

How Fascism Takes Root in a Democratic Society

by Alon Stein

On a nice autumn Sunday afternoon, we gathered on Zoom to watch the documentary “Lesson Plan, The Story Of The Third Wave” about the 1967 Palo Alto High School experiment in fascism, which was followed by a presentation by extremism disengagement consultant Jeff Schoep.

The documentary is about an experiment called The Third Wave, which took place at Cubberley High School in Palo Alto, California.

Ron Jones was a history teacher at Cubberley High School. Instead of lecturing about how children got indoctrinated into the Hitler Nazi Youth, he decided to do a demonstration of how it could happen in America.

In a nutshell, by creating a sense of belonging and exclusion, and by disciplining the students through chants like “strength through discipline,” “strength through community,” and “strength through action,” in five to eight days there were students recruiting other students, students fist fighting with other dissenting students and student reporters, and students acting as goon Gestapo bodyguards.

In the documentary movie, the students involved in the experiment are interviewed, along with the teacher Ron Jones, who returned to the school after being away for nearly 40 years.

Two of Mr. Jones’s former students, Philip Neel and Mark Hancock, produced the documentary. They were present to answer questions from Decalogue participants on issues such as a lack of disclosure and/or informed consent, and whether or not they believed some other teacher not as popular as Ron Jones could have gotten the results that Mr. Jones obtained. They stated the experiment was probably unfair, especially because there are long-term effects to the participants that remain for some.

Next, Jeff Schoep, a former leader of the National Socialist movement spoke. He gave a presentation called “Inside White Nationalism: A Look at Neo-Nazism In America.” He spoke about how people get radicalized, why, and what can be done to change hearts and minds.

The main theme of his presentation was that many white nationalists get radicalized because they mistakenly believe they are doing something honorable and noble. They feel that that they are defending their people from “the other.” Everyone wants to feel needed and if someone starts disagreeing with the group, that person is thrown out. Hate is present but it is not often the sole reason for joining such a group, but rather the mistaken belief that one is doing something good due to fear that they are at risk of losing something in their reality.

By changing such perceptions, ideas can be changed, which is what caused Mr. Schoep to leave the National Socialist movement. It has also led him to shift his focus from leading hate groups to getting others out of hate groups.

All in all, both the documentary and Jeff Schoep’s presentation were eye opening.

It was a great way to spend a Sunday afternoon.

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Learn More About the Program and the Presenters

For more information about the Wave experiment visit <https://www.lessonplanmovie.com/watch/>

What is Ron Jones doing now? Find out at <https://www.thewavehome.com/>

Visit Mark Hancock’s page at <https://www.markhancock.com/>

More about Philip Neel at <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0624167/>

Learn more about Jeff Schoep’s efforts to counter extremism at <https://beyondbarriersusa.org/>