

4 | I

Volume 4 | Issue I | March 2020

A Quarterly Journal
Humanities and Social Sciences
Young Scholars Worldwide

The Schola



9 772508 783006

ISSN 2508-7835

The Schola | Volume 4 | Issue I | March 2020

Editor: Eva M Shin

Publisher: Veritaum

Editorial contact: editorial@theschola.org

Cover design: Leo Solluna

© 2016, The Schola. All rights reserved. *The Schola* (ISSN 2508-7835) is an online journal published quarterly by Veritaum. Use of this digital material is governed by the terms and conditions set out by *The Schola*. Essays published in the journal may not be republished, photocopied, or reproduced without the prior written permission of Veritaum. A subscription purchases access to the journal, but not the intellectual property rights in it. The publisher has the sole right to make copies or allow them to be made, apart from the exceptions allowed by law, such as fair dealing.

This issue was typeset on a MacBook Air, using Microsoft Publisher.

For further information on *The Schola*, visit our website: www.theschola.org.

CONTENTS

Volume 4 | Issue I | March 2020

<i>History</i> Fascist Fashion: Women's Style under the Third Reich	1
	<i>Tara Shayegan '20</i> BASIS Scottsdale Arizona, USA
<i>History</i> The Edelweiss Pirates	17
	<i>Esther Li-Chen '20</i> BASIS Scottsdale Arizona, USA

Fascist Fashion: Women's Style under the Third Reich

Tara Shayegan '20
BASIS Scottsdale
Arizona, USA

Abstract

This fashion history is fairly new in academia, and much of the economic, social, and political dimensions of clothing remain to be explored. Knowledge of fashion under the Third Reich and what fashion shows about the Nazis is still inadequate. My research has revealed that sources on fashion, particularly on women's style under Hitler's rule, are scarce. This paper is expected to fill the gap in connecting gender studies, fashion history, and Nazi Germany. In this research, I analyzed primary source images, a video, multiple articles on Nazi gender roles, and a book on women's clothing under the Nazis. By examining the Nazis' failure to popularize a natural look, the traditional German dirndl dress, and the independent German fashion, we can learn more about Hitler's and female civilians' values.

Introduction

Fashion has played a defining role in economic, social, and political interpretations of groups of people. It shows the collective "tensions and moods in the land."¹ Clothes show occupation, social status, nationality, and the period of the wearer. It identifies the individuality and specific values of people. The power of clothing and its importance in history had long been dismissed until Valerie Steele, a well-known fashion historian, published an article called "The F

¹ Irene V. Guenther, *Nazi Chic? Fashioning Women in The Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford International Publishers, 2004), 8.

Word,” which discusses how fashion had been looked down upon by historians.² Many scholars denied seeing fashion in a serious way. The view of fashion history has now evolved and many have learned to see the significance of clothing in academia. In this essay, I will discuss the place of fashion within the spheres of culture, politics, and economics in the Third Reich. The Nazis tried to create an image for all women to follow, which was a natural motherly woman wearing a German folk dress. Although the Nazis tried to enforce traditional gender roles, which aligned with the clothing, in reality, women were dressed very differently. The Nazis failed to create a coherent practical German fashion for women. There was a large gap between propaganda and reality, which developed to show that by the end the Nazis were very unclear and contradictory with fashion and gender policy.

Context

During WWI the fashion debate established a competition for decades between the French and German. There was an “overwhelming French influence in Germany,” but when WWI broke out tensions rose between the French and the Germans not only in the political world but also in the fashion industry.³ In Germany, nationalism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism increased, which intertwined with the idea that the morality of women on the home front needed to be preserved. Many Germans believed they needed an independent patriotic style that separated them from France.

Morality tied nationalism and clothing together in Germany during and after WWI, as more people connected inappropriate dress to being unpatriotic and immoral.⁴ Women were encouraged to show chastity and patriotism through their clothing, which meant to “pull away” from inappropriate “degenerate” French clothing and instead express a “matriarchal” role as a “wife and mother.”⁵ However, as more women entered traditionally male-dominated jobs during the war, the demand to become a mother became impractical.⁶ While this was going on, different organizations and fashion magazines were made to create a unique national German fashion. The *Elegante Welt* was a popular magazine that attempted to create and spread German

² Ibid., 7.

³ Ibid., 24.

⁴ Ibid., 35.

⁵ Amanda Bradley, “Nazi Fashion Wars: The Evolian Revolt against Aphroditism in the Third Reich,” Part 1 (2011): 1, <https://www.counter-currents.com/2011/01/nazi-fashion-wars-part-1/>.

⁶ Guenther, *Nazi Chic?*, 37.

clothing designs and the *Verband* was an organization that helped the international reputation of German fashion.⁷

As industrialization and mass consumerism spread throughout Germany after WWI, all parts of society seemed to reflect “massive dislocations, heightened social anxieties, and deepened cultural concerns.”⁸ In the Weimar Republic, the notion of the New Woman, an independent modern woman with short “boyish” hair and an overall “masculinizing” look, emerged.⁹ The famous German silent film star, Marlene Dietrich, is a perfect example of masculine looks.¹⁰ In most of her photos, she is seen with very short hair, traditionally men’s clothing (pants), and very apparent makeup. The Weimar period was a time for many women to embrace their own “individuality” and not be seen as “symbolic objects,” but instead be seen as an independent person.¹¹ Women found themselves to be liberated, physically (from their painful corsets), symbolically, and sexually. They strayed away from the traditional mother and wife role and instead expressed their individuality by working. The “boyish haircut, loosely fitted clothing, and slim ankles” became popular and women’s curves were deemphasized by low waistlines on dresses and “bras designed to flatten.” The 1920s saw the rise of the hemline and the disappearance of the waistline. Also, as seen in images of Dietrich, “pants showed up in women’s daytime wear” and the “masculinization” of women’s clothing popularized.¹² The fashion trends for the New Woman paralleled women’s social role in Germany at the time. “Fashion was under explosive development and of utmost cultural importance in the modernization of Germany.”¹³ Women’s fashion had never broken from hundreds of years of traditional gender roles. Clothing paralleled with the social and economic situation of women in Germany as seen from the gender imbalance in the labor force due to the aftermath of WWI.¹⁴ When women were working in male-dominated jobs for the first time, they created a style that helped them live life much easier. The loose-fitted

⁷ Ibid., 45.

⁸ Ibid., 54.

⁹ Andrea Kollnitz, “Women in Weimar Fashion: Discourses and Displays in German Culture, 1918–1933 by Mila Ganeva,” *Fashion Theory* 17, no. 3 (2013): 382, <https://doi.org/10.2752/175174113x13597248661909>.

¹⁰ Bridey Heing, “Marlene Dietrich: The femme fatale who fought social and sexual oppression,” *CNN Style*, June 19th, 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/style/article/marlene-dietrich-dressed-for-the-image/index.html>.

¹¹ Kollnitz, “Women in Weimar Fashion,” 383.

¹² Guenther, *Nazi Chic?*, 57.

¹³ Kollnitz, “Women in Weimar Fashion,” 384.

¹⁴ Guenther, *Nazi Chic?*, 64.

clothing and pants helped them move easily and the short hair “would not necessitate much time or upkeep.”¹⁵ Many mainstream trends that Germans wore did not set in completely with the German population until the mid-1920s, because of the economic state at the time and hyperinflation. Once the economy began to revitalize, international fashion came back to German consumers.

During the Weimar period, there were four main critiques made of the New Woman’s look. People criticized the blurring of gender in women’s clothing for being too “masculinized,” Americanized, French, and Jewish.¹⁶ Many men at the time frowned upon the masculinization of women’s clothing. Women’s advancement in education, political rights, and role in the workplace tied to masculinizing clothing, which threatened many men because it rejected the dynamics of traditional “heterosexual relationships.”¹⁷ Women and others who disagreed with this view claimed the New Woman encouraged women to develop their tastes and individuality. Some also critiqued the new fashions as being American, because the U.S. at the time represented modernism and had influenced Germany with American fashion, jazz, and Hollywood films.¹⁸ Additionally, anti-French sentiment had been around in Germany, especially after WWI and the French occupation of the Ruhr. Critics believed French fashion was “despicable” and they argued there was no real German fashion.¹⁹ The moral stance on this was that women should not fall for degenerate French “whore fashion.”²⁰ Anti-Semitism was also a reason for criticism because German Jews were very prevalent in the German fashion industry and played an essential role in the industry’s development in its later success.²¹ After WWI, many Germans blamed the Jews for their defeat. This stab-in-the-back theory reflected the anti-Semitism in Germany. Critics and later Nazis believed Jews could contaminate fashions and, thereby, German women. The ultimate reason why many criticized the German fashion landscape was that all the “social insecurities of the age,” especially after the horrific collective memory of WWI, connected the New Woman to “cultural degeneration and economic crisis.”²²

¹⁵ Ibid., 55.

¹⁶ Ibid., 53.

¹⁷ Ibid., 68.

¹⁸ Ibid., 70.

¹⁹ Ibid., 74.

²⁰ Ibid., 25.

²¹ Ibid., 81.

²² Ibid., 83.

The Woman's Role in Nazi Germany

As Hitler came to power in January of 1933, everyone began to be ideologically indoctrinated, including women, who were given a role from the beginning to follow. Most of the Nazi ideals for women were reactions to the New Woman, specifically rejecting the “cultural decay” of the Weimar Republic.²³ One of the main goals a woman should have had under Nazi Germany was born as many pure Aryan children as possible to expand the *Volks-gemeinschaft*. It limited personal freedom, as a person's body was “no longer considered their own,” and instead was seen as a tool to grow the German population.²⁴ As one historian puts it, “a woman sacrificed her body and life for the good of the Fatherland, in which they approach sex with the purpose of fulfilling national goals rather than pursuing their pleasure.”²⁵ While women during the Weimar period were able to experience the sex reform movement, in which sex was not just a form of procreation, women under Hitler were repressed by treating sex as a public service to their country and were seen as a “mechanical womb.”²⁶ Decreasing birth rates in 1933 made it a priority for Nazis to increase the population with indoctrinated racially pure children and to do this, Hitler “wiped out the boundaries between public and private life.”²⁷ Childless women were often “subjected to public stigmatization for working against the nation.²⁸ For the ideal Nazi woman, “fertility, not intellectual abilities, was the key.”²⁹ Her main role was to be a mother at home, focusing on the “children, kitchen, and church.”³⁰ The Nazis' traditionalism and anti-feminism very obviously contradicted the New Woman in the 1920s. Hitler in 1935 said in his speech to the *Frauenschaft*:

*When our opponents say: You degrade women by assigning them no other task than that of childbearing, then I answer that it is not degrading to a woman to be a mother. On the contrary, it is her greatest honor. There is nothing nobler for a woman than to be the mother of the sons and daughters of the people.*³¹

²³ Nicole Loroff, “Gender and Sexuality in Nazi Germany,” *Constellations* 3, no. 1 (2012): 51, <https://doi.org/10.29173/cons16286>.

²⁴ Loroff, “Gender and Sexuality in Nazi Germany,” 49.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 52.

²⁶ Charu Gupta, “Politics of Gender: Women in Nazi Germany,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 26, no. 17 (1991): 40, www.jstor.org/stable/4397988.

²⁷ Gupta, “Politics of Gender,” 46.

²⁸ Loroff, “Gender and Sexuality in Nazi Germany,” 58.

²⁹ Gupta, “Politics of Gender,” 95.

³⁰ Loroff, “Gender and Sexuality in Nazi Germany,” 50.

³¹ Gupta, “Politics of Gender,” 40.

Motherhood was promoted and encouraged and viewed as an honor as with the “Honor Cross” given to prolific mothers for their service.³² Additionally, women continued to be encouraged to leave the workforce, since work was too masculine and not seen as fit for a woman to do. The Nazis used a few tactics to get women out of their jobs. One of which was the “Law for the Reduction of Unemployment,” which would not give out marriage loans if the woman had paid employment.³³ It promoted marriage and motherhood, while also trying to get rid of the unconventional dynamics and values of women holding jobs. Also, the Nazis presented themselves as “protectors of sexual morality,” “naturalness and purity,” and traditional values. However, there was a surprising contradiction to the glorification of being a traditional stay-at-home wife, whose only duty is to her husband, children, and nation. One organization under Hitler called the *Lebensborn* exemplified the Nazis’ view on what a woman was. The *Lebensborn*, an SS-run organization, had the “purpose of impregnating” unmarried young German women to grow the population of the people’s community.³⁴ It was meant to manage the breeding of a superior Aryan race. Although bearing as many children for the Third Reich went along with party ideas, the *Lebensborn* went as far as to encourage pre-marital sex, which did not follow traditional values, showing how Hitler prioritized women more like mothers than wives.

The encouragement to become a mother was also tied to racial hygiene. Eugenics and racial sterilization were incorporated into Nazi Germany very quickly as seen when eugenic sterilization was legalized in the spring of 1933 and the Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring passed in the summer of 1933.³⁵ The goal of the Nazis was to create a *Herrenvolk*, which meant sterilization and abortion of the impure race were common. Abortions were not legal for ethnically German women, because the goal for them was to increase the racially superior German Volk. Therefore, the role of a German woman under Hitler was to bear elite Aryan children for the Third Reich as a mother and a wife, who only focuses on the sphere of the family. However, *Lebensborn* shows that at the end of the day, the Nazis prioritized motherhood more than traditionalism, abstinence, and marriage in some cases.

³² Guenther, *Nazi Chic?*, 98.

³³ Loroff, “Gender and Sexuality in Nazi Germany,” 57.

³⁴ Gupta, “Politics of Gender,” 47.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

The Unnatural Natural Look

Because women's style in the 1920s was related to masculinization, Jewish influence, French influence, and "poisonous" cosmetics, the Nazis wanted a natural look with no makeup or extravagance.³⁶ The Nazis discouraged "provocative dress, makeup, and unnatural hair" and instead encouraged an all-natural look with no makeup and fairly conservative clothing.³⁷ Cleanliness and simplicity were the main focus of the ideal Nazi woman. The Nazis looked up to the ancient Greeks and Romans because of a partly true belief that Germanic people were connected to them a long time ago. They also looked up to the Greeks and Romans because they believed it was the only time in history, unaffected by Jews and their poisonous influence. Romans did not believe in "unnatural embellishment" and cosmetics, because they liked preserving natural beauty. In ancient Greece, makeup was also seen as something for the "lower class." "Cosmetics, dying hair, and over-accessorizing" were all associated with "loose women" and sometimes Jews in Western society.³⁸ In the Third Reich, many magazines advocated for "minimal, natural-looking makeup" to create a healthy feminine image.³⁹ To the Nazis, an unnatural look was not Aryan, while a pure and natural look centered around the traditional Aryan worldview of identifying motherhood and femininity with women.

Many women in the Weimar era were attracted to the "vamp image," which had heavily made-up eyes, "bright red mouths," and thin eyebrows.⁴⁰ This was an obvious result of the influence of Hollywood actresses like Clara Bow, whose image reached Germany.⁴¹ However, the Nazis completely rejected this wanting a "healthy beauty" that reflects physical fitness and fertility.⁴² Many magazines like the NS-Frauenchaft advised on how to do a "naturally beautiful look" with makeup. Those same magazines gave tips on how to do makeup similar to popular American movie stars like Greta Garbo and Katherine Hepburn.⁴³ Tanning also became popular under

³⁶ Guenther, *Nazi Chic?*, 98.

³⁷ Bradley, "Nazi Fashion Wars Part 1," 3.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁹ Amanda Bradley, "Nazi Fashion Wars: The Evolian Revolt against Aphroditism in the Third Reich," Part 2 (2011): 4, <https://www.counter-currents.com/2011/02/nazi-fashion-wars-the-evolian-revolt-against-aphroditism-in-the-third-reich-part-2/>.

⁴⁰ Guenther, *Nazi Chic?*, 100.

⁴¹ Nicholas Barber, "Culture - Clara Bow: The Original 'It Girl'," *BBC*, December 29, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20141222-who-was-the-original-it-girl>.

⁴² Guenther, *Nazi Chic?*, 103.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 104-105.

the Nazis, but many women accomplished this with tan-colored hosiery; however, when there was a shortage of hosiery during the war, “tan-colored leg cosmetics were produced as a substitute.”⁴⁴ Nazi propaganda continued to push for naturalness in women, but many women during this time used unnatural techniques to achieve it. One question Guenther brings up in her book, *Nazi Chic?*, is why did the Nazis continue to feel necessary to create “anti-vamp” and “anti-cosmetics” propaganda when many designers in 1933 claimed there was a disappearance of this unnatural look?⁴⁵ The Nazis found it necessary because women in Germany still had not fully complied with these goals of the Nazi regime for women. Many women continued to use heavy cosmetics even though propaganda kept trying to force the natural look. Additionally, women aiming for the natural look often achieved it through unnatural ways. They did this by putting on makeup, doing sunless tanning, having hair permanent, and dyeing their hair a “shiny Nordic blonde.”⁴⁶ German women were going for the unnatural natural look, by aiming to look physically similar to what was on propaganda posters. Women, who were unable to conform to rigid standards, achieved the look through artificial means. When Eva Braun, Hitler’s mistress, heard there was a proposed ban on permanents and possible cosmetics, she demanded an explanation, which led Hitler to avoid an outright ban.⁴⁷ This example shows how many women, even one close to Hitler himself, were not open to completely discarding cosmetics. The Nazis failed to indoctrinate women on the ideals behind anti-cosmetics and unnaturalness, which connected to being a pure Aryan mother.

Rise and Fall of the Dirndl Dress

Nazi propaganda promoted the ideas of motherhood, naturalness, health, and “blood and soil,” which led to National Socialists offering their first fashion proposal.⁴⁸ The farmer’s wife was labeled the female ideal, who had no cosmetics, good physical health, and a simplistic manner while wearing a “handmade traditional folk costume.”⁴⁹ Nazi women’s clothing was the traditional dirndl dress, which was synonymous with beauty, energy, health, and productivity.⁵⁰ Nazis wanted the dirndl dress to return to fashion,

⁴⁴ Ibid., 106.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 101.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 105.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 106.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 108.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 109.

⁵⁰ Irene V Guenther, “Fascist and Nazi Dress,” *Love to Know*, <https://fashion-history.lovetoknow.com/fashion-history-eras/fascist-nazi-dress>.

partly for traditional rural values, but also to create a unique independent German fashion separate from the French. To have a truly authentic dirndl, Nazis claimed that they should be hand sewn to reflect “age-old custom.”⁵¹ They were supposed to spin the wool or linen threads, weave the fabrics, and sew their dress. One private film that is in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum shows raw footage of agriculture and rural living in Germany. The recording shows farmers taking care of their crops and near the end, a group of women can be seen chopping wood.⁵² The activities they are doing require lots of physical strength. They can all be seen wearing a tied scarf over their heads, modest rural peasant clothing that seems to give lots of room to move. In the video, one can tell that no one who works in the fields is wearing a traditional dirndl dress even though Nazis encouraged it repeatedly. The dirndl dress was very impractical for agricultural work and the costs of making a dress from scratch were straining for most rural families.⁵³ Also, the light, vibrant colors of dirndl dresses didn’t make sense in a rural setting. Many rural women wore darker fabrics because they would show much less dirt after working in fields.⁵⁴ The folk clothing Nazis wanted was not grounded in the reality of farm work and strict rationing during the war did not help the affordability of this look. Instead, most women had one folk dress that was saved for special occasions and festivals.

In urban areas, different takes on the dirndl dress became popular, but often were mass-produced and ready-to-wear clothing. Many magazines advertised the “Alpine look” to German women.⁵⁵ However, the dirndl dress was not the only style women were wearing. During the 1936 Olympics, it was seen as the perfect opportunity to show that German women were fashionable, unlike their stereotype. Magazines like *Die Dame* would consistently suggest the latest international styles for German women to keep up with the rest globally.⁵⁶ The dirndl dress reached its peak of popularity in early 1939 when the trend reached the United States to Hollywood actresses.⁵⁷ The dirndl dress made a mark in the international fashion scene but soon ended when politics caught up to the dirndl dress. Three years into WWII, the *NS Frauen-Warte* published an article

⁵¹ Ibid., 111.

⁵² “Agriculture in the 1930s, private films,” *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, 23:25, April 2015.

⁵³ Guenther, *Nazi Chic?*, 112, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn632584>.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 118.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 115.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 116.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 117.

encouraging the folk dress, while at the same time, a publication called *Deutsche Volkskunde* talked about the disappearance of the folk dress, claiming that weak old mothers were the only ones left wearing the dress.⁵⁸ The failure and death of the dirndl dress were due to its unrealistic demands from farm women and strict rationing among everyone, including urban women. Women in cities especially continued to wear the latest international trends, completely ignoring Nazi propaganda. What propaganda preached and what German women did were often two very different things.

The Aryanization of the German Fashion Industry

A belief existed among Nazis that Jewish women were “prone to excess and extravagance in their clothing,” with lots of makeup, jewelry, and influence from international styles, which the Nazis despised.⁵⁹ Jews had been prevalent in Germany’s fashion industry for quite a long time and Nazis believed that it was poisoning the German women directly. The “purification” of German clothing was caused by “anti-Semitism, radical nationalism, and economic considerations.”⁶⁰ Jews had visible success in German department stores and the *Konfektion* industry, ready-to-wear clothing. They were accused of monopolizing German fashion, producing “cheap, trashy clothing that degraded women, and brought ruin to small German businesses.”⁶¹ The Nazis created an anti-foreign, buy German campaign that told women buying only German products was a national duty everyone must follow.⁶² Popular clothing magazines like *Die Dame* and the *Elegante Welt* continued to display international trends and some furious denunciations accused them of being “Jewified.”⁶³ On April 1, 1933, the first Nazi-state-directed boycott against Jews began. It intended to force Jews out of the economy in favor of German competitors.⁶⁴ The event was important, because it began the process of Aryanization, transferring Jewish businesses to non-Jewish owners.

In 1933, an organization called Adefa was founded to remove Jews from the German fashion industry.⁶⁵ Adefa, Adebe, and the German Fashion Institute all had “virtually identical objectives” of

⁵⁸ Ibid., 119.

⁵⁹ Bradley, “Nazi Fashion Wars Part 2,” 2.

⁶⁰ Guenther, *Nazi Chic?*, 144.

⁶¹ Ibid., 144.

⁶² Ibid., 146.

⁶³ Ibid., 150.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 152.

⁶⁵ Bradley, “Nazi Fashion Wars Part 2,” 3.

breaking the “Jewish monopoly” and creating an independent German fashion.⁶⁶ As much as these organizations wanted an Aryan fashion industry, the deserved reputation of Jews in fashion, because of their quality and stylish designs, could not be completely ignored.⁶⁷ However, Adefa continued to push their efforts. In 1938, the organization created a labeling system, in which shops were “Adefa-designated” and had their sign in front of the stores. Also, the Adefa symbol was sewn into all clothing produced by Aryan hands.⁶⁸ The Adefa program also gave out generous bank loans and security bonds to Aryanized clothing stores.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, this did not stop many women from wearing Jewified international trendy styles.

For most Jews, Kristallnacht, the first outright large-scale violence towards Jews carried out by German civilians and the SA, sealed the fates for their businesses.⁷⁰ Massive pressure, propaganda, denunciations, firings, boycotts, economic sanctions, and systematic persecution led to the fashion industry being free of Jews. However, this had a devastating effect on the German economy, and the “little practical experience and design talent” of Nazis did not help.

⁷¹Although the Nazis succeeded in removing Jews from the fashion industry, it was an ultimate failure, because the organizations still failed to create a unique German fashion. There still was no clear definition of German fashion, because of influences from Paris. Also, Germany lost many of its most “knowledgeable, experienced, and gifted talents,” which led to the collapse of the German Fashion Institute, ironically.⁷² Even Magda Goebbels, the Propaganda Minister’s wife, complained that “elegance will now disappear from Berlin along with the Jews.”⁷³

Fashion Under the Ration

Soon at the beginning of WWII, German magazines replaced photographs of the enemy fashions, English and French, with Italian, Austrian, and German designs.⁷⁴ When German troops overran France in June of 1940, many designers saw it as a German fashion opportunity. However, in the long run, the fantasy to become the

⁶⁶ Ibid., 155.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 156.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 160.

⁶⁹ Bradley, “Nazi Fashion Wars Part 2,” 4.

⁷⁰ Guenther, *Nazi Chic?*, 164.

⁷¹ Ibid., 165.

⁷² Ibid., 201.

⁷³ Ibid., 161.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 204.

world's center of fashion after taking Paris did not last long because many German women faced severe rationing later on. Also, the event would do nothing to further the "unique German fashion."⁷⁵ Under the Germans, some French designers quickly became friendly with the Germans, while others simply left. The ones who stayed would sell "frivolous, excessive designs" to get back at the simple Germans.⁷⁶ German women continued to insist on wearing international and French styles, despite Nazi propaganda to the contrary. Some historians claim that German women's extravagance in clothing was a form of resistance and female agency, but this can be easily dismissed because women's motivations were not to resist the Nazis but more because of personal choice.

German magazines like *Die Mode* showed off "extravagant styles" with "fine wool," "silk crepe," and "fur hats trimmed in velvet."⁷⁷ However, these magazines were extremely unrealistic because of rationing and shortages that grew worse and worse during the span of the war. Shortages in insole leather, synthetic leather, and rubber sole supplies marked the beginning of fabric shortages.⁷⁸ Clothing cards with a point system of 100 were given out, in which a skirt cost 20 points and a winter coat cost the entire 100 points.⁷⁹ Clothing cards in 1942 did not necessarily mean they would get clothing, because "clothes rationing became purely theoretical. Clothing simply ceased to exist."⁸⁰ Women were encouraged to be creative with clothing by reusing fabrics like tablecloths, bath towels, and pillowcases. Recent widows were encouraged to dye their dresses black instead of buying a completely new ones.⁸¹ More and more attention was placed on hats for fashion because they could "perk up" an old dress. "Strips of material, old scarves, worn-out cloth napkins, wood shavings, and even newspaper" were used to create a fashionable hat.⁸² Because of severe rationing near the end of the war, the black market grew very popular among many Germans.

During WWII, a huge surplus of women joined the workforce again, when the men left to fight. After years of preventing women from working, opportunities opened again because of WWII. During the war, many contradictions between the mother figure and the

⁷⁵ Ibid., 207.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 211.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 212.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 216.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 217.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 220.

⁸¹ Ibid., 224.

⁸² Ibid., 227.

working-class woman grew. Education and labor opened up to women as seen by 1944, 49 percent of students in higher education were women, and most of those women studied in fields deemed inappropriate in Nazi ideology.⁸³ There was a growing number of women as “war auxiliaries, air defense volunteers, postal carriers, train conductors, and airplane repair persons.”⁸⁴ Because of the mobilization of women in the workforce, pants and culottes reappeared in fashion. They facilitated easy movement and felt comfortable for long shifts. The masculinization of women’s clothing that the Nazis despised came back.⁸⁵ The Nazis’ stance on pants had to be shelved for the time being, much like how their stance on the woman’s role had to be shelved.⁸⁶ Pants for women were a revolutionary idea, not only because of their practicality but also because women could wear the pants of their absent husbands or brothers and save resources.⁸⁷

Conclusion

In essence, the image of Nazi female fashion remained widely variable, unclear, and often contradictory. Generally, fashion did not align with the Nazis’ suggestions and pressures. Regardless of the push for the natural look, many women still used cosmetics and unnatural beauty methods. Although blood and soil propaganda offered the dirndl dress as the main German fashion, urban women continued to wear international styles and rural women did not find the dirndl dress to be practical. Even when organizations like Adefa succeeded in purifying German clothing, it damaged the German fashion world in the long run. During WWII, there still was no unique German fashion, and the masculinization of women’s clothing resurged even though Nazis despised the symbolic article of clothing for female agency. The Nazis failed to create a unique pure German fashion, separate from American, French, and Jewish styles. They also failed to enforce their gender policy of being a mother in the end, as seen from the high participation of women in higher education and the workforce, which were considered traditionally male areas.

Many German women dressed themselves in extravagant, wild, impractical, and fashionable clothing. Some argue that women’s

⁸³ Michelle Mouton. “From Adventure and Advancement To Derailment and Demotion: Effects of Nazi Gender Policy on Women’s Careers and Lives.” *Journal of Social History* 43, no. 4 (2010): 951, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40802012?seq=1>.

⁸⁴ Guenther, *Nazi Chic?*, 251.

⁸⁵ Guenther, *Nazi Chic?*, Plate 36.

⁸⁶ Mouton. “From Adventure and Advancement to Derailment and Demotion,” 941.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 252.

fashion choices were a form of resistance or even non-compliance to the National Socialists. An outrageous hat or new dress is sewn from an old tablecloth could be seen as a universal way of showing defiance against bleak and troubled times. However, they should not be interpreted as resistance because the motivations of these women may have had a wide range and each woman had her own choice. Some women may have been more involved with the Nazi party and still decide to be fashionable. For example, a female concentration camp guard indulged in hair dyes, cosmetics, and the latest styles.⁸⁸ This is not a form of resistance because women still helped the Nazis' cause.

⁸⁸ Guenther, *Nazi Chic?*, 273.

Bibliography

“Agriculture in the 1930s, private films.” *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, 23:25. April 2015.

<https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn632584>.

Bradley, Amanda. “Nazi Fashion Wars: The Evolian Revolt against Aphroditism in the Third Reich.” Part 1 (2011): <https://www.counter-currents.com/2011/01/nazi-fashion-wars-part-1/>.

Bradley, Amanda. “Nazi Fashion Wars: The Evolian Revolt against Aphroditism in the Third Reich.” Part 2 (2011): <https://www.counter-currents.com/2011/02/nazi-fashion-wars-the-evolian-revolt-against-aphroditism-in-the-third-reich-part-2/>.

Barber, Nicholas. “Culture - Clara Bow: The Original ‘It Girl’.” BBC. BBC, December 29, 2014.

<http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20141222-who-was-the-original-it-girl>.

Guenther, Irene V. “Fascist and Nazi Dress.” *Love to Know*.

<https://fashion-hist-ory.lovetoknow.com/fashion-history-eras/fascist-nazi-dress>.

Guenther, Irene V. *Nazi Chic? Fashioning Women in The Third Reich*. Oxford: Oxford International Publishers, 2004.

Gupta, Charu. “Politics of Gender: Women in Nazi Germany.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 26, no. 17 (1991): 40-48.

www.jstor.org/stable/4397988.

Heing, Bridey. “Marlene Dietrich: The femme fatale who fought social and sexual oppression.” *CNN Style*. June 19th, 2017.

<https://www.cnn.com/style/article/marlene-dietrich-dressed-for-the-image/index.html>.

Kollnitz, Andrea. “Women in Weimar Fashion: Discourses and Displays in German Culture, 1918–1933 by Mila Ganeva.” *Fashion Theory* 17, no. 3 (2013): 381–84. <https://doi.org/10.2752/175174113x13597248661909>.

Loroff, Nicole. “Gender and Sexuality in Nazi Germany.” *Constellations* 3, no. 1 (2012): 48-61. <https://doi.org/10.29173/cons16286>.

Mouton, Michelle. “From Adventure and Advancement to Derailment and Demotion: Effects of Nazi Gender Policy on Women’s Careers and

Lives.” *Journal of Social History* 43, no. 4 (2010): 945-71. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40802012?seq=1>.

Wipplinger, Jonathan O. “The Aural Shock of Modernity: Sam Wooding and Weimar Germany’s Experience of Jazz.” In *The Jazz Republic: Music, Race, and American Culture in Weimar Germany*, 51-83. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017. doi:10.2307/j.ctt1qv5n7m.6.

The Edelweiss Pirates

Esther Li-Chen '20
BASIS Scottsdale
Arizona, USA

Abstract

The general memory behind the rule of the Nazis from Hitler's rise as a prominent political figure to their ultimate loss in the Second World War has been one of tragedy and violence. As time has passed, the most common associations with the Nazis have been the Holocaust and the system of fear and terror. However, while it is important to remember the consequences of the Nazis' reign in Germany, it is also crucial to identify the few civilian resistance movements that aimed to work against the Third Reich, one of which was the Edelweiss Pirates. In the aftermath of World War Two, historians have debated the role and ideological convictions of the Edelweiss Pirates, creating a controversial legacy of the Edelweiss Pirates. This research delves further into the classification of the Edelweiss Pirates and argues that this civilian resistance movement's legacy should be one of inspiration and heroism.

Introduction

The Third Reich has been one of the turning points in the 20th century that still shapes the present through ideology and international relations. The tyrannical leadership, police state, and genocidal treatment of minorities have all contributed to the dark and tragic memory of Nazi Germany. Yet, despite the extremely anti-Semitic and radical values at the core of the regime, very few civilian resistance movements existed in Germany during Hitler's entire reign from 1933 to 1945. Swing Clubs, the Edelweiss Pirates, and the White Rose have been largely regarded as the three main civilian resistance movements

that occurred in the period without much influence from religion or ethnicity. The lack of civilian resistance was due to many factors, including economic prosperity, the Gleichschaltung, the Volksgemeinschaft, and, most importantly, the system of fear and terror that the Nazis cultivated. Such factors paired with the passive complacency of most of the German people allow for the quick assumption that all German civilians were perpetrators of the war crimes and violence surrounding the regime. However, the mere existence of such movements disproves such a claim. Thus, it is even more crucial to further study these few examples of civilian resistance to create a holistic understanding of the Third Reich and the memory that it left.

Additionally, while the three movements all posed significant threats to the Nazi party, especially its indoctrination efforts, the Edelweiss Pirates were the most significant in terms of their active years and their success during the war. However, the classification of the Edelweiss Pirates as a resistance movement has differed between both historians and authorities during and after the world war. American reports during the war define the Edelweiss as “loosely knit groups of... juvenile delinquents..., who ... have nothing to do, no place to go. There is no effective authority that might reeducate or rehabilitate them.”¹ This presents one possible view of the Edelweiss Pirates: teenagers who rebel against authority for no other reason than to cause trouble. Another possible view is that the Edelweiss Pirates were resistance fighters similar to those in the White Rose who worked to help the Allied forces against the Third Reich. This paper will delve further into the classification of civilian resistance movements, specifically with the Edelweiss Pirates, and the role of the Edelweiss Pirates in World War Two, aiming to answer the question, “How should historians approach the legacy of the Edelweiss Pirates?” Through an analysis of primary sources, propaganda, and historians’ opposing viewpoints, the Edelweiss Pirates’ legacy remains one of hope and perseverance during a terrifying and controlling regime in Germany.

The Edelweiss Pirates as a civilian resistance movement

To best analyze the memory of the Edelweiss Pirates, it is important to determine the group’s proper classification as a civilian resistance movement or not. By understanding the comparison

¹ Wayne Geerling, Magee, G. B., & Brooks, R. “Faces of Opposition: Juvenile Resistance, High Treason, and the People’s Court in Nazi Germany” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol 44, No. 2 (2013): 215.

between the two other resistance movements that were previously mentioned, it is possible to assess which classification the Edelweiss Pirates best fit into.

The importance of the civilian resistance movements lay in the refusal to contribute to the Nazi system because of beliefs that opposed typical Nazi ideology. However, Swing Clubs consisted of Hitler Youth members who would participate in jazz and swing clubs during their time off. Even though they were going against Nazi indoctrination and, thus, were resisting the Nazis in one aspect, it was extremely common for even the most heavily indoctrinated Hitler Youth members to resist the system in one way or another. Thus, it is normal to see spurts of rebellion from the majority of Hitler Youth members. Alfons Heck's *A Child of Hitler* exemplifies this when he describes his sexual encounter with his family's farmhand, Hanna. Although Heck initially felt that he was going against the Nazi party even after being thoroughly indoctrinated, he "gradually lost some of [his] guilt feelings."² While this was the only instance that Heck participates in himself, he mentions that other Hitler Youth boys acted upon their sexual urges as well, although they would continue to fight, and die, for the Nazi cause. When Heck was in charge of the sector in West Wall in 1944, "even the ugliest village girl had at least 10 admirers," and "some girls [inevitably] got pregnant," implying that they all rejected the Nazi idea of abstinence for more sexual activities.³ One of the most significant drawbacks in the information that Heck provides is that he is recounting his experiences from over forty years ago. He acknowledges that he had to use his "imagination to recreate conversations and to dramatize scenes" to make the autobiography more appealing to the everyday person, which was his audience.⁴

Even though Heck's narrative may not be wholly trustworthy in its specifics, he can be considered credible in recounting whether or not he – along with other Hitler Youth soldiers – participated in sexual activity. Such credibility stems from the lack of external incentives that would have encouraged him to include such details: it does not reflect poorly on him, it does not contribute much to the main narrative, and there was no fear of persecution or punishment for disclosing such information. Through Heck's account, it is evident that Nazi indoctrination was not thoroughly effective in some aspects,

² Alfons Heck, *A Child of Hitler: Germany in the Days When God Wore a Swastika*, (Phoenix, Arizona: Renaissance House, 1985), 52.

³ A. Heck, *A Child of Hitler*, 102.

⁴ Alfons Heck, *A Child of Hitler: Germany in the Days When God Wore a Swastika*, (Frederick, Colorado: Renaissance House, 1985), opening of *A Child of Hitler*.

especially sexual activity. Despite the resistance that was evident in the Hitler Youth, with both Swing Clubs and sexual activity, they continued to participate in the system of fear and coercion by following Nazi orders and fighting in the war. And, by participating in the system, the Hitler Youth members were indirectly supporting and furthering it. Therefore, the Swing Clubs can be dismissed as a significant civilian resistance movement regarding the classification of the Edelweiss Pirates. Instead, this research will focus mainly on the comparison between the White Rose and the Edelweiss Pirates to contextualize and classify the latter's role as a resistance movement.

Understanding the difference in tactics, ideology, and resistance between the White Rose, a recognized overt resistance movement and the Edelweiss Pirates will help with the assessment of the extent of resistance that the Edelweiss Pirates contributed.

The White Rose was led by Sophie and Hans Scholl, students at the University of Munich, from 1942 to 1943. They witnessed the violence and brutality of the Nazi regime on the Eastern front firsthand, and once they returned to the university, they immediately began writing and distributing leaflets opposing the militaristic control in the regime, which began after the first few German losses in the war in North Africa and Russia in late 1942. However, despite the group's origin being in the University of Munich, their reach went far past the campus from 1942 to 1943 when "thousands of people in South German cities found pamphlets in their mailboxes calling for resistance against the Nazi Regime." Furthermore, when the final, sixth leaflet was produced, it was given to the British, who proceeded to drop "more than 5 million copies over Germany in the fall of 1943" titled "A German pamphlet – a manifesto of the students of Munich."⁵ The White Rose's stance is best described in its "First Leaflet," in which the group critiques the "spineless, will-less herd of hangers-on" nature of German citizens, and encourages "every individual... [to] defend himself against the scourges of mankind, against fascism and any similar system of totalitarianism." They urge such individuals to "offer passive resistance – *resistance* – wherever [he or she] may be."⁶ In this leaflet, there is an evident connection between the White Rose's motives and actions with that of the Edelweiss Pirates. The "First Leaflet" advocates for Germans to fight

⁵ White Rose Foundation. *The White Rose*. 1st edition (Munich, Germany: 2006), 56. <https://www.bls.org/downloads/MFL/White%20Rose.pdf>

⁶ Hans and Sophie Scholl. "The First Leaflet." February 1943. http://www.whiterosesociety.org/WRS_pamphlets_first.html

against the Nazi government in any way possible, whether passive or overt and in doing so, would be a part of their resistance movement.

The purpose of the White Rose stated simply, was to stand up for the “right of the individual to choose his manner of life and to live in freedom.”⁷ Hans and Sophie Scholl accomplished such an idea by distributing leaflets in their university speaking against Hitler and the Nazis, while also refusing to participate in the expected activities as outlined by the ideology. More specifically, even before the White Rose was formed, the Scholls left the Hitler Youth despite the promotions Hans received, *fableinfubrer*, because he opposed the controlling and militaristic aspect of the organization.⁸ This background along with their beliefs and the distribution of leaflets contribute the most to their classification as a resistance movement.

Shifting the focus back to the Edelweiss Pirates by looking into the parallels between the White Rose and the Edelweiss Pirates, this research can best classify the group in terms of resistance movements. In an interview, Walter Meyer, a member of the Edelweiss Pirates, described the group as “anti-authority” because of the prevalence of “bad” authority in their lives, alluding to both the way he was raised and the nature of the Nazi government. However, he distinguishes between the anti-authoritarian motives and the anti-Hitler motives, since he was “too young to understand that.”⁹ But, Meyer also mentions the existence of older Edelweiss Pirates groups throughout Germany who “actually had ideological ideas,” implying that they might have been “anti-Nazi.”¹⁰ According to Meyer, his group in the Edelweiss Pirates was not motivated in the same ways as the White Rose. Instead of being anti-Nazi and anti-Hitler, the group was against any type of authority. However, in his description of the authority that he, along with the other Edelweiss Pirates, opposed, it was the Nazi government that had created the negative environment that they had rebelled against. On a deeper level, although they did not outright understand what they were resisting other than authority, such negative authority had been curated and implemented wholly by Hitler and the Nazis, and so, their hatred of this society was also a hatred of the Third Reich. Therefore, even if Meyer did not believe he had any anti-Hitler motivations, he knew he opposed the system, and

⁷ Inge Scholl. *The White Rose: Munich, 1942-1943*. Translated by Arthur Schultz, 2nd Ed., (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), 4.

⁸ Scholl, *The White Rose*, 10-12.

⁹ Walter Meyer. “Oral History Interview with Walter Meyer.” Interview by Katie Davis. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, August 2, 1996, audio, Tape #1. <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn504864>

¹⁰ Meyer, “Interview with Walter Meyer,” Tape #3.

therefore, he opposed the Nazis, just as Hans Scholl did when in the Hitler Youth.

Walter Meyer represents only one perspective on what motivated the Edelweiss Pirates, and the recounting of his story is limited by the large time gap between the real events and the retelling. Thus, it is possible that many other members did explicitly oppose the Nazi regime for similar reasons to the White Rose. For example, another Edelweiss Pirates member, Gertrud Koch, helped hide a Jewish musician and helped distribute leaflets “urging German soldiers to put down their weapons and come home,” reflecting what was said in the White Rose’s pamphlets. Although some Edelweiss Pirates may have only been anti-authority, others were also specifically anti-Nazi. This resistance was recognized by Cologne in 2005, the Edelweiss Pirates were officially recognized as “resistance fighters,” a label also applied to the White Rose.¹¹ Despite the ambiguity behind the motives and beliefs of the Edelweiss Pirates members, the White Rose and the Edelweiss Pirates were similar in both the act of resistance they committed – planning and spreading leaflets – as well as the passive resistance to much of Nazi Germany’s ideology. Therefore, in comparison to the White Rose, the Edelweiss Pirates was a civilian resistance movement during the Nazi regime.

World War II

Now that it is established that the Edelweiss Pirates were a significant civilian resistance movement, it is necessary to clarify what they did during the Second World War and the risks they faced. By looking into their role in the Second World War, it is possible to see the effectiveness of the Edelweiss resistance, which would further contribute to the legacy of the Edelweiss Pirates. The main acts of rebellion that the Edelweiss Pirates accomplished were leisure hiking and camping, sexual experimentation, the “Eternal War on the Hitler Youth,” assistance of German deserters, and the spread of Allied Propaganda. While most of the actions committed were done passively against the values of the Hitler Youth, the spread of leaflets against the Third Reich was the most significant in terms of attempting to urge others to take action and rebel, and the clearest example of assisting the Allies.

¹¹ Hannah Cleaver, “Teenage Rebels Who Fought Nazis are Honoured at Last,” *Telegraph*, June 25, 2005, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/germany/1492771/Teenage-rebels-who-fought-Nazis-are-honoured-at-last.html>.

This research will examine one specific example of the type of propaganda that the Edelweiss Pirates would place into mailboxes and disseminate throughout Germany. The propaganda in question reads “for the Fuhrer and the Fatherland” at the top with “why?” written at the bottom with an image spanning the entire page. The illustration contains three German soldiers’ corpses with obituary notices in the background, demonstrating the violence and death surrounding the war to dissuade the public. The backside of the pamphlet has multiple lines of information, but the emphasized red lines on the backside of the pamphlet reads “Hitler cannot win the war... yet Hitler demands... millions more are to die for Hitler!”¹² Again, the Allied powers are emphasizing the amount of bloodshed and casualties that occur in the war to turn them against the Nazi party. This leaflet was dropped between March and April of 1942, by the British production agency, Political Warfare Executive (P.W.E.) to weaken public morale. This pamphlet was released well within the periods of active Edelweiss Pirates resistance throughout Germany with the knowledge that Edelweiss Pirates would spread these kinds of leaflets. Even if this specific example was not distributed by the group, the themes and purpose would have been consistent throughout most of the propaganda released.

On another note, despite the group’s role in helping the spread of propaganda, the Allied powers viewed the Edelweiss Pirates as “nearly useless to [their] war effort.”¹³ However, even though they were not pragmatically helpful in assisting the war effort, the size of the Edelweiss Pirates represented “that [opposition] on a large scale is possible even if there is not yet evidence of their having achieved any very significant action.”¹⁴ Additionally, the mere existence of the Edelweiss Pirates inspired hope in the Allied Powers since it meant that “the generation of Germans who had grown up under the shadow of National Socialism might be less ideologically contaminated than otherwise believed.”¹⁵ While there were still some uncertainties about the specific actions and motives of the Edelweiss Pirates, the Allied powers generally considered the Edelweiss Pirates as an example of how youths and large-scale resistance movements could persevere in a tyrannical state during a violent war.

¹² Britain to Germany, PWE G series, 1942. <https://www.psywar.org/leaflets#wwii>.

¹³ Perry Biddiscombe, “The Enemy of Our Enemy?: A View of the Edelweiss Pirates from the British and American Archives,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 30, No. 1, January 1995: 40. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/260921>

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

Now that the Edelweiss Pirates' role in distributing anti-Nazi propaganda and inspiring the Allied Forces has been established, an evaluation of the harsh consequences that the Edelweiss members faced for committing such actions will lend insight into the risk and conviction required. One key organization that the Nazi government had in place to keep citizens in line was the Gestapo, the secret police. In the tense police state created by the Gestapo, the citizens' role was crucial, and the Edelweiss Pirates could be reported by anybody who either suspected or caught them participating in any anti-Nazi or anti-authority crimes. Furthermore, if any youth resistance members were caught, the Nazis' transformation of the legal and judicial system would likely lead the perpetrators to be severely punished for their actions. From 1933 to 1945, "at least sixty-nine juveniles were indicted for high treason," of which "thirteen were sentenced to death; twelve to a penitentiary, which entailed the loss of civil rights for the entire term; and thirty-one to jail," with eight executed later.¹⁶

In his interview, Walter Meyer mentions how his involvement with the Edelweiss Pirates led the SS and Gestapo to interrogate, beat, and later imprison him.¹⁷ This further corroborates the idea of a tense Nazi society that easily accused and imprisoned teenage resistance members based on minimal amounts of evidence. A more drastic punishment that the Edelweiss Pirates faced other than what Meyer outlined was seen through the 1944 Ehrenfeld Group hanging in Cologne, in which six of the thirteen accused were active teenagers of the Cologne Edelweiss Pirates chapter. Although the Edelweiss Pirates' impact on the Allied war effort was negligible, the true significance of the civilian resistance's actions lay in the mere fact that such a large group of youths was willing to stand in the face of the Nazis despite the harsh punishment they would receive if caught.

One of the main points of contention with the Edelweiss Pirates is the ambiguity that lies within its actions due to how widespread it was. While some groups were willing to work with the Allied powers in post-war Germany by "hunt[ing] down war criminals and other law criminals," others transformed into "conduits of National Socialism" who "scrawl[ed] swastikas and post[ed] anti-Allied placards."¹⁸ These contrasting reactions to the end of World War Two contributed to the confusion over the memory of the Edelweiss Pirates. Therefore, an analysis of how local and national

¹⁶ Geerling, *Faces of Opposition*. 211.

¹⁷ Meyer, "Interview with Walter Meyer," Tape #2.

¹⁸ Biddiscombe, "The Enemy of Our Enemy," 51.

communities have responded to the Edelweiss Pirates after World War Two will best define what the legacy is.

Legacy

In order to holistically approach the legacy of the Edelweiss Pirates, it is necessary to look into their post-war activities, their recognition in modern times, and their current traditions. In post-war Germany, starting in 1945, the Edelweiss Pirates continued to be active in their local chapters, but, as mentioned previously, their actions differed between remaining anti-Nazi or anti-authority. Generally, in 1946, the tide turned against the Allied powers as the Edelweiss Pirates planned to “sabotage” them or “pave the way for a German ‘revival.’”¹⁹ Such a drastic change in the Edelweiss Pirates – distributing leaflets and fighting Hitler Youth members to planning a large-scale overthrow of power – spurs questions as to if this was the same group of working-class youths that formed the movement in the beginning.

In American and British reports, they claimed that the new 1946 version of the Edelweiss Pirates were made up of “neo-Nazi gangs as an initial means of protecting themselves from the inquiries of Allied security agencies” and that they “have no connection with their predecessors, who... were genuinely anti-Nazi.”²⁰ If the aim of the Edelweiss Pirates during the war was to resist the Nazi government and ideology, then the end of the Third Reich in 1945 would suggest that the original members would have stopped fighting. Thus, the Edelweiss Pirates’ actions in post-war Germany should not be considered a part of the original resistance movement and instead, can be deemed wholly anti-authority. However, according to Perry Biddiscombe, it is possible to assume that the majority of the Edelweiss groups were “merely the enemy of an enemy and one which was destined to turn its negative focus upon the Allies themselves.”²¹ But, it cannot be claimed that all of the Edelweiss Pirates were this way because of the existence of multiple groups throughout Germany without one specific head. So, some of the groups could have been in support of the Allies and did not participate in such anti-authoritative actions after 1945.

Since there still exists some ambiguity on the role and legacy of the Edelweiss Pirates, an analysis of the contemporary German

¹⁹ Ibid., 52.

²⁰ Ibid., 52.

²¹ Ibid., 56.

reaction would best clarify how the group has been received in the context of the war. In 2011, a former Edelweiss Pirate member, Fritz Theilenz, who was active during the war, along with another surviving member, was awarded the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany for their roles in resisting the Nazi government by the Cologne mayor, Jurgen Roters.²² The Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany is “the highest tribute the Federal Republic of Germany can pay to individuals for services to the nation,” and is given for achievements that are “of particular value to society generally.”²³ Through this memorialization of some members of the Edelweiss Pirates, it is evident that the German government recognizes the anti-Nazi resistance of at least some groups during the war period. Another way in which the legacy of the Edelweiss Pirates has been memorialized has been indirect with the Yad Vashem Law 5713-1953 which commemorates “the heroism of... underground fighters in towns, villages, and forests, who staked their lives in the battle against the Nazi oppressors and their collaborators.”²⁴ In both examples, the Edelweiss Pirates have been recognized and honored as resistance fighters in modern-day Germany.

Now that the historical and governmental perspective on the Edelweiss Pirates has been established, an understanding of the group’s view of their actions, as seen in their traditions, will help present all facets of how the Edelweiss Pirates should be remembered. There is a recurring Edelweiss Pirate festival in which Germans honor their efforts and celebrate the survivors in their local chapter.²⁵ Such a celebration by the local community implies that they also view the Edelweiss Pirates, at least in this chapter, as a resistance movement that worked against the Nazis and represented hope and freedom from the authoritative government. Although the historians’ debate over how the Edelweiss Pirates should be remembered is critical in properly classifying the group as a resistance movement, the local and national community has already officially recognized members of the Edelweiss Pirates as resistance heroes. However, it is important to

²² David Childs. “Fritz Theilen: Member of the Edelweiss Pirates, the Children Who Resisted Hitler.” *Independent*, May 3, 2012.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/fritz-theilen-member-of-the-edelweiss-pirates-the-children-who-resisted-hitler-7707378.html>

²³ “The Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany,” Der Bundespräsident. <http://www.bundespraesident.de/EN/Role-and-Functions/HonoursAndDecorations/TheOrderOfMerit/theorderofmerit-node.html>

²⁴ “Martyrs’ and Heroes Remembrance (Yad Vashem) Law 5713-1953,” *Yad Vashem: The World Holocaust Remembrance Center*. <https://www.yadvashem.org/about/yad-vashem-law.html>

²⁵ “Edelweiss Pirates Festival.” <http://www.edelweisspiratenfestival.de/>

note that those awarded and recognized belonged to specific chapters of the Edelweiss Pirates which could have been wholly anti-Nazi and acted only against the Third Reich. Therefore, while it is currently appropriate to label some of the Edelweiss Pirates' members as valiant resistance fighters against the tyranny of their times, it is also necessary to keep in mind the darker underbelly of these groups, some of which quickly transformed to be anti-authority and, in some cases, neo-Nazis.

Conclusion

The Edelweiss Pirates represent a significant part of German civilian life during and after World War Two. Its opposing definition as either a civilian resistance movement against the Nazi government or a rebellious group of teens against all kinds of authority has led to different memorialization. However, the most prominent legacy of the Edelweiss Pirates in the eyes of the general public and the German government has been one revolving around acts of heroism and ideas of equality and justice in the face of the Nazis. Despite its lack of any significant contributions to the Allied war efforts through its activities – leaflet distribution, brawls with the Hitler Youth, protection of German deserters and Jews – the Edelweiss Pirates represents the hope that people have for the youth to be conduits of resistance even in the most heavily indoctrinated and darkest of times.

Works Cited

- Biddiscombe, Perry. "The Enemy of Our Enemy': A View of the Edelweiss Piraten from the British and American Archives." *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (January 1995): 37-63.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/260921>
- Britain to Germany, PWE G series, 1942.
<https://www.psywar.org/leaflets#wwii>.
- Childs, David. "Fritz Theilen: Member of the Edelweiss Pirates, the Children Who Resisted Hitler." *Independent*, May 3, 2012.
<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/fritz-theilen-member-of-the-edelweiss-pirates-the-children-who-resisted-hitler-7707378.html>
- Cleaver, Hannah. "Teenage Rebels Who Fought Nazis are Honoured at Last." *Telegraph*, June 25, 2005.
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/germany/1492771/Teenage-rebels-who-fought-Nazis-are-honoured-at-last.html>.
- "Edelweiss Pirates Festival." <http://www.edelweisspiratenfestival.de/>
- Geerling, Wayne, Gary B. Magee, and Robert Brooks. "Faces of Opposition: Juvenile Resistance, High Treason, and the People's Court in Nazi Germany." *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Autumn 2013): 209-234. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43830469>.
- Heck, Alfons. *A Child of Hitler: Germany in the Days When God Wore a Swastika*. Phoenix, Arizona: Renaissance House Publishers, 1985.
- "Martyrs' and Heroes Remembrance (Yad Vashem) Law 5713-1953." *Yad Vashem: The World Holocaust Remembrance Center*.
<https://www.yadvashem.org/about/yad-vashem-law.html>
- Mayer, Walter. "Oral History Interview with Walter Mayer." Interview by Katie Davis. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, August 2, 1996. Audio. <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn504864>
- Scholl, Hans and Sophie Scholl. "The First Leaflet." February 1943.
http://www.whiterosesociety.org/WRS_pamphlets_first.html
- Scholl, Inge. *The White Rose: Munich, 1942-1943*. Translated by Arthur Schultz. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2nd ed., 1983.

“The Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany.” Der Bundespräsident. <http://www.bundespraesident.de/EN/Role-and-Functions/HonoursAndDecorations/TheOrderOfMerit/theorderofmerit-node.html>

Welch, David. “Manufacturing a Consensus: Nazi Propaganda and the Building of a ‘National Community’ (Volksgemeinschaft).” *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (March 1993): 1-15. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20081463>

White Rose Foundation. *The White Rose*. 1st edition. 2006. Accessed 10 Jan 2020. <https://www.bls.org/downloads/MFL/White%20Rose.pdf>

