

# New York's Nazi town: For years it had streets named after Hitler and Goebbels and hedges trimmed into swastikas. Now you 'STILL have to be Aryan to live there'

 [www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3311303/New-York-s-Nazi-town-years-streets-named-Hitler-Goebbels-hedges-trimmed-swastikas-Aryan-live-there.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3311303/New-York-s-Nazi-town-years-streets-named-Hitler-Goebbels-hedges-trimmed-swastikas-Aryan-live-there.html)

- Yaphank is just 60 miles from **New York City** but has a historic Nazi past
- It was the unlikely outpost of the Third Reich with street names named after Adolf Hitler and Goebbels

There is no sign left of Adolf Hitler Street, nor Goebbels Street or Goering Street. The swastika-shaped garden hedge and swastika stonework above a residential front door have also gone.

Nothing remains to indicate to the casual visitor that this unremarkable-looking rural corner of New York's Long Island has an extraordinary history.

Where parades of black and brown-uniformed fascists dressed like the stormtroopers of Hitler's feared SS once marched behind the flags of the Nazi Party, now children play and men mow lawns.

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Philip Kneer and Patricia Flynn-Kneer are suing the GASL after they learned about shocking restrictions on the sale of their home.

One local, Courtney Peters, a 22-year-old nurse, explains that her community's disturbing past is 'more of a joke round here than an embarrassment'. Yet a fascinating new court case has come to haunt them.

She's sitting outside her grandmother's home in Park Boulevard — once Adolf Hitler Street, but long since renamed.

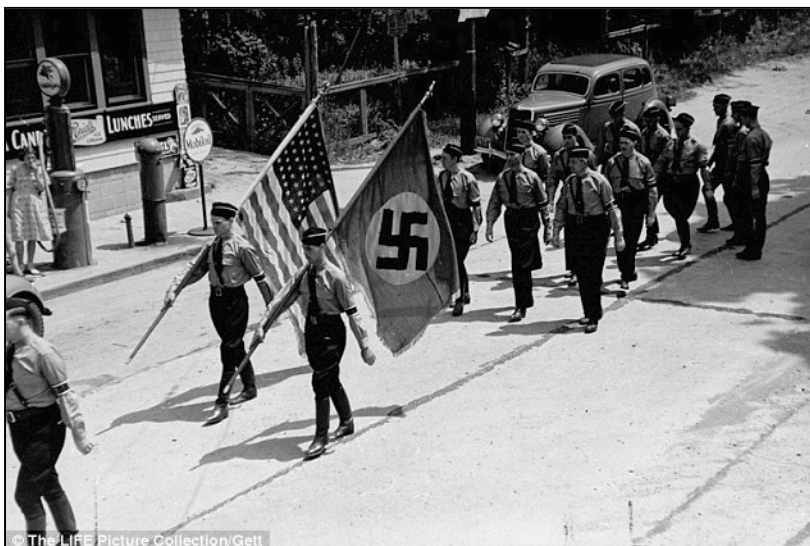
Miss Peters's family have lived here for four generations — German-Americans, like most of her neighbours. Has she ever asked her grandmother about the old days? She shakes her head.

Perhaps best not. Although Yaphank, a hamlet of some 6,000 people, is just 60 miles from New York City, and not far from the millionaires' summer playground of The Hamptons, it was once the unlikeliest outpost of the Third Reich.

The neighbourhood of German Gardens was set up in the Thirties to house American Nazis, adults and children, who flocked in their hundreds to attend a summer camp, where they basked in the dubious delights of American-tinged National Socialism.

At the time, there was nothing too shocking about Camp Siegfried. German-Americans were by far the country's biggest single ethnic group, isolationism was rife and the U.S. seemed a long way from war with Germany.

After World War II broke out, the U.S. government seized the land, but its owner, a community organisation called the German-American Settlement League (GASL), later managed to wrestle back control of much of the site.



Although they have long since been changed, the town used to have street names dedicated to Hitler and Goebbels. There is no sign left of Adolf Hitler Street, nor Goebbels Street or Goering Street. The swastika-shaped garden hedge and swastika stonework above a residential front door have also gone.

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The dystopian scenario of America's east coast being taken over by victorious Nazi Germans was famously imagined by Philip K. Dick in his 1962 novel *The Man In The High Castle*, which has now been turned into a TV series. For some Yaphank residents, the programme might feel a little too close to home.

Indeed, one local couple say the community's ugly history is far from dead and buried. Philip Kneer and Patricia Flynn-Kneer are suing the GASL, which re-named Camp Siegfried as Siegfried Park, and owns the land on which the Kneers' house and some 50 others are built.

The couple accuse the organisation of 'racially divisive housing policies', which stop them from selling their home to anyone who isn't white and of German extraction.

In court documents that seem astonishing to find in 21st-century America, the couple reveal that the GASL still cherishes the notorious 'sig' rune, a Nazi symbol used by both the SS and Hitler Youth.

Pictures submitted by the Kneers show the league logo — a single sig rune with a spade running through it — on the league's headed paper and decorating the top of a flagpole in the community clubhouse.

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In their court submission, the Kneers emphasise their point by including pictures from the Thirties of fascist Italian Blackshirts parading past a giant swastika flag at a Camp Siegfried rally, as well as a copy of the GASL constitution.

Its first listed objective is to 'introduce, cultivate and propagate in every direction true Germanic culture and to cultivate the German language, customs and ideals'.

Membership, says the constitution, is primarily open to adults of 'German extraction, and of good character and reputation'.

The Kneers bought their two-bed bungalow in Siegfried Park for the knockdown price of \$70,000 in 1999. There was but one significant proviso — they had to prove they were of German descent and join the GASL.

The Kneers say they repeatedly asked the league to change its restrictive rules, but were told that members wanted to keep Siegfried Park 'the way it is'.

Keen to check on their racial claims, senior league members even visited Mrs Flynn-Kneer's Berlin-born mother and conducted part of the interview in German. The league's former president asked to meet the young couple.

'He wanted to see what I looked like,' says Mrs Flynn-Kneer, who — like her husband — is white. Whether or not they were alarmed by such behaviour, the house was an absolute bargain and they bought it.

Though they were struck, they say, by the fact that the neighbourhood was entirely white and a neighbour's black boyfriend was not made welcome, the Kneers lived in the house until they had their second child and decided it was time to move to a bigger home.

They first tried to sell the house in 2006 but, under the strict rules drawn up by the league, they were not allowed to advertise it beyond the organisation's members' newsletter.

Any buyer, they said, had to be sponsored by a current member of the league and accepted by a majority vote. When the Kneers tried to take out a loan so they could extend their Siegfried Park home, banks refused to lend money on a house that sat on land owned by someone other than the couple.

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The Kneers say they repeatedly asked the league to change its restrictive rules, but were told that members wanted to keep Siegfried Park 'the way it is'. The Kneers are being backed in their legal action, in which they are claiming undisclosed damages, by a Long Island housing advocacy group.

The Kneers say they felt imprisoned in a repressive community that was intent on staying white and German. 'You feel like a caged animal here,' said Mr Kneer, before moving his family out of their home last month.

'It's terrible for everyone — for the kids, for us and even for our dogs.'

Senior members of the league admit their cosy hamlet is almost completely white, but insist they have parted ways with their Nazi past.

Robert Kessler, the settlement league's president, claimed the Kneers were simply 'bitter' because they hadn't got the price they wanted for their home. He admitted his organisation's rules were 'antiquated', but said members had voted against changing them.

Mr Kessler dismissed some of the more sinister-sounding behaviour of league members cited by the Kneers, such as scrutinising their ethnic background, as the behaviour of old guard members who were gradually being replaced by younger residents.

Other residents insist German-themed celebrations no longer extend beyond three annual parties in the Bavarian-style clubhouse, outside which a frayed national German flag still flutters below a Stars & Stripes on the flagpole.

But Mr Kessler's insistence that 'most people don't even know any of this happened here' is way off the mark. It has been a standing joke on Long Island for years that, for all the talk of old Nazis hiding out in South America, the biggest nest of them was right under America's nose.

As recently as 1995, local politicians in Long Island's Suffolk County voted to expunge the official records of any reference to Yaphank's Nazi past, an outrageous attempt to airbrush history. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the plan never got past state legislators

Camp Siegfried and its surrounding Nazi-themed residential streets were set up in 1935 by the league, which was an offshoot of the German-American Bund, a quasi-military nationwide organisation set up to promote Nazism. The Bund ran camps across the U.S. but, being so close to New York, Camp Siegfried had a special significance.

Membership was open to 'national-minded American citizens of Aryan blood'. Every summer, hundreds of Nazi sympathisers, adults and children would descend on the camp from across New York state, attracted by the promise that 'you will meet people who think like you do'.

Catching a special early morning Camp Siegfried train from Manhattan's Penn Station, they would be greeted at Yaphank Station by massed ranks of uniformed Bund members, giving the Nazi salute as the train pulled in.

Young members dressed in a uniform modelled on the Hitler Youth and were given training. When they weren't strutting around in their smart uniforms, adults would listen to lectures on Nazi ideology in areas such as eugenics and the wickedness of the Jews. While the Bund members were careful not to be seen carrying weapons openly, they would get rifle training as an affiliate of America's National Rifle Association.

They also drank heavily, shocking witnesses by the amount of beer they put away in the camp bar.

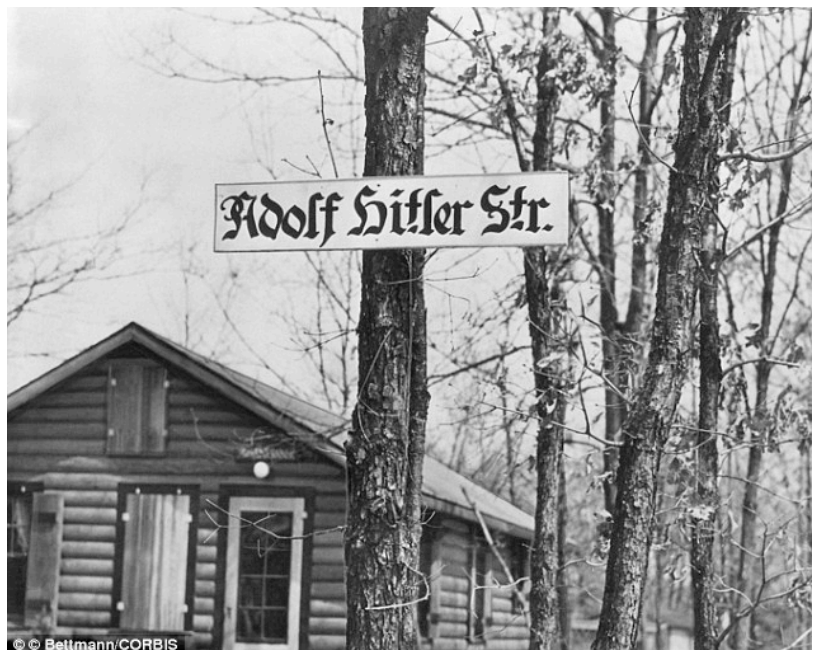
Paris pictured in 1940 after it was seized by Nazi forces following a rapid attack from Germany

After so much Aryan merry-making, Siegfried Park has a lonely, forlorn feel today. The parade ground, where aspiring stormtroopers would march up and down past giant banners of the U.S. and Nazi Germany, still remains. The old clubhouse, once festooned in swastika flags, is gone.

A couple of street names still honour famous Germans — the poet philosopher Friedrich Schiller and the composer Johann Sebastian Bach.

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Whatever happens in the Kneers' court case, there will be some who won't thank them for reminding Americans of a chapter in their history they would rather forget.



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