

THE WAVE

A Study Guide compiled by
Roberta McNair
for the Mill Valley Film Festival

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Introduction

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Objective

This study guide aims to provide a framework for students to analyze and understand this film, its basis in actual events, and an historical context for the fascist direction The Wave group takes. Through research, analysis, and discussion, students will achieve an understanding not only of the subject of this drama but also the nature and psychology of the need to belong, empowerment, and authoritarianism.

The Film

The Wave (Die Welle), 2007

Director Dennis Gansel

Writers Dennis Gansel, Peter Thorwarth, Todd Strasser (novel)

Producer Nina Maag

Cinematographer Torsten Breuer

Editor Ueli Christen

Cast

Jürgen Vogel—Rainer Wenger

Frederick Lau—Tim

Max Riemelt—Marco

Jennifer Ulrich—Karo

Christiane Paul—Anke Wenger

Elyas M'Barek—Sinan

Cristina do Rego—Lisa

Jacob Matschenz—Dennis

Maximilian Vollmar—Bomber

Maximilian Mauff—Kevin

“You are thus of the opinion that a dictatorship would be no longer possible today in Germany.”

When Rainer Wegner, a popular high school teacher, finds himself relegated to teaching autocracy as part of the schools project week, he's less than enthusiastic. So are his students, who greet the prospect of studying fascism yet again with apathetic grumbling. We get it. Struck by the teenagers' complacency and unwitting arrogance, Rainer devises an unorthodox experiment. He introduces his students to everyday life in a dictatorship. But his hastily conceived lesson in social orders and the power of unity soon grows a life of its own. But what begins as an educational game with the terms “discipline” and “community” develops in just a few days into a genuine movement called “The Wave.”

The students are initially fascinated by the social mechanisms and fail to notice how much and how quickly they are turning into a fascist society. By the third day they are starting to exclude and persecute those who think differently. The Wave gathers momentum and within six days has taken a grip on the whole school. Rainer, himself fascinated by his role as Fuehrer, is no longer capable of ending the

experiment that has now gone completely out of control.



Frederick Lau addresses the audience as he holds his trophy at the German Film Prize “Lola” award ceremony in Berlin April 25, 2008.

In probing the underpinnings of fascism, *The Wave* is far from a social-studies lesson. As with his previous film, *Before the Fall*, director Dennis Gansel fashions an energetic, gripping drama that cuts through superficial ideological interrogatives and goes straight for the veins—the human psychologies and individual behaviors that contribute to collective movements. In unpeeling the emotional layers and contradictions of his characters (the need to belong, to be empowered, to escape social distinctions), Gansel offers a humanistic perspective on the terrifying irony that these students may welcome the very things they denounce.

Before *The Wave* is too easily dismissed as a cautionary tale, it's noteworthy that the true story that prompted Todd Strasser's novel *The Wave* (from which the film was adapted) did not take place in Germany, but at a high school in Palo Alto.

Actor Frederick Lau, who plays Tim, was awarded the “Lola” (comparable to the Oscar) as best supporting actor in *The Wave*.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1063669/>,
<http://twitchfilm.net/site/images/mastheads/D-War.jpg&imgrefurl=http://twitchfilm.net/site/view/german>

[y-goes-fascist-in-die-welle-the-wave/
www.daylife.com/photo/0epc4BX58B1zz](http://www.daylife.com/photo/0epc4BX58B1zz/y-goes-fascist-in-die-welle-the-wave/)

The Director

Dennis Gansel was born in 1973 in Hanover, Germany. After gaining some theater experience in local amateur dramatics, he decided his future was in film. A weekend seminar entitled “How to Make Your First Movie” provided just enough knowledge and experience convince him film was the career he wanted, and to know that he had a lot more to learn. After making several short films—mostly to impress the local girls—he got serious about film and attended the Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen (University for Film and Television) in Munich from 1994 to 2000.



Dennis Gansel

The Book

The Wave

By Todd Strasser (writing as Morton Rhue)

The novel won the 1981 Massachusetts Book Award for Children’s/Young Adult literature.

Strasser writes on his Website:

“THE WAVE is loosely based on an essay by Ron Jones that appeared in a WHOLE EARTH CATALOGUE some time in the early 1970s. I have never met Mr. Jones. I’ve been told that he is the teacher who did the experiment upon which the book and TV movie are based.

Filmography

Die Welle (The Wave) (2008)
Videotagebuch von Dennis Gansel (2005)
NaPolA (Before the Fall) (2004)
Mädchen, Mädchen (Girls on Top) (2001)
... aka (USA)
The Dawn (2001)
Das Phantom (The Phantom) (2000) (TV)
Living Dead (1998)
Im Auftrag des Herrn (1998)
The Wrong Trip (1996)

<http://www.german-films.de/en/germanfilmsquarterly/previousissues/seriesgermanandirectors/marenade/index.html>,
<http://www.dennisgansel.com/>,
<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0304541/>

“To be honest, I have always wondered if the “real life” experiment conducted by Mr. Jones actually went as far as his essay alleges. At the same time I firmly believe that whether it did or not is entirely besides the point.

“The point is the message of the story, which serves both as a reminder of what has passed and a warning regarding the future.

“The murder of 6 million Jews (plus thousands of other “undesirables”) may seem like a distant event from your life. But it isn’t. Are you aware that similar massacres of innocent people continue to this day? In your lifetime it has happened in Eastern Europe and Africa.

“To me, one of the most rewarding aspects of THE WAVE is knowing that it is required reading not only in your class, but in most of Germany as well.”

Strasser worked not only from Ron Jones’s article but also the teleplay for *The Wave* by Johnny Dawkins, who was nominated for a 1982 Humanitas Prize in the 60-minute category, and a 1983 WGA Award for Best Children’s Show.

Summary of the novel

The setting of *The Wave* is fictitious Gordon High School, 1969. The plot revolves around history teacher, Ben Ross, who cannot answer the question of why the Germans allowed Adolf Hitler and the genocidal Nazi Party to rise to power, acting in a manner inconsistent with their own pre-existing moral values. The only way he can see to answer the question is to start an experiment that shows the students what it may have been like in living in Nazi Germany.

Ben starts by having his history class sit up straight and obey his commands by, at first, standing at attention beside their desks and having to say “Mr. Ross ...” before asking questions or answering questions he asked them. After seeing the students’ reactions toward the experiment, he decides to continue it the next day by creating a salute, a symbol and addressing three mottoes he made up: “Strength through discipline, Strength through community, Strength through action.” He calls this movement “The Wave.”

At first, students are skeptical about The Wave, but after seeing how everyone becomes equal, and that the stress of making choices are lifted, the class falls into The Wave, and begins to recruit others into it. Robert, the class reject, seems to have changed the most due to The Wave—his physical appearance becomes neater and the students grow to accept him more.

Laurie, a student in Mr. Ross’ class, starts to think that The Wave is having too much of an impact. A huge majority of the school is in The Wave, and its members attack students who refuse to join. Using her influence as the school newspaper editor, Laurie releases an entire issue of *The Grapevine* dedicated to showing the dangers of The Wave. While some thank her,

especially teachers and parents, others do not. Laurie’s boyfriend David, who has been in The Wave since the beginning, tries to get her to stop bad-mouthing The Wave. He eventually shoves her to the floor and then realizes what harm The Wave has done.

After talking with Laurie and David, as well as his wife, Christy, who is also a teacher at the school, Ross realizes that The Wave has taken a turn for the worse, and is determined to stop it. However, he is determined to do so in a way that communicates the lesson he intended for The Wave to teach in the first place. He calls a Wave meeting in the auditorium and requests that only Wave members be present. They gather in a similar fashion to the Nazi rallies, even equipped with banners and armbands emblazoned with the Wave logo.



Die Welle—Das Musical
the.Arter Greiz (Deutscheland) March 28, 2008

Ben tells The Wave members that they are about to see the leader of the whole organization and that he is going to speak to all of them on television to create an international Wave Party for Youths. Everyone is shocked when Mr. Ross reveals that there is no leader, and that there is no international Wave Party. However, Mr. Ross tells the audience that if there were a leader, it would be the man on the projection screen—Adolf Hitler. He explains how their obedience led them to act like Nazis.

The shocked students drop all their Wave-branded trinkets and items, and slowly leave the gym. As Ben turns to leave, the one person who really flourished in The Wave, Robert, is standing alone, upset that The Wave ended. During The Wave, he was finally accepted as an equal, no one picked on him, he

had friends, but his newfound social status is now worthless without The Wave. Mr. Ross hugs and comforts Robert, and they walk out together.

The experiment: The Third Wave

Ron Jones first wrote about his classroom social experiment in an essay in *The Whole Earth Catalog* in 1972, under the title "Take As Directed."

In that essay, Jones writes that he started the first day of the experiment (Monday, April 3 1967) with simple things, such proper seating, drilling the students until they were able to move from outside the classroom to their seats, and take the proper seating position in less than 30 seconds without making a sound. He then proceeded to strict classroom discipline, emerging as an authoritative figure and improving efficiency of the class dramatically.

On the second day he managed to mold his history class into a group with a supreme sense of discipline and community. Jones named the movement "The Third Wave," after the common belief that the third in a series of ocean waves is last and largest. Jones made up a greeting similar to the Nazi regime and ordered class members to salute each other even outside the class. They all complied with this.

The experiment took on a life of its own, with students from all over the school joining in: On the third day the class expanded from initial 30 students to 43 attendees. All of the students showed drastic improvement in their academic skills and tremendous motivation. All of the students were issued a member card and each of them received a special assignment (such as designing a Third Wave Banner, stopping non-members from entering the class, etc.). Jones instructed the students on how to initiate new members, and by the end of the day the movement had over 200 participants. Jones was surprised when some of the students started reporting other members of the movement who failed to abide by the rules.

On Thursday, the fourth day of the experiment, Jones decided to terminate the movement because it was slipping out of his

<http://www.krref.krefeld.schulen.net/referate/englisch/r0416t00.htm>, <http://www.toddstrasser.com/html/thewave.htm>, <http://www.toddstrasser.com/html/ToddsBlog.html>, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Wave_\(book\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Wave_(book)), [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Wave_\(TV_special\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Wave_(TV_special))

control. The students became increasingly involved in the project and their discipline and loyalty to the project were astounding. He announced to the participants that their group was only a part of a nationwide movement, and that on the next day a national candidate for president would publicly announce existence of the movement and that they were the local representatives of the youth movement. Jones ordered students to attend a noon rally on Friday to witness the announcement.

Y account of his progress on his
e diet.
s There have been reports of
u strange happenings in Mr.
5 Jones' Contemporary History
it classes. It has something to
r do with the Gestapo and curved
hands...
r A Faculty Fairytale: While
returning from one of his

Blurb from the Cubberley High School Catamount, April 7, 1967

Instead of televised address of their leader, the students were presented with dead air. After few minutes of waiting, Jones announced that they have been a part of an experiment in fascism and that they all willingly embraced a sense of superiority that German citizens had in the period of Nazi Germany. He then played them a film of the Nuremberg rally. Students left the auditorium quietly, some in tears. The experiment ended.

<http://www.vaniercollege.qc.ca/Auxiliary/Psychology/Frank/Thirdwave.html>, <http://www.ronjoneswriter.com/wave.html>, http://www.outspokenideas.com/html/the_wave.html, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Third_Wave, <http://www.thewave.tk/>

Controversies

Ron Jones did not write about the Third Wave experiment for a number of years. There was no media coverage of the event, which was not unusual for 1967 but would be unheard of today. There were two instances in which the Third Wave made it into the Cubberley school paper, *The Catamount*, around the time of the events. But it did not become a *cause célèbre* in its time.

Bill Klink had the byline for the April 21, 1967 article in *The Catamount*, entitled “‘Third Wave’ presents inside look into Fascism.” Klink reported, “One group reportedly had 500 parents backing a boycott to remove Jones as a teacher because of ‘a movement they didn’t quite understand.’ His fifth period senior government class launched the most successful coup d’etat on Wednesday, April 5, the last day of the movement, as they kidnapped Jones and threatened to deliver his lectures on democracy to his sophomore classes. However, he persuaded them to let him go, telling them he had planned to end the movement that day with a rally at lunch.”

The story in *The Catamount* reveals some inconsistencies with Jones’s account of the Third Wave, such as stating that Wednesday, April 5, 1967 was the last day of the movement, but most notably, the article points out a reaction outside of school, from parents. The degree of the reaction Klink reports is at odds with what Jones himself wrote in “Take As Directed.”

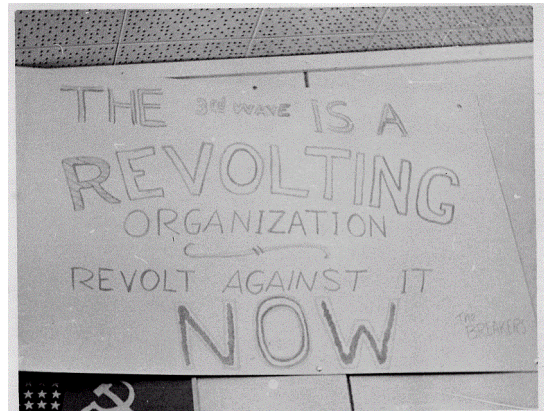
Jones recounts, “In telling their parents of the experiment they set up a brief chain of events. The rabbi for one of the parents called me at home. He was polite and condescending. I told him we were merely studying the German personality. He seemed delighted and told me not to worry. He would talk to the parents and calm their concern.”

Later, Jones remembers, “Wednesday evening someone had broken into the room and ransacked the place. (I later found out it was the father of one of the students. He was a retired air force colonel who had spent time in a German prisoner of war camp. Upon hearing of our activity he simply lost control. Late in the evening he broke into the room and tore it

apart.[.]).” Jones talked with the man about his experiences and they reached an understanding. Jones does not mention any more parents.

Jones admits that he was fired from Cubberley, but it is only clear that his teaching methods were controversial, and there is not evidence that the Third Wave was at issue.

This has led some people to doubt that the events occurred at all, or at least not in the way that Jones claims they did. One man has devoted a Website to debunking the Third Wave, and he put out a call to the country to have the events confirmed or denied by students in Mr. Jones’s class.



Third Wave protest poster, Cubberley High School

Some students have come forward to talk about their experience with the Third Wave, including Leslie Weinfield in 1991, who wrote an essay entitled, “Remembering the 3rd Wave.” On Ron Jones’s Website is a list entitled, “People to contact regarding The Wave or Ron Jones.” One of those is Philip Neel, and it’s noted that “He and others from the experiment are creating a documentary to tell their experiences in The Wave.”

Other social psychology experiments

Another controversy about the experiment has cropped up occasionally in the years since, especially after publication of Todd Strasser’s book, *The Wave*. Some schools have reportedly tried the own experiments, inspired by The Wave. In 1999, an eighth grade class in Chicago, Illinois, did a mini-recreation of The Wave experiment. In 2006, a middle school

history class in Florida attempted to recreate the experiment with even younger children.

The Milgram Experiment

The Third Wave shares characteristics with other social psychology experiments of the 20th century, notably the 1963 Milgram experiment, which measured the willingness of study participants to obey an authority figure who instructed them to perform acts that conflicted with their personal conscience. People participated in what they thought was an experiment helping a researcher's study of memory and learning in different situations, acting the role of teacher. Teachers were told to push a button and give increasingly strong electric shocks to a learner who gave wrong answers when tested on his memory of word pairs.

Although the teachers knew that the pain increased with every shock, because they heard the learners' cries, they continued with the testing. Only when they heard banging on the wall separating the teacher's room from the learner's room—and heard complaining about the learner's heart condition did—the teachers question the experiment.

The teachers did not know that the researcher and learners were actors, and though the button actually produced electric shocks, the learner was not experiencing them. The teachers had been told that they would not be held responsible for any harm to the learners. They were also prodded, when they expressed doubts about continuing, with successively strong verbal prods: "Please continue," "The experiment requires that you continue," "It is absolutely essential that you continue," and "You have no other choice, you must go on." If they resisted after the fourth prod, the experiment stopped.

The conclusions of the experiment showed 65 percent (26 of 40) of experiment participants administered the experiment's final 450-volt shock, though many were very uncomfortable doing so. At some point, every participant paused and questioned the experiment, and some said they would refund the money they were paid for participating in the

experiment. No participant steadfastly refused to administer shocks before the 300-volt level.



Test subject from the Milgram Experiment, 1963

The Stanford prison experiment

The other relevant experiment was the 1971 Stanford prison experiment. This experiment dealt with group dynamics, like the Third Wave did. It was a study of the psychological effects of becoming a prisoner or prison guard. The goal was to test the idea that the inherent personality traits of prisoners and guards were key to understanding abusive prison situations.

Twenty-four students were assigned the roles of either prisoner or guard. They were told they would participate in a two-week "prison simulation." The "prison" itself was in the basement of Stanford's Jordan Hall, which had been converted into a mock jail. Researchers played the roles of warden and prison superintendent.

The researchers provided weapons—wooden batons—and clothing that simulated that of a prison guard—khaki shirt and pants from a local military surplus store. They were also given mirrored sunglasses to prevent eye contact. Prisoners wore ill-fitting smocks and stocking caps. Guards called prisoners by their assigned numbers, sewn on their uniforms, instead of by name. A chain around their ankles reminded them of their roles as prisoners.

The guards were told, "You can create in the prisoners feelings of boredom, a sense of fear to some degree, you can create a notion of arbitrariness that their life is totally controlled by

us, by the system, you, me, and they'll have no privacy... We're going to take away their individuality in various ways. In general what all this leads to is a sense of powerlessness. That is, in this situation we'll have all the power and they'll have none."



"Guards" and "prisoners" in the Stanford prison experiment, 1971

The participants who had been chosen to play the part of prisoners were "arrested" at their homes and "charged" with armed robbery. They were fingerprinted, photographed, and booked at the Palo Alto Police Department. At the prison, they were transported to the mock prison where they were strip-searched and given their new identities.

The results of the experiment caused its chief researcher, psychologist Philip Zimbardo, to call off the experiment after six days. Prisoners suffered—and accepted—sadistic and humiliating treatment from the guards. The high level of stress progressively led them from rebellion to inhibition. By experiment's end, many showed severe emotional disturbances.

Guards forced the prisoners to count off repeatedly as a way to learn their prison numbers, and to reinforce the idea that this was their new identity. Guards soon used these prisoner counts as another method to harass the prisoners, using physical punishment such as

protracted exercise for errors in the prisoner count. Sanitary conditions declined rapidly, made worse by the guards refusing to allow some prisoners to urinate or defecate.

Zimbardo concluded the experiment early when Christina Maslach, a graduate student he was then dating (and later married), objected to the appalling conditions of the prison after she was introduced to the experiment to conduct interviews. Zimbardo noted that of more than 50 outside persons who had seen the prison, Maslach was the only one who questioned its morality.

The experiment's result has been argued to demonstrate the impressionability and obedience of people when provided with a legitimizing ideology and social and institutional support. It is also used to illustrate cognitive dissonance theory and the power of authority. Shortly after the study had been completed, there were bloody revolts at both the San Quentin and Attica prison facilities, and Zimbardo reported his findings on the experiment to the U.S. House Committee on the Judiciary.

When the Abu Ghraib military prisoner torture and abuse scandal was published in March 2004, many observers immediately were struck by its similarities to the Stanford Prison experiment—among them, Philip Zimbardo, who paid close attention to the details of the story. He was dismayed by official military and government efforts shifting the blame for the torture and abuses in the Abu Ghraib American military prison on to "a few bad apples" rather than acknowledging it as possibly systemic problems of a formally established military incarceration system.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanford_prison_experiment,
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milgram_experiment,
<http://www.ronjoneswriter.com/>,
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Third_Wave,
<http://www.prisonexp.org/>, <http://www.new-life.net/milgram.htm>

Authoritarian Movements

One way to look at the students' rapid acceptance and promulgation of *The Wave* is to understand crowd psychology. In crowd psychology, ordinary people can typically gain direct power by acting collectively. The psychology of the crowd differs significantly from the psychology of those individuals within it. But while crowd psychology is a likely factor in the students' behavior, the key element for the students in the film is Rainer Wenger—the authority figure.

The 20th century saw two major, and ultimately destructive, authoritarian, autocratic movements—each founded and led by a charismatic individual who not only intuitively understood crowd psychology, they understood the human need to belong. These were the Fascists in Italy, led by Benito Mussolini, and the Nazis in Germany, led by Adolf Hitler.

Fascism

“*Fascio*” in Italian means league. The Fascists in Italy began as a response to the inflation, large debts, unemployment aggravated by demobilization of thousands of soldiers after the First World War. Additionally, Italy experienced social unrest with strikes; attempts at insurrection by anarchists, Socialists, and Communists; and the flourishing of organized crime. The democratically elected Liberal government had no means to control the unrest, so when Benito Mussolini took matters into his own hands to combat the social unrest by organizing the paramilitary Blackshirts, made up of former socialists and war veterans, the government allowed this league to continue.

Italy was also experiencing a new sense of nationalism, unique in its recent history. The Manifesto of the Fascist Struggle the initial stances of Fascism were outlined to institute, among other things, voting rights for women, insertion of a minimum wage, insertion of an eight-hour workday for all workers, and reorganization of public transport, such as railways. The strongest uniting factor for the Fascists, however, was the fight against Bolshevism, which was perceived as a great

threat to Italy's autonomy and heritage. By 1921, there were over 250,000 Blackshirts, and the *Fascisti* were transformed into the National Fascist Party.



Benito Mussolini, Il Duce

Mussolini was elected to the Chamber of Deputies the same year, and the Fascists, who had had enough of what they considered a weak parliamentary democracy process, marched on Rome in an effort to take power, with promises of restoring Italian pride, reviving the economy, increasing productivity, ending harmful government controls and furthering law and order. While the march was taking place, king Victor Emmanuel III made Mussolini Prime Minister.

From early in his rise to power, Mussolini—called *Il Duce*, The Duke (or leader)—used the same tools seen in *The Wave*. He put his *Fascisti* in the black shirts that identified the Fascists, united them with a uniform, and came to symbolize the movement. Rather than develop a symbol for the group, Mussolini used his own face as a symbol. Mussolini's strong face looked out at every Italian, plastered as it was on nearly every building.

Additionally, in declaring the Bolsheviks as the enemy of the Fascists (they had expelled him from the party in 1915), he united the movement against something, as well

as for the social changes laid out in Manifesto of the Fascist Struggle.

As the Fascist influence grew in the Parliament, Mussolini employed other tactics that played on the desire to belong, to follow, and to feel powerful. Mussolini had a secret police force led by a clique of high-ranking Fascist officials—a force he affectionately called the *Cheka*—that was in the habit of attacking anyone who made themselves obnoxious to Mussolini's interests. They kidnapped and murdered a popular Socialist member of Parliament. One hundred and fifty Socialist deputies protested the killing by quitting Parliament—a tremendous mistake. It left Parliament without anyone supporting democracy.

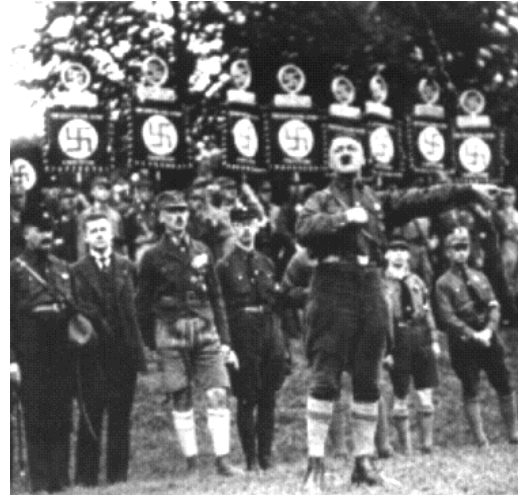
Mussolini then strengthened his regime by signing an agreement with industrialists, assuring them control over their own industries. He made a similar agreement with the large employers in agriculture and commerce. Unions were crippled. They could not strike and they were denied the right to the leaders of their choice.

Mussolini was able to shut down hostile newspapers and to make the remaining press subservient to his government's authority. And the Fascists were strong enough as a parliamentary force that they were able to outlaw rival political parties. To the applause of the nation, Mussolini spoke of the putrefying corpse of liberty. His government emphasized the virtues of militarism along with the Fascist credo, "Together we are strong!" Boys and girls of all ages were enrolled in semi-military formations, given black shirts and toy machine guns, and taught loyalty to the state.

Nazism

National Socialism was similar in many respects to Italian fascism. The roots of National Socialism, however, were peculiarly German, grounded, for example, in the Prussian tradition of military authoritarianism and expansion; in the German romantic tradition of hostility to rationalism, liberalism, and democracy; in various racist doctrines according to which the Nordic peoples, as so-called pure Aryans, were

not only physically superior to other races, but were the carriers of a superior morality and culture; and in certain philosophical traditions that idealized the state or exalted the superior individual and exempted such a person from conventional restraints.



Early days of National Socialism

The immediate origins of National Socialism are to be found in the consequences of the German defeat in World War I (1914-1918). Under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, Germany was charged with sole responsibility for the war, stripped of its colonial empire, and forced to pay heavy reparations. German political and economic life was seriously disrupted as a result of the treaty. Severe inflation, which reached its climax in 1923, all but destroyed the German middle class, leaving many of its impoverished and despairing members vulnerable to the appeals of radical political groups that sprang up in the postwar years. Only a few years after some measure of economic stability and progress had been achieved, the worldwide economic crisis that began in 1929 plunged Germany into an apparently hopeless depression.

The democratic Weimar Republic could not withstand the social and economic pressures, and by 1933 the majority of German voters supported one or the other of the two major totalitarian parties, the Communist and the National Socialist.

Adolf Hitler, a disillusioned veteran of World War I, joined the small German Workers'

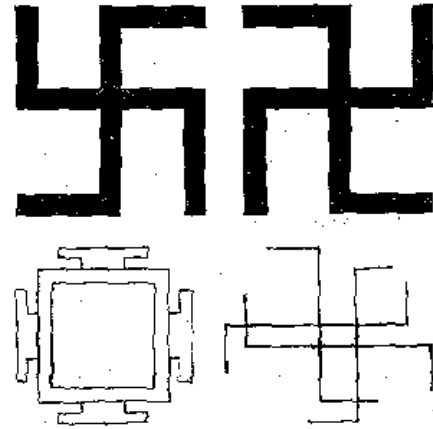
Party in 1919. With only six active members out of a nominal 25, Hitler quickly moved in as leader of the group. The membership grew slowly. At the first mass meeting of the German Workers' Party, held in Munich on February 24, 1920, Hitler read the party program, which consisted of 25 points comprising a mixture of exaggerated nationalistic demands, corruptions of socialist ideas, and racist and anti-Semitic doctrines. As the essential conditions for the realization of its aims, the party declared in point 25 of the program: "For modern society, a colossus with feet of clay, we shall create an unprecedented centralization which will unite all powers in the hands of the government. We shall create a hierarchical constitution, which will mechanically govern all movements of individuals."

The party changed its name to the National Socialist German Workers' Party (abbreviated to Nazi). Convinced of the necessity, indeed, the value, of violence to achieve its ends, the party soon organized the *Sturmabteilung* (Storm Troops), or SA, to defend its meetings; to disrupt the meetings of liberal democrats, socialists, Communists, and trade unionists; and to persecute Jews, especially Jewish merchants. It was aided in these activities by some disaffected army officers.

In 1921 Hitler was elected "unlimited chairman" of the party, which in the same year adopted as its official emblem a flag consisting of a red field in the center of which was a large white circle containing a black swastika. Hitler, a former aspiring artist, chose the swastika carefully and deliberately.

An ancient symbol, it is still found in the cultures that are in modern-day India and the surrounding area, sometimes as a geometrical motif and sometimes as a religious symbol. It was a decorative form used frequently in the Roman Republic and Empire. Eighteenth-century archaeologists linked the pre-history of European people to the ancient "Aryans" (variously referring to the Indo-Iranians or the Proto-Indo-Europeans). Following his discovery of objects bearing the swastika in the ruins of Troy, Heinrich Schliemann concluded that the Swastika was a specifically Indo-European

symbol. This idea was taken up by many writers, and the swastika quickly became popular in the West, appearing in many designs from the 1880s to the 1920s.



Hindu swastikas

Hitler saw the value of the symbol, because Nazism stated that the historical Aryans were the forefathers of modern Germans. This made subjugation of the world by Germany desirable, and even predestined. The swastika became a mystical symbolic connection that emphasized the Aryan-German correspondence and instilled racial pride.

Every Nazi wore the swastika, which symbolized they were part of a ruling group, the hierarchy that would "mechanically govern all movements of individuals." The swastika was not only a symbol of pride, it was a symbol of warning to those outside the group, especially those who could never belong because of their race.

The Nazi Party took all possible advantage of the deepening economic depression from 1929 to 1932. Unemployment increased, and an ineffectual government undermined what remained of belief in parliamentary democracy in Germany. As a consequence, Hitler drew a huge vote in the presidential elections of 1932, even though he lost. The Nazi Party continued to gain seats in the Reichstag (parliament), but it was in main competition with the Communist Party.

Hitler refused to participate in a coalition with the Communists, which

threatened the very function of the Reichstag. To keep Hitler and the Nazis happy, and the Reichstag in operation, President Hindenburg appointed Hitler chancellor on January 30, 1933. Then the party began the creation of the National Socialist state.



Nazi emblem with swastika

Late in February, almost at the close of the election campaign for a new Reichstag, the building housing the national parliament was destroyed by fire of incendiary origin. The Nazis blamed the Communists and made the incident a pretext to suppress the Communist Party with brutal violence; later, the Social Democratic Party was also violently suppressed. Neither party offered organized resistance. All other parties were subsequently outlawed, the attempt to create a new party was made a crime, and the National Socialist Party became the only legal party. In the Enabling Act of March 23, 1933, the legislative powers of the Reichstag were passed to the cabinet. The act granted Hitler dictatorial powers and signified the end of the Weimar Republic. By a law enacted on December 1, 1933, the Nazi Party was “indissolubly joined to the state.”

Thereafter the party was the principal instrument of the totalitarian control of the state and of German society, exercised through the leadership corps of the party. Loyal Nazis soon held most high government offices—national, provincial, and local. Party members of “pure” German blood 18 years or more of age swore allegiance to the Führer and according to Reich law were accountable for their actions only in

special party courts. Nominally, membership in the party was voluntary, and millions willingly joined, but a great many others were compelled to become members against their will. Many civil-service employees were required to join. At its peak, the party had an estimated membership of about 7 million.

For all the distaste with which modern culture holds Hitler, it must be remembered that he was undeniably a charismatic figure for the Nazis, and much of Germany. He was a compelling orator, and his speeches promoting the Nazi ideals—and vision of domination in a world hierarchy through the Third Reich (realm)—were attractive to people who had suffered the national diminishment and shame following Germany’s defeat in the First World War.

Belonging to the Nazi Party satisfied many needs, and for those who felt empowered by crowd psychology—especially when moral responsibility was removed by the authority—the SA was a perfect fit. The principal auxiliary organization of the Nazi Party was the SA, officially designated as the “guarantor of the National Socialist revolution” and the “vanguard of National Socialism.” It extorted large sums of money from German workers and farmers through its annual “winter help” collections for the poor; it conducted the training in National Socialism of all German youth through the age of 17; and it organized a thorough pogrom against the Jews in 1938.

During World War II, the SS—another important party formation—organized special combat divisions to bolster the regular army at critical moments. Together with the *Sicherheitsdienst* (Security Service), or SD, the espionage agency of the party and the Reich, the SS controlled the Nazi Party during the last years of the war. The SD operated the concentration camps for victims of Nazi terrorism and during the war played an important role in enabling Hitler to win control of the armed forces from the general staff.

If the Nazis had been victorious in the Second World War, the Hitler *Jugend* (Hitler Youth organization) might have been the most important party auxiliary. The Hitler *Jugend*

prepared boys of 14 to 17 years of age for membership in the SA, the SS, and the party. At the age when humans arguably feel the most alone, the Hitler *Jugend* provided the community that made them feel wanted, needed, empowered, and a sense of purpose.



Hitler Jugend

The Wave

The character of Rainer Wenger intuitively understood this need in teenagers, and the rapid spread of The Wave was due in great part to their vulnerability to the most attractive aspects of Fascism and Nazism: belonging to a group that is special in itself, not in its individuals, and that enhances its prestige through excluding—and punishing—those who do not accept the value of the group and the authority of its leader.

Manipulating people's emotions effectively lessens the power of rational analysis. Strengthening that emotional bond to the group through defining it with badges, uniforms, slogans, and pride removes the moral consequences of the group's actions—both because it's the group that's performing them,

and the actions fulfill the will of the authoritative leader.

The Third Wave in all its incarnations proves that embracing fascism is an uncomfortable possibility in our present and future society, instead of being a relic of the past that we have grown beyond. Human nature and frailty keep it possible.

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Questions for Discussion and Research

1. Todd Strasser, when asked if he believed the account of the Third Wave was true or not, answered, “To be honest, I have always wondered if the ‘real life’ experiment conducted by Mr. Jones actually went as far as his essay alleges. At the same time I firmly believe that whether it did or not is entirely besides the point. The point is the message of the story, which serves both as a reminder of what has passed and a warning regarding the future.”

Does it matter whether or not the Third Wave actually occurred? If it did not occur, why not simply tell it as a story, a piece of cautionary fiction? Would the story have the same impact if, at the beginning of *The Wave*, there could not be a statement that the events had actually occurred? Why or why not?

2. Discuss the characters in the film as archetypes. (In psychology, an archetype is a model of a person, personality, or behavior.) For example, Tim can be characterized as a loner, an outcast, a misfit, or perhaps all of these. In particular, look at Karo, Sinan, and Kevin. Karo rejects and fights against The Wave. Sinan, in spite of being non-Germanic, joins The Wave. Kevin won’t conform to The Wave, but he later wants to belong. What personality or behavior characteristics drive these behaviors? Can they be summed up in one archetypal label, or is there something more complex about them than any other characters?



Nazi rally at the Brandenburg Gate, Berlin

3. In addition to a television movie from 1983 and this current film, *The Wave* has been made into a stage musical, first performed in The Netherlands in 2003. Discuss how the action would have to change to tell the story in the restricted environment of a stage. Musicals traditionally use songs not only to substitute for dialog but also to allow internal thoughts and feelings to be expressed without

the constraints of realism. How would telling the story of *The Wave* benefit from being free of some of the strictures of realistic action and dialog?

4. Rainer is inspired with *The Wave* as a creative means of teaching his disinterested class about autocracy and authoritarianism without dry recitations about Nazism. Instead of telling the students about how people could embrace fascism, he will let them understand its seductive power through experience. However, while his students are becoming intoxicated with the power of *The Wave* through unity and purpose as a group, Rainer is being seduced by the power of being the authoritarian, self-appointed leader (arguably, since he offers the students the chance to choose their leader). How do the attractions of his role blind him from what is going on with his class, or is he aware of the dangerous momentum of *The Wave*?

When his wife asks him to stop the experiment, he doesn't want to. What is it in his personality that makes him argue with her about it, when he soon comes to understand how dangerous *The Wave* has become?

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Appendix

The Third Wave

Ron Jones (1972)

For years I kept a strange secret. I shared this silence with two hundred students. Yesterday I ran into one of those students. For a brief moment it all rushed back.

Steve Coniglio had been a sophomore student in my World History class. We ran into each other quite by accident. It's one of those occasions experienced by teachers when they least expect. You're walking down the street, eating at a secluded restaurant, or buying some underwear when all of a sudden an ex-student pops up to say hello. In this case it was Steve running down the street shouting "Mr. Jones, Mr. Jones." In an

embarrassed hug we greet. I had to stop for a minute to remember. Who is this young man hugging me? He calls me Mr. Jones. Must be a former student. What's his name? In the split second of my race back in time Steve sensed my questioning and backed up. Then smiled, and slowly raised a hand in a cupped position. My God He's a member of the Third Wave. It's Steve, Steve Coniglio. He sat in the second row. He was a sensitive and bright student. Played guitar and enjoyed drama.

We just stood there exchanging smiles when without a conscious command I raised my hand in curved position. The salute was give. Two comrades had met long after the war. The Third Wave was still alive. "Mr. Jones do you remember the Third Wave?" I sure do, it was one of the most frightening events I ever experienced In the classroom. It was also the genesis of a secret that I and two hundred students would sadly share for the rest of our lives.

We talked and laughed about the Third Wave for the next few hours. Then it was time to part. It's strange, you most a past student In these chance ways, You catch a few moments of your life. Hold them tight. Then say goodbye. Not knowing when and if you'd ever see each other again. Oh, you make promises to call each other but It won't happen. Steve will continue to grow and change. I will remain an ageless benchmark in his life. A presence that will not change. I am Mr. Jones. Steve turns and gives a quiet salute. Hand raised upward in a shape of a curling wave. Hand curved in a similar fashion I return the gesture.

The Third Wave. Well at last it can be talked about. Here I've met a student and we've talked for hours about this nightmare. The secret must finally be waning. It's taken three years. I can tell you and anyone else about the Third Wave. It's now just a dream, something to remember, no it's something we tried to forget. That's how it all started. By strange coincidence I think it was Steve who started the Third Ways with a question

We were studying Nazi Germany and in the middle of a lecture I was interrupted by the question. How could the German populace claim

ignorance of the slaughter of the Jewish people. How could the townspeople, railroad conductors, teachers, doctors, claim they knew nothing about concentration camps and human carnage. How can people who were neighbors and maybe even friends of the Jewish citizen say they weren't there when it happened. it was a good question. I didn't know the answer.

In as such as there were several months still to go in the school year and I was already at World War II, I decided to take a week and explore the question.

STRENGTH THROUGH DISCIPLINE

On Monday, I introduced my sophomore history students to one of the experiences that characterized Nazi Germany. Discipline. I lectured about the beauty of discipline. How an athlete feels having worked hard and regularly to be successful at a sport. How a ballet dancer or painter works hard to perfect a movement. The dedicated patience of a scientist in pursuit of an Idea. it's discipline. That self training. Control. The power of the will. The exchange of physical hardships for superior mental and physical facilities. The ultimate triumph.

To experience the power of discipline, I invited, no I commanded the class to exercise and use a new seating posture; I described how proper sitting posture assists mandatory concentration and strengthens the will. in fact I instructed the class in a sitting posture. This posture started with feet flat on the floor, hands placed flat across the small of the back to force a straight alignment of the spine. "There can't you breath more easily? You're more alert. Don't you feel better."

We practiced this new attention position over and over. I walked up and down the aisles of seated students pointing out small flaws, making improvements. Proper seating became the most important aspect of learning. I would dismiss the class allowing them to leave their desks and then call them abruptly back to an attention sitting position. In speed drills the class learned to move from standing position to attention sitting in fifteen seconds. In focus drills I concentrated attention on the feet being parallel and flat, ankles locked, knees bent at ninety degree

angles, hands flat and crossed against the back, spine straight, chin down, head forward. We did noise drills in which talking was allowed only to be shown as a detraction. Following minutes of progressive drill assignments the class could move from standing positions outside the room to attention sitting positions at their desks without making a sound. The maneuver took five seconds.

It was strange how quickly the students took to this uniform code of behavior I began to wonder just how far they could be pushed. Was this display of obedience a momentary game we were all playing, or was it something else. Was the desire for discipline and uniformity a natural need? A societal instinct we hide within our franchise restaurants and T.V. programming.

I decided to push the tolerance of the class for regimented action. In the final twenty-five minutes of the class I introduced some new rules. Students must be sitting in class at the attention position before the late bell; all students Must carry pencils and paper for note taking; when asking or answering questions a student must stand at the side of their desk; the first word given in answering or asking a question is "Mr. Jones." We practiced short "silent reading" sessions. Students who responded in a sluggish manner were reprimanded and in every case made to repeat their behavior until it was a model of punctuality and respect. The intensity of the response became more important than the content. To accentuate this, I requested answers to be given in three words or less. Students were rewarded for making an effort at answering or asking questions. They were also acknowledged for doing this in a crisp and attentive manner. Soon everyone in the class began popping up with answers and questions. The involvement level in the class moved from the few who always dominated discussions to the entire class. Even stranger was the gradual improvement in the quality of answers. Everyone seemed to be listening more intently. New people were speaking. Answers started to stretch out as students usually hesitant to speak found support for their effort.

As for my part in this exercise, I had nothing but questions. Why hadn't I thought of this technique before. Students seemed intent on the assignment and displayed Accurate recitation of facts and concepts. They even seemed to be asking better questions and treating each other with more compassion. How could this be? Here I was enacting an authoritarian learning environment and it seemed very productive. I now began to ponder not just how far this class could be pushed but how such I would change my basic beliefs toward an open classroom and self directed learning. Was all my belief in Carl Rogers to shrivel and die? Where was this experiment leading?

STRENGTH THROUGH COMMUNITY

On Tuesday, the second day of the exercise, I entered the classroom to find everyone sitting in silence at the attention position. Some of their faces were relaxed with smiles that come from pleasing the teacher. But most of the students looked straight ahead in earnest concentration. Neck muscles rigid. No sign of a smile or a thought or even a question. Every fibre strained to perform the deed. To release the tension I went to the chalk board and wrote in big letters "STRENGTH THROUGH DISCIPLINE." Below this I wrote a second law, "STRENGTH THROUGH COMMUNITY."

While the class sat in stern silence I began to talk lecture sermonize about the value of community. At this stage of the game I was debating in my own mind whether to stop the experiment or continue. I hadn't planned such intensity or compliance. In fact I was surprised to find the ideas on discipline enacted at all. While debating whether to stop or go on with the experiment I talked on and on about community. I made up stories from my experiences as an athlete, coach and historian. It was easy. Community is that bond between individuals who work and struggle together. It's raising a barn with your neighbors, it's feeling that you are a part of something beyond yourself, a movement, a team, La Raza, a cause.

It was too late to step back. I now can appreciate why the astronomer turns relentlessly to the telescope. I was probing deeper and deeper into my own perceptions and the motivations for

group and individual action. There was much more to see and try to understand. Many questions haunted me. Why did the students accept the authority I was imposing? Where is their curiosity or resistance to this marshal behavior. When and how will this end?

Following my description of community I once again told the class that community like discipline must be experienced if it is to be understood. To provide an encounter with community I had the class recite in unison "Strength Through Discipline." "Strength Through Community." First I would have two students stand and call back our motto. Then add two more until finally the whole class was standing and reciting. It was fun. The students began to look at each other and sense the power of belonging. Everyone was capable and equal. They were doing something together. We worked on this simple act for the entire class period. We would repeat the mottos in a rotating chorus. or say then with various degrees of loudness. Always we said them together, emphasizing the proper way to sit, stand, and talk.

I began to think of myself as a part of the experiment. I enjoyed the unified action demonstrated by the students. It was rewarding to see their satisfaction and excitement to do more. I found it harder and harder to extract myself from the momentum and identity that the class was developing. I was following the group dictate as much as I was directing it.

As the class period was ending and without forethought I created a class salute. It was for class members only. To make the salute you brought your right hand up toward the right shoulder in a curled position. I called it the Third Wave salute because the hand resembled a wave about to top over. The idea for the three came from beach lore that waves travel in chains, the third wave being the last and largest of each series. Since we had a salute I made it a rule to salute all class members outside the classroom. When the bell sounded ending the period I asked the class for complete silence. With everyone sitting at attention I slowly raised my arm and with a cupped hand I saluted. It was a silent signal of recognition. They were something

special. Without command the entire group of students returned the salute.

Throughout the next few days students in the class would exchange this greeting. You would be walking down the hall when all of a sudden three classmates would turn your way each flashing a quick salute. In the library or in gym students would be seen giving this strange hand jive. You would hear a crash of cafeteria food only to have it followed by two classmates saluting each other. The mystique of thirty individuals doing this strange gyration soon brought more attention to the class and its experiment into the German personality. Many students outside the class asked if they could join.

STRENGTH THROUGH ACTION

On Wednesday, I decided to issue membership cards to every student that wanted to continue what I now called the experiment. Not a single student elected to leave the room. In this the third day of activity there were forty-three students in the class. Thirteen students had cut class to be a part of the experiment. While the class sat at attention I gave each person a card. I marked three of the cards with a red X and informed the recipients that they had a special assignment to report any students not complying to class rules. I then proceeded to talk about the meaning of action. I explained how discipline and community were meaningless without action. I discussed the beauty of taking full responsibility for ones action. Of believing so thoroughly in yourself and your community or family that you will do anything to preserve, protect and extend that being. I stressed how hard work and allegiance to each Other would allow accelerated learning and accomplishment. I reminded students of what it felt like being in classes where competition caused pain and degradation. Situations in which students were pitted against each other In everything from gym to reading. The feeling of never acting, never being a part of something, never supporting each other.

At this point students stood without prompting and began to give what amounted to testimonials. "Mr. Jones, for the first time I'm learning lots of things." "Mr. Jones, why don't

you teach like this all the time.” I was shocked! Yes, I had been pushing information at them in an extremely controlled setting but the fact that they found it comfortable and acceptable was startling. It was equally disconcerting to realize that complex and time consuming written homework assignments on German life were being completed and even enlarged on by students. Performance in academic skill areas was significantly improving. They were learning more. And they seemed to want more. I began to think that the students might do anything I assigned. I decided to find out.

To allow students the experience of direct action I gave each individual a specific verbal assignment. “It’s your task to design a Third Wave Banner. You are responsible for stopping any student that is not a Third Wave member from entering this room. I want you to remember and be able to recite by tomorrow the name and address of every Third Wave Member. You are assigned the problem of training and convincing at least twenty children in the adjacent elementary school that our sitting posture is necessary for better learning. It’s your job to read this pamphlet and report its entire content to the class before the period ends. I want each of you to give me the name and address of one reliable friend that you think might want to join the Third Wave.”...

To conclude the session on direct action, I instructed students in a simple procedure for initiating new members. It went like this. A new member had only to be recommended by an existing member and issued a card by me. Upon receiving this card the new member had to demonstrate knowledge of our rules and pledge obedience to them. My announcement unleashed a fervor.

The school was alive with conjecture and curiosity. It affected everyone. The school cook asked what a Third Wave cookie looked like. I said chocolate chip of course. Our principal came into an afternoon faculty meeting and gave me the Third Wave salute. I saluted back. The Librarian thanked me for the 30’ banner on learning which she placed above the library entrance. By the end of the day over two

hundred students were admitted into the order. I felt very alone and a little scared.

Most of my fear emanated from the incidence of “tattletaling”. Though I formally appointed only three students to report deviate behavior, approximately twenty students came to me with reports about how Allan didn’t salute, or Georgine was talking critically about our experiment. This incidence of monitoring meant that half the class now considered it their duty to observe and report on members of their class. Within this avalanche of reporting one legitimate conspiracy did seem underway

Three women in the class had told their parents all about our classroom activities. These three young women were by far the most intelligent students in the class. As friends they chummed together. They possessed a silent confidence and took pleasure in a school setting that gave them academic and leadership opportunity. During the days of the experiment I was curious how they would respond to the equalitarian and physical reshaping of the class. The rewards they were accustomed to winning just didn’t exist in the experiment. The intellectual skills of questioning and reasoning were non existent. In the martial atmosphere of the class they seemed stunned and pensive. Now that I look back, they appeared much like the child with so called learning disability. They watched the activities and participated in a mechanical fashion. Whereas others jumped in, they held back, watching.

In telling their parents of the experiment they set up a brief chain of events. The rabbi for one of the parents called me at home. He was polite and condescending. I told him we were merely studying the German personality. He seemed delighted and told me not to worry. He would talk to the parents and calm their concern. In concluding this conversation I envisioned similar conversations throughout history in which the clergy accepted and apologized for untenable conditions. If only he would have raged in anger or simply investigated the situation I could point the students to an example of righteous rebellion. But no. The rabbi became a part of the experiment In remaining ignorant of the oppression in the

experiment he became an accomplice and advocate.

By the end of the third day I was exhausted. I was tearing apart. The balance between role playing and directed behavior became indistinguishable. Many of the students were completely into being Third Wave Members. They demanded strict obedience of the rules from other students and bullied those that took the experiment lightly. Others simply sunk into the activity and took self assigned roles. I particularly remember Robert. Robert was big for his age and displayed very few academic skills. Oh he tried harder than anyone I know to be successful. He handed in elaborate weekly reports copied word for word from the reference books in the library. Robert is like so many kids in school that don't excel or cause trouble. They aren't bright, they can't make the athletic teams, and don't strike out for attention. They are lost. invisible. The only reason I came to know Robert at all is that I found him eating lunch in my classroom. He always ate lunch alone.

Well, the Third Wave gave Robert a place in school. At least he was equal to everyone. He could do something. Take part. Be meaningful. That's just what Robert did. Late Wednesday afternoon I found Robert following me and asked what in the world was he doing. He smiled (I don't think I had ever seen him smile) and announced, "Mr. Jones I'm your bodyguard. I'm afraid something will happen to you.

Can I do it Kr. Jones, please?" Given that assurance and smile I couldn't say no. I had a bodyguard. All day long he opened and closed doors for me. He walked always on my right. Just smiling and saluting other class members. He followed me every- where. In the faculty room (closed to students) he stood at silent attention while I gulped some coffee. When accosted by an English teacher for being a student in the "teachers' room" her just smiled and informed the faculty member that he wasn't a student. he was a body guard.

STRENGTH THROUGH PRIDE

On Thursday I began to draw the experiment to a conclusion. I was exhausted and worried. Many students were over the line. The Third

Wave had become the center of their existence. I was in pretty bad shape myself. I was now acting instinctively as a dictator. Oh I was benevolent. And I daily argued to myself on the benefits of the learning experience. By this, the fourth day of the experiment I was beginning to lose my own arguments. As I spent more time playing the role I had less time to remember its rational origins and purpose. I found myself sliding into the role even when it wasn't necessary. I wondered if this doesn't happen to lots of people. We get or take an ascribed role and then bend our life to fit the image. Soon the image is the only identity people will accept. So we become the image. The trouble with the situation and role I had created was that I didn't have time to think where it was leading. Events were crushing around me. I worried for students doing things they would regret. I worried for myself.

Once again I faced the thoughts of closing the experiment or letting it go its own course. Both options were unworkable. If I stopped the experiment a great number of students would be left hanging. They had committed themselves in front of their peers to radical behavior. Emotionally and psychologically they had exposed themselves. If I suddenly jolted them back to classroom reality I would face a confused student- body for the remainder of the year. It would be too painful and demeaning for Robert and the students like him to be twisted back into a seat and told it's just a game. They would take the ridicule from the brighter students that participated in a measured and cautious way. I couldn't let the Roberts lose again.

The other option of just letting the experiment run its course was also out of the question. Things were already getting out of control. Wednesday evening someone had broken into the room and ransacked the place. (I later found out it was the father of one of the students. He was a retired air force colonel who had spent time in a German prisoner of war camp. Upon hearing of our activity he simply lost control Late in the evening he broke into the room and tore it apart. I found him that morning propped up against the classroom door. He told me about his friends that had been killed in Germany. He

was holding on to me and shaking. In staccato words he pleaded that I understand and help him get home. I called his wife and with the help of a neighbor walked him home. We spent hours later talking about what he felt and did, but from that moment on Thursday morning I was more concerned with what might be happening at school.

I was increasingly worried about how our activity was affecting the faculty and other students in the school. The Third Wave was disrupting normal learning. Students were cutting class to participate and the school counselors were beginning to question every student in the class. The real gestapo in the school was at work. Faced with this experiment exploding in one hundred directions, I decided to try an old basketball strategy. When you're playing against all the odds the best action to take is to try the unexpected. That's what I did.

By Thursday the class had swollen in size to over eighty students. The only thing that allowed them all to fit was the enforced discipline of sitting in silence at attention. A strange calm is in effect when a room full of people sit in quite observation and anticipation. It helped me approach them in a deliberate way. I talked about pride. "Pride is more than banners or salutes. Pride is something no one can take from you. Pride is knowing you are the best... It can't be destroyed ..."

In the midst of this crescendo I abruptly changed and lowered my voice to announce the real reason for the Third Wave. In slow methodic tone I explained what was behind the Third Wave. "The Third Wave isn't just an experiment or classroom activity. It's far more important than that. The Third Wave is a nationwide program to find students who are willing to fight for political change in this country. That's right. This activity we have been doing has been practice for the real thing. Across the country teachers like myself have been recruiting and training a youth brigade capable of showing the nation a better society through discipline, community, pride, and action. If we can change the way that school is run, we can change the way that factories, stores, universities and all the other institutions are run. You are a selected

group of young people chosen to help in this cause. If you will stand up and display what you have learned in the past four days...we can change the destiny of this nation. We can bring it a new sense of order, community, pride and action. A new purpose. Everything rests with you and your willingness to take a stand."

To give validity to the seriousness of my words I turned to the three women in the class whom I knew had questioned the Third Wave. I demanded that they leave the room. I explained why I acted and then assigned four guards to escort the women to the library and to restrain them from entering the class on Friday. Then in dramatic style I informed the class of a special noon rally to take place on Friday. This would be a rally for Third Wave Members only.

It was a wild gamble. I just kept talking. Afraid that if I stopped someone would laugh or ask a question and the grand scheme would dissolve in chaos. I explained how at noon on Friday a national candidate for president would announce the formation of a Third Wave Youth Program. Simultaneous to this announcement over 1000 youth groups from every part of the country would stand up and display their support for such a movement. I confided that they were the students selected to represent their area. I also questioned if they could make a good showing, because the press had been invited to record the event. No one laughed. There was not a murmur of resistance, quite the contrary. A fever pitch of excitement swelled across the room. "We can do it!" "Should we wear white shirts?" "Can we bring friends?" "Mr. Jones, have you seen this advertisement in Time magazine?"

The clincher came quite by accident. It was a full page color advertisement in the current issue of Time for some lumber products. The advertiser identified his product as the Third Wave. The advertisement proclaimed in big red, white and blue letters, "The Third Wave is coming." "Is this part of the campaign, Mr. Jones?" "Is it a code or something?" "Yes. It's" "Now listen carefully."

"It's all set for tomorrow. Be in the small auditorium ten minutes before 12:00. Be seated. Be ready to display the discipline, community,

and pride you have learned. Don't talk to anyone about this. This rally is for members only."

STRENGTH THROUGH UNDERSTANDING

On Friday, the final day of the exercise, I spent the early morning preparing the auditorium for the rally. At eleven thirty students began to ant their way into the room; at first a few scouting the way and then more. Row after row began to fill. A hushed silence shrouded the room. Third Wave banners hung like clouds over the assembly. At twelve o'clock sharp I closed the room and placed guards at each door. Several friends of mine posing as reporters and photographers began to interact with the crowd taking pictures and jotting frantic descriptive notes. A group photograph was taken. Over two hundred students were crammed into the room. Not a vacant seat could be found. The group seemed to be composed of students from many persuasions. There were the athletes, the social prominents, the student leaders, the loners, the group of kids that always left school early, the bikers, the pseudo hip, a few representatives of the school's dadaist click, and some of the students that hung out at the laundromat. The entire collection however looked like one force as they sat in perfect attention. Every person focusing on the T.V. set I had in the front of the room. No one moved. The room was empty of sound. It was like we were all witness to a birth. The tension and anticipation was beyond belief.

"Before turning on the national press conference, which begins in five minutes, I want to demonstrate to the press the extent of our training." With that, I gave the salute followed automatically by two hundred arms stabbing a reply. I then said the words "Strength Through Discipline" followed by a repetitive chorus. We did this again, and again. Each time the response was louder. The photographers were circling the ritual snapping pictures but by now they were ignored. I reiterated the importance of this event and asked once more for a show of allegiance. It was the last time I would ask anyone to recite. The room rocked with a guttural cry, "Strength Through Discipline."

It was 12:05. I turned off the lights in the room and walked quickly to the television set. The air in the room seemed to be drying up. It felt hard

to breathe and even harder to talk. It was as if the climax of shouting souls had pushed everything out of the room. I switched the television set on. I was now standing next to the television directly facing the room full of people. The machine came to life producing a luminous field of phosphorus light. Robert was at my side. I whispered to him to watch closely and pay attention to the next few minutes. The only light in the room was coming from the television and it played against the faces in the room. Eyes strained and pulled at the light but the pattern didn't change. The room stayed deadly still. Waiting. There was a mental tug of war between the people in the room and the television. The television won. The white glow of the test pattern didn't snap into the vision of a political candidate. It just whined on. Still the viewers persisted. There must be a program. It must be coming on. Where is it? The trance with the television continued for what seemed like hours. It was 12:07. Nothing. A blank field of white. It's not going to happen. Anticipation turned to anxiety and then to frustration. Someone stood up and shouted.

"There isn't any leader is there?" "Everyone turned in shock. first to the despondent student and then back to the television. Their faces held looks of disbelief.

In the confusion of the moment I moved slowly toward the television. I turned it off. I felt air rush back into the room. The room remained in fixed silence but for the first time I could sense people breathing. Students were withdrawing their arms from behind their chairs. I expected a flood of questions, but instead got intense quietness. I began to talk. Every word seemed to be taken and absorbed.

"Listen closely, I have something important to tell you." "Sit down." "There is no leader! There is no such thing as a national youth movement called the Third Wave. You have been used. Manipulated. Shoved by your own desires into the place you now find yourself. You are no better or worse than the German Nazis we have been studying."

"You thought that you were the elect. That you were better than those outside this room. You bargained your freedom for the comfort of

discipline and superiority. You chose to accept that group's will and the big lie over your own conviction. Oh, you think to yourself that you were just going along for the fun. That you could extricate yourself at any moment. But where were you heading? How far would you have gone? Let me show you your future."

With that I switched on a rear screen projector. It quickly illuminated a white drop cloth hanging behind the television. Large numbers appeared in a countdown. The roar of the Nuremberg Rally blasted into vision. My heart was pounding. In ghostly images the history of the Third Reich paraded into the room. The discipline. The march of super race. The big lie. Arrogance, violence, terror. People being pushed into vans. The visual stench of death camps. Faces without eyes. The trials. The plea of ignorance. I was only doing my job. My job. As abruptly as it started the film froze to a halt on a single written frame. "Everyone must accept the blame No one can claim that they didn't in some way take part."

The room stayed dark as the final footage of film flapped against the projector. I felt sick to my stomach. The room sweat and smelt like a locker room. No one moved. It was as if everyone wanted to dissect the moment, figure out what had happened. Like awakening from a dream and deep sleep, the entire room of people took one last look back into their consciousness. I waited for several minutes to let everyone catch up. Finally questions began to emerge. All of the questions probed at imaginary situations and sought to discover the meaning of this event.

In the still darkened room I began the explanation. I confessed my feeling of sickness and remorse. I told the assembly that a full explanation would take quite a while. But to start. I sensed myself moving from an introspective participant in the event toward the role of teacher. It's easier being a teacher. In objective terms I began to describe the past events.

"Through the experience of the past week we have all tasted what it was like to live and act in Nazi Germany. We learned what it felt like to create a disciplined social environment. To build a special society. Pledge allegiance to that

society. Replace reason with rules. Yes, we would all have made good Germans. We would have put on the uniform. Turned our head as friends and neighbors were cursed and then persecuted. Pulled the locks shut. Worked in the "defense" plants. Burned ideas. Yes, we know in a small way what it feels like to find a hero. To grab quick solution. Feel strong and in control of destiny. We know the fear of being left out. The pleasure of doing something right and being rewarded. To be number one. To be right. Taken to an extreme we have seen and perhaps felt what these actions will lead to. we each have witnessed something over the past week. We have seen that fascism is not just something those other people did. No, it's right here. In this room. In our own personal habits and way of life. Scratch the surface and it appears. Something in all of us. We carry it like a disease. The belief that human beings are basically evil and therefore unable to act well toward each other. A belief that demands a strong leader and discipline to preserve social order. And there is something else. The act of apology.

"This is the final lesson to be experienced. This last lesson is perhaps the one of greatest importance. This lesson was the question that started our plunge in studying Nazi life. Do you remember the question? It concerned a bewilderment at the German populace claiming ignorance and non-involvement in the Nazi movement. If I remember the question. it went something like this. How could the German soldier, teacher, railroad conductor, nurse, tax collector, the average citizen, claim at the end of the Third Reich that they knew nothing of what was going on. How can a people be a part of something and then claim at the demise that they were not really involved? What causes people to blank out their own history? In the next few minutes and perhaps years, you will have an opportunity to answer this question."

"If our enactment of the Fascist mentality is complete not one of you will ever admit to being at this final Third Wave rally. Like the Germans, you will have trouble admitting to yourself that you come this far. You will not allow your friends and parents to know that you were willing to give up individual freedom and power

for the dictates of order and unseen leaders. You can't admit to being manipulated. Being a follower. To accepting the Third Wave as a way of life. You won't admit to participating in this madness. You will keep this day and this rally a secret. It's a secret I shall share with you."

I took the film from the three cameras in the room and pulled the celluloid into the exposing light. The deed was concluded. The trial was over. The Third Wave had ended. I glanced over my shoulder. Robert was crying. Students slowly rose from their Chairs and without words filed into the outdoor light. I walked over to Robert and threw my arms around him. Robert was sobbing. Taking in large uncontrollable gulps of air. "It's over." "it's all right." In our consoling each other we became a rock in the

Remembering the 3rd Wave

by Leslie Weinfield

Peninsula, September 1991

Although the specter of fascist resurgence seems largely forgotten in the euphoria of German reunification, it may not be far beneath the peaceful veneer of that nation, or any other, for that matter. Even the most ostensibly free and open societies are not immune to fascism's lure - including places like Palo Alto.

What came to be known as the "Third Wave" began at Cubberly High School in Palo Alto as a game without any direct reference to Nazi Germany, says Ron Jones, who had just begun his first teaching job in the 1966-67 academic year. When a social studies student asked about the German public's responsibility for the rise of the Third Reich, Jones decided to try and simulate what happened in Germany by having his students "basically follow instructions" for a day.

But one day turned into five, and what happened by the end of the school week spawned several documentaries, studies and related social experiments illuminating a dark side of human nature - and a major weakness in public education.

Before students arrived for class on Monday, Jones vigorously cleaned his classroom and arranged the desks in unusually straight rows.

stream of exiting students. Some swirled back to momentarily hold Robert and me. Others cried openly and then brushed away tears to carry on. Human beings circling and holding each other. Moving toward the door and the world outside.

For a week in the middle of a school year we had shared fully in life. And as predicted we also shared a deep secret. In the four years I taught at Cubberly High School no one ever admitted to attending the Third Wave Rally. Oh, we talked and studied our actions intently. But the rally itself. No. It was something we all wanted to forget.

<http://www.vaniercollege.qc.ca/Auxiliary/Psychology/Frank/Thirdwave.html>

He dimmed the lights and played Wagnerian music as students drifted in for class. Then Jones, a popular instructor who normally avoided even such regimentation as taking roll, told his students that he could give them the keys to power and success - "Strength Through Discipline."

"It was thoroughly out of character for Ron Jones to say "Let's help the class out with a little more discipline," recalls a former student Philip Neel, now a television producer in Los Angeles. But because Jones was an interesting teacher, the class went along.

Classmate Mark Hancock remembers Jones adding a political cast and a set of incentives soon thereafter. "It was something like, if you're a good party member and play the game well, you can get an A. If you have a revolution and fail, you get an F. For a successful revolution, you get an A," recounts Hancock, currently a regional development director for a Los Angeles property company.

Jones next commanded the class to assume a new seating posture to strengthen student concentration and will: feet flat on the floor, hands across the small of the back, spines straight. And he added speed drills, after which the entire group could move from loitering outside the room to silent, seated attention in less than 30 seconds.

“Even when we started with Strength Through Discipline, it was easy for me to see the benefits of the posture,” remarks Steve Coniglio, who now helps run a Truckee retail store. “Even on that very first day, I could notice that I was breathing better. I was more attentive in class.”

Jones closed the first day’s session with a few rules. Students had to be sitting at attention before the second bell, had to stand up to ask or answer questions and had to do it in three words or less, and were required to preface each remark with “Mr. Jones.”

“At the end of that day, I was grandly happy. I mean, it seemed to work and everyone seemed to get into it,” Jones still marvels. Grades were based on participation, and no one accepted the study hall alternative that Jones offered prior to commencing the exercise that day. But neither did anyone make a connection to the German history lessons they’d just completed. “Most of us were headed toward college,” says Hancock. “It wasn’t Nazi German life that mattered, it was Palo Alto grades.”

Jones says he assumed the class would return to its usual format the next day. “But when I came in, the class was all sitting...” His voice trails off as his body snaps to military attention.

Jones considered calling a halt, but then went to the blackboard and wrote “Strength Through Community” below the previous day’s slogan, “Strength Through Discipline.”

“I began to lecture on community - something bigger than oneself, something enjoyable. They really bought that argument,” Jones recalls.

A powerful sense of belonging had sprung up among lowly sophomores at the bottom of the rung of the three-year school, and Jones admits he soon became a part of the exercise as well as its leader.

“It was really a mistake, a terrible thing to do. My curiosity pulled me in at first, and then I liked it. They learned fast, didn’t ask questions. It was easier as a teacher.”

As his Strength Through Community lecture ended, he created a class salute by bringing his right hand toward his right shoulder in an outwardly curled position, resembling a wave.

Jones named it the Third Wave, and - despite its similarity to Third Reich - claims he borrowed the term from beach folklore, which holds that the last wave in every series of three is the largest.

Students acknowledging each other this way in the halls attracted the attention of upper classmen, who clamored to know the salute’s significance, Coniglio says. Cubberley students began skipping their regular classes, asking to be part of the Third Wave. In three days Jones’ class had expanded to 60 students.

After telling the enlarged class that “strength is fine, now you must act,” Jones assigned everyone a task to be completed that day. Some were to memorize the names and addresses of everyone in the group; others were to make Third Wave banners, armbands and membership cards. And since that day’s theme was “Strength Through Action,” everyone was to proselytize.

By day’s end Coniglio says banners were all over the school, including a 20 footer in the library. Members brought in some 200 converts from other classes to be “sworn in.”

“It just swept through the school,” recalls Jones, who is still teaching, now at the San Francisco Recreation Center for the Handicapped. “It was like walking on slippery rock...by the third or fourth day, there was an obvious explosion of emotion that I couldn’t control.”

Several boys were assigned to “protect” Jones as he walked the school’s corridors, wearing Third Wave armbands to signify their responsibility.

“It was a black band. When I went home, it got my parents worried,” says Steve Benson, now a Palo Alto mechanic. “They thought it was the equivalent of the SS.” Although his mother called Jones to express her concern, the teacher reassured her it was merely a class exercise.

Everyone involved in the Third Wave received a membership card, three of which Jones randomly marked with an X. Those holding the marked cards were told to note who transgressed class rules, which now dictated such matters as what campus paths members could walk and with whom they could associate.

“There were three or four stoolies,” Jones explains bluntly. “I wanted to see how this was being taken outside of class.”

By the end of four days, approximately half the class had approached Jones with detailed information about the transgressions of others, ranging from improper salutes to coup plots against him.

“It was phenomenal. There was a whole underground of activity. People were assigning themselves as guards,” Jones says. “I knew exactly what was going on in class because of this strange snitching that was going on.”

There was betrayal among teens who had been close friends since childhood. A group of buddies could be sharing a cigarette in the bathroom, discussing a plan to “kidnap” Jones the next day and fulfill the exercise’s requirement for a top grade, but “it wouldn’t happen,” say Coniglio. “Somebody - one of those two or three - would inform Ron Jones of the plot.”

This is exactly what happened to Hancock, who told several friends he had bought a cap pistol to school to earn an A with mock assassination. Jones gave him a stern look in class while reminding the group of the penalties for disloyalty; Hancock dropped the ideas and to this day cannot identify his betrayer.

“Jones was able to stop a lot of lines of communication between people. That’s how he made his power. He was keeping us under his thumb very effectively,” say Hancock.

Jones also selected an official but anonymous “secret police” group to help enforce Third Wave rules in and out of school. These students enjoyed the assistance of a tough, leather-jacketed campus car club known as The Executors, who had been attracted to the Third Wave. Both groups - along with regular Third Wave members - denounced their classmates for a raft of real and imagined transgressions.

“The paranoia was really strange,” Coniglio says. “People were finking, and you had to make your own choice that way - whether you would tell.”

In addition to the names supplied by student enforcers, Jones would also pull “indictments” from his shirt pocket - slips of paper from which he would then read names and alleged offenses, Hancock says.

No matter who fingered them, the accused stood immediately. A few were let off, but many were convicted by a class shouting, “Guilty!” and sent into library exile. Mistrust blossomed even there. Hancock recalls an acquaintance later telling him she thought he’d turned her in because she was “caught” a day after they had a brief, innocuous conversation.

Hancock subsequently asked Jones about the indictments, only to learn the accusations were usually fabricated. “Not only did he cause us to convict our peers, he’d just pick a name and get ‘em convicted,” say Hancock. “As long as that level of fear was there, the system was working.”

Adding to the ferment was the dawn of antiwar activism. Third Wave meeting announcements and instructions on daily activity were read over the P.A. system, regularly followed by calls for revolution or radical social change. The polar extremes only added to the confusion of the teens, from many of whom a Vietnam draft call was looming.

“You were either radical or you weren’t. You couldn’t be in the middle. Perhaps we were ready to be molded,” Coniglio shrugs. “We were caught between extremes that were getting all the attention.”

Something of an underground existed within the Third Wave, but Hancock says it had as much effect as protesting against the Nazi regime in Germany.

One of the underground’s main problems was that Jones kept changing the rules established early in the experiment, and simply ignored several attempts at the revolution whose perpetrators had been promised an A. Hancock says some desperate conspirators even considered a mass “hit” with Mattel machine guns concealed in lunch bags, but Jones got wind of it and rescheduled the student assembly at which the assassination was to have taken place.

By the fifth day, the sheer volume of student migration to Jones' class was disrupting normal school routines and raised his concern that matters had gotten out of control.

Besides reports about students who failed to salute properly, Jones received word that three of the exercise's biggest skeptics were about to get beaten up. All three had told their parents about the Third Wave; one family's rabbi even called Jones at home with questions, but accepted Jones' vague answers without delving too deeply.

"I was hoping he would come in with a tremendous amount of rage," say Jones. "I kept hoping someone would walk in and ask what was going on, so I could point to them and say, 'That's right, look what you're doing, you've become just like fascists' and end it. But it didn't happen."

Some parents did warn their children not to attend the class, which only reinforced student desires to participate, says Coniglio.

For his part, Jones easily disposed of the few polite parent inquiries by describing the Third Wave as a class exercise. Even teachers at the school did not question it while it was going on, he notes.

Jones decided he had to end the experiment immediately, but without losing the point of the lesson. He had the three skeptics escorted to the library for their own safety, and then told those remaining that the Third Wave was more than an exercise, that it was more than just a game.

In fact, Jones said, they were a local cell of a select youth movement recruiting students nationwide. More than 1,000 such groups would rise up during a special noon rally that day to support a national presidential candidate, one who would announce a Third Wave Youth Program to bring the country "a new sense of order, community, pride and action."

By noon, students were crammed into the lecture hall, backs ramrod straight, eyes riveted to a television set in the front of the room. With the car club toughs guarding the door, Jones led the group in chants and salutes for the benefit of

several friends he had posing as reporters and photographers.

Then Jones dimmed the lights, snapped the television set on and left the room.

Students waited with rapt attention for a vision of the future, but the screen stayed blank.

"Everybody's eyes began to go like this," Hancock says, darting his eyes frantically from side to side. After looking around a few minutes, Hancock says he realized in a daze that "there weren't any bodyguards, there wasn't any Jones. We were all just sitting at discipline."

For Coniglio, the gray faces staring at the gray screen triggered his most potent image of World War II - the gas chambers.

"I thought, 'My God, we're all dead.'" He yelled, "I'm getting out of here," and ran for the back doors, which he thought would be locked like in the concentration camp ovens. But the doors opened, and Coniglio was surprised to encounter a normal spring day at lunch hour. "Music was coming from the quad, flowers were blooming and a warm breeze was blowing."

Back inside, Jones returned to shut off the television and take a position at a microphone on stage, while a movie montage of World War II scenes flashed onto a large screen behind him.

"There is no Third Wave movement, no leader," he told the stunned audience. "You and I are no better or worse than the citizens of the Third Reich. We would have worked in the defense plants. We will watch our neighbors be taken away, and do nothing," Jones said, referring to the three skeptics exiled to the library for the crime of disbelief. "We're just like those Germans. We would give our freedom up for the chance of being special."

Neel remembers that "everybody just sat there a long time. Then everyone went their own way. No one wanted to talk about it. I think I remember a couple of people sitting there, not moving."

"Nazi is always a dirty word when you're growing up, but when you get hit with it, that you've become one, it's a very shocking statement."

Several students were crying. Barbara Miller Moore, a Third Wave member who did not attend the rally, recalls seeing several people walking away in shock. "Steve was pale," she remembers of Coniglio. "I was worried about him. He as always exceptionally sensitive. I didn't know what would happen to him."

The salutes ended with the rally; membership cards turned to litter and attention to Vietnam. But memories of the one-week experiment remain strong 25 years later.

"It hurts so much when I realized I'd been so fooled, but then, that was the lesson," remarks Coniglio. Upon subsequent reflection, he says he realized "it was one of the most valuable lessons I've ever had in my life. How often are you - as a 16 year old- not only able to learn about history, but to participate in it?"

Although Neel remembers feeling frightened before the rally and the thought of linking up with a national movement, he says peer pressure overcame his doubts, along with his regard for Jones and the climate of the times.

"A big reason I went along with it was my trust for Jones," Neel says. Moreover, he "was just beginning to feel bitter about Vietnam, and part of the experiment seemed like we could change the government responsible for hurting us. There was a feeling something really remarkable was going to happen, going on throughout the country - that the movement was going to change politics, change the structure of school. The combination of everything made it happen, and boy, did it happen."

For student Alyssa Hess Reit, the conclusion of the Third Wave experiment led to some heartfelt compassion and empathy for the Germans. "It seemed very clear that if a bunch of high school students from Palo Alto who had everything - nothing to lose - could be so easily pulled in, knowing it was just a game, it was clear what it must've been like for real people losing jobs and families," she says. "That's not to say there weren't ways to resist or that they couldn't, but we didn't even know how to go about it."

Reit says she knows of no one who was damaged by the Third Wave. Jones "helped wake us up, and I've always been grateful," she

comments. "Good experiences aren't necessarily pleasant. I've often thought about it, and I'm glad I had it. I would want my kids to have it."

Many parents also supported Jones and the exercise, regardless of whether they had children involved. They went to bat for him two years later, when he was denied tenure for reasons ostensibly unrelated to the Third Wave.

"Jones was an outstanding and creative teacher whose principal effort was to teach children to think for themselves," says Joseph Pickering, an interested parent. "Jones had excellent character and the highest motives."

The experiment generated a great deal of debate among Jones' fellow teachers, however, with several arguing it was not his place to expose students to such emotional wrenching.

"To a certain extent, they were right," Jones agrees, although he considers any negative impacts to have been temporary and the risks worthwhile.

Bernard Oliver, president of the school board that denied Jones tenure, objected to Jones' teaching style for different reasons.

"We were upset with his performance largely because the subject matter was not being taught. If you weren't concerned about basic values, his teaching was OK. It's easy to load up classes with excitement, things kids like. While this impresses many parents, it can also be one-sided and far removed from traditional values," Oliver adds.

Jones' Third Wave also caught the attention of Stanford University psychologist Philip Zimbardo, whose famous prison experiment several years later resulted in college students lapsing into sadism and eventual emotional breakdown after being assigned the role of guard in prison.

"Situations exert much more influence over human behavior than people acknowledge," explains Zimbardo, who has invited Jones to speak to classes many times.

Although the tendency runs counter to Western ideas of individual responsibility, Zimbardo

points to two real-life incidents to prove his point - the U.S. massacre of civilians at My Lai, and postwar tests conducted on concentration camp guards that revealed no subsequent propensity for violence.

“It’s an unpleasant message people don’t like to hear. But unless you’re aware of the vulnerability, you don’t recognize how easy it is for simulation to become reality, for the uniform to dominate the person.”

Third Wave veterans agree.

“When he started rewarding people, I could see how that goes a long way toward influencing them,” Neel says. “I could see how people would be susceptible to that kind of behavior and would go along with it. You want to please your teachers, your peers and you don’t want to fail.”

Although Jones says he would never repeat the Third Wave, he insists it could easily happen today, anywhere in the United States, for a variety of reasons.

“Fascism is always a possibility because it’s so simple and people are frustrated. They lose their jobs, their dignity, their sense of worth, and someone comes along and says, “I’ve got the answer.”

School systems prepare the ground, Jones says by using only standardized tests for success and failing to recognize alternative paths of learning, as well as a wider variety of individual achievements.

Educational institutions weed out troublemakers and those who are difficult to teach, he contends, rewarding placid students who want to succeed at any cost and will accept authority.

“That’s the sad thing. Teachers can trigger it by telling students they’re special, they’re part of a community, that they can do special things. All they have to give is their loyalty,” Jones concludes. “It happens every day in school, only the paraphernalia isn’t there. Kids aren’t learning to ask questions. You create a population where freedom’s just a spelling word.”

<http://www.ronjoneswriter.com/wave.html>