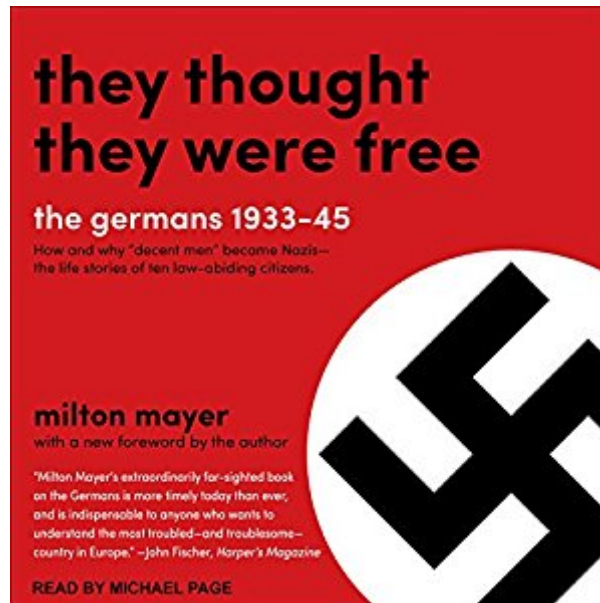




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# They Thought They Were Free: The Germans, 1933-45



## Synopsis

First published in 1955, *They Thought They Were Free* is an eloquent and provocative examination of the development of fascism in Germany. Milton Mayer's book is a study of 10 Germans and their lives from 1933-45, based on interviews he conducted after the war when he lived in Germany. Mayer had a position as a research professor at the University of Frankfurt and lived in a nearby small Hessian town which he disguised with the name "Kronenberg". "These ten men were not men of distinction," Mayer noted, but they had been members of the Nazi Party; Mayer wanted to discover what had made them Nazis.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I loved this book so much, I bought a few more copies and gave them to my friends. The first-hand narrative of an American professor who went to live in Germany for a year in 1954. He lived in a small town and became friends with 10 ordinary German men, all of whom were members of National Socialist party before the WWII. He narrated their conversations about the reasons to become Nazi members, their opposition or support of Hitler's regime, the way of life in Germany before and during the rise of Nazi, and how the populist regime, combined in a perfect storm with other circumstances lead to the WWII.

Milton Mayer writes wonderful profiles of ten Germans who lived through the Third Reich. His analysis is very human; compassionate, yet to some extent damning. I liked Mayer in these chapters, but liked him less in the opening and closing chapters when he writes, not so much about

the individuals caught up in the war, but about the nations involved and especially the United States. Mayer joins other Blame-the-USA critics in imagining some better(undetermined) solution to winning WWII than bombing Dresden and Tokyo, let alone Hiroshima and Nagasaki! Mayer is a wonderful writer and thinker. I'd like to read his other book, What Can a Man Do? If you have a chance to read They Thought They Were Free, you will not be disappointed!

The times require we revisit the lives of these men. As this book reveals, Fascism doesn't just happen one day. It is a slow deliberate process which appears to have started to gain traction in 21st Century America.

Reading this was a fascinating venture into the minds of regular every-day Germans of the period. If you've ever wondered, "How could civilized people go along with all that?", you will find some answers in this book. The author interviews 10 regular folk for an answer to that question. Their answers will challenge your views of what "freedom" really means. For me, I had just read two different biographies of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, so I was disappointed to see so little in "Free" about the Confessing church, although DB does get a mention.

To learn from history, it's not enough to understand events. It's critically important to understand human weakness -- and how quickly our institutions and ideals can fail us. This book is both surprising and unsurprising. To read it is to understand that not only can it "happen here", but it can happen more quickly and easily than we might imagine.

This needs to be in every library. This needs to be in every home. If you can read this without having to drop it on your lap every so many pages and gasp, "that's us, now!" then likely, you are lost to reason and freedom.

Fascinating look at Germans and Germany ten years after the end of WW2. Written in 1955 this work by a professor trying to find out where the average German was, has some messages for us today.

This cold war era study, an analysis of attitudes toward Nazism by its recent practitioners, while dated, has a good deal to teach. The German national character of the 1950s was quite different from the modern-day, reunited nation. It's a cautionary tale, as well as a thought provoking one

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