
Lesson 15 - Reading Set 2

Rejecting Nazism

Some German young people refused to join Nazi youth organizations. One group who refused to join called themselves the *Swing-Jugend* ("swing kids") after a style of American jazz music and dancing they loved. Historian Richard Bessel describes the "swing kids":

The swing youth were not anti-fascist in a political sense—their behavior was indeed emphatically anti-political—both Nazi slogans and traditional nationalism were of profound indifference to them. They sought their counter-identity in what they saw as the "slovenly" culture of . . . England and America. They accepted Jews and "half-Jews" into their groups . . . and gave ovations to visiting bands from Belgium and Holland.⁴

A Hitler Youth report on a 1940 swing festival attended by more than 500 teenagers in Hamburg describes the kind of behavior that upset Nazi officials:

The dancers made an appalling sight. None of the couples danced normally; there was only swing of the worst sort. Sometimes two boys danced with one girl; sometimes several formed a circle, linking arms and jumping, slapping hands, even rubbing the backs of their heads together; 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 to their knees. When the band played a rumba, the dancers went into wild ecstasy. They all leaped around and mumbled the chorus in English. The band played wilder and wilder numbers; none of the players was sitting any longer, they all "jitterbugged" on the stage like wild animals. Frequently boys could be observed dancing together, without exception with two cigarettes in the mouth, one in each corner . . .⁵

⁴ Richard Bessel, *Life in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 39.

⁵ Bessel, *Life in the Third Reich*, 37.