

1.2. The Order of Nature

This article takes a more sociological point of view than Reading 1, looking at ways in which different groups, including the Germans, indoctrinated members with their thinking.

Source: Lisa Pine, "Nazism in the classroom," *History Today*, 47:4, April 1997, pp. 22–27. Used with permission of *History Today* (<http://www.historytoday.com>).

The Nazi preoccupation with 'the order of nature' formed the basis of a number of texts. For example, in one story, a husband and wife decide to exchange roles. The husband takes over the cooking, whilst the wife goes out into the fields to do his work. After a disastrous day for the man—who previously thought his wife had the easy option in staying at home and cooking—he tells her that it is better 'not to reverse the order of nature.' The implications of this are crystal clear in relation to Nazi ideology.

In a similar vein—but more related to Nazi pseudoscientific racial thought—was a fable appearing in the *German Reader for Secondary Schools* (1942), whose substance was as follows: A cuckoo meets a nightingale in the street. The cuckoo wants to sing as beautifully as the nightingale, but claims that he cannot do so because he was not taught to sing when he was young. The nightingale laughs and says that nightingales do not learn to sing, but are born with the ability to sing. The cuckoo, nevertheless, believes that if only he could find the right teacher, his offspring will be able to sing as beautifully as the nightingale. His wife has a clever idea. She decides to lay an egg in the nest of a hedge sparrow. When the mother hedge sparrow returns to her nest, she is surprised to see the strange egg, but decides to take care of it as if it were her own. When the eggs hatch, a young cuckoo emerges among the fledgling sparrows. He is nourished and cared for in exactly the same way as them, but he does not grow into a hedge sparrow. In fact, the older he grows, the more noticeable his differences become. When he tries to sing, he cannot. Despite growing up in the nest of a hedge sparrow, he grows up to be a true cuckoo.

This story was used to pose the questions: 'What is more important? The race from which one stems, or the nest in which one grows up?' The issues raised in this fable are particularly significant, reflecting both the debate about inherited versus acquired characteristics, and the rudiments of Nazi racial ideology.

Racism and anti-Semitism also permeated biology and 'racial science' textbooks, which aimed to point out to children the distinctions between the 'Aryan' race and 'inferior' races, for example, by means of craniology. There were also readers, such as *The Poisonous Mushroom* (1938), in which a whole array of anti-Semitic imagery was used, with caricatures, graphic illustrations, and vivid descriptions of Jews as hideous, hook-nosed seducers of 'Aryan' women, Christ-slayers, and money-grabbing usurers. 'The Jew'

was portrayed as 'the Devil in human form.' In many secondary school books, anti-Semitic quotations by Hitler and other Nazi leaders were interspersed with folklore and nationalist literature. This type of racial indoctrination was, of course, just one small part of the Nazis' attempt to create popular consensus for their anti-Semitic policies culminating in the 'Final Solution'.

History lessons were a way of exciting children's sense of national pride and concern about the continued existence of the German state and nation, and about future glories to match—or even to exceed—those of the nation's great heroic past. History was to be looked at 'with the eyes of blood' and its primary function was to serve the 'political, intellectual and spiritual mobilisation of the nation.' Nazi history textbooks often dealt with German history only. Great rulers of Germany's past, such as Frederick the Great, were used to stress heroic leadership, ceaseless service to the state, military successes, and, of course, parallels to Hitler.