



Destined to Witness: Growing Up Black in Nazi Germany

By Hans J. Massaquoi

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This is a story of the unexpected. In *Destined to Witness*, Hans Massaquoi has crafted a beautifully rendered memoir -- an astonishing true tale of how he came of age as a black child in Nazi Germany. The son of a prominent African and a German nurse, Hans remained behind with his mother when Hitler came to power, due to concerns about his fragile health, after his father returned to Liberia. Like other German boys, Hans went to school; like other German boys, he swiftly fell under the Fuhrer's spell. So he was crushed to learn that, as a black child, he was ineligible for the Hitler Youth. His path to a secondary education and an eventual profession was blocked. He now lived in fear that, at any moment, he might hear the Gestapo banging on the door -- or Allied bombs falling on his home. Ironic, moving, and deeply human, Massaquoi's account of this lonely struggle for survival brims with courage and intelligence.

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Destined to Witness: Growing Up Black in Nazi Germany By Hans J. Massaquoi Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #94133 in Books
- Brand: Massaquoi, Hans J.
- Published on: 2001-02-06
- Released on: 2001-02-06
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.00" h x 1.08" w x 5.31" l, .89 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 480 pages



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In a unique addition to the literature of life under the Third Reich, Massaquoi, a former managing editor of Ebony magazine, chronicles his life as the son of a German nurse and Al-Haj Massaquoi, the son of the Liberian consul general to Germany. Soon after his birth in Hamburg in 1926, the author's father returned to Liberia to bolster his family's failing stature in national politics, leaving his wife and son to grapple with everyday life amid the rise of fascism in Germany. The Reich's racial politics were so steadfastly drummed into German schoolchildren that the young Hans quickly acquired an anti-Semitic outlook only to realize that he was also subject to discrimination as a non-Aryan. He sought intellectual escape from German nationalism through reading books by Jules Verne, Arthur Conan Doyle and James Fenimore Cooper; in his idealization of African-American athletes Joe Lewis and Jesse Owens; and by learning how to play jazz and his involvement with the "swingboys" officially condemned as purveyors of "degenerate" music and dance. Massaquoi and his mother survived both Nazi rule and the devastating 1943 British bombing of Hamburg. He tells of life after the war, of befriending black American soldiers, of moving to Liberia in 1948 and of his subsequent move to America in 1950, where he came to feel that racism was as prevalent as it had been under the Third Reich. Thoughtful and well written, Massaquoi's memoir adds nuance to our comprehension of 20th-century political and personal experience.

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From Library Journal

Massaquoi, the retired managing editor of Ebony, presents an unusual perspective on the Nazi era. The son of an "Aryan" mother and an African diplomat, he grew up in Germany on the wrong side of Nazi racial ideology, confronting not only the bigotry of his countrymen but the danger of Allied bombs on a nearly daily basis. Even after his postwar immigration to the United States and service with the U.S. Army in Korea, the author sees his life as one of witness to racial inequality. His journey from Nazi Germany to the post-Civil Rights United States makes for interesting reading, recounted with an eye for detail and a humanity that is appealing. Although there were many individuals like Massaquoi, few took the path he did, and probably few could write about it with such force. Recommended for public and academic libraries. *AFrederic Krome, Jacob Rader Marcus Ctr. of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati*

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From [Booklist](#)

Massaquoi, a man of mixed racial heritage, survived 12 years of Nazi terror in Germany during World War II. The son of a German mother and a Liberian father, he grew up in a country that became progressively obsessed with racial purity, where Massaquoi was unable to escape racist taunts and hostilities. He recalls his early, naive acceptance and even admiration of Hitler, even in the face of creeping racial animosities, primarily aimed at Jews but slowly encompassing other non-Aryan people as well. By adolescence, embittered by his perpetual outsider status, Massaquoi had come to grips with the reality of his situation and that of his mother. Through sports figures Joe Louis and Jesse Owens, Massaquoi attached his racial identity to that of black Americans and became obsessed with coming to the U.S. After the war, he settled temporarily in Liberia with his father's family before journeying to the U.S. and eventually becoming a reporter with *Ebony* magazine. Massaquoi's background and experiences provide incredible context to this personal story of overcoming racism. *Vanessa Bush*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Shelia Lopez:

This Destined to Witness: Growing Up Black in Nazi Germany book is simply not ordinary book, you have it then the world is in your hands. The benefit you receive by reading this book is actually information inside this e-book incredible fresh, you will get details which is getting deeper a person read a lot of information you will get. That Destined to Witness: Growing Up Black in Nazi Germany without we realize teach the one who studying it become critical in pondering and analyzing. Don't always be worry Destined to Witness: Growing Up Black in Nazi Germany can bring whenever you are and not make your handbag space or bookshelves' turn out to be full because you can have it in your lovely laptop even telephone. This Destined to Witness: Growing Up Black in Nazi Germany having very good arrangement in word in addition to layout, so you will not sense uninterested in reading.

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