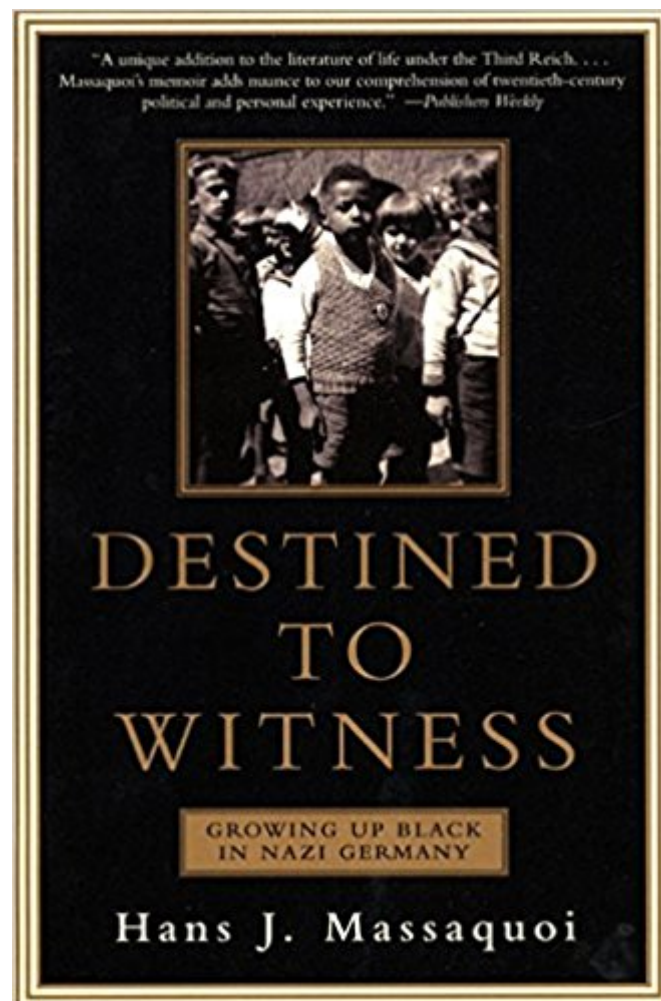




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# Destined To Witness: Growing Up Black In Nazi Germany



## Synopsis

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. Ironical, moving, and deeply human, Massaquoi's account of this lonely struggle for survival brims with courage and intelligence.

## Book Information

Paperback: 480 pages

Publisher: William Morrow Paperbacks (February 6, 2001)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0060959614

ISBN-13: 978-0060959616

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 1.1 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars 191 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #114,331 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #95 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Europe > Germany #208 in Books > History > World > Jewish > Holocaust #247 in Books > History > Europe > Germany

## Customer Reviews

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. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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. A Frederic Krome, Jacob Rader Marcus Ctr. of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Hans Massaquoi's book "Destined to Witness" was especially interesting. The conditions under which he had to survive as a black child, born to a white mother, growing up when Nazism invaded Germany, were extremely difficult. Being black and living in Germany in the 1920s under a totalitarian and racist system and subjected to the dehumanizing conditions was a herculean challenge however, it did not prevent him from trying to belong even though the odds were against him. Imagine living a country which denies your existence bereft of any humanity. Its like swimming upstream where each day is filled with uncertainty and dystopia. The love and the courage demonstrated by his mother and extended family, as well as from some of his schoolmates and neighborhood friends, provided some solace and comfort. His was a difficult life in transition. His migration to the United States began a successful journey where his journalistic career blossomed and excelled to new heights. All the better to begin life anew. Great read. Bruce E. McLeod, Jr. 25

March 2015 Las Vegas, Nevada

This memoir grabbed my attention in a way that usually only a novel would. The author tells a very personal story of himself as a child in a difficult family situation that interweaves with and parallels an entire society's upheaval. A black Liberian father (son of an ambassador) and a white German mother (working class) start the story in post WWI Germany. The author weaves evocative detail into this tale of a dark-skinned child growing up in Hamburg with a single mother who battles to protect her son from discrimination as Hitler rises to power. The author speaks with both human and pathos as he describes his teenage years in a nation going to war for Aryan supremacy. He brings to life the horror of the bombing of Hamburg and the brutal struggle for food and shelter that he shared with many Germans in post-war Germany. His adventures and misadventures with American servicemen in Germany and then with his Liberian family in Africa bring another layer into sociological insights offered to the reader. The story wraps up in the USA, pulling the threads of historical trends into more recent decades. A well-told tale from a unique perspective. Highly recommended.

A very lucky man takes us out onto the knife's edge of his life. His smart, well-grounded mother provides the security needed for a mixed race child to survive Nazi Germany. Those of us for whom the second world war is history can benefit from this man's journey through the rise of Nazi Germany, the war years, and the contrast of life in Liberia, then America. Luck and his sensible mother give him an insider/outsider view; here is a man who could have been crushed into self-loathing or killed by racists at several points in his life, but he keeps his head, he makes a wonderful life for himself, and he proves all the weird bigotry wrong, again and again. A well-written memoir. The author applies his journalist's training on his life to provide an insightful examination of the Nazi regime. He presents his life and it becomes clear that regardless of the hate propagated in the culture, he comes out a rather strong, flexible, and cheerful man. He looks at the inverted racism and corruption of Liberia without the embarrassment or shame that some would project. He remains convinced that America is the true land of the free, except in the southern states. Even when that idyllic vision is wiped away by the casual bigotry of some of the Americans he meets, he loves America for its high aims. He celebrates the potential that America represents for him. In truth, it is his large family that gives him the glow that shines through his entire story. In the darkest days he and his mother find a way to live with dignity.

The question "how was it possible" - becoming and believing in Naziism - this book certainly shines a light on how all aspects of life were permeated with subtle as well as blunt messages to do, become and believe all that was "party line". Hans J's description of the every day life of ordinary citizens, albeit many working class, in this strategically major German seaport city of Hamburg, was keenly observed and beautifully delivered. Throughout the different phases of his life he brought into focus much of what we know and much of what we did not know as well as did not want to concern ourselves with. His astute assessment of many of life's conditions as he experienced them is well described and must be applauded for his concise deliverance.

This is a real life saga of a black man growing up in prewar and post war (WWII) Germany. Massaquoi was born of a German mother and a Liberian father. Massaquoi's grandfather came to Germany after World War I as a diplomat. In this memoir, Massaquoi details his life lived on three continents. Life as a non-Aryan in Nazi Germany was uncertain and harrowing. His life in Africa, was interesting and allowed him to reconnect with his father and his African relatives. Africa brought him closer to his ultimate goal...America.

This is a first hand account of a bright resilient black child's life in Germany shortly before, during and after the Nazi's reign. This is not a dark book although there are clearly some mean people and evil elements in the book. Hans and his fiercely loving and protective white German mom live as ordinary citizens - almost. You experience the German school system, city life, rural life and the growth of the all pervasive all powerful Nazi propaganda machine all through the eyes of a growing boy. You also see his ultimate determination to escape Germany and make his fortune in America. Although this is a true story it reads with the ease of a great fiction novel. This is an incredibly interesting book!

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