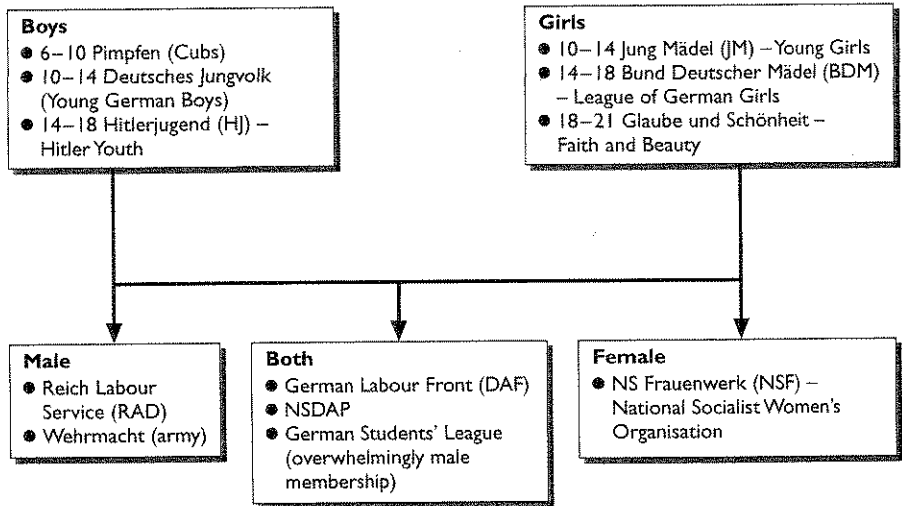
Discuss your findings with your group. Then one group on each topic can report its findings to the rest of the class.

14A Nazi youth policy

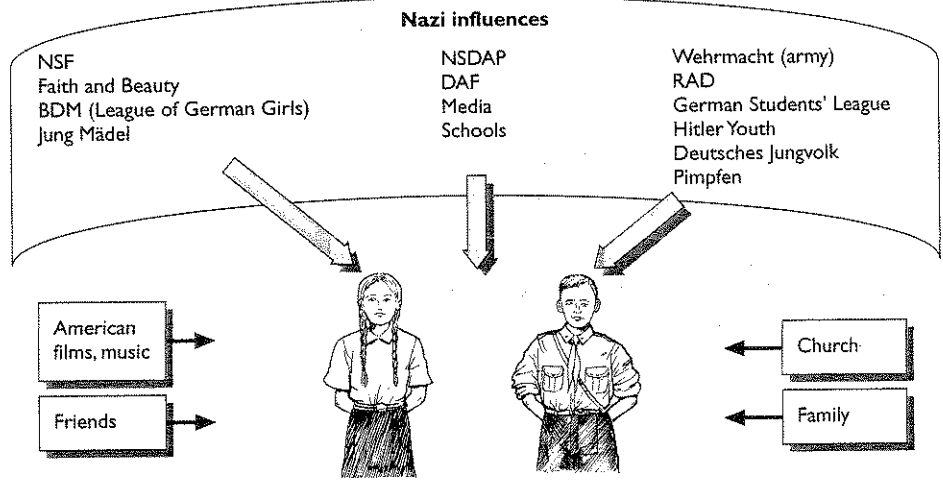
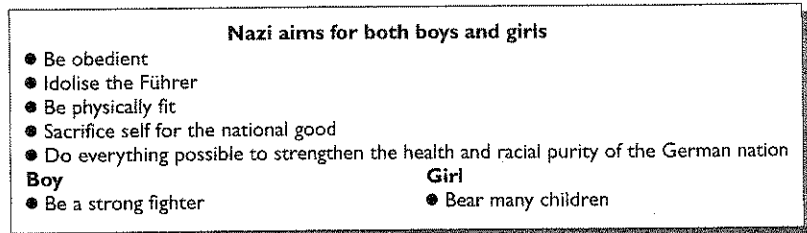
SOURCE 14.5 Robert Ley, leader of the Labour Front (DAF)

We start our work when the child is three. As soon as it begins to think, a little flag is put into its hand. Then comes school, the Hitler Youth Movement, the Storm Troop . . . We never let a single soul go, and when they have gone through all that, there is the Labour Front, which takes them when they are grown up and never lets hold of them . . . whether they like it or not.

The progress of German youth through Nazi organisations

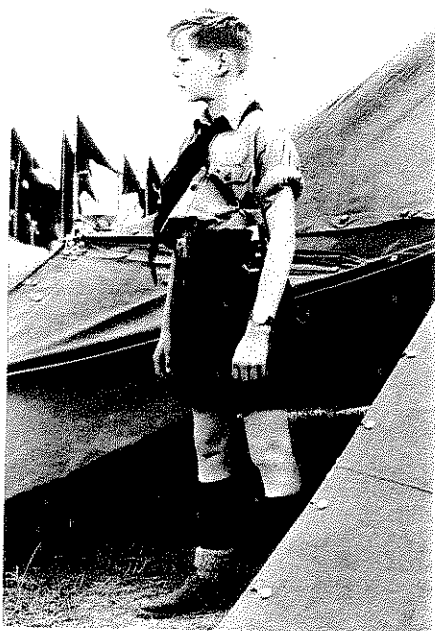


Influences on German youth under the Third Reich



What kinds of sources do you think historians use in investigating the impact of the Nazis on young people?

SOURCE 14.6 A young boy in the uniform of the Pimpfen (Cubs)



SOURCE 14.7 A nursery rhyme from the 1930s

*What puffs and patters?
What clicks and clatters?
I know, oh what fun!
It's a lovely Gatling-gun.*

Do you think contemporary youth movements are used for propaganda purposes?

ACTIVITY

What do Sources 14.8–14 show about the following aspects of the youth movements:

- the aims of the Hitler Youth
- the methods used
- the reasons why youngsters joined
- the reactions of young Germans?

A How did the Nazis use youth movements to inculcate their values?

The Nazis used two major institutions to achieve their aims: the school system and, in particular, youth groups. Furthermore, once youngsters left education and youth movements, they would join other Nazi organisations, such as RAD and DAF (see page 252), to ensure they did not escape control. The Nazis hoped that the influence of such an array of institutions would predominate over the traditional, and possibly hostile, influences of parents and the Church.

Converting any group in society to a way of thinking has long exercised the minds of politicians and advertisers. If you can offer exciting activities, people may become more receptive to your broader aims. Thus the Hitler Youth focused on offering fun and action to the young, but this was backed up by intimidation to persuade members to conform to all the state's demands. The Hitler Youth, created in 1926, expanded rapidly after 1933 with the support of the government. It organised a variety of activities, such as camps, sport and military training.

In 1935 all other youth organisations, except Catholic ones protected by the Concordat (see pages 308–9), were taken over by the Hitler Youth. After 1936 all other youth organisations were banned. Although membership of the Hitler Youth became compulsory, many managed to avoid it, especially after they left school, which many did at fourteen. In addition, some rival groups were set up, which the authorities failed to suppress. As membership became more widespread, the Hitler Youth arguably became less successful, because it included less committed youngsters and because there developed an increasing stress on military preparation at the expense of other, more popular, activities.

SOURCE 14.8 Marianne Gartner joined the Hitler Youth at the age of twelve in 1938. In her memoirs *The Naked Years: Growing up in Nazi Germany* she recalls the change from 'exciting activities' to 'indoctrination' (instruction)

One day, fittingly enough on Hitler's birthday, my age group was called up and I took the oath: 'I promise always to do my duty in the Hitler Youth, in love and loyalty to the Führer.' Service in the Hitler Youth, we were told, was an honourable service to the German people. I was, however, not thinking of the Führer, nor of serving the German people, when I raised my right hand, but of the attractive prospect of participating in games, sports, hiking, singing, camping and other exciting activities away from school and the home. A uniform, a badge, an oath, a salute. There seemed to be nothing to it . . . Thus, unquestioningly, I acquired membership, and forthwith attended meetings, joined ball games and competitions, and took part in weekend hikes . . .

It was not long, however, before plain-faced leaders taught us marching drill and marching songs. I hated marching . . . There were now lectures on National Socialism, stories about modern heroes and about Hitler . . . while extracts from Mein Kampf were used to expound [put forward] the new racial doctrines.

SOURCE 14.9 A German describes her experience in the BDM, the League of German Girls

I and all the other girls of my age had to attend evening classes twice weekly. We had to be present at every public meeting and at youth rallies and sports. The weekends were crammed full with outings, campaigns and marches, when we carried heavy packs on our backs. It was all fun in a way, and we certainly got plenty of exercise, but it had a bad effect on our school reports. We had no time for homework. The young BDM leaders taught us songs and tried desperately to maintain a certain amount of discipline . . . We were marched up and down as though we were soldiers on the barrack square . . . We were of course lectured a lot on National Socialist ideology, and most of this went over our heads . . . We were told to prepare for motherhood, as the mother of our beloved leader and the National Socialist government was the most important person in the nation. We were Germany's hope and Germany's future.

SOURCE 14.10 Membership of the Hitler Youth

1932	107,956
1934	3,500,000
1936	6,000,000+

SOURCE 14.12 The numbers of participants in nationwide sporting competitions for young people

1935	3.4 million
1939	7 million

SOURCE 14.11 Numbers attending camps

1935–7 973,803 HJ members attended camps
1937 96,699 BDM members attended camps

In 1935, during a rally of 100,000 members of the Hitler Youth and League of German Girls in Nuremberg, 900 fifteen- to eighteen-year-old girls became pregnant.

SOURCE 14.13 A. Klonne, *Youth in the Third Reich*, 1982

What I liked about the Hitler Youth was the comradeship. I was full of enthusiasm ... what boy isn't fired by high ideals such as comradeship, loyalty, honour ... The trips ... off into the countryside ... I was pleased that sport had its place ...

Later when I became a leader the negative aspects became obvious. I found the compulsion and the requirement of absolute obedience unpleasant. It was preferred that people should not have a will of their own ... The Hitler Youth was interfering everywhere in people's private lives ...

In our troop the activities consisted almost entirely of stolid [boring] military drill ... Why didn't we complain to parents and teachers? The explanation I can find is that we were all in the grip of ambition; we wanted to impress our sub-leaders with exemplary [perfect] discipline, with our powers of endurance, with our military bearing.

SOURCE 14.14 Melita Maschmann, former leader in the BDM, *Account Rendered*, 1964

Whenever I probe the reasons which drew me to join the Hitler Youth, I always come up against this one: I wanted to escape from a childish narrow life and I wanted to attach myself to something that was great and fundamental. This longing I shared with countless others of my contemporaries.

Our camp community was a reduced model of that which I imagined our national community to be. It was a completely successful model. Never before or since have I had the experience of such a good community. Among us were peasant girls, students, workers, shop assistants, hairdressers, pupils, clerks, and so forth. The camp was led by an East Prussian farmer's daughter ... She managed us in such a way that, after we had recognised one another's strengths and weaknesses, she led us to accept one another as we were, with everyone endeavouring to be helpful and reliable. The fact that I had experienced this model of a national community intensely created in me an optimism which I held on to stubbornly until 1945. Supported by this experience I believed in the face of all evidence to the contrary that this model could be extended infinitely.

**Baldur von Schirach (1907–74): Hitler Youth Leader**

Schirach was the son of an aristocratic German father and an American mother. He studied art history and developed anti-semitic and anti-Christian views. In 1925 he joined the Nazi Party. A great admirer of Hitler, he was appointed head of the German Students' League in 1929 and Nazi Youth Leader in 1931. At the age of 26 he became Youth Leader of the German Reich, a post he held until 1940. Photographs of him were much displayed, and he was presented to the Germans as a demigod [outstanding, almost divine person], embodying all that was fine and noble in German youth. Enemies made jokes about his effeminate (feminine-like) behaviour. In 1941 he was made *Gauleiter* of Vienna, where he supervised the deportation of Jews, though at the Nuremberg trials in 1945–6 he denied knowledge of the Holocaust. He was sentenced to twenty years' imprisonment. Released in 1966, he wrote a book which, in an attempt to prevent any rebirth of Nazism, explained the fatal fascination of Hitler.

ACTIVITY

- 1 Write a report by a sympathetic journalist in 1939 about the role of the Hitler Youth in Nazi Germany.
or:
- 2 After reading the rest of this chapter, write a report as a German opponent of Nazism in 1942 for the Social Democratic Party in exile (SOPADE), assessing the extent of the effectiveness of the Hitler Youth.

C Alternative youth

Edelweiss Pirates

SOURCE 14.29 Edelweiss Pirates. The edelweiss flower was chosen as a symbol of resistance to Hitler. The pirates wore the edelweiss as a metal badge on their collars



FOCUS ROUTE

- 1 Choose five features of the activities of the alternative youth groups and explain what aspects of Nazi ideology they challenged.
- 2 Why do you think their popularity increased in the later part of the war?
- 3 Why do you think most of the sources on the alternative youth movements come from agents of the Nazi state?

The growing political and ideological bias of the Hitler Youth diminished its attraction for many young people. The Edelweiss Pirates was the name for a loose collection of subgroups. These bands were mainly of boys aged 14–17 but also included a few girls. They could be recognised by their badges, for example the edelweiss or skull and crossbones; and some wore check shirts, dark short trousers, and white socks. They were largely localised groups with their own names, such as the Roving Dudes, Kittelbach Pirates, the Navajos. Membership was mainly rooted in the working class. The earliest recorded groups existed in 1934 and membership has been estimated at 2,000 by 1939. Numbers grew most rapidly during the war years. In 1945, for instance, the Cologne authorities reported twenty groups of around 100 members.

Their aims are not easy to identify. They were partly just rebellious youth trying to escape the intrusive Nazi system, joining in popular pastimes such as weekend camps, hikes and singing songs about sex and food (not Hitler Youth songs!). However, some groups were highly politicised, establishing links with the KPD and beating up Hitler Youth patrols with the slogan 'Eternal War on the Hitler Youth!' In 1942 the Düsseldorf Hitler Youth complained of 'no go' areas. During the Second World War some groups helped escaped prisoners of war and distributed Allied and communist leaflets. Thus their actions ranged from socially nonconformist behaviour to political resistance.

The response of the authorities became harsher over time. They initially issued warnings with some raids and arrests, but in March 1940 130 Navajos in Cologne were arrested. Later, in December 1942, the Gestapo arrested 739 Edelweiss Pirates in Düsseldorf. They had their heads shaven, were detained, or sent for corrective education or to labour camps. Some were tried and executed. In November 1944 the leaders of the Cologne Edelweiss Pirates were hanged.

Swing

These groups of mainly upper-middle-class youths, unlike the Edelweiss Pirates, had the wealth to frequent night-clubs. Many were nominally members of the Hitler Youth. Swing groups mainly developed in large cities, such as Hamburg, Berlin, Frankfurt and Dresden, during the late 1930s. They rejected Hitler Youth

SOURCE 14.30 Edelweiss Pirates' song

*Hark the hearty fellows sing!
Strum that banjo, pluck that string!
And the lassies all join in
We're going to get rid of Hitler,
And he can't do a thing.*

*We march by banks of Ruhr and Rhine
And smash the Hitler Youth in twain.
Our song is freedom, love and life,
We're Pirates of the Edelweiss.*

*Hitler's power may lay us low,
And keep us locked in chains,
But we will smash the chains one day.
We'll be free again.*

*We've got fists and we can fight
We've got knives and we'll get them out.
We want freedom, don't we boys?
We are the fighting Navajos.*

ideals, but were generally anti-politics. Their approach was to develop a counter identity, expressed through forbidden music. They met in bars, night-clubs and houses and played American Black and Jewish jazz and swing, not the officially sanctioned German folk music. The Nazis felt undermined by their activities and closed the bars and made some arrests. Although only a tiny minority of German youths were connected with the Swing groups, they do illustrate, as with the Pirates, the failure of the regime to dominate youth; and for many they were a heartening illustration of non-conformity.

SOURCE 14.31 A newspaper report in the *Rheinische Landeszeitung*, February 1936

Dangerous Pirate Games

On 6 October of last year the police authorities . . . staged a mass raid on the so-called Wolfsberg near Huels. It had become known that a great number of 'Kittelbach pirates' had undertaken a social trip to the Wolfsberg . . . In order to put a stop to their games once and for all, the police patrol of 6 October was made ready. The 80 or so young chaps aged from 16 to 25 who were on the journey were dressed in the typical 'uniform' of the Kittelbach pirates (short summer trousers, white shirt, belt with death's head, death's head ring, lump of porcelain on the trouser buckle, tin whistle in the leg of the boot). They had taken along with them strips of canvas for spending a night in the open, alcohol galore and . . . girls . . .

When the police arrived, they found most of the 'pirates' completely drunk, and the girls in an indescribable state. The whole group (apparently overcome by a false romantic idea of what it is to be an outlaw) was picked up by the police. Perhaps 70 of these wayward young chaps were taken to the law court in Krefeld where they were found guilty of offences against Section 4 of the ORDINANCE of 28 February 1933, wearing a banned uniform. Ten additional ones . . . had to appear before the Düsseldorf special court today . . .

In the main trial, which was conducted 'in camera' [in private], all of the accused (who used nicknames like 'Bobby', 'Jumbo', 'Sonny Boy', 'Black Hand' and the like) admitted their guilt . . . 'Black Hand' was sentenced to two months in prison, 'Bobby' to one month. The other pirates each got a 75 Mark fine . . . The chairman of the court explained that . . . if the accused had been older and had displayed activity which amounted to subversion . . . the death penalty, life imprisonment or a long prison sentence would have been expected. The chairman of the special court concluded that this may serve as warning to any other 'members of other special groups'.

Is total youth conformity an impossible task for any regime?

SOURCE 14.32 In 1942 the Reich youth leadership was driven to declare

The formation of cliques, i.e. groupings of young people outside the Hitler Youth, was on the increase a few years before the war, and has particularly increased during the war, to such a degree that a serious risk of the political, moral and criminal breakdown of youth must be said to exist.

Some German historians have been accused of exaggerating the significance of the Edelweiss Pirates. Why might they have done so?

SOURCE 14.33 The hanging of Edelweiss Pirates in 1944



D Was Nazi youth policy successful?

It is very hard to judge the extent to which the Nazis succeeded in indoctrinating German youth. You have already encountered evidence that some children reacted against Nazi propaganda, whilst others absorbed it. Clearly a whole range of variables would affect the degree of impact.

FOCUS ROUTE

1 Read Sources 14.34–39, then copy and complete the chart below.

Responses to Nazi youth policies	Sources you could use	Evidence
Enthusiasm	14.35	
Conformity for career reasons	14.35, 14.37	
Conformity through fear	14.36, 14.38	
Conformity through apathy/natural obedience	14.34	
Nonconformity/disillusion	14.36	
Criticism/opposition	14.36, 14.37, 14.39	

- 2 Do the sources suggest that young people's reactions to the Nazis changed over time?
- 3 Most of these sources come from either the German opposition or the police. How reliable on this topic do you think these two types of source are?
- 4 Write your own judgement on the success of Nazi youth policy. Then compare it with those of the historians quoted in the chapter review (pages 290–1).

SOURCE 14.34 A German reflects back on his youth in the Third Reich: quoted in D. Peukert, *Life in the Third Reich*, ed. R. Bessel, 1987, p. 27

No one in our class ever read Mein Kampf. I myself only took quotations from the book. On the whole we didn't know much about Nazi ideology. Even anti-Semitism was brought in rather marginally at school – for example via Richard Wagner's essay 'The Jews in Music' – and outside school the display copies of Der Stürmer made the idea questionable, if anything...

Nevertheless, we were politically programmed: to obey orders, to cultivate the soldierly 'virtue' of standing to attention and saying 'Yes, sir', and to stop thinking when the magic word 'Fatherland' was uttered and Germany's honour and greatness were mentioned.

SOURCE 14.35 A 1934 report to the Social Democratic Party in exile (SOPADE)

Youth is still in favour of the system: the novelty, the drill, the uniform, the camp life, the fact that school and the parental home take a back seat compared to the community – all that is marvellous. A great time without any danger. Many believe that they will find job opportunities through the persecution of Jews and Marxists...

The new generation has never had much use for education... on the contrary, knowledge is publicly condemned... The children and young people follow the instructions of the HJ and demand from their parents that they become good Nazis... The parents cannot forbid the child to do what all children are doing, cannot refuse him the uniform... The secret of National Socialism is the secret of its youth. The chaps are so fanaticised that they believe in nothing but their Hitler.

Source 14.36 From SOPADE reports, 1935

[Bavaria] The reports dealing with youth and its enthusiasm for the regime are not uniformly in agreement. In as much as most of our colleagues detect tremendous support for the regime among the oncoming generation, some maintain that the sentiments among youth are diverse. It goes without saying that Hitler Youth does its utmost to create enthusiasm, but among working-class youths one can hear much criticism.

[Southwestern Germany] To youth in the secondary schools, the continuous force-feeding of National Socialism is having the same effect as the heavy emphasis on religious instruction in earlier decades. National Socialism is no longer a matter of youthful rebellion but has instead become the state-sponsored school curriculum. Consequently National Socialism has lost much of its appeal, especially since the suppression of political opponents and otherwise orientated youth organisations. This is why today the frequent dodging of the Hitler Youth and its events, as well as the transgression [violation] of National Socialist prohibitions, has become a favourite game for youths who eagerly outfox the authorities.

[Rhineland–Westphalia] Some of the teachers tried everything in order to force children into the Hitler Youth . . . Teachers enquire whether or not one's father is a party member or is in the SA . . . or which newspapers are read at home. Children whose parents are avowed opponents of the Nazis answer yes many times simply because they are afraid.

. . . In the rural areas as well as industrial cities one can see an increasing demoralisation of youth. In rural areas there has been a sharp decline in participation at Hitler Youth events. Many have resigned their membership, and membership dues are frequently unpaid. While at first uniforms and war games were quite appealing, the regimented routine is now regarded as burdensome by children. The power of authority which was bestowed upon some children has given rise to discontent and resistance. It is not unusual for a youthful group leader whose position of authority has gone to his head to receive a beating from his charges because he wanted to drill the already exhausted group even harder . . .

SOURCE 14.37 From a SOPADE report, 1938

Young people are more easily influenced in terms of mood than are adults. This fact made it easier for the regime to win over young people in the first years after the seizure of power. It appears that the same fact is now making it hard for the regime to keep young people in thrall [submissive] . . . They were made particularly large promises which for the most part were incapable of fulfilment. The great mass of young people today can see that the well-paying posts in public administration and the Party apparatus have been filled by comrades who had the good fortune of being a few years older . . . in the long run young people too are feeling increasingly irritated by the lack of freedom and the mindless drilling that is customary in the National Socialist organisations . . .

SOURCE 14.38 The title page of *Kamaradschaft* (Comradship), an underground youth magazine of 1938



SOURCE 14.39 The Düsseldorf–Crafenberg branch of the National Socialist Party reported to the Gestapo on 17 July 1943

The said youths are throwing their weight around again. I have been informed that assemblages of young people have become more conspicuous than ever, especially since the last terror [bombing] raid on Düsseldorf. These youngsters, aged between 12 and 17 hang around into the late evening, with musical instruments and young females. Since this riffraff is to a large extent outside the Hitler Youth and adopts a hostile attitude towards the organisation, they represent a danger to other young people . . . There is a suspicion that it is these youths who have been inscribing the walls of the pedestrian subway on the Altenbergstrasse with the slogans 'Down with Hitler', 'The OKW is lying', 'Medals for Murder!', 'Down with Nazi brutality', etc. However often these inscriptions are removed, within a few days new ones appear on the walls again.

E Review: Did the Nazis succeed in winning the hearts and minds of German youth?

Assessing the effectiveness of propaganda on the young in a totalitarian society is a notoriously difficult task. There is the problem of people at the time being too frightened to put their real views on paper. On the other hand, there is the danger that people recording their oral testimony at a later date exaggerate their degree of opposition to the regime. Furthermore, when we do find opposition from young people, is it really opposition to the regime or simply the normal rebelliousness of youth? Several historians have attempted to assess the overall impact of Nazi policies.

SOURCE 14.40 G. Mosse, *Nazi Culture*, 1981, p. 265

It is difficult to say just how successful the Nazi reshaping of education proved to be in practice. It must have varied greatly from school to school and depended a great deal on individual teachers and principals.

SOURCE 14.41 A. Wilt, *Nazi Germany*, 1994, p.66

It has been estimated that as many as 95 per cent of the German youth backed the Nazis, or at least Hitler, and that opposition for the most part remained vague and diffuse.

SOURCE 14.42 D. Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany. Conformity and Opposition in Everyday Life*, 1987, pp. 152, 173

The second half of the 1930s reveals a growing crisis in the Hitler Youth, a crisis which during the war years developed into a massive opposition movement on the part of groups and gangs of young people. The SOPADE reports on Germany for 1938 already recorded this radical shift of attitude among the young, from initial attraction to growing rejection.

... The two central projects of National Socialist social policy – the nullification [cancelling] of class reality through the sentiment of Volksgemeinschaft; and the mobilisation of the people, militarised and schooled in CHAUVINISM, to smash the perceived threat to traditional influences posed by modernity [current fashion] and internationalism – seem to have miscarried even before the end of the Third Reich loomed into sight in the shape of military defeat.

SOURCE 14.43 K. Fischer, *Nazi Germany*, 1995, p. 353

Nazi educational efforts as a whole turned out to be poorly thought out and lacking in substance. At best, the Nazis put a thin ideological veneer [surface] on German education. It is not surprising that twelve years were not enough to break down 'two thousand years of European cultural heritage'. However, Nazi indoctrination was able to miseducate and misuse a whole generation of young people.

SOURCE 14.44 B. Sax, D. Kuntz, *Inside Hitler's Germany*, 1992, p. 308

Through the training of young men and women, the Nazis procured [acquired] a most impressionable group of individuals on whom to impose their ideas in the hope of creating the new men and women of the Volksgemeinschaft... What National Socialist training produced, however, were duller and stupider, though healthier, individuals. By the late 1930s, the authorities became increasingly aware of the fact that while students, no longer able to think for themselves, would therefore not resist the regime, they were incapable of either providing political leadership in the future or contributing the intellectual and technical skills necessary for running a modern industrial society. They proved to be the most willing to sacrifice themselves to the principles of National Socialism.

SOURCE 14.45 M. Housden, in *Resistance and Conformity in the Third Reich*, 1997, p. 81, summarises reasons for the support for Nazism

There were all manner of reasons for youngsters to support the Third Reich. [1] National Socialism provided a vehicle for conflict between generations. [2] It could be dynamic, exciting and purposeful. [3] Youngsters were socialised into National Socialist ways at school and [4] in the Hitler Youth. [5] When all else failed they could be intimidated. What is more, the longer the Nazi system was in place, the more hazy became the memories of younger Germans of the days before Hitler. Eventually youngsters knew no alternative. And yet, despite all this, support for Hitler was less than total.

ACTIVITY

- 1 a) Explain the limited success of Nazi education. Refer, with supporting evidence, to the following:
 - Nazi ideas on the aims of education
 - the complex institutional structure
 - the reactions of teachers, parents and students
 - the length of time the Nazis held power.
- b) Why are there problems in both finding and assessing the evidence for this question?
- 2 Find evidence to support all the statements we have numbered in Source 14.45.
- 3 'Natural youth behaviour' or 'political opposition'. Which is the more appropriate description of groups like the Edelweiss Pirates?
- 4 Now use your Focus Route answers (see page 277) to do your essay.

KEY POINTS FROM CHAPTER 14: Did the Nazis succeed in winning the hearts and minds of German youth?

- 1 The Nazis sought to indoctrinate the young from the age of four, using youth movements and the school system to impose their values.
- 2 The Nazis scorned intellectual learning and placed emphasis on physical strength and obedience.
- 3 Millions joined the Hitler Youth, initially attracted by adventurous activities. Pressure to join increased, and in 1936 membership was made compulsory.
- 4 There is evidence of increasing disillusion with aspects of the Nazi youth movements as the years passed.
- 5 During the war, organised groups of young people directly challenged Nazi orthodoxy, despite the danger of getting caught.
- 6 There was no major reorganisation of schools, except for a decline in denominational schools and the creation of a few elite schools.
- 7 The government attempted indoctrination via control of the curriculum and teachers.
- 8 Many parents disliked the Nazi training but felt it safer outwardly to conform.
- 9 One effect of the Nazi changes was to reduce the academic quality of the students.
- 10 There is mixed evidence as to the overall effectiveness of Nazi propaganda on German youth.