

# They Thought They Were Free: The Germans 1933-1945

In the aftermath of World War II, many people were left wondering how it was possible for the German people to have allowed the rise of the Nazi regime and the atrocities that followed. In his groundbreaking book, "They Thought They Were Free," Milton Mayer attempts to answer this question by examining the lives of ordinary Germans living in the town of Ludwigshafen am Rhein during the years leading up to and during the Nazi era.

Mayer's book is not a traditional history of the Third Reich. Instead, it is a collection of interviews with Ludwigshafen residents who witnessed firsthand the rise and fall of the Nazi regime. Through these interviews, Mayer provides a unique and deeply personal account of how the Nazis came to power and how they were able to maintain their grip on Germany for so long.



## They Thought They Were Free: The Germans, 1933–45

by Milton Sanford Mayer

★ ★ ★ ★ ☆ 4.6 out of 5

Language : English  
File size : 1573 KB  
Text-to-Speech : Enabled  
Screen Reader : Supported  
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled  
X-Ray : Enabled  
Word Wise : Enabled  
Print length : 392 pages  
Lending : Enabled



One of the most striking things that emerges from Mayer's interviews is the sense of normalcy that prevailed in Ludwigshafen during the early years of the Nazi regime. Many people who lived through this period recall that there was little outward sign of the atrocities that were being committed against Jews and other minorities. In fact, many Germans genuinely believed that the Nazis were making Germany a better place.

As the Nazi regime became more entrenched, however, the atmosphere in Ludwigshafen began to change. The Gestapo became increasingly active, and more and more people were arrested and sent to concentration camps. The Jewish population of the town was decimated, and many of those who remained were forced to live in hiding.

Despite the growing repression, there were still many Germans who refused to give up hope. Mayer's interviews reveal that there were pockets of resistance throughout Germany, even in the darkest days of the Nazi era. These brave individuals risked their lives to help Jews and other persecuted groups, and they kept alive the flame of hope for a better future.

"They Thought They Were Free" is a powerful and moving account of the rise and fall of the Third Reich. Mayer's interviews provide a unique and deeply personal perspective on this dark chapter in human history. The book is a reminder that even in the darkest of times, there is always hope for a better future.

## **Key Themes**

The following are some of the key themes that emerge from Mayer's book:

- **The banality of evil:** Mayer argues that the rise of the Nazi regime was not due to the actions of a few evil men, but rather to the apathy and indifference of ordinary Germans. He writes, "The Germans were not all Nazis. But they were all responsible for Hitler."
- **The power of propaganda:** The Nazis were masters of propaganda, and they used it to great effect to manipulate the German people. Mayer shows how the Nazis used the media, education, and even the churches to create a climate of fear and hatred that made it possible for them to seize power.
- **The importance of resistance:** Even in the darkest of times, there were still Germans who refused to give up hope. Mayer's interviews reveal that there were pockets of resistance throughout Germany, even in the darkest days of the Nazi era. These brave individuals risked their lives to help Jews and other persecuted groups, and they kept alive the flame of hope for a better future.

## Legacy

"They Thought They Were Free" has had a profound impact on our understanding of the rise and fall of the Nazi regime. The book has been translated into more than 20 languages and has sold millions of copies worldwide. It is considered one of the most important works of non-fiction written about the Holocaust.

The book has also been used as a teaching tool in schools and universities around the world. It is a powerful reminder of the dangers of prejudice and

hatred, and it is a call to action for all of us to stand up against tyranny and injustice.

"They Thought They Were Free" is a must-read for anyone who wants to understand the rise and fall of the Third Reich. Mayer's interviews provide a unique and deeply personal perspective on this dark chapter in human history. The book is a reminder that even in the darkest of times, there is always hope for a better future.



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