

Nazi Germany Was Highly Educated

There's a persistent temptation for modern societies to identify education with formal schooling.

America seems to have fallen into that temptation. Education today is almost wholly associated with school, and improvements to education are focused on raising proficiency scores, helping students meet "standards," and designing a more efficient system.

It is [often claimed](#) that the accomplishment of the above goals can solve poverty, inequality, and make for a smarter society and a "smarter planet."

However, we should bear in mind that improving formal schooling itself is no guarantee of an enlightened society. Even if our education system raises students' literacy and numeracy (which would be great!), that won't necessarily result in better people. In fact, it may result in worse people.

On this score, Nazi Germany serves as a historical admonition to us. In his [review](#) of Amos Elon's *A History of Jews in Germany*, Steven Zipperstein writes of the rise of Nazism:

"This all occurred in what was, or at least seemed by the late 19th century to be, Europe's most cultivated, certainly its best-educated country. Germany had the world's finest elementary school system, the highest literacy rate and the best universities; by 1913 more books were published annually in Germany than in any country in the world. Its technical skill, its industry, its relentless business savvy (a trait, interestingly, commonly associated at the time with both Germans and Jews) marked it off as among modernity's singular successes. The Weimar era [1919-1933], the German Jewish

sociologist Karl Mannheim boasted, represented a new Periclean age. Soon he, like so many others fortunate enough to survive, had to flee for his life."

When a society associates education almost solely with formal schooling, methods, and standards, it will eventually end up with what C.S. Lewis called "Men without Chests" or what someone else referred to as "more clever devils." Actually, I think the former prepares the ground for the latter.

As Allan Bloom lamented in his bestselling *The Closing of the American Mind*, "Fathers and mothers have lost the idea that the highest aspiration they might have for their children is for them to be wise." We want a society that produces wise men and women, not merely schooled ones.