

The German Democratic Republic: *Jugendweihe* (1959)

Abstract

In the GDR, the *Jugendweihe* (a kind of secular confirmation ceremony) was an emotionally and politically charged ritual that aimed to introduce young people to the new socialist state and anchor them to the new order. The following late-1950s newsreel reportage on the subject opens with a quote from GDR politician Walter Ulbricht about the Buchenwald concentration camp. This production decision is telling, insofar as it suggests that the GDR saw itself as “the better German state,” or as the state that was not the legal successor to the Nazi state. A political-public ritual, the *Jugendweihe* also represented a private rite of passage from childhood to youth; it was a celebration that brought gifts and an opportunity to dance with adults, with the radio as a symbol of technical progress for the future. This reportage was from *Der Augenzeuge* [*The Eyewitness*], a newsreel produced in the GDR by the state film company DEFA.

Source

The Eyewitness 1959_B 32

Jugendweihe 1959

Jugendweihe candidates from the district of Genthin visit the National Memorial in Buchenwald. There, at the site of the murder of Ernst Thälmann, who remains unforgotten, the boys and girls vowed to work on behalf of the socialist future.

Ceremony in Berlin.

National Prize winner Professor Hänselmann officially welcomed the *Jugendweihe* candidates into adulthood and wished them success and joy in the next chapter of their lives.

With her family present, Siegrid Undeutsch's *Jugendweihe* was an unforgettable experience. The first congratulants were the representatives of her apartment building's residential community; they added their present to the table of gifts.

Siegrid wants to become a physical education teacher. Daddy and Mummy wished their daughter much creative inspiration and success. The first dance was of course with Siegrid, who will always remember her *Jugendweihe*.

Source: *Der Augenzeuge* 1959/B 32 (GDR newsreel): *Jugendweihe* candidates visit Buchenwald; *Jugendweihe* in Berlin with Professor Hänselmann; original: 35mm film, digitized. All newsreels from *Augenzeuge* are available online at: <https://progress.film>

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