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## Obstacles and Stepping Stones to the Hero's Pedestal: Reunified Germany's Selective Commemoration of Resisters to National Socialism

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**Obstacles and Stepping Stones to the Hero's Pedestal:  
Reunified Germany's Selective Commemoration  
of Resisters to National Socialism**

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2006-07



*“You could not endure the shame; you resisted; you gave the great, eternally vital sign of change, sacrificing your glowing lives for freedom, justice, and honor.”<sup>1</sup>*



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<sup>1</sup> Translation of the plaque in the center of the courtyard at the Memorial to German Resistance in Berlin,, where a firing squad murdered four army officers for their role in the most famous plot to kill Hitler on July 20, 1944. In the second photograph is the plaque which lists the officers who died there that same night. Translation courtesy of Dr. Ekkehard Klaus in the pamphlet “The Bendlerblock: Introduction.” The German Resistance Memorial Center. Words originally written by Prof. Edwin Redslob.

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## German Terms and Abbreviations Used in This Thesis

*Bundesland*= German state

CDU: Christian Democratic Union (*Christliche demokratische Union*)

EU: European Union/*Europäische Union*

FAZ: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*

*Freiheit*= freedom

FRG/BRD: Federal Republic of Germany/West Germany/*Bundesrepublik Deutschland*

*Gedenkstätte deutscher Widerstand* = Memorial to German Resistance (GDW)

GDR/DDR: German Democratic Republic/East Germany/*Deutsche demokratische Republik*

KPD: German Communist Party (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*)

LMU= Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität (University of Munich)

*Rechtsterrorismus*= “right-wing terrorism,” term used by Chancellor Helmut Kohl

*Rote Kapelle* = Red Orchestra (lit. “Red Chapel”)

SPD: Social Democratic Party (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*)

*Stasi*= *Staatssicherheit*, the East German secret police

*Straße* = street

*Süddeutsche Zeitung*= southern Germany’s daily newspaper

SWR: *Südwestrundfunk* (a German broadcasting company)

(*Tages*)*Zeitung* = (daily) newspaper

*Vorbild*= role model, example

*Weisse Rose* = White Rose

ZDF= *Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen* (a German TV network)

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To everyone in the Colby Libraries, especially Kathy Corridan in InterLibrary Loan, and Vickie McTague in Media Services, and the reference librarians, thank-you for your help locating my nearly impossible-to-find sources. I'd also like to thank the fellow thesis students who let me know I'm not the only one who was afraid of losing their

sanity this year. Last but not least, thank you to my wonderful family and friends for putting up with my obsession with this project, both in Germany and back in the U.S.

## Preface

My fascination with the Second World War began over a decade ago, when I discovered books like *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Lois Lowry's *Number the Stars*, Johanna Reiss's *The Upstairs Room*, and films like *The Great Escape* and *To Hell and Back*. In particular, I became interested in what people did to resist the Nazis, whether they were a Dutch family hiding Jews in their house or Royal Air Force POWs trying to outwit the *Luftwaffe*. But what I never learned about was the resistance to the Nazis *within* Germany. As someone who has been researching the German resistance for the past year and a half, I am somewhat embarrassed to say that I had never even heard of Germans resisting the Nazis before September of 2005. The reality is, most people outside of Germany probably have not heard of the German resistance, either. That was one of the reasons why I wanted to learn more about it.

This project has gone through countless revisions of the thesis; in fact, it did not even really *have* much of an actual argument at first. It started out as a paper for Professor Raffael Scheck's senior research seminar, "Debating the Nazi Past." The earliest versions more or less stated that there were political and moral problems involved with the memory of resistance to National Socialism. But after doing more in-depth research, I realized that that was just a basis for where I really wanted to go with the project. What I really wanted to know was why reunified Germany thinks it is so important to remember the resistance, particularly after the initial political reasons for memory of East and West Germany started to become obsolete and less credible. The

breakthrough in research came when I began learning more about the neo-Nazis in Germany in the 1990s. I learned that a commemoration speech that Helmut Kohl gave on July 20, 1994, the fiftieth anniversary of the most famous attempt to kill Hitler, came at an opportune time: when there were pressures on the Kohl government to do something about the growing problem of extremist violence. In his speech, Kohl speaks of all of the resistance groups glorified in West Germany, yet he makes no mention of left-wing resistance; he cites the legacy of the resistance as an example to follow in fighting dangerous extremism in modern Germany. On the sixtieth anniversary of July 20, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, Kohl's successor, gave a speech in which he specifically mentioned resisting communists and social democrats, finally giving recognition to resisters who had long been neglected by the West German government. But I realized that the damage had been done: certain resistance groups had, due to commemoration in former West Germany, managed to remain at the forefront of memory of the resistance, overshadowing the rest of the groups and individuals. Historians, journalists, and others have already established why certain resistance groups were favored prior to unification (this had to do with politics and the creation of two separate memories of resistance in East and West); I wanted to know what the circumstances were which made some of the same few groups still overshadow others *after* 1990.

I have to confess that, though I am writing about biased memory, my own view of the resistance is not, after more than a year and a half of learning about it, completely objective. When reading and writing about the Germans and others who risked and ultimately sacrificed their lives rather than submit to Nazism, it is easy to become attached to those people and present them in as positive a light as possible. I have tried to



maintain objectivity; though I do subscribe to the view of the resisters as heroes, I do so not without taking facts, however unflattering to the resisters, into account.

One other very important reason why I feel so strongly about this subject is that the image of Germans today is still one clouded by the Nazi past. Germans are often still the butts of World War II- and Third Reich-related jokes, stereotypes, and even insults. Over sixty years later, those jokes and stereotypes have—to put it in the simplest term possible—gotten old. Remembering the resistance gives the rest of the world a broader picture of Nazi Germany. Many Americans seem to think that all Germans blindly followed Hitler for twelve years. The resistance is an extreme example that shows that that was not the case, presenting the other side of the broad spectrum between collaboration and resistance, and helping to show that most Germans fell somewhere between the two extremes. In Nazi Germany, both terrible and encouraging forms of human capability manifested themselves. The Germans were capable of mass murder, yet they were also capable of trying to destroy the man and apparatus responsible for that mass murder. In addition to showing how and why certain resisters gained the most recognition in Germany, the broader goal of my thesis is to present, to college students outside of Germany in particular, a topic with which most are not familiar, one which will force them to reexamine their own misconceptions which they may have about Germany and its history.

## I. A Complicated Memory

*“He who decides to act must know that he will go down in history as a traitor to his country. But if he fails to act, he will be a traitor to his own conscience.”<sup>2</sup>*

Bombs, propaganda, graffiti, espionage, murder. Normally these words carry a negative connotation, unless used with regard to German resistance to Adolf Hitler and the Nazis. The resistance, which included groups and individuals from all areas of German society but failed to produce a single mass anti-Hitler movement, has gained little recognition outside of Germany but much within, particularly during the past thirty years. Germany has taken the one positive light from that dark time period and used it as a tool of legitimization for the government and other institutions, and as a source for heroic figures of whom Germans can be proud.<sup>3</sup> Through the use of resisters as a political tool and as a source of inspiration, some resisters have gained more recognition and fame than others, a fact which became especially apparent in the years surrounding German unification in 1990. Yet the idea of the resister as a heroic role model only applied to certain resisters. This was due to political boundaries that had already been drawn, misconceptions and distortions as a result of those political lines, and even current events to which Germans could apply the legacy of the resisters. Despite developments in recent

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<sup>2</sup> Words of Claus von Stauffenberg, the man who came closest to killing Hitler in July 1944. Quoted in Peter Steinbach and Johannes Tuchel, ed. *Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1994), 12.

<sup>3</sup> The idea of a positive “light” was first expressed by Chancellor Theodor Heuss in the 1950s. See David Clay Large’s essay, “‘A Beacon in the German Darkness’: The Anti-Nazi Resistance Legacy in West German Politics,” in Michael Geyer and John W. Boyer, ed. *Resistance Against the Third Reich: 1933-1990* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press

German history and memory that would suggest acceptance of a less biased view of resisters, the focus of memory on a select few resisters still remains today.

The period in Germany's history from 1933-1945, also known as the "Third Reich," has been and will continue to be the best-known of all in the country's past. Few people around the world have never heard of the dictator Adolf Hitler and his party of National Socialists (NSDAP), more commonly known as Nazis, and the ways in which they terrorized Germany and Europe for over a decade. Though the world no longer holds modern Germany accountable for the atrocities of Adolf Hitler's radically racist regime, the memory of the Nazi era is still ever-present in Germany. Germans from multiple generations are not entirely comfortable flying their own flag—the traditional black, red, and yellow bars, which is supposed to be a symbol for modern Germany's democratic tradition—because they see it instead as a symbol of right-wing nationalism, despite the Nazis' abolishment of the use of the flag in 1933.<sup>4</sup> Hitler's *Mein Kampf* cannot be legally sold in Germany. Denial of the Holocaust, display of the Nazi flag or the swastika, and the "Heil Hitler" salute are all illegal, and the German national anthem no longer contains the verse beginning with the words, "*Deutschland, Deutschland, über alles*"—"Germany, Germany above all," although the author, August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben, wrote the song in 1841 and did not have the same political intentions as the Nazis; he wanted to promote the possibility of German unity at a time when it was divided into small princedoms.<sup>5</sup> The National Socialist party is illegal, but there are some

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<sup>4</sup> This changed during the 2006 World Cup in Germany; German flags were on display everywhere as a symbol of support for the German soccer team. During and after the World Cup, I spoke with Germans from both my generation and the pre-reunification generation who do not feel comfortable displaying the German flag. Conversations with Ute Link, 14 June 2006, and Sanya Zillich, 17 November 2006. Information about the flag also provided by Professor Raffael Scheck.

<sup>5</sup> "In Search of *Heimat*" course packet for Colby Professor Ursula Reidel-Schrewe's senior German seminar, GM493, Spring 2007. Song text and background information, pages 48-49.

small extreme right-wing parties, such as the National Democratic Party (NDP).<sup>6</sup> These right-wing radicals and neo-Nazis continue to attract followers and have been growing in number since reunification; neo-Nazi violence, almost always hate crimes, has also increased dramatically since the Berlin Wall fell.<sup>7</sup>

What many people, particularly those outside of Germany, do not know about the Nazi era is that there were Germans who resisted the regime. Non-Germans tend to think of resistance by other countries, such as the French *résistance*, when they hear “resistance” and “Nazis” in the same sentence. Resisters from all countries, but especially the German resisters, endangered their own lives and the lives of those closest to them. Resistance took on various forms in Nazi Germany. It could mean inaction such as refusing to give the Hitler salute in public or not telling the Gestapo about Jewish neighbors. This type of resistance is “passive,” as it was a more subtle and not an outright way of denouncing or negatively affecting the regime. In a crowd of thousands, it was hard to pick out the one person who did not give the Hitler salute, but the point is that he or she refused to lift their arm at all.<sup>8</sup>

In Germany, what many people tend to think of first when they hear the word “resistance,” however, is the outright action against the Nazis such as attempting to blow up Hitler or distributing anti-Nazi pamphlets; this type of resistance is “active.” According to historian Frank McDonough, there exists both a broad and a specific definition of resistance. Historian Martin Broszat, for example, wrote that any form of

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<sup>6</sup> Yaron Svoray and Nick Taylor, *In Hitler's Shadow* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 12.

<sup>7</sup> “Right-Wing Violence on the Rise.” 17 October 2006. Spiegel Online.  
<http://www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,443063,00.html>

<sup>8</sup> On a tour at the Memorial to German Resistance in Berlin (Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand, or GDW) by Dr. Sylvia Foelz on 15 June 2006, I saw a photograph of a man who refused to give the Hitler salute in the middle of a large crowd. The GDW had circled the man in red so that visitors were able to pick him out in the crowd when they viewed the photograph, and Dr. Foelz cited this man’s conscious inaction as an example of passive resistance.

opposition, from a joke to a bomb, was resistance, whereas historian Detlev Peukert explained resistance in a sort of pyramidal structure, with actions such as jokes or illegally listening to the BBC at the bottom (punishable by death in the last years of the regime)<sup>9</sup>, and mass-producing anti-Nazi pamphlets and trying to blow up Hitler at the top. According to McDonough, this idea “fully recognizes the difference between placing a bomb under Hitler’s table, with the intention of killing him, and telling a close friend that Joseph Goebbels [Hitler’s propaganda minister] was a ‘poison dwarf.’”<sup>10</sup> The Nazis punished both active and passive resistance with imprisonment, torture, or death. More active resisters lost their lives than passive resisters, mainly because the Gestapo could catch active resistance much more easily. Passive resistance, however, was more common.<sup>11</sup>

Due to the nature of the Third Reich as a regime that used terror to control the people, it is important to remember not to draw a clear line between resisters and collaborators; a gray area exists between the two extremes, and the majority of Germans during that time moved in that area. These were the people who dared not act out of fear for their own lives (and the lives of their families and others close to them); they neither resisted nor collaborated. These people sometimes receive the label of “indifferent.” That label may have fit those who truly did not care about what was happening in Germany; the reality, however, is that many did have political opinions but feared expressing them. They were the Germans who may have agreed with the Nazis on some policies and issues

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<sup>9</sup> This information courtesy of Professor Raffael Scheck.

<sup>10</sup> McDonough, *Opposition and Resistance in Nazi Germany*, 59-60.

<sup>11</sup> Much of this information about the nature of resistance obtained from a tour by Dr. Sylvia Foelz at the GDW on 15 June 2006. Other instances of passive resistance explained by Professor Raffael Scheck during January 2005 and Fall 2005, in Colby history courses “Europe and World War II” and “Debating the Nazi Past,” respectively.

but not others. Many well-known resisters even agreed with Hitler in the early days of the Third Reich. Circumstances, of course, varied from person to person. Many opposed the Nazis and told jokes about Hitler or listened to BBC Radio within their own homes. Both of those activities were dangerous, but are not necessarily considered resistance as much as personal opposition, as those actions were not intended to disrupt the regime.<sup>12</sup> For many active resisters, the initial goal was to work against the regime in the hopes of eventually bringing it down. But for some, resisting the regime ultimately became a necessity regardless of overwhelming odds against success, because they could no longer stand to live passively indifferent to the Nazi dictatorship.

Those Germans who chose to resist the regime, either actively or passively, had one characteristic in common: they disagreed with Hitler enough to believe that he should not be in power, and that he was harming rather than helping Germany. Active resisters also decided that they would—as overtly as was possible in Nazi Germany—make their discontent with the Nazi regime known. They distributed pamphlets encouraging Germans to resist the regime, painted anti-Nazi slogans on buildings, passed information on to the Allies in World War II, and tried to blow up Hitler, to name just a few of their activities.

Though remembering resisters to the Nazis as heroes after the war seems like the obvious course of action, the resistance has actually been controversial. While the Netherlands and France were able to hail the resistance as a heroic group of people who worked against an oppressor of their country, Germany could not adopt this stance so easily because the resisters, some Germans believed, had worked against their *own*

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<sup>12</sup> Distinction between opposition and resistance made clear by Dr. Sylvia Foelz on a tour at the GDW, 15 June 2006. For more about the difference, see Frank McDonough, *Opposition and Resistance in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

country.<sup>13</sup> At the end of the Second World War, many Germans saw the men who had tried to overthrow Hitler—and anyone else who had worked against the regime—as traitors, and a new kind of stab-in-the-back myth developed, similar to what happened at the end of World War I when Germans blamed their loss on the German revolution, which came about because of a population exhausted by war and inspired by socialist, democratic, and pacifist ideas.<sup>14</sup> To many, soldiers who had taken an oath of loyalty to Hitler betrayed him when they should have been fighting for their country. Other resisters were traitors because they had spied for the Allies, passing on valuable information that could have affected the course of the war. The general consensus in the mid- to late 1940s was that the resisters had all committed treason.<sup>15</sup>

That negative attitude changed when Germany was divided into East and West in 1949. The two countries suddenly scrambled to legitimize their respective regimes to the world by attempting to demonstrate a clear distance between their government and the Nazis. In the early 1950s, each country chose a resistance movement that they could most easily tailor to fit the values of its regime. Communist East Germany (The German Democratic Republic, GDR) portrayed the communists as anti-fascists and victims of Nazism. Identification with the victims rather than the aggressors, as well as the existence of left-wing resistance to the Nazis, were the GDR's ways out of shouldering any blame for the past. West Germany (The Federal Republic of Germany, FRG) decided, partly due to the need to legitimize itself to the United States, Great Britain, France, and the rest of

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<sup>13</sup> Pierre Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation: Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe, 1945-1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 64.

<sup>14</sup> This information about the “stab-in-the-back myth” or “Dolchstoßlegende” comes from my coursework on both World War I and World War II, taken at Colby and at the University of Tübingen.

<sup>15</sup> David Clay Large, “‘A Beacon in the German Darkness:’ The Anti-Nazi Resistance Legacy in West German Politics,” in Michael Geyer and John W. Boyer, ed. *Resistance Against the Third Reich: 1933-1990* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 244.

the capitalist world, that its best course of action was to shoulder the responsibility for the Nazi past, but to make clear that not all Germans had been Nazis. In the early 1950s, the West German government in Bonn had just begun to revise the postwar view that anyone who had resisted the Nazis during the Second World War was a traitor who had contributed to Germany's defeat. In 1953, Theodore Heuss, then-president of the FRG, stated, "The blood of the martyred resisters has cleansed our German name of the shame which Hitler cast upon it...[it is] a gift to the German future."<sup>16</sup> Heuss advocated the idea of the "other Germany": not every German had been a Nazi. West Germany chose some of the most famous resisters: the men involved in the July 20, 1944, plot to kill Hitler and take over the government. In 1952 the German government began to commemorate the 20<sup>th</sup> of July, as well as non-communist resistance, which included students, the clergy, the nobility, and the military.<sup>17</sup>

Both countries glorified their own resistance but tended to ignore or denounce the other. East Germany saw the July 20 conspirators as power-hungry, capitalistic latecomers in the resistance movement who wanted to get rid of Hitler solely in their own self-interest. West Germany, the East argued, was fascist because its leaders were former Nazi collaborators and capitalists.<sup>18</sup> The East German government put all of the blame for Nazism onto the shoulders of the West. West Germany saw the communists as acting in the interests of the Soviet Union and communism rather than Germany. Because of the Cold War, any resistance the East hailed as heroic did not gain recognition in West

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<sup>16</sup> David Clay Large's "A Beacon in the German Darkness: The Anti-Nazi Resistance in West German Politics" in Geyer & Boyer, *Resistance Against the Third Reich*, 247.

<sup>17</sup> Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand, "Ort der Erinnerung," <http://www.gdw-berlin.de/ort/ort-d-d.php>

<sup>18</sup> Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 30. Courtesy of the History E-Book Project at the University of Michigan, [www.historyebook.org](http://www.historyebook.org)



Germany. For decades, two views of the resistance existed: it was either “anti-fascist” as the East German government called it, or the “other Germany” to the West German government. Until German reunification in 1990, East and West Germany “tended to exaggerate the achievements of their chosen group.”<sup>19</sup>

With the student revolution of 1968 in the FRG, the view toward the Nazi past began to change. Pressure to face the Holocaust increased as the students wanted to know what their parents had done during the Nazi era. In facing the past, some continued to make the same claim a historical work on German memory criticizes: *Opa war kein Nazi* (*Grandpa was not a Nazi*). Among individuals and within families, people began to tell stories of resistance; this made facing and discussing the past easier.<sup>20</sup> “Resistance” became important to individual Germans; any evidence that someone in their family had resisted the Nazis—or even opposed the Nazis simply by telling a joke—was a source of comfort in the face of any guilt brought about by confronting the past. Even some former Nazis and those who had occasionally made negative remarks about the regime tried to claim resistance.<sup>21</sup>

After reunification, Germany faced a dilemma: was it possible to reconcile two different—and conflicting—memories? Which memory was the “right” one? Did the Germans even *want* to reconcile the memory of East and West? The GDR ceased to exist, whereas the FRG remained intact. Early after unification, Germany made efforts to wipe out the East German memory, and the Western tradition of memory of resisters became the dominant one. Everyone except some East Germans, it seemed, wanted to continue to

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<sup>19</sup> Bill Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past* (London: Routledge, 2002), 63.

<sup>20</sup> Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller and Karoline Tschuggnall, *Opa war kein Nazi: Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003).

<sup>21</sup> This information courtesy of Professor Raffael Scheck.

ignore the communists. Of course, the East German government had had a biased and twisted view of the resistance, but that does not mean that West Germany's memory was completely without distortion, either.

Up until the mid-1990s, politics, morals, personal feelings about the Nazi past, and the compromising of facts prevented Germany from presenting a clearer picture of resistance to the people. Politics, influenced by the two memories created in East and West Germany, had been the driving force behind how Germany presented the resistance to the German public. Yet in 1994, that began to change. A "revisionist" view of the resistance, which had begun to develop in the 1970s and 1980s, began to grow, gaining more recognition than it had before the Berlin Wall fell, a view that included all known resisters of National Socialism and attempted to show those people as they truly were. The goal, in its purest sense, was to strip away the old assumptions and inaccuracies that politics had created, and to present history as authentically as possible.<sup>22</sup> The Nazi past had, some thought, already been faced. Revisionists did not want to dwell on the past; it was time for Germany to move on. The revisionist view, however, is still competing with old assumptions, which tend to bring a select few resisters to the forefront in commemorations and other forms of recognition of the resistance.

Why has Germany believed it is important to remember the resistance, and how did the memory of the resistance play into events in reunified Germany and even the world? How should we define "memory" in this new historical context? There is a difference between official and personal memory; the German government may make one statement regarding the resistance, such as in a commemoration speech ("official"),

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<sup>22</sup> Shareen Blair Brysac, "At Last, Recognition and Praise for the Resistance in Nazi Germany," *The New York Times*, 7 October 2000. Lexis-Nexis. Bill Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past* (London: Routledge, 2002), 77.

but individual Germans might think something else (“personal”).<sup>23</sup> A German filmmaker, for instance, may view the resistance differently than a group of German politicians.

What makes memory of the resistance so significant in unified Germany? Intolerance of injustice is one of the major reasons why the resistance received so much attention after reunification. After the Berlin Wall fell, East Germany began to recover from 40 years of Communist dictatorship and assimilate into “Western” culture. The question of German identity became a central theme in the reunited country. Many Germans believe that it is important to pass on the memory of the Nazi period—including the memory of the resistance—to younger generations.<sup>24</sup> Fewer and fewer Germans who lived through the Nazi era are still alive, and the view that it is important to put previous politics aside in order to remember resistance has prevailed since the 1994 controversy. That change, however, does not mean that all resisters have suddenly begun to receive recognition in Germany.

The idea of the resisters as heroes came to dominate over the once-popular views of the resisters as traitors to their country, or as having questionable motives, or as a forgotten, unimportant entity in Germany’s history. Since German reunification, history in eastern Germany became more open, particularly with regard to confronting the dark time period from 1933-1945. Archives to which historians had not previously had access became open.<sup>25</sup> Even before reunification, film series on Germany’s past, including

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<sup>23</sup> Koonz, Claudia. “Between Memory and Oblivion: Concentration Camps in German Memory,” in John R. Gillis, ed. *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 261.

<sup>24</sup> Ministerpräsident Günther Oettinger (CDU) in a Südwestrundfunk (SWR) article, “Stauffenberg-Gedenkstätte in Stuttgart: Ein Fenster zur Vergangenheit.” November 2006.  
<http://www.swr.de/regionen/stuttgart/stauffenberg/-/id=3398/did=1740486/9q4...>

<sup>25</sup> For the 2005 film „Sophie Scholl: Die letzten Tage“ the filmmakers used documents that had been housed in East Germany to accurately recreate the last days of 21-year-old resister Sophie Scholl, which were spent in prison and under interrogation.

Edgar Reitz and Peter Steinbach's 1984 series *Heimat*, as well as the construction of memorials, such as the GDW in Berlin, have all been defining moments in becoming more open toward talking about twentieth-century German history. In the years following November 9, 1989 (the day the border between the two Germanys opened), remembering Germany's history became even more of a trend in film and through memorials. Michael Verhoeven's film *Das schreckliche Mädchen*, based on the true story of a woman named Anna Rosmus, was released. Rosmus faced opposition from people within her hometown when trying to research what the town did during the Nazi period.<sup>26</sup> Even Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* enjoyed immense popularity in Germany upon its release in the early 1990s. The Holocaust Memorial opened in Berlin in 2005, indicating that, as parliamentary president Wolfgang Thierse claimed, Germany now "faces up to its history."<sup>27</sup> Memory of the Nazi past, as well as of Germany's history in general, has become a common trend in recent films. From the 2006 film *Der letzte Zug* (*The Last Train*) which is about a train to Auschwitz, to the 2007 Hollywood film *The Good German*, which takes place in Berlin right after the Second World War ends, the film industry continues to capitalize on Germany's Nazi past.<sup>28</sup> Is it possible that, despite the positive result of Germany more or less coming to terms with its past, there is the danger of almost *too much* memory? There is certainly at least the danger that that memory gets unevenly distributed. With regard to the resistance, this super-memory can create the impression that only a few very small groups of people—the ones who have received the most recognition—resisted the Nazis, rather than thousands, or the opposite, the *Opa war*

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<sup>26</sup> "Das schreckliche Mädchen," Dir. Michael Verhoeven. Germany, 1990.

<sup>27</sup> "Berlin Opens Holocaust Memorial." BBC News Online, 10 May 2005.  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4531669.stm>

<sup>28</sup> This information taken from my own experience and observations.

*kein Nazi* syndrome, namely that everyone resisted the Nazis. What is most dangerous about that possibility is that commemoration could include those who, due to their collaboration, do not deserve recognition next to those who risked their lives to work against or try to bring down the regime. One recent example of this sort of problem was a funeral speech in which Günther Oettinger, the president of the German state Baden-Württemberg, claimed that Nazi collaborator Hans Filbinger was against the regime. The speech caused a major controversy: The speech writer was fired and Oettinger had to make multiple public apologies.<sup>29</sup> With growing trends of inclusiveness in memory, in which resistance groups such as the communist or other left-wing groups gain public recognition (though none comparable to resisters who have already received the most attention), the possibility of a myth of broader resistance is not out of the question.

Today Germany generally sees the resisters as heroes and as role models. The German word for “role model” is *Vorbild* (plural *Vorbilder*). The idea of the resisters as *Vorbilder* became more prevalent in the 1980s and after unification. This view developed due to revisionism, the relevance of the resisters’ legacy to modern politics, the rise in problems with neo-Nazis in Germany, the preservation of history motivated by the fear of forgetting, and later, the passage of time since reunification. Yet with this development came the tendency to exalt a select few and forget everyone else. When viewing the resisters as heroes, it is important to remember that their own path to resistance was not necessarily immediate or straightforward.

Historians, journalists, and filmmakers have already produced a vast amount of material on certain resisters. One group is a favorite of the German government, the other

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<sup>29</sup> “Oettingers Redenschreiber abgeschoben.” *Spiegel* Online, 28 April 2007.  
<http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,480016,00.html>

is a favorite of the general public. The goal of this paper is to show why those people dominated—and dominate—memory of resisters in reunified Germany, despite increased recognition of other resisters, going beyond the obvious, oversimplified answer of “they fought the Nazis,” and paying close attention to political motives in particular. Doing so will provide insight into why the rest of the resisters have still been neglected, and to paint a picture of resistance and the memory of that resistance in a way that does not just blindly see these people as heroes. This paper will analyze what made certain resisters to National Socialism heroes in Germany, specifically the events in recent German history that contributed to the development of certain resisters into heroes and *Vorbilder*.

## II. Those Who “Dared the Decisive Stroke”<sup>30</sup>

*“We are your guilty conscience.”<sup>31</sup>*

On a quiet street in Berlin is a courtyard inconspicuously tucked into a massive gray building complex. Visible from the entrance to the courtyard are several trees and a bronze statue. At the statue’s feet, embedded in the cobblestone, is a large plaque with a dedication written in raised letters in German. A reddish-brown wreath that looks as though it has been there for quite some time hangs on a wall to the left, and above it is a dark gray plaque. The courtyard is quiet and peaceful, and unless a visitor were to read and understand the words on the wall above the wreath, it would be hard to believe that

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<sup>30</sup> Major-General Henning von Tresckow in June 1944, referring to the action his fellow army officers were about to take against Hitler and his regime in July 1944. Quoted in Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1936-1945: Nemesis*, (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), 653; “dared the decisive stroke” has also been translated as “took the plunge.” See Joachim Fest, *Plotting Hitler’s Death* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1996, English translation).

<sup>31</sup> From one of the White Rose’s pamphlets, reprinted on the White Rose Memorial in Ulm, Germany. Quote referenced from a photograph I took of the White Rose memorial in Ulm, Germany, on 22 February 2006.

late one evening in July over sixty years ago, a firing squad murdered four men in this same place for standing up to a regime and a dictator they felt would destroy Germany, a regime that they believed no longer deserved their loyalty and service.

The Memorial to German Resistance in Berlin (the *Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand*, or GDW), which opened a permanent exhibition on July 19, 1989, remembers every known individual or group who resisted the Nazis.<sup>32</sup> Located at the building complex of military offices known as the Bendlerblock, as well as at Plötzensee, a former prison for political prisoners, it is the only place in Germany where every known resister receives recognition in as unbiased a manner as possible. The gargantuan gray building complex of the Bendlerblock contains room after room of exhibits remembering those who fought against Nazi tyranny. A first-time visitor to the Bendlerblock would need at least a full day to see everything there is to see, and would have a difficult time deciding where to look first among the twenty-six exhibits throughout the building. The brightly-lit rooms, including the former office of the most famous would-be Hitler assassin, Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg, provide a stark contrast to the dark period in which the subjects of the exhibits lived. Thousands of photographs cover the walls, along with famous words and descriptions of resisters, and encased historical artifacts such as anti-Nazi pamphlets.<sup>33</sup> Each major group or individual merits a brief introduction in order to clarify issues later discussed in this paper:

The four military officers the Nazis shot in the courtyard of the Bendlerblock—Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg, First Lieutenant Werner von Haeften, General Friedrich Olbricht, and Colonel Albrecht Ritter Mertz von Quirnheim—were just a few of the

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<sup>32</sup> Dr. Ekkehard Klaus, "The Bendlerblock: Introduction." The German Resistance Memorial Centre.

<sup>33</sup> This description comes from my own visit to the Bendlerblock on 15 June 2006, and from Dr. Ekkehard Klaus, "The Bendlerblock: Introduction." The German Resistance Memorial Centre.

conspirators behind the July 20, 1944, plot to kill Hitler and stage a coup d'état. Other masterminds included military officers Major General Henning von Tresckow and General Ludwig Beck, both of whom committed suicide after both the assassination attempt and the coup—"Operation Valkyrie"—failed. The attempt on Hitler's life is one of the best-known outright resistance acts in Germany, commemorated every year on July 20<sup>th</sup> at the GDW in the Bendlerblock courtyard. Of the major conspirators and the thousands of other Germans involved in and executed for their role in the plot, Claus von Stauffenberg—the man who planted the bomb at Hitler's East Prussian headquarters known as the *Wolfschanze* ("Wolf's Lair")—is the most famous.

The group behind July 20 consisted mostly of *Wehrmacht*, or army, officers. It was connected to members of the civilian group known as the Kreisau Circle, although not all members of that circle had a part in or agreed with the assassination attempt. Some officers reciprocated the disagreement; Stauffenberg, for example, called the group a "conspirator's tea party."<sup>34</sup> The common misconception exists that these groups worked closely together on the assassination and coup attempts; while that is partially true (as the Nazis executed many of the group's members for their connections to the conspiracy), it is important to acknowledge Kreisau's separateness from the officers. The ringleaders of the Kreisau Circle were Helmuth James von Moltke and Peter Yorck von Wartenburg, both of whom the Nazis murdered in August of 1944, along with hundreds of others linked in some way to the July 20, 1944 plot.<sup>35</sup> The Kreisau Circle's greatest concern was Germany after Hitler: what should happen and how? They were people who planned on leading Germany into a future without Hitler. Moltke himself, along with Hans Bernd

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<sup>34</sup> Fest, *Plotting Hitler's Death*, 218.

<sup>35</sup> Fest, *Plotting Hitler's Death*, 156.



von Haefen, the brother of Werner von Haefen, were some of the members who had strong reservations about the planned assassination. Hans Bernd von Haefen's hesitation to support the assassination stemmed from the moral dilemma of planting a bomb that would kill several people, and Moltke's hesitation was a result of his concern that an assassination would lead Germany further into chaos and hurt chances of rebuilding itself in the future.<sup>36</sup> Moltke, like Stauffenberg, is very well-known in Germany.

Another very famous group with which the Kreisau Circle attempted to establish connections is the White Rose, a student group based in Munich with branches in Freiburg, Hamburg, and Ulm. The founding members were siblings Hans and Sophie Scholl, their professor Kurt Huber, and fellow students Alexander Schmorell, Christoph Probst, and Willi Graf, all from Munich. The White Rose distributed anti-Nazi pamphlets and painted anti-Hitler slogans around Munich. On February 18, 1943, Hans and Sophie Scholl distributed pamphlets in the central hall of the University in Munich. A maintenance worker caught them in the act, and the Gestapo arrested the Scholls. Four days after their arrest, the Nazis beheaded the Scholl siblings and Probst, who had been arrested on account of incriminating documents the Gestapo found. Over the next few months, they also executed Huber, Graf, and Schmorell, and in January of 1945, after over a year in prison, they executed Hans Konrad Leipelt, who had been involved in the Hamburg White Rose group.<sup>37</sup>

Countless other youth groups, not nearly as well-remembered as the White Rose, resisted the regime. The members of these groups engaged in resistance activities similar

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<sup>36</sup> From the introduction by M.L.G. Balfour in Ger van Roon's . *German Resistance to Hitler: Count von Moltke and the Kreisau Circle*. Translated by Peter Ludlow. (London: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1971), vi, 1.

<sup>37</sup> Peter Steinbach, "Die Weiße Rose: Weiße Rose Hamburg." GDW, Berlin, 1998.

to that of the White Rose, and many met with the same fate. These groups included the Hübener Group, four young working-class Mormons who distributed anti-Nazi pamphlets. The Nazis beheaded the group's seventeen-year-old leader, Helmuth Hübener, on October 27, 1942.<sup>38</sup> Another group, the Edelweiss Pirates, also distributed anti-Nazi pamphlets. They refused to join the Hitler Youth, and lived more or less as outcasts of Nazi Germany's society. The group valued independence for young people and did not conform to the strict expectations the Nazis had for Germany's youth. They also were responsible for the murder of Cologne's Gestapo chief, for which the Nazis executed twelve members of the group.<sup>39</sup>

Still other people outcast by the Nazis, particularly the German Communist Party (KPD), opposed and resisted National Socialism. They produced their own newspaper, *Die rote Fahne* ("The Red Flag"). Hitler had considered the communists an enemy since the 1920s, and targeted them from the moment he became Chancellor. He outlawed the KPD, and the Gestapo began arresting communists as well as members of the moderate Social Democratic Party (SPD). Communists and social democrats became the first prisoners in concentration camps, which, at the time, were work camps. The Baum Group, named for its leader Herbert Baum, consisted of Jewish communists, all of whom the Nazis executed for the distribution of anti-Nazi literature, and, more notoriously, for burning an anti-communist exhibit at the ministry of propaganda in the spring of 1942. After executing the members of the Baum Group, the Nazis murdered hundreds of Jews as a further retaliation against the group's actions, using the group to lend credence to

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<sup>38</sup> Blair R. Holmes and Alan F. Keele, ed. *When Truth Was Treason: German Youth Against Hitler; the Story of the Helmuth Hübener Group* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), photograph insert of the announcement of Hübener's death between pages 141 and 146.

<sup>39</sup> Peter Steinbach, "Jugendopposition." *Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand*, Berlin, 1998. Holmes and Keele, *When Truth Was Treason*, xiii.

their argument that Jews were Bolsheviks and therefore a threat to Germany.<sup>40</sup> By that time, after the Wannsee conference in January of 1942, the mass murder of Jews had already started in Eastern Europe and Russia.

Another group whose anti-Nazi activities reached their height in the early 1940s was a group of individuals from various backgrounds, dubbed the “Red Orchestra” by the Gestapo for passing information on to the Soviets. In early 1941, Harro Schulze-Boysen, the group’s leader who worked in one of the Reich ministries, informed the Soviet embassy of Germany’s plans to invade the Soviet Union.<sup>41</sup> The Nazis executed Schulze-Boysen, his wife Libertas, and other major members of the group in 1943 and 1944. The common misconception is that they only passed information on to Moscow and consisted solely of communists. It exists because of East Germany’s glorification of the group as “anti-fascist” resistance and the negative view of the group as Soviet spies in the world west of the Iron Curtain.

Many members of the Catholic and Protestant clergy took a very public stand against the Nazis, including Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Bernhard Lichtenberg, and Clemens von Galen. Galen, a Catholic bishop, condemned Hitler’s euthanasia program in his sermons when the program began in 1939. In 2005, Pope Benedict XVI beatified von Galen, describing him as an example of courage, and a “model for those in public roles today.”<sup>42</sup> Bishop von Galen is now one step away from sainthood, and if von Galen were to eventually receive that honor that would bring the resistance to National Socialism as a whole even more into the public eye, particularly among Catholics. Lichtenberg, also a

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<sup>40</sup> Frank McDonough, *Opposition and Resistance in Nazi Germany*, 8-9.

<sup>41</sup> “Harro Schulze-Boysen.” Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand. [www.gdw-berlin.de/bio/ausgabe\\_mit.php?id=17](http://www.gdw-berlin.de/bio/ausgabe_mit.php?id=17)

<sup>42</sup> Frances D’Emilio, “Pope Hails anti-Nazi Bishop as Courageous Example for Today.” The Associated Press, 9 October 2005. Printed in The Norwich Bulletin, Norwich, Connecticut.

Catholic, stood up for the Jews in the face of persecution by praying for them, as well as other prisoners, in public.<sup>43</sup> Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran pastor, denounced the Nazis' anti-Jewish policies as early as 1933 and aided in the escape and protection of Jews.<sup>44</sup> The name Dietrich Bonhoeffer is one recognized worldwide, specifically among Christians. On April 9, 1945, just weeks before the end of the war, the Nazis hanged Dietrich Bonhoeffer, along with members of the counterintelligence service, the *Abwehr*, Wilhelm Canaris and Hans Oster. Bonhoeffer opposed the Nazis' anti-Jewish policies from the beginning, and eventually became a conspirator in the July 20 plot. Christians consider Dietrich Bonhoeffer a martyr, and, in the opinion of some, he is equivalent to a saint.<sup>45</sup>

Other individuals not affiliated with any resistance organization took drastic measures to try to bring down the regime. Probably the most remarkable of these individuals is carpenter Georg Elser, who set a bomb to kill Hitler in one of Munich's large beer halls, the Burgerbräukeller, in November 1939. The bomb exploded after Hitler had finished his speech and left the building. After setting the bomb, Elser tried to flee to Switzerland, but the Gestapo caught him in the German city of Konstanz near the Swiss border. He died in prison in 1945.<sup>46</sup>

Many of the Germans who actively resisted the Nazis paid for their actions with their lives. The list of names and groups of resisters goes into the thousands and is therefore impossible to list here in its entirety. Despite extensive historical research on the resistance, there are certainly still unknown individuals who have yet to gain

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<sup>43</sup> Stephen R. Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Legacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 44. "Speech by Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schröder at the ceremony commemorating the resistance to National Socialist tyranny, Berlin, 20 July 2004." [http://www.german-embassy.org.uk/speech\\_by\\_federal\\_chancellor\\_g.html](http://www.german-embassy.org.uk/speech_by_federal_chancellor_g.html)

<sup>44</sup> Geoffrey B. Kelly, "The Life and Death of a Modern Martyr." *Christian History* 10, no. 4 (1991): 8.

<sup>45</sup> Stephen R. Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon: Portraits of a Protestant Saint* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), xii.

<sup>46</sup> This information comes from my own visit to the Rosgarten Museum in Konstanz, Germany, on 10 January 2006.

recognition for their anti-Nazi activities, as well as those about whom historians and journalists have written very little.<sup>47</sup>

As late as 1994, there was still controversy over which resisters did or did not deserve recognition as heroes. Some Germans, mostly members of the more conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU), and family members of the July 20 plotters, protested against recognizing communists alongside people such as Claus von Stauffenberg, Ludwig Beck, Helmuth von Moltke, and Hans and Sophie Scholl.<sup>48</sup> Back in 1994, communism in Germany was clearly still a very sensitive subject for West Germans, understandably so after living for over three decades alongside a Communist dictatorship responsible for the deaths of thousands of Germans.

Within the political dilemma of recognizing communists as resisters exists a moral dilemma. Communists Walter Ulbricht and Wilhelm Pieck, the men included in the 1994 GDW exhibit, went on to lead a regime responsible for the deaths of thousands of Germans after the war. Still other moral questions arise when recognizing resisters as heroes: Stauffenberg's bomb killed four men on July 20; one of them was involved in the anti-Hitler plot. Georg Elser's bomb killed eight people and injured 63 in a Munich beer hall, the Burgerbräukeller, in 1939.<sup>49</sup> Stauffenberg and Elser are heroes; Pieck and Ulbricht are not. Politics is very much behind that distinction.

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<sup>47</sup> For a basic overview of the German resistance, see Frank McDonough, *Opposition and Resistance in Nazi Germany*. For detailed profiles of resisters themselves, see Annedore Leber, Willy Brandt, and Karl Dietrich Bracher, *The Conscience in Revolt: Portraits of the German Resistance, 1933-1945*. Translated from the German by Thomas S. McClymont (Mainz/Munich: Hase & Koehler, 1994).

<sup>48</sup> Anton Gill, "Nazi Heroes We Should Honour." *The Independent*, London: 19 July 1994. Lexis-Nexis. One of Claus von Stauffenberg's sons, Franz Ludwig von Stauffenberg, contested the inclusion of the communists in the Memorial to German Resistance.

<sup>49</sup> Arno Luik, "Ich sprengte die Regierung in die Luft." Berlin: taz, *Die Tageszeitung*, 31 March 1995. Lexis-Nexis.

Most historians specializing in twentieth-century Germany view the resistance as a “tragic failure.”<sup>50</sup> The resistance itself fits that description in that it failed to achieve its initial goal of destroying the Nazi regime, but it has succeeded somewhat in the goal stated by Major General Henning von Tresckow: “It’s not a matter any more of the practical aim, but of showing the world and history that the German resistance movement at risk of life has dared the decisive stroke. Everything else is a matter of indifference alongside that.”<sup>51</sup> Stauffenberg echoed these words: “It is no longer just success that counts. People will have to know that there was resistance and that we did not tolerate injustice.”<sup>52</sup>

Each year, approximately 70,000 people visit the Bendlerblock.<sup>53</sup> Though that only amounts to just under 200 visitors per day, these numbers show that people are aware of and interested in the German resistance. Career officers and soldiers in Germany’s military are required to take a seminar and serve at the Memorial to German Resistance.<sup>54</sup> The goal of the seminar is to educate the military about the resistance, particularly the officers’ conflict between betrayal of their oath of loyalty to the state and betrayal of their own conscience. The legacy of the resistance penetrates various levels of society, be it the general public, the military, or government officials.

After 1990, the memory of resistance no longer centered solely on the people whose political motivations best suit Germany. It is important to remember, however, that politics did not change overnight when East and West Germany became one country,

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<sup>50</sup> See Frank McDonough, *Opposition and Resistance in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) for more information. See also the work of Hans Mommsen, *Alternatives to Hitler* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

<sup>51</sup> Major-General Henning von Tresckow in June 1944, quoted in Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1936-1945: Nemesis*, (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), 653.

<sup>52</sup> Checkpoint Charlie Museum, Berlin. From a photograph took on 15 June 2006.

<sup>53</sup> Tour at the Memorial to German Resistance by Dr. Sylvia Foelz, 15 June 2006.

<sup>54</sup> Conversation with Ute Link, 16 June 2006.

and the political lines drawn between memory of resistance movements after the war shaped the way Germany remembered the resistance in the early 1990s. In addition, the idea of the “other Germany” still persists, reassuring people that even in Germany’s darkest time period, there were people who dared to stand up against tyranny. The resisters have become *Vorbilder*, but in building up some of the resisters as positive examples, many—or, more accurately, most—get left behind and forgotten. Reunification has not brought about an unbiased memory of the resistance.

While the GDR and FRG’s original political reasons for remembering a particular group no longer carry much weight in Germany, a new sort of bias has prevailed since the 1994 controversy. Despite the idea that resisters should be remembered based on the fact that they did not tolerate Nazism, certain groups still manage to dominate most of the recognition that exists in Germany—ceremonies, films, and monuments, to name a few—for what they did.

### III. Representative Heroes...or One-Track Memory?

*“Es lebe die Freiheit!”*<sup>55</sup>

The most direct English translation for the German word *Freiheit* is “freedom.” The very last word Hans Scholl ever spoke, the word Sophie Scholl scribbled on the back of a piece of paper shortly before her death, the word German politicians have used in multiple speeches commemorating the resistance, a word once described as having been “misused and thoroughly ruined”<sup>56</sup> is the backbone of why the resistance went from a group of traitors to a group of heroes, why some resisters have gained more recognition than others. The word has been used as the cornerstone of political use of the resistance, as well as one of the major reasons why some institutions model their missions after those groups or individuals, with the belief that those groups or individuals stood for principles valued in free societies. The GDR was not a free society, and as such many of the resisters whom they honored in building their “anti-fascist” society do not fit into this post-unification model of the *Vorbild*, which the German government and other institutions often connect with the concept of *Freiheit*. Despite the permanent exhibition at the GDW, it is very clear that Germany pays most attention to just a few groups and individuals when commemorating the resistance. There are two groups in particular which have gained most of the attention, and within each of those groups, there is one individual who has become representative of that group and of the resistance in general.

One of those groups is the men involved in July 20, 1944. Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg, one of the masterminds behind the plot, is the name most Germans and historians associate with the 20<sup>th</sup> of July. He is without question one of the best-known

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<sup>55</sup> Last words of Hans Scholl: “Long live freedom!”

<sup>56</sup> “ ‘Es lebe die Freiheit!’ ” Speech by Romano Guardini on 12 July 1958. Reprinted in Romano Guardini, *Freiheit und Verantwortung* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1997), 23.



resisters; some even go so far as to call him the “symbol of the German resistance.”<sup>57</sup> Within the other most widely remembered resistance group, the White Rose, siblings Hans and Sophie Scholl (Sophie in particular), have received the most recognition, especially through books and film, for their part in the anti-Nazi movement. The mission and message of the White Rose was simple: expose the Nazis’ crimes, specifically the mass murder of the Jews, and promote the idea of individual *Freiheit*, something that had been lacking in Germany for nearly ten years.<sup>58</sup> The members of the group wanted Germans to turn against the regime, and their pamphlets encouraged people to do so by whatever means possible, specifically through passive resistance and sabotage.

Streets named after Stauffenberg and the Scholls exist all over Germany. German filmmakers have made movies about the July 20, 1944, plot and about the White Rose, most recently in 2004 and 2005. Of the thousands of resisters to National Socialism, Stauffenberg and the Scholls are the most famous, and today Germany recognizes them as heroes. “Because of circumstances,” writes West German historian Hans Rothfels in a 1950s article, “the resistance of many workers and other nameless persons is less well documented than is the resistance of leading individuals and groups.”<sup>59</sup> The “circumstances” to which Rothfels was referring were politics; many workers, for instance, were communists or at least communist sympathizers. Both Stauffenberg and the Scholls fit the West German definition of resistance: pro-*Freiheit* and not communist. That politically charged definition was as true in 1990 as it was in 1950, and it still holds

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<sup>57</sup> Arno Luik, “Ich sprengte die Regierung in die Luft.” Berlin, *Die Tageszeitung*, 31 March 1995. Lexis-Nexis.

<sup>58</sup> Mark Starr, Bruce Shenitz, and Debbie Seward, “Resisting Hitler.” *Newsweek*, 13 May 1985. Lexis-Nexis.

<sup>59</sup> Hans Royce et. al, *Germans Against Hitler: July 20, 1944*. Translated into English by Allan and Lieselotte Yahraes. (Bonn: Berto-Verlag, 1960), 4.

true in the present, though within a different context of current events. This idea of a select few individuals as symbols of the resistance would probably be most accurately called “selective commemoration,” as only a few individuals, for whatever reason, became representative of the resistance movement to which they belonged. Even something as small as a title of a book or article illustrates this sort of selectiveness, for example: “Sophie Scholl *and* the White Rose” or “Stauffenberg *and* the Assassination Attempt of July 20, 1944.”<sup>60</sup>

Memory of individual resisters is more common in Germany than memory of the group as a whole; “Weiße-Rose-Straße,”<sup>61</sup> “Rote-Kapelle-Straße,” and “Straße des 20. Juli” are either nonexistent or hard to come by. In Berlin, there is a “Straße des 17. Juni” commemorating the anti-communist uprising in East Germany in 1953. But there is no “Straße des 20. Juli.” There are only streets named after specific people, including “Stauffenbergstraße” “Mildred-Harnack-Straße” and “Ludwig-Beck-Straße” in Berlin.<sup>62</sup> While there is no denying the courage of the individuals after whom these streets are named, using those individuals to represent the rest of the resistance makes their actions seem more daring, more courageous, and more heroic than those whose names are not as well known but who risked just as much as those whose names have become synonymous with German resistance.

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<sup>60</sup> “Sophie Scholl and the White Rose:” is the title of a 2006 book by Annette Dumbach and Jud Newborn. “Stauffenberg and the Assassination Attempt of July 20, 1944” is the heading on the Memorial to German Resistance’s website article about the plot, as well as the memorial’s name for the exhibition itself.

<sup>61</sup> “Straße” is the German word for “street.” See “German Terms and Abbreviations Used in This Thesis” for a full list.

<sup>62</sup> From my own observations during a trip to Berlin, 13-18 June 2006.

*“Everything is Sophie Scholl”<sup>63</sup> and the White Rose*

*“There is a higher justice! They will go down in history!”<sup>64</sup>*

One of the most famous women in German history is Sophie Magdalena Scholl. After the West German government declared resisters heroes and symbols of the “other Germany” rather than traitors in 1952, the White Rose moved to the forefront in West German memory of resistance. In 1983, German filmmaker Michael Verhoeven directed the film *Die Weisse Rose (The White Rose)* starring Lena Stolze as Sophie Scholl. The film focused on Sophie in particular. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, Sophie Scholl's fame increased. Sophie Scholl has become an influential role model, in particular for young women, since the 1980s, when Verhoeven's *The White Rose* led to the retraction of the conviction of the members of the White Rose by the so-called “People's Court.”<sup>65</sup>

Initially, the German government refused to allow the film to be shown abroad due to an epilogue which pointedly observed that the legal judgment condemning the White Rose society had never been rescinded. Ultimately, the political controversy surrounding Verhoeven's film directly caused the German government to officially invalidate the Nazi “People's Court” system that sentenced the group to death.<sup>66</sup>

Popular support for the White Rose opposite the stance of the German government was the driving force behind the decision, more evidence which suggests that the White Rose is the general public's favorite of all of the resistance groups. Within that memory, the story of Sophie Scholl almost always seems to come to the forefront. The stories of brave

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<sup>63</sup> From a conversation with Ursula Reidel on 9 January 2007.

<sup>64</sup> Words of Sophie and Hans's father, Robert Scholl, after he forced his way into the “People's Court,” during the trial of Hans, Sophie, and Christoph. Quoted in Dumbach and Newborn, *Sophie Scholl & the White Rose* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 158.

<sup>65</sup> Michael Verhoeven, „Die Weisse Rose,“ 1983.

<sup>66</sup> Back cover of American edition of Verhoeven's “Die Weisse Rose,” 1983.

young women during the Nazi era are nothing new: take for instance the story of a teenaged Jewish girl hiding from the Nazis in Holland who became known worldwide through the publication of her diary. Sophie Scholl's story, like that of Anne Frank, became known through the publication of Sophie's letters and diaries, and through films.

In 2005, the German film industry came out with a highly successful, award-winning film recognized within and outside of Germany: *Sophie Scholl: Die letzten Tage* (*Sophie Scholl: The Final Days*), starring Julia Jentsch, a well-known German actress, as Sophie. This film brought the German resistance even more into public discourse in Germany and, even more importantly, to the world's attention. The English-language case for the film describes Sophie Scholl as "Germany's most famous anti-Nazi heroine."<sup>67</sup> The filmmakers used documents from East Germany only available since reunification in order to accurately and realistically depict Sophie's last days, specifically her interrogation.<sup>68</sup> The as-realistic-as-possible filmmaking is consistent with revisionism. The film makes clear the ideals for which the members of the White Rose stood, freedom in particular. The *New York Times* wrote that the film "challenges you to gauge your own courage."<sup>69</sup>

Germans certainly recognize the Scholls' courage. A poll conducted in 2003 by a major German television network, ZDF, listed Hans and Sophie Scholl as number four on the list of "Greatest Germans of All Time," behind Konrad Adenauer, Martin Luther, and Karl Marx, and beating out Einstein, Goethe, and von Bismarck, among others in the Top

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<sup>67</sup> "Sophie Scholl: The Final Days." Film released on DVD in the United States in November 2006.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with director Marc Rothmund included in the U.S. edition of "Sophie Scholl: The Final Days."

<sup>69</sup> "Sophie Scholl: The Final Days." U.S. DVD cover.

Ten.<sup>70</sup> Stauffenberg did not make the Top Ten on the list; in fact, the Scholls were the only members of the resistance ranked higher than place number 34, which went to Dietrich Bonhoeffer.<sup>71</sup> Stauffenberg was number 49, and Georg Elser 97. One other resister made the Top 200 list, Bishop Clemens August von Galen at 138. Among those ranked ahead of Bonhoeffer were singer Herbert Grönemeyer, auto racer Michael Schumacher, and tennis star Steffi Graf.<sup>72</sup>

What is most significant about this poll is the recognition the Scholl siblings received. No other member of the White Rose made the list, most likely because Hans and Sophie Scholl have become representative of and synonymous with the White Rose. It is clear that the White Rose is a favorite of the German public; Stauffenberg's position at number 49 only reinforces the notion that, despite respect among the general public, he and the other July 20 conspirators are more favorites of the German government than of the people, as they have been since the 1950s. Sophie Scholl was the highest ranked German woman on the list; the next-highest ranked woman was politician Regine Hildebrandt at 22, followed immediately by feminist Alice Schwarzer.<sup>73</sup> *Brigitte*, a German magazine for women, voted Sophie the "most important woman of the twentieth century."<sup>74</sup> That honor in itself speaks volumes about what the general public, specifically women, think of Sophie Scholl: she is truly a *Vorbild*.

Most historians and Germans have not, since the 1950s, contested Sophie Scholl's status as a German heroine. The problem, however, is that many other women involved

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<sup>70</sup> 100 Greatest Germans of All Time, „Unsere Besten,“ 2003. Zweites deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF), [www.zdf.de/ZDFde/inhalt/31/0,1872,2051839,00.html](http://www.zdf.de/ZDFde/inhalt/31/0,1872,2051839,00.html)

<sup>71</sup> Geoffrey B. Kelly, "The Life and Death of a Modern Martyr." *Christian History* 10, no. 4 (1991): 8. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

<sup>72</sup> 100 Greatest Germans of All Time (List of 100): <http://www.zdf.de/ZDFde/download/0,1896,2001035,00.pdf>, Top 200 List, <http://www.zdf.de/ZDFde/download/0,1896,2001036,00.pdf>

<sup>73</sup> 100 Greatest Germans, ZDF, <http://www.zdf.de/ZDFde/download/0,1896,2001035,00.pdf>

<sup>74</sup> Annette Dumbach and Jud Newborn, *Sophie Scholl & the White Rose*, iii.

in the resistance movement do not get the same recognition as Sophie Scholl, not even in the context of historiography. The first biography of Mildred Harnack, member of the Red Orchestra, was not published until 2000.<sup>75</sup> Books on Sophie Scholl date back decades. Harnack was an American, so she is understandably not necessarily a "German" heroine, though Germany does remember her more than most women through schools and streets named after her. Another leading female member of the Red Orchestra, Libertas Schulze-Boysen, a German woman and the wife of Harro Schulze-Boysen, is not nearly as well-known or well-represented in the historiography of the resistance as Sophie Scholl, or even Mildred Harnack. The Nazis murdered Libertas Schulze-Boysen for her anti-Nazi activities on December 22, 1942, at Plötzensee prison near Berlin.<sup>76</sup> Countless other women resisted the Nazis, but Sophie Scholl is the only one to receive widespread recognition from the German public and German government. Like Stauffenberg, she has become a "symbol" of the German resistance, and more specifically a symbol of the women of the resistance. Both of the Scholls are "now regarded as iconic figures of resistance the world over."<sup>77</sup>

The straightforwardness of the White Rose's cause, their courage, and their belief in the basic human right of individual freedom make them so well-remembered in reunified Germany. There are no major controversies surrounding their memory, be it through historical debate or public memory. The pamphlets that the group distributed contain words about exactly the same principles valued in modern free societies,

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<sup>75</sup> Shareen Blair Brysac's *Resisting Hitler: Mildred Harnack and the Red Orchestra* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>76</sup> Gedenkstätte deutscher Widerstand. "Biographien: Libertas Schulze-Boysen." [http://www.gdw-berlin.de/bio/ausgabe\\_mit.php?id=18](http://www.gdw-berlin.de/bio/ausgabe_mit.php?id=18)

<sup>77</sup> Back cover of Annette Dunbach and Jud Newborn, *Sophie Scholl & the White Rose* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006).

principles such as “*individuelle Freiheit*,” wrote Franz J. Müller, a German journalist, in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* on February 16, 1993.<sup>78</sup> A member of the “Sophie Scholl” film crew referred to the White Rose pamphlets as a “manifesto of today’s society.”<sup>79</sup> Hans Scholl and Alexander Schmorell, responsible for authoring several of the group’s pamphlets, wrote that the most important characteristic human beings possess is free will, one of the very values former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl spoke of over fifty years later.<sup>80</sup>

In their second pamphlet, Hans Scholl and Alexander Schmorell referred to the Nazis’ murders of the Jews in Poland: “Here we are seeing the most terrible crime against human dignity, a crime unlike any other in the history of mankind.”<sup>81</sup> The White Rose’s attention to the Nazi atrocities in Europe and the blatantly honest statements they made against the regime through their pamphlets and the slogans they painted on public buildings, and above all the value they placed on individual *Freiheit*, are why Germans have revered them so much, why many Germans consider two of their members—hopefully representative of their entire group rather than somehow more important than the rest of the group—among the “Greatest Germans of All Time.”

Perhaps the group to most strongly revere the White Rose is young people. Children in the city of Ulm, hometown of Hans and Sophie Scholl, have read the Scholl letters and diaries in school.<sup>82</sup> University students in particular feel a connection to the

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<sup>78</sup> Franz J. Müller, „Weisse-Rose-Stiftung: Beispiel für zivilen Ungehorsam Aufforderung an den Bürgermut.“ *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 16 February 1993. Lexis-Nexis.

<sup>79</sup> “Sophie Scholl: Die letzten Tage.” Dir. Marc Rothmund, 2005. From the “Making of” special feature on the American DVD.

<sup>80</sup> First White Rose pamphlet, written by Hans Scholl and Alexander Schmorell, June 1942. “Flugblätter der Weißen Rose.” Copy printed by the Memorial to German Resistance, 1999.

<sup>81</sup> Second White Rose pamphlet, written by Hans Scholl and Alexander Schmorell, June 1942. “Flugblätter der Weißen Rose.” Copy printed by the Memorial to German Resistance, 2002.

<sup>82</sup> Conversation with Yvonne Poloczec, 11 January 2006, Konstanz, Germany.

group through the common denominators of age and occupation. At Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität (LMU) in Munich, where the members of the White Rose either studied or worked, the group's ideas are central to the university's mission, outlined by university president Professor Dr. Bernd Huber in his welcome message on the school's website:

The LMU takes the instruction of young people very seriously. The mission of the university is a comprehensive education, which includes social competence as well as a critical consciousness of values and history. The legacy of the White Rose, the student resistance group against National Socialism, belongs to that mission.<sup>83</sup>

The university clearly considers the events surrounding the White Rose to be among the most important, if not the most important, in the school's history. The group's connection to a major German university provides more opportunities to commemorate their actions, whether through mission statements, ceremonies, or naming areas in front of university buildings "Geschwister-Scholl-Platz" or "Professor-Huber-Platz," named for Professor Kurt Huber of the White Rose.<sup>84</sup> The largest memorial to the White Rose group is at the LMU. Embedded into the ground are replicas of the White Rose pamphlets, along with photos of some of the members of the group.<sup>85</sup>

The LMU is not the only German university to name areas of its campus after members of the White Rose. In the small southwestern city of Tübingen, there is a Geschwister-Scholl-Platz in front of a major university building.<sup>86</sup> Throughout Germany,

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<sup>83</sup> From the webpage of Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich. "Herzlich willkommen!" [http://www.uni-muenchen.de/ueber\\_die\\_lmu/index.html](http://www.uni-muenchen.de/ueber_die_lmu/index.html)

<sup>84</sup> I learned of Professor'Huber-Platz on a visit to Munich on 9 June 2006.

<sup>85</sup> For photographs of the memorial, see "A Teacher's Guide to the Holocaust," Produced by the Florida Center for Instructional Technology, College of Education, University of South Florida, 2005. <http://fcit.usf.edu/HOLOCAUST/photos/wrose/wrose.htm>

<sup>86</sup> As a student at the Eberhard Karls Universität in Tübingen during the spring and summer of 2006, I walked past the Geschwister-Scholl-Platz nearly every day.



there are also streets named after Professor Kurt Huber and Willi Graf, Christoph Probst, and Alexander Schmorell, other student members of the group.<sup>87</sup> There is a school named after Christoph Probst in the Bavarian town of Gilching, near Munich. The school's webpage has a section devoted entirely to Christoph Probst, and explains why they named the school after him. After referring to Probst's "courage to resist," and "willingness to risk his life,"<sup>88</sup> among other characteristics, the school ends its statement on Probst with:

As a member of the school community it should be a point of honor to inform oneself about the resistance to the violent Nazi regime, and, with conviction, to make one's own the good sense of the [school's namesake].<sup>89</sup>

Here again is the idea of the *Vorbild*. There are also several schools named after Willi Graf, Kurt Huber, and Alexander Schmorell throughout Germany.

The appreciation of the White Rose within the academic world was not a new concept; as early as the mid-1940s, the LMU and other universities commemorated the group's actions. Philosopher Romano Guardini gave several speeches from late 1945 to 1960 at the LMU and at Tübingen's university, the Eberhard Karls Universität. The speeches highlighted characteristics of the White Rose that transcend politics: "They fought for freedom of the spirit and honor of human beings, and their names will remain united with this struggle."<sup>90</sup> This transcendence explains largely why both East and West Germany recognized the actions of the group.

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<sup>87</sup> A simple internet search reveals the existence of such streets in Germany. [www.google.com](http://www.google.com)

<sup>88</sup> "Sinn und Wirkung einer Namensgebung." Christoph Probst Gymnasium, Gilsing. <http://www.cpg-gilching.de/> My own translation.

<sup>89</sup> <http://www.cpg-gilching.de/> My own translation.

<sup>90</sup> "Die Waage des Daseins." Speech by Romano Guardini on 4 November 1945. Reprinted in Guardini, *Freiheit und Verantwortung*, 20.

German historian Joachim Fest, in his 1994 book *Plotting Hitler's Death*, points out that when remembering the resistance, attention “tends to focus on dramatic events like the idealistic and reckless actions of the White Rose...the courageous efforts of other groups are forgotten.”<sup>91</sup> Fest’s description of the group’s actions as “reckless” is one of the few criticisms that exists of the White Rose, if it is even a criticism. In the environment of Nazi Germany, any form of opposition was “reckless” because it often carried a death sentence. Fest also clearly believes that in remembering a select few resisters, Germany unfairly neglects the rest.

***Claus von Stauffenberg: The “Symbol of the German Resistance”***<sup>92</sup>

*“Yet you will remain with us, defining, leading,  
the war-god’s lordly herald of the future world,  
only enhanced by one eye’s sacrifice.”*<sup>93</sup>

The story of the one-eyed, one-armed who tried to blow up Hitler in the summer of 1944 is very well known in Germany.<sup>94</sup> Joachim Fest describes him as someone who “imbued the resistance with a vitality that had long been lacking...[h]e seemed to send an electric charge through the lifeless resistance networks as he quickly and naturally assumed a leadership role.”<sup>95</sup> The Memorial to German Resistance describes him as having had “a great deal of charisma” and states that he was “valued for his professional

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<sup>91</sup> Fest, *Plotting Hitler's Death*, 3.

<sup>92</sup> Arno Luik, “Ich sprengte die Regierung in die Luft.” Berlin, taz, *Die Tageszeitung*, 31 March 1995. Lexis Nexis.

<sup>93</sup> From the poem „Der Tod des Meisters,“ quoted in Hoffmann, *Stauffenberg: A Family History, 1905-1944* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003), 246. This stanza specifically refers to Stauffenberg.

<sup>94</sup> Stauffenberg suffered severe injuries in North Africa during the war, which left him without his left eye and right arm. He also lost fingers on his left hand.

<sup>95</sup> Fest, *Plotting Hitler's Death*, 215.

expertise.”<sup>96</sup> Even in looking at something as simple as the change in name of the street on which the Bendlerblock is located from Bendlerstraße to Stauffenbergstraße, it is clear that Germany also believes that he was a “leader” of the resistance. The German government honors him, the other plotters, and the resistance in general yearly at the Bendlerblock, and his is one of the most recognizable faces of the resistance. One of the strongest elements of his legacy is that he refused to be a “traitor to his own conscience,”<sup>97</sup> a message repeated in titles of books, commemoration speeches, museum exhibits, and films about the resistance.

In writing about July 20, 1944, Fest acknowledged that the subject was one that had received the “lion’s share” of the attention of the resistance, but that his was a more complete account that would provide insight into the motives of the group; it was not just a rehashing of the events leading up to, on, and after July 20.<sup>98</sup> Fest originally wrote those statements in 1994, at a sensitive time for the memory of resistance. Though more resisters gained recognition as the revisionist view began to prevail in 1994 with the opening of exhibits commemorating communist resisters, Germany does not remember the Scholls and Stauffenberg any less. In fact, Germany remembers them even *more*. The “lion’s share” of the attention the German government puts on the resistance goes to the men involved in the July 20 plot, be they *Wehrmacht* officers or members of the Kreisau Circle.

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<sup>96</sup> German Resistance Memorial Center, “Stauffenberg and the Assassination Attempt of July 20, 1944.” <http://www.gdw-berlin.de/b12/b12-1-e.php#>

<sup>97</sup> Well-known words of Stauffenberg: “He who decides to act must know that he will go down in history as a traitor to his country. But if he fails to act, he will be a traitor to his own conscience,” quoted in Peter Steinbach and Johannes Tuchel, ed. *Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1994), 12.

<sup>98</sup> Fest, *Plotting Hitler’s Death*, Introduction.

Of all of the army officers involved in the plot to assassinate Hitler and take over the government, Stauffenberg receives the most recognition. Of all of the attempts on Hitler's life, July 20<sup>th</sup> is the best known. That is no accident. Though July 20, 1944, is no longer specifically used as a tool of political legitimization, it serves another purpose, as does the concentration of memory on one person. The twentieth of July and Claus von Stauffenberg became, to the German government, representative of the resistance as a whole, an historical event which they could mold to fit in with current events and political concerns.

The carpenter Georg Elser also attempted to kill Hitler in a beer hall in 1939, yet his name does not appear as often as Stauffenberg's in Germany. Despite the lack of historical literature on Elser, he does not go completely without recognition. There is a Georg-Elser-Platz in Konstanz, Germany, where the Gestapo arrested him as he tried to flee to Switzerland after the assassination attempt in 1939.<sup>99</sup> There is also a memorial in Elser's hometown. Still, that is a small number when compared to all of the commemorations of Stauffenberg which exist throughout Germany.

Elser's bomb would have killed Hitler had he been in the beer hall at the same time as the explosion. In 1995, Elser's brother spoke with a Berlin journalist about his brother's legacy. He was upset that Georg Elser had not received much recognition. In particular, the fact that many refer to Elser as the would-be "assassin" and not the "resister" troubled him.<sup>100</sup> Georg Elser, an "ordinary" German who followed his convictions and tried to kill the dictator, does not receive nearly as much recognition as count and colonel Claus von Stauffenberg. Part of why that is has to do with the scale of

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<sup>99</sup> This information from my own observations while in Konstanz, Germany.

<sup>100</sup> Arno Luik, "Ich sprengte die Regierung in die Luft."

each of the attempts: Elser acted entirely alone, but Stauffenberg had a large circle of conspirators who planned not only to kill Hitler but also to take over the government.

Yet many besides Stauffenberg and Elser receive far less recognition than Elser for trying to kill Hitler, if any at all. Germans certainly acknowledge Elser's actions as heroic, as demonstrated by the ZDF "100 Greatest Germans of All Time" list; aside from that poll and the occasional memorial or street sign, recognition is fairly minimal. It is there, however, which is important. The only other man to come close to assassinating Hitler has not been completely forgotten. Even Helmut Kohl and Gerhard Schröder's commemoration speeches in 1994 and 2004, respectively, mentioned Elser.

One of the major reasons why Stauffenberg and even Elser receive recognition for their attempts to assassinate Hitler is that their bombs actually exploded. Their failed attempts give credence to Ian Kershaw's statement that Hitler's survival was the "luck of the devil."<sup>101</sup> Countless other men, mostly army officers, planned to kill Hitler and had bombs in briefcases set to go off. Rather than Claus von Stauffenberg, the names Fabian von Schlabrendorff, Henning von Tresckow, Axel von dem Bussche, or Rudolph-Christoph von Gersdorff could have been synonymous with heroic resistance.<sup>102</sup> Some of those five names have been lost in history, overshadowed by Stauffenberg.

Why, in the years since the revisionist view of resistance developed, has Stauffenberg remained dominant in German memory? Since the early 1950s, particularly in 1955, when German filmmaker Georg Wilhelm Pabst directed *Es geschah am 20. Juli* (*It happened on July 20<sup>th</sup>*), positive memory of Stauffenberg has existed in Germany. (That does not mean that negative memory of Stauffenberg as a traitor only concerned

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<sup>101</sup> Gerhard Schröder quoted Kershaw in his 20 July 2004 speech. See also Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1936-1945: Nemesis* (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000).

<sup>102</sup> Fest, *Plotting Hitler's Death*, 192-223.

with preserving his own power disappeared after the FRG decided to include the resistance as a tool of legitimization.) Stauffenberg was the soldier to actually plant the bomb to kill Hitler; he is the first name most in Germany associate with July 20, 1944. Yet on the night of July 20, Stauffenberg was not the only soldier the Nazis shot, and those men were not the only people to die in connection with the assassination and coup plots. Several of the other officers had major roles in the assassination; Werner von Haeften, Stauffenberg's first lieutenant, was with him at the Wolf's Lair in East Prussia, present everywhere except the meeting room where Stauffenberg planted the bomb next to the table at which Hitler stood. The Nazis murdered him that same evening along with Stauffenberg, Friedrich Olbricht, and Albrecht Ritter Mertz von Quirnheim. As the Nazis fired at Stauffenberg, von Haeften jumped in front of him, a last act of loyalty to his military superior.<sup>103</sup> That fact is not very well-known, nor well-represented in accounts of 20<sup>th</sup> of July.<sup>104</sup>

Stauffenberg tends to be representative of all of the men involved in the plot, much in the way that Hans and Sophie Scholl represent all of the members of the White Rose. This selective representation, however, tends to cause less of the memory to be directed toward the other major players in the assassination attempt and coup, such as Henning von Tresckow, who in 1943 also tried to kill Hitler, and Ludwig Beck, who had long opposed Hitler.<sup>105</sup> When remembering Stauffenberg, it is also important to remember the hundreds of others executed in connection to the plot, including the men

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<sup>103</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1936-1945: Nemesis* (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), 660. The narrative in Kershaw about the night of July 20, 1944, is incredibly detailed, accurate, and moving.

<sup>104</sup> "Es geschah am 20. Juli" (Dir. Georg Wilhelm Pabst, Germany, 1955) shows Stauffenberg yelling "Es lebe das heilige Deutschland!" ("Long live holy Germany!"), cuts away from the officers against the Bendlerblock courtyard wall, and then after the firing squad shoots, goes back to the now-empty wall. I have only read two accounts: one in Kershaw, *Nemesis*, and the other in Fest, *Plotting Hitler's Death*, which mention von Haeften jumping in front of Stauffenberg.

<sup>105</sup> For more on Beck, see Fest, *Plotting Hitler's Death*.

the Nazis executed by hanging them on short ropes from meat hooks and whose executions were filmed at Hitler's request. The 1994 documentary series *Widerstand* (*Resistance*), a seven-part film about resistance which, like the GDW, paid attention to all known resisters, included trial footage of the men executed in August of 1944. The series, reproduced in multiple languages, gave viewers a firsthand look at the resisters themselves and showed the heroic dignity, courage, and even defiance with which the resisters tried at the "People's Court" faced "judge" Roland Freisler, later dubbed "Hitler's Hangman."<sup>106</sup>

Documentaries receive attention from the general population, but feature films sometimes attract a wider audience. The 2004 television film *Stauffenberg*, also titled *Operation Valkyrie*, came out before the sixtieth anniversary of the plot and enjoyed great popularity in Germany.<sup>107</sup> The film, as evidenced by the title, focuses on Stauffenberg, played by well-known German actor Sebastian Koch. SWR, a German radio station, produced the film. Every ten years, it seems, there is a renewed interest among the German news media and the general population in the plot to kill Hitler that came closest to success. With that comes a renewed interest in the man who almost killed Hitler. The attachment of a specific date and event in history to a resister facilitates commemoration; yearly ceremonies, speeches, and so on are possible.

Positive commemoration of Stauffenberg continued after July 2004. In Stuttgart, Stauffenberg's hometown, an exhibition opened up on Claus von Stauffenberg and his brother Berthold, also an active member of the resistance, one of the German nobility in

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<sup>106</sup> "Widerstand: German Resistance to Hitler." Dir. Michael Kloft. K Chronos Production for Transtel Deutsche Welle & NDR, Germany. Köln, 1994.

<sup>107</sup> Clare Murphy, "Emerging from the Nazi Shadow?" 19 July 2004. BBC News Online. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3897885.stm>

the Kreisau Circle executed in August of 1944 for his role in the July 20 conspiracy. The exhibition opened on November 15, 2006, which would have been the 99<sup>th</sup> birthday of Claus von Stauffenberg. The choice of date is significant; it seems like a sign of respect for the man who came closest to killing Hitler.

One of the major reasons highlighted by Germans, including politicians and journalists, as to why Stauffenberg has become so respected, is the assumption that “had the attempt succeeded, it would have saved millions of peoples’ lives.”<sup>108</sup> This is a fact; 4.8 million Germans died between July 20, 1944, and the end of the war.<sup>109</sup> That number does not include the number of people murdered in concentration camps or the number of non-German soldiers and civilians killed in the last year of the war. But even after acknowledgement of this fact, the news media, historians, and others still do not pay much attention to the rest of the conspirators and all of the other attempts to kill Hitler that occurred before July 20, 1944. *Der Spiegel* briefly includes, in its July 12, 2004, article on the plot to kill Hitler, a list of some of the assassination attempts which preceded Stauffenberg’s. Joachim Fest’s *Plotting Hitler’s Death* provides one of the most detailed accounts of assassination attempts preceding Stauffenberg’s.

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<sup>108</sup> This statement made by the following people in the following sources: Ministerpräsident Günther Oettinger (CDU) in a Südwestrundfunk (SWR) article, “Stauffenberg-Gedenkstätte in Stuttgart: Ein Fenster zur Vergangenheit.” November 2006. <http://www.swr.de/regionen/stuttgart/stauffenberg/-/id=3398/did=1740486/9q4...> Klaus Wiegrefe, “Helden und Mörder.” *Der Spiegel*, 12 July 2004, 32. My own translation.

<sup>109</sup> Fest, *Plotting Hitler’s Death*, 3-4.



*Defining the Hero's Pedestal*

*“I asked...whether it wasn't strange to move around  
as a human being among the shadows of heroes....”<sup>110</sup>*

The more a hero a person is in the eyes of those who come after them, the harder it becomes to say anything negative about them, even if the negative statements are fact. For that reason, Germany needs to treat the concept of resisters as *Vorbilder* with caution. Hans Bernd Gisevius, July 20 conspirator and member of the *Abwehr*, writes in his 1947 memoir *To the Bitter End*, the first successful publication documenting the resistance to Hitler,<sup>111</sup> “So far as my dead friends are concerned, I should be dishonoring the memory of their sacrifices were I to assert that in all their actions they behaved without hesitation and without error.”<sup>112</sup> In the pre-unification, early revisionist period, and then in the mid-1990s, unified Germany finally began to do what Gisevius had done fifty years earlier: present facts, regardless of the information it might reveal. Gisevius would agree that Germany has begun to truly honor the resisters by moving toward presenting them as they really were.

One result of Stauffenberg's position on the hero's pedestal was that his personal beliefs were often subject to misinterpretation. He has been called a Nazi, a conservative, and even a democrat. According to his wife, that is inaccurate. Stauffenberg was neither a conservative nor a Nazi.<sup>113</sup> An April 5, 2006, Associated Press obituary of Countess Nina von Stauffenberg referred to her as “the widow of the aristocratic Nazi officer who tried

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<sup>110</sup> From Christa Wolf's short story, “A Little Outing to H,” in *What Remains & Other Stories* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 164.

<sup>111</sup> Fest, *Plotting Hitler's Death*, 80.

<sup>112</sup> Hans Bernd Gisevius, *To the Bitter End*, translated by Richard and Clara Winston (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1947), 604.

<sup>113</sup> From Michael Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History* (Macmillan, 2000). Quote reprinted at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claus\\_Schenk\\_von\\_Stauffenberg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claus_Schenk_von_Stauffenberg)

to kill Adolf Hitler.”<sup>114</sup> One day later, the Associate Press embarrassingly had to correct itself: “An obituary by The Associated Press yesterday about Nina von Stauffenberg, the widow of Col. Claus Graf Schenk von Stauffenberg, who tried to kill Hitler with a briefcase bomb, misstated the colonel's affiliation. He was in the German Army; he was not a member of the Nazi party.”<sup>115</sup> Indeed, though he agreed with Hitler on some issues initially, many of his principles stemmed from his Christian and noble background, as well as from his fascination with poet Stefan George.<sup>116</sup> He and many of the officers stood for principles that date back to pre-Weimar Germany and Otto von Bismarck; of those, loyalty to authority, specifically loyalty through an oath, held special significance for them. The Prussian value of loyalty deterred many officers from breaking their oath to Hitler. To justify their actions in relation to the oath of loyalty, Stauffenberg stated, “No one is obliged to observe his oath of service towards a person who has broken the oath a thousand times over.”<sup>117</sup> This quote was on display in the Checkpoint Charlie Museum in Berlin, right next to a quote by Gandhi, which stated, “An individual can oppose the whole power of a state of injustice to save his honour and his soul and to thus create the basis for the downfall of this state or for its improvement.”<sup>118</sup> The placement of Stauffenberg's words next to the words of such a respected person as Gandhi further shows the value Germany places upon what the men involved in July 20, 1944, did. More specifically, the two quotes also show the level to which Germany elevates Stauffenberg.

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<sup>114</sup> “Nina von Stauffenberg, 92, Widow of Rebel Nazi Officer, is Dead.” The Associated Press. Printed in the New York Times, 5 April 2006.  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/05/world/europe/05stauffenberg.html?ex=1172725200&en=eee90d0b77307ead&ei=5070>

<sup>115</sup> Correction to “Nina von Stauffenberg, 92, Widow of Rebel Nazi Officer, is Dead.” The Associated Press. Printed in the New York Times, 6 April 2006.

<sup>116</sup> For more about Claus von Stauffenberg and Stefan George, see Hoffmann, *Stauffenberg*.

<sup>117</sup> Checkpoint Charlie Museum, Berlin. From a photograph I took on 15 June 2006.

<sup>118</sup> Checkpoint Charlie Museum, Berlin. From a photograph I took on 15 June 2006.

Calling someone a “hero” is subjective. Even if an entire nation believes that someone is a “hero,” there are varying degrees of how highly they think of that person in comparison to others whom they would call “heroes.” The level of knowledge among the general public also contributes to whether or not someone considers an historical figure a “hero.” If someone hears, for example, the words “Claus von Stauffenberg tried to kill Adolf Hitler,” without having any familiarity with Stauffenberg’s background, chances are that person would, without much hesitation, think highly of Stauffenberg, unless that person were a neo-Nazi. They would have to dig deeper into the history books or magazine articles such as the July 2004 article in *Der Spiegel* to find out that Stauffenberg was no advocate of equality in Germany, including racial equality, and that Stauffenberg’s bomb killed four people, one of whom was involved in the conspiracy. Knowledge of history can affect how an individual remembers a particular historical figure.

To give a comparative example, if an American heard that Thomas Jefferson was one of the engineers behind the Declaration of Independence for the United States, and did not know much about Jefferson himself, chances are they would think highly of him. Without a more thorough knowledge of history, people do not know that Jefferson owned slaves and had illegitimate children with those slaves, actions most Americans consider morally wrong. Yet Jefferson still has a large memorial dedicated to him, as do the anti-Nazi resisters. Despite whatever personal shortcomings, they still gain recognition for their positive actions. This general memory of heroes is not exclusive to Germany, but it certainly applies to the memory of resisters to National Socialism in unified Germany.

West Germany put Claus von Stauffenberg and Hans and Sophie Scholl on a pedestal. They remain there, yet as of the late 1990s and early 2000s, some formerly ignored or controversial members of the resistance are now beginning to move up there with them (not without difficulty), and the German news media has addressed the fact that Stauffenberg was neither a convinced anti-Nazi from the beginning nor a democrat. The German magazine *Der Spiegel* made it clear in its article of July 12, 2004, that Claus von Stauffenberg had at first supported Hitler and the National Socialist regime. While historians had long recognized that he had not always been a resister, it was perhaps not as well-known among the German public. At the time of Hitler's entrance into power, Stauffenberg "dreamed of a thousand-year empire...and understood himself as part of a new elite [group]."<sup>119</sup> This particular issue of *Der Spiegel* also included an interview with a historian who explained the divided memory of resistance which had occurred in East and West Germany.<sup>120</sup> The acknowledgement of a formerly divided memory strengthens the case for a shift in memory once those two memories clashed, but that shift does not mean that memory of the resistance has become united or equal. After reunification, the same people who were on the hero's pedestal in West Germany continued to gain most of the public recognition that the resistance received. Thousands of resisters remained, with the exception of the display at the GDW, in the shadows.

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<sup>119</sup> Klaus Wiegrefe, "Helden und Mörder." *Der Spiegel*, 12 July 2004, 35, 36. My own translation.

<sup>120</sup> " 'Beide Geschichten erzählen' ." Klaus Wiegrefe and Hans Michael Kloth's interview with historian Stephan Malinowski. *Der Spiegel*, 12 July 2004, 46-48.

#### **IV. Neglected, Misinterpreted, and Forgotten Resistance ...a Product of Reunification?**

*“We would have their deeds remind us of the necessity of standing together,  
over and above all political party differences among us,  
in the basic issues of freedom and justice.”<sup>121</sup>*

These words, written long before German reunification by conservative German politician Dr. Robert Lehr, did not carry much truth with regard to actual German public opinion and government opinion, neither in the FRG nor the GDR. His words sound as though a revisionist spoke them in the 1990s. Yet even with the development of revisionism as a way of looking at the Nazi past, the deeply drawn political lines remained intact for many Germans.

When the Berlin Wall fell and East and West Germany became one country, the West wasted no time in erasing the memory of Communists in the East, including Communist resisters to National Socialism. Street signs and buildings, particularly schools, originally named after Communist resisters lost their names. Some of the changes in street signs indicated political sentiments toward specific resistance movements or resisters. In the city of Erfurt in the former GDR, officials renamed sixteen streets named after Communist resisters, one of which was changed from Wilhelm Pieck Avenue to Stauffenberg Avenue.<sup>122</sup> What happened after unification was a continuation of the sentiments of the West throughout all of Germany; therefore, the resisters who had gained the attention in the FRG prior to unification remained at the forefront of German memory of the resistance. The message was clear: Colonel von Stauffenberg deserved

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<sup>121</sup> Words of Dr. Robert Lehr in 1952, in Hans Royce et al, *Germans Against Hitler: July 20, 1944*, translated into English by Allan and Lieselotte Yahraes. (Bonn: Berto-Verlag, 1960), 4.

<sup>122</sup> Klaus Neumann, *Shifting Memories: The Nazi Past in the New Germany* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000), 173. Bill Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past* (London: Routledge, 2001), 86.

more recognition than communist leader Wilhelm Pieck. Name changes along political lines were a part of the West's dominance of memory of the resistance.

Some name changes, however, were not necessarily politically charged, and were even supported by the local populations. "In a number of cases, communist street names have been replaced with the names that the streets had before the communist takeover of eastern Germany after the war," writes historian Bill Niven in his book, *Facing the Nazi Past*, which is why the city of Berlin changed "Wilhelm-Pieck-Straße" back to "Torstraße" in the 1990s.<sup>123</sup> Not every case of a name change, therefore, favored resisters in West German memory over those in East German memory. Some of the name changes came about simply because many in the East were sick of hearing about communist resistance heroes.<sup>124</sup> According to Niven, the extent of the change in street names "has been exaggerated by its opponents [in the former GDR],"<sup>125</sup> and "a complaint often voiced is that the changes in the eastern street-name landscape have not been accompanied by appropriate adjustments in the [west]."<sup>126</sup> In the early 1990s, sensitivity toward left-wing politics—brought about by anti-GDR sentiments, tensions between East and West, and concern about left-wing extremism—would have deterred West German cities from making those "appropriate adjustments." After reunification, West German culture dominated over the culture of the former GDR, and memory of the resistance was no exception in the years following the fall of the Berlin Wall. Some groups that had never been very well understood remained so after reunification. West Germany, up until the early to mid-1990s, even ignored left-wing groups composed only in part of

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<sup>123</sup> Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past*, 84.

<sup>124</sup> Thanks to Professor Raffael Scheck for this information.

<sup>125</sup> Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past*, 84.

<sup>126</sup> Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past*, 86.

communists, such as the Red Orchestra, which distributed anti-Nazi propaganda and provided both the Americans and the Soviets with information.

***The “Red Orchestra”: Misrepresented in East, West, and Reunified Germany***

“War – hunger – lies – Gestapo – How much longer?”<sup>127</sup>

The Red Orchestra, or *Rote Kapelle*, is one of the most consistently misinterpreted resistance groups. It often falls into the category of “communist resistance” because of its glorification by the GDR. The Gestapo gave the Red Orchestra its name during the Third Reich and branded them as Soviet spies. In reality, the Red Orchestra’s major activities included passing information on to both the Americans and Soviets. It originally started out as a circle of intellectuals who met regularly in the 1930s. Some of its more famous members were Arvid Harnack and his American wife Mildred, and Harro and Libertas Schulze-Boysen. Hans Coppi, son of Red Orchestra members Hans and Hilde Coppi, believes that accurate representation is most important when remembering resisters to National Socialism, particularly due to the Red Orchestra’s misrepresentation. “They were neither Soviet spies, as the West claimed, nor one of the Moscow KPD-led organizations, as the GDR wanted it to be in their history.”<sup>128</sup>

Both the East and West distorted the history of the Red Orchestra, which subsequently affected its memory in reunified Germany. The Red Orchestra did not fit the idea of the *Vorbild* as well as, for example, the White Rose, because they were working for the enemy. They were spies, not examples of courage and *Freiheit*. What some West Germans, such as those opposed to the inclusion of members of the Red

<sup>127</sup> From one of the Red Orchestra’s 1942 leaflets. Quoted in material from the GDW: Peter Steinbach and Johannes Tüchel, “Rote Kapelle: Übersicht,” 2005.

<sup>128</sup> Article by Hans Coppi in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. 20 April 1996. Lexis-Nexis. My own translation.

Orchestra in memorial exhibits, tended to overlook was the fact that the Red Orchestra, by working for the enemy, was working against Hitler and therefore in the best interest of Germany.<sup>129</sup> Because of the Cold War, passing information to the Soviets, even though they were one of the Allies, worked against positive memory of the Red Orchestra. Several July 20 conspirators, such as Wilhelm Canaris and Hans Oster, passed information on to the western Allies, but because the FRG developed positive relations with those countries after the war, Oster and Canaris' espionage was not controversial. Anti-Soviet sentiments also developed from the poor treatment of Germans by the Red Army versus by the western Allies' armies.<sup>130</sup>

In 1992, an exhibit on the Red Orchestra opened at the GDW. Like the exhibit honoring the former GDR leaders in 1994, it was controversial.<sup>131</sup> In 1994, a resistance exhibit designed by Peter Steinbach opened at the United States Library of Congress and included communists and the Red Orchestra. The exhibit met objection from American academic and anti-communist Herbert Romerstein, former member of the House Un-American Activities Committee, who said that "when one has to elevate spies motivated by loyalty to Moscow to the status of the White Rose or Count von Stauffenberg, who were motivated by their disgust of Hitler, that's sacrificing history in favor of political correctness."<sup>132</sup> Romerstein's insinuations, that the Red Orchestra's motivations for resistance did not include "disgust of Hitler," are unfounded. Historical evidence clearly contests his statement. For instance, of the group's pamphlets included bold statements

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<sup>129</sup> "German Exhibit Honors Communists." *Human Events* 50, no. 30: 7. 1994. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

<sup>130</sup> This information about treatment of Germans by Soviets, Americans, and British from courses at Colby and from conversations.

<sup>131</sup> Gedenkstätte deutscher Widerstand. [http://www.gdw-berlin.de/aus/html/Wanderaus\\_Leihbedin\\_RoteKapelle.pdf](http://www.gdw-berlin.de/aus/html/Wanderaus_Leihbedin_RoteKapelle.pdf)

<sup>132</sup> Quoted in "German Exhibit Honors Communists," 1994. *Human Events* 50, no. 30: 7. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.



such as “War – hunger – lies – Gestapo – How much longer?”<sup>133</sup> With ignorant statements such as Romerstein’s floating around in the world of exhibits, anti-communism, and memory of the resistance, it is no wonder that the Red Orchestra (and many other resistance groups and individual resisters) have been subject to misinterpretation by the general public, both within and outside of Germany. Clearly the lies about the Red Orchestra which circulated in Germany for decades carried enough weight to cross the Atlantic.

Stefan Roloff, whose father was a member of the Red Orchestra, gave an interview in 2006 with one of Berlin’s daily newspapers, *Die Tageszeitung*. He said that in the West prior to unification it had been “shameful to have belonged to that [left-wing] resistance movement.”<sup>134</sup> Some Germans, as evidenced by the controversy surrounding the 1994 exhibit at the GDW, held those sentiments even after reunification. Roloff also clarified that the group was “independent” and “not ideologically driven, in which everyone was welcome.”<sup>135</sup> The left-leaning political opinions of some of the group’s leading members, as well as the branding of the group as a bunch of “spies,” led to distortion of the group’s reality. That distortion fueled the fire for the idea that the group was not as deserving of commemoration as others.

The Red Orchestra is a unique example of the dilemmas of post-unification memory of left-wing groups, because both East *and* West accepted a distorted view of the group. What is important to remember about the changes in how Germany remembers

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<sup>133</sup> From one of the Red Orchestra’s 1942 leaflets. Quoted in material from the GDW: Peter Steinbach and Johannes Tüchel, “Rote Kapelle: Übersicht,” 2005.

<sup>134</sup> Silke Kettelhake, “Ich wollte meinen Vater kennen lernen.“ Berlin: *Die Tageszeitung*, 7 April 2006. Lexis-Nexis. Original quote in German: „Es galt im Westen eher als eine Schande, zu dieser Widerstandsbewegung gehört zu haben.“

<sup>135</sup> Kettelhake, “Ich wollte meinen Vater kennen lernen.”

left-wing resistance in general is that much of East Germany's remembrance of the resistance was either an extreme exaggeration or an outright distortion. The East German government changed Arvid Harnack's last words from "I believe in the power of love" to "I die a convinced Communist!"<sup>136</sup> Some of the changes in East German memory after 1990 were simply recognitions that the GDR had twisted the memory of the resistance in their attempt to depict themselves as an "anti-fascist" nation. With that, however, came skepticism toward any group which the GDR had fit into the "anti-fascist" image. Any group that the GDR had glorified did not fit the idea of *Freiheit* linked to the *Vorbild*, because of connections to communism.

In 1999, an exhibit on the Red Orchestra opened at the Federal Finance Ministry in Berlin, featuring Harro Schulze-Boysen in particular. At the time of the opening of the exhibit, Peter Steinbach stated, "This group is not only an integral component of the resistance to National Socialism, but in its worldview and social variety stands as exemplary for it."<sup>137</sup> Whether the rest of Germany agrees with this revisionist view is still undetermined. With the facts about the true nature of the group out in the open, however, it is easier to accept them as heroes of the resistance than another more obviously and completely left-wing group of resisters: the communists.

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<sup>136</sup> Shareen Blair Brysac, "At Last, Recognition and Praise for the Resistance in Nazi Germany." *The New York Times*, 7 October 2000, Lexis-Nexis.

<sup>137</sup> "Postume Gerechtigkeit: Eine Ausstellung im Bundesfinanzministerium erinnert an Harro Schulze-Boysen." *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 27 December 1999. Lexis-Nexis.

***The Communists: “Not Heroes of the Resistance”?***<sup>138</sup>

*“Driven out of businesses and offices, deported into the country,  
show your hatred of Hitler!”*<sup>139</sup>

Outright anger toward Communist resisters has not been the trend in reunified Germany, though Franz-Ludwig von Stauffenberg’s reaction to the 1994 GDW exhibition would suggest otherwise. In comparison to the men of July 20, the White Rose, and the resisting clergy, West Germany did not pay much attention to the Communists at all, at least not until the very end of the twentieth century, when the revisionist view, endorsed in the late 1990s by former Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, became prevalent.

Can Germany justify the negative view toward the Communists? Someone who lost a family member to the violence of the East German regime certainly can. Someone who lost a family member to Nazi violence because they distributed copies of *Die Rote Fahne* would contest that justification, especially because many communist resisters had nothing to do with the GDR; they did not live to experience it. The Cold War damaged the image of the communist resistance above all else. Just as communist East Germany equated the Western capitalists with fascists, the West linked communism and fascism. Similarities between Nazi Germany and the GDR supported that argument; for example, there were state organizations such as the *Stasi* (*Staatssicherheit*, literally “State Security,” but more accurately “secret police”), which was comparable to and reminiscent of the Gestapo. Another argument the West used was to say that the communists were only concerned with pursuing their own agenda, of turning Germany

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<sup>138</sup> Words of Franz-Ludwig von Stauffenberg regarding the inclusion of communists in a memorial exhibit. Quoted previously in paper.

<sup>139</sup> KPD leaflet from 1934, reprinted in Allan Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985), 108.

into a one-party Communist state rather than a one-party National Socialist state. It is true that the communist resisters' vision for Germany looked very much like the GDR. The most convincing proof of such a claim were anti-Nazis-turned-GDR leaders Walter Ulbricht and Wilhelm Pieck.

Any resister the GDR had used to support their "anti-fascist" image was far less likely to earn the status of "hero of the resistance"<sup>140</sup> in reunified Germany. What is interesting, however, is that the GDR also remembered the anti-Nazi activities of the White Rose, even issuing a stamp featuring Hans and Sophie Scholl.<sup>141</sup> Yet because the West had already developed a solid view of the Scholls as heroes, there was no question about their legacy as heroes as there was with communist sympathizer Helmuth Hübener and some of the other youth groups that resisted the Nazis.

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<sup>140</sup> This is a paraphrase of Franz-Ludwig von Stauffenberg's words about GDR leaders and Nazi resisters Wilhelm Pieck and Walter Ulbricht, when he said that they were not "heroes of the resistance."

<sup>141</sup> Knowledge of the existence of this stamp courtesy of Professor Raffael Scheck.

***Not Just the White Rose:  
The Edelweiss Pirates, the Helmuth Hübener Group,  
and Other Forgotten Youth Resistance Groups***

*“Time will show who told the truth.”<sup>142</sup>*

Neither the “Edelweiss Pirates” nor the Helmuth Hübener group have gained much recognition in Germany. Both, like the Red Orchestra and the KPD, have been subject to misinterpretation since the end of the Second World War. The actions of both the Edelweiss Pirates and the Hübener group cost at least one member of each their lives at the hands of the Gestapo. Unlike the White Rose, these two groups, along with several others, have managed to slip into the background in Germany’s memory of the resistance. Why did that happen at the same time that the White Rose became a symbol of standing up for freedom and justice? All of the resisters believed that their beliefs superseded that of the radical, violent dictatorship in which they lived. Most of these youth groups, like the White Rose, distributed anti-Nazi pamphlets and encouraged sabotage or practiced sabotage themselves.

The obscurity of the Helmuth Hübener group is partially due to the GDR’s use of the group as a part of their “anti-fascist” image. Hübener was a working-class communist sympathizer and therefore fit the GDR’s conditions for “anti-fascist resistance.”<sup>143</sup> Like the Red Orchestra, the group did not fit the idea of the *Vorbild* in reunited Germany for that reason. While there is a Helmuth Hübener exhibition at the GDW and in Hamburg at the Helmuth Hübener house, recognition is fairly limited. As is true for Elser, most of the commemoration of Hübener occurs in his hometown or in the more neutral territory of

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<sup>142</sup> From a flier written by the Helmuth Hübener Group, reprinted in Peter Steinbach’s “Jugendopposition: Die Gruppen um Hanno Günther und Helmuth Hübener.” Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand, 1998.

<sup>143</sup> Blair R. Holmes and Alan F. Keele, ed. *When Truth Was Treason: German Youth Against Hitler; the Story of the Helmuth Hübener Group*, xix.

the GDW. Despite the limited commemoration, German scholar Klaus J. Hansen notes that Stauffenberg and Hübener, despite their differences, had one thing in common: conscience.<sup>144</sup>

Another forgotten youth group was that of Hanno Günther. Along with his friends Elisabeth Pungs, Emmerich Schaper, Bernhard Sikorski and Wolfgang Pander, he distributed pamphlets and fliers and put them in people's mailboxes in Berlin. On December 3, 1942, the Nazis murdered Günther, Pander, and Sikorski.<sup>145</sup> These individuals are among the countless German youth who died at the hands of the Nazis, yet whose names are lost in the tangled mess of historical memory. Like Hübener's group, Günther's group had connections to young communists, which could very well have affected how some viewed Günther's group in the context of the resistance.

Within Germany, the Edelweiss Pirates are relatively well-known, but their memory as heroes of the resistance is slightly complicated. During the Third Reich, the group harassed the Hitler Youth and murdered the Gestapo chief of Cologne. But after the war, the Pirates' aims changed and became much more controversial. The group "attacked non-Germans, countrymen they considered disloyal to the state, and comrades deemed unfit...[the group traveled around Germany] because they were unemployed, had unstable living situations, or to escape the law."<sup>146</sup> The group's controversial and complicated postwar legacy is similar to that of the communists' in that their actions after 1945 were morally questionable. The Edelweiss Pirates' connections to communist

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<sup>144</sup> Holmes and Keele, ed. *When Truth Was Treason*, xii.

<sup>145</sup> Steinbach, "Die Gruppen um Helmuth Hübener und Hanno Günther." GDW, 1998.

<sup>146</sup> Brian Hannon, "The Legacy of the Edelweiss Pirates," (Thesis: Providence College Graduate Program in History, 2005), 59-60.

resisters certainly did not help their postwar image in the West, either, which was too preoccupied with July 20, 1944, to notice many other groups.<sup>147</sup>

### **V. The Effects of Morals and Politics on the Memory of July 20, 1944 in Reunified Germany**

*“The failure of the 20<sup>th</sup> of July belongs to the great tragedies of the past century.”<sup>148</sup>*

After reunification, July 20, 1944, remained at the forefront of German memory of the resistance, but was not immune to skepticism or political use. In fact, of all of the resistance movements, it has probably been subject to just as much political use as the communist resisters were in the GDR. Since 1952, the government of the FRG has used the July 1944 plot as a political tool, with individual politicians taking whatever message they get out of the meaning of the assassination attempt and applying it to their own political context. While those corrupting factors would seem to take away from the mostly heroic legacy of the officers involved in the plot, the use of the event in the political arena has actually brought more attention to the assassination attempt. That attention is positive, despite moral questions such as what to do with a brutal dictator, whether to honor those who have done both “good” and “bad,” and what can and cannot be overlooked in commemorating people and events. These questions of morals are relevant to late twentieth-century and contemporary Germany, as well as to the rest of the world.

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<sup>147</sup> McDonough, *Opposition and Resistance in Nazi Germany*, 17.

<sup>148</sup> Klaus Wiegrefe, “Helden und Mörder.” *Der Spiegel*, 12 July 2004, 32. My own translation.

***Heroism Despite Moral Dilemmas and Political Inconsistencies:  
The Two-Sided Legacy of July 20, 1944***

Since the mid-1950s, West Germany honored the people involved in the plot of July 20. The East German view of the assassination attempt, that the July 20 conspirators only acted after the tide of war turned against the Germans in 1943 and only cared about saving their own necks has some truth to it, but only on the surface. It is true that the conspirators did not act until it was clear that the only way to save Germany was to destroy Hitler and his regime. Yet several of the conspirators began to resist as early as the 1930s.<sup>149</sup> Ludwig Beck, for instance, resigned as the army's Chief of Staff because he "wanted no responsibility for Nazi war adventures."<sup>150</sup>

The officers behind the bomb plot and coup wanted to establish a conservative government and return to the tradition of pre-Weimar Germany. Any belief that the officers wanted a democratic state resembling the FRG is largely false. Other conspirators may have been supportive of democracy, particularly social democrats involved in the plot. Yet the officers sometimes get grouped with those supportive of democracy, and that is inaccurate.

The words of Stauffenberg himself clearly show that the men of July 20 were not all democrats, a fact historians have long since acknowledged, but one the German public may not have fully realized: "We want a New Order which makes all Germans supporters of the state and guarantees them law and justice, but we scorn the lie of equality and we bow before the hierarchies established by nature."<sup>151</sup> The "lie of equality" and

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<sup>149</sup> See Fest, *Plotting Hitler's Death*, for more on Ludwig Beck.

<sup>150</sup> Fabian von Schlabrendorff, *The Secret War Against Hitler* (New York: Pitman Publishing Corporation, 1965), 81.

<sup>151</sup> Excerpt from Stauffenberg's *Oath*, reproduced in Peter Hoffmann, *Stauffenberg: A Family History, 1905-1944* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2003), 293.



“hierarchies established by nature” were not foreign concepts in Nazi Germany. Count Helmuth James von Moltke believed that the officers thought “only of their fame and not of the cause,”<sup>152</sup> in reference to the officers’ desire to show the world that there were Germans who had “dared the decisive stroke,” as Tresckow said. The officers, on the other hand, would have argued that they were trying to salvage some of Germany’s dignity before they lost the war.

Both major assassination attempts on Hitler’s life— “major” meaning that they were the closest to success—in 1939 and 1944, killed multiple people. Georg Elser and Claus von Stauffenberg knew that Hitler would not be the only one who died when their bombs went off; both men expected that every person in the room with Hitler would die. Does that make the July 20 conspirators and Georg Elser murderers? Yes. Even though they failed to hit their specific target, they were fully conscious of the fact that they would kill other people. But their goal of killing Hitler supersedes that fact in official German memory. In recent history, political violence, often labeled terrorism, has become one of the central issues on the world stage.

Do some people consider resisters like Elser and Stauffenberg terrorists? Or do Elser and Stauffenberg fall into a completely different category because their target was a murderous dictator, a man whose death could save millions of lives? Most people accept the latter answer as to whether or not Elser and Stauffenberg committed a terrorist act. If the definition of terrorism is simply political violence, then yes, they were terrorists. Like the officers who tried to kill Hitler before him, Stauffenberg initially planned to blow himself up along with Hitler, which would have made him, to use another term relevant

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<sup>152</sup> Freya von Moltke, in “Widerstand: German Resistance to Hitler.” Dir. Michael Kloft. K Chronos Production for Transtel Deutsche Welle & NDR, Germany. Köln, 1994. Video #1: “From Leaflet to Assassination Attempt. ”

to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a suicide bomber.<sup>153</sup> But in labeling Stauffenberg and Elser as terrorists, it is important to remember that today's definition of a terrorist encompasses much more than trying to blow up Adolf Hitler, and men who tried to assassinate the person directly responsible for the deaths of millions of people should by no means be placed out of historical context with regard to the definition of a "terrorist." The moral dilemma of Elser and Stauffenberg's actions stems not from their goal of killing a murderous dictator, but from the undesired but accepted outcome of their actions.

Christian churches laud the bishops, pastors, and priests who resisted the Nazis. Yet how have Christians—significant particularly because approximately two thirds of Germany is Christian—dealt with the memory of the 20<sup>th</sup> of July?<sup>154</sup> Are the resisters' actions as honorable as the German government and general public think? According to Catholic theology, "He who acts according to an inner conviction that is rationally at all tenable and that is personally honest never commits a sin.... An active resistance, including a bloodless one, is only justifiable if all constitutional means for remedying the disaster brought on by the regime have been exhausted, or have been recognized as hopeless.... The men of July 20 are upheld in regard to their moral intentions and attitudes."<sup>155</sup> Even the Christian churches generally see the conspirators in a positive light. The officers' following of their conscience overrides any moral questionability of their actions. Germany seems to agree: as of late June 2004, according to a poll the German magazine *Der Spiegel* conducted and printed in their July 12, 2004, issue, 33 percent of Germans view the assassination attempt with admiration, 40 percent with

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<sup>153</sup> Joachim Fest, *Plotting Hitler's Death*, 226.

<sup>154</sup> The World Factbook, [www.cia.gov](http://www.cia.gov). "Germany."

<sup>155</sup> Hans Rothfels, "The German Resistance: Its Motives and its Historical Significance," in Royce, *Germans Against Hitler: July 20, 1944*, 250-254.

respect, and just five percent with objection, five percent with contempt, and ten percent with indifference. The remaining seven percent either did not know or had no answer. It is clear where the sentiments of most Germans lie, and it is entirely likely that the ten percent of negative political views of the officers came mostly from the GDR and neo-Nazis; the former no longer carries legitimacy in Germany and the latter's opinions find and deserve no respect. Some East Germans believed that the attempt was a late effort on the part of those who wanted to "preserve their power beyond the lost war and to find a way out at the cost and to the detriment of the German and other peoples."<sup>156</sup> The neo-Nazis consider Otto-Ernst Remer, the man who "destroyed the putsch against Hitler in 1944," a hero.<sup>157</sup>

Another component of the negative view could also come from those who do in fact believe that the assassination attempt was morally wrong. Even some resisters, including Helmuth von Moltke, believed that the assassination attempt was a bad idea, on either moral or practical grounds. Werner von Haeften originally agreed to try to assassinate Hitler, but his brother, Kreisau Circle member Hans-Bernd von Haeften, changed his mind because of religious considerations.<sup>158</sup>

It goes almost without saying that, given the Catholic Church's views on murder, Claus von Stauffenberg, a Catholic, would never receive the same honor as Bishop Clemens August von Galen, or even the same unofficial honor as Bonhoeffer as having the respect that a saint does, despite the fact that Stauffenberg was a religious man and

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<sup>156</sup> Jeffrey Herf, "German Communism, the Discourse of 'Antifascist Resistance' and the Jewish Catastrophe," in Geyer & Boyer's *Resistance Against the Third Reich*, 268-9.

<sup>157</sup> Svoray and Taylor, *In Hitler's Shadow*, 168. The quotations are the words of Constantin Mayer, a German neo-Nazi.

<sup>158</sup> Fest, *Plotting Hitler's Death*, 225.

despite Bonhoeffer's own support for the assassination attempt.<sup>159</sup> But saints and heroes are not always the same. In the case of Stauffenberg, he is no saint, but he is a hero in the eyes of the majority of Germans and certainly in the eyes of the German government.

***Resisters as Political Tools or Positive Examples?  
July 20, 1994, vs. July 20, 2004***

In 1994, right around the time of the fiftieth anniversary of the July 1944 attempt to kill Hitler, the Memorial to German Resistance opened the controversial exhibit on anti-Nazi communists Wilhelm Pieck and Walter Ulbricht. Despite Pieck and Ulbricht's resistance to the Nazis in the 1930s and 1940s, their ultimate status as East German leaders cancelled out any contribution they had made to the anti-Nazi effort for many German conservatives such as Claus von Stauffenberg's son, Franz-Ludwig von Stauffenberg, who felt uncomfortable giving the communist resistance the same recognition as the men of the 20<sup>th</sup> of July and the White Rose. Helmut Kohl's commemoration speech on July 20, 1994, in the Bendlerblock did not even mention the communists, but his successor Gerhard Schröder acknowledged them in his July 20, 2004, speech.<sup>160</sup> Kohl's decision not to include communist resistance was in part *because* of the controversy; angry family members of murdered army officers would not have received the speech well had it included communists, even if Kohl had not mentioned Pieck and Ulbricht by name. Kohl's only reference to resistance other than the July 20 conspirators, the Kreisau Circle, the White Rose, and Christian resisters was when he

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<sup>159</sup> Geoffrey B. Kelly, "The Life and Death of a Modern Martyr." *Christian History* 10, no. 4 (1991): 8. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

<sup>160</sup> "Speech by Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schröder at the ceremony commemorating the resistance to National Socialist tyranny." Berlin, 20 July 2004. Speech by Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl at the ceremony commemorating resistance, Berlin, 20 July 1994. Speech reprinted in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 21 July 1994. Lexis-Nexis.

explained that July 20, 1944, was the culmination—and more or less the end—of the resistance to Hitler. He refers to “men and women from the most different of political directions,”<sup>161</sup> but never uses the words “communist” or “social democrat.”

What changed about the memory of the communists within the ten years between Kohl and Schröder’s speeches? Was Schröder’s mentioning of the communists a genuine reflection of a desire to include left-wing resistance groups in the memory of reunified Germany? Time affects memory in that it changes what is and is not acceptable to say; the question “Is it too soon to say/do this?” begins to fade. Helmut Kohl’s speech took place only four years after reunification, whereas mention of communists in Schröder’s speech was, fourteen years after reunification, no longer as controversial. In 2004, there was also no dispute surrounding the exhibits—which by this time included left-wing resistance—at the Memorial to German Resistance close to the time of the anniversary of July 20.

Also important to note is that Kohl was a member of the conservative CDU and Schröder a member of the moderately left-wing Social Democratic Party (SPD). Kohl, in part, played to his conservative support base, which included Franz-Ludwig von Stauffenberg, with his speech, whereas Schröder, as a social democrat, was more sympathetic to communist and other left-wing resistance:

But we know the resistance to the tyranny did not just begin in 1944 when the defeat of Hitler’s Germany in the war seemed imminent. The resistance to the dictatorship started as early as 1933 when the National Socialists seized power. Social democrats and intellectuals, Communists and practicing Christians, but also many individuals who just wanted to be “decent” Germans offered resistance.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Speech by Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl, 20 July 1994.

<sup>162</sup> “Speech by Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schröder at the ceremony commemorating the resistance to National Socialist tyranny.” Berlin, 20 July 2004.

Schröder’s speech, which carried the tone of apolitical revisionism, marks a clear point in the twenty-first century in which the communist resistance gained outward acceptance by a West German leader. In a state once divided, one that remembers not only victims of Nazism but also “victims of the violent communist regime” of the GDR, what happened to the memory of communist resistance?<sup>163</sup> The easiest answer would be to say that many of the communists involved in resistance activities during the Third Reich had not survived the war and had no part in the violent East German regime, and that Schröder’s speech marks a clear point in time when communist resisters gained acceptance by Germans. Another easy answer would be to say that resistance to the Nazis, regardless of political beliefs, was enough, but that does not take into account the years in which West Germany—and reunified Germany—consciously and unconsciously ignored communist resistance. Schröder’s speech was also just that: a speech. He was Federal Chancellor and therefore a politician. Despite its apolitical tone, there was some political strategy involved in the speech, though not comparable to Helmut Kohl’s of 1994. He represents one opinion and may not have even written the speech himself. His speech alone cannot be taken as a sign of acceptance of communist and other left-wing resisters in the memory of all or most Germans, though it does reflect the tendency of Schröder’s SPD government to take an approach of “de-politicization” toward the Nazi past.<sup>164</sup>

Certainly many share Schröder’s view, such as Peter Steinbach, creator of the 1994 Pieck and Ulbricht exhibition at the GDW and co-writer of Edgar Reitz’s revisionist

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[http://www.german-embassy.org.uk/speech\\_by\\_federal\\_chancellor\\_g.html](http://www.german-embassy.org.uk/speech_by_federal_chancellor_g.html)

<sup>163</sup> Translation of the words “die Opfer kommunistischer Gewaltherrschaft” at the Berlin Wall Memorial in Berlin. From photograph by Suzanne Swartz, 15 June 2006.

<sup>164</sup> Niven, Bill, ed. *Germans as Victims* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 19.

1984 film series *Heimat*, but Steinbach is a highly respected historian of the resistance and knows far more about it than the average German would.<sup>165</sup> The memory of the resistance is not black-and-white; politics and morals and various other subjective factors influence what people think. Politicians are a reliable source for what the German government thinks, but not necessarily a reliable source of the German public's opinion.

The resistance, according to Schröder, is important because the resisters valued what Europe values today:

20 July is a constant reminder of the importance of never tiring of defending the values of freedom and tolerance which we have come to take so much for granted....These values will be our shield with which to counter future threats of dictatorship, aggression or even genocide.....This is the great task we face—in respectful remembrance of the resistance fighters in Germany and in Europe and in our shared responsibility for our future in Germany and Europe.<sup>166</sup>

Part of Schröder's speech intended to highlight the importance of remembering resistance to tyranny throughout Europe. The speech mentions anti-Nazi resistance in Poland, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia. He also spoke of the former GDR, connecting resistance against the Nazi dictatorship to resistance against the Communist dictatorship. The former Chancellor was addressing Europeans, not just Germans, and cited the value of the legacy of the resistance throughout the European Union (EU). He wanted to connect Germany to the rest of Europe by using the one positive aspect of the history of Nazi Germany. Schröder may very well have been trying to present Germany in a way

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<sup>165</sup> Information about *Heimat*'s revisionist sentiments obtained in Professor Ursula Reidel-Schrewe's Colby German seminar: "In Search of *Heimat*." Spring 2007. Also cited in Miriam Hansen's "Dossier on *Heimat*," *New German Critique*, 1985, pages 3-23.

<sup>166</sup> "Speech by former Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schröder at the ceremony commemorating the resistance to National Socialist tyranny." Berlin, 20 July 2004. [http://www.german-embassy.org.uk/speech\\_by\\_federal\\_chancellor\\_g.html](http://www.german-embassy.org.uk/speech_by_federal_chancellor_g.html)

that the rest of Europe had not yet seen it. One reason he could do this—and Kohl could not—was that Germany was not dealing with a complicated recent internal history as it was in 1994, briefly after the demise of the GDR.

In Gerhard Schröder's speech there were, without a doubt, political overtones with relation to maintaining a united Europe. Despite his revisionist view toward the Nazi past in general, Schröder still found a way to work the resistance into modern politics. He also spoke of fighting injustice, much in the way Kohl's speech called for resistance against extremism. In Germany, that injustice included violence toward Jews and immigrants, which began to escalate in the 1980s and continued to increase even more so in the early 1990s. Most often, the group behind this violence was Germany's growing radical right-wing movement: the neo-Nazis.



## **VI. Finishing What They Started? The Connection Between Remembering Certain Resisters and Opposing the Neo-Nazi Movement in Germany**

*“We cannot and will not wane in our vigilance against the enemies of freedom. That is the greatest and most noble expression of gratitude our nation will always owe to the men and women of the German resistance.”<sup>167</sup>*

Neo-Nazi violence escalated after reunification for a variety of reasons. The extremists were able to attract followers particularly in the former East, where many former Nazis had fled after the war to protect themselves from prosecution. A combination of xenophobia and economic troubles was another force behind the increase in the number of neo-Nazis, particularly among young Germans. The number of immigrants had increased rather dramatically over the past twenty years in the FRG. Immigrants were sent to the former East Germany, and some Germans claimed that the immigrants were taking jobs that would have otherwise been available to Germans from the former GDR.<sup>168</sup>

Right around the time of the 1994 controversy at the Memorial to German Resistance in Berlin, neo-Nazi violence was escalating at a shocking rate, and it was almost directly correlated with the fact that more and more immigrants were entering Germany.<sup>169</sup> The increase in violence was and is a major cause for concern for the German government. As recently as the spring of 2006, Germans highlighted the importance of remembering the resistance with regard to current events involving the

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<sup>167</sup> Last lines of speech by former Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl at the ceremony commemorating resistance, Berlin, 20 July 1994. Speech reprinted in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 21 July 1994. Lexis-Nexis. My own translation.

<sup>168</sup> This information taken from a combination of sources, including a course I took while in Germany during the spring of 2006 called “Berlin Through Film,” which included much information about modern Germany. Another source of information is Yaron Svoray and Nick Taylor’s *In Hitler’s Shadow* (New York: Doubleday, 1994). This book is the true account of an Israeli journalist who spent several months undercover inside Germany’s neo-Nazi movement.

<sup>169</sup> Svoray and Taylor, *In Hitler’s Shadow*, 40.

neo-Nazis. In Hamburg, a play about the White Rose, “Die Weiße Rose,” earned rave reviews. Playgoers commented on the timely importance of the production, saying that the Nazi era is “much too quickly forgotten” today, and in Germany’s society, there is “the danger of a feeding ground for Nazis.”<sup>170</sup> The resistance serves as a reminder of the human capacity to fight dangerous extremism and injustice, and the amount of attention the White Rose received in theater, film, and other media contributes to the ability of the German public, and not just the German government, to draw such a connection between the resisters’ legacy and current events. There could be even more of a connection than the playgoers thought: in August 2006, vandals tore one of the plaques commemorating the White Rose out of the ground in front of the LMU and damaged it badly. Authorities did not discover whether the vandalism was politically charged (meaning a neo-Nazi incident) or a prank, and “the media wondered why the police only went public with the case days later.”<sup>171</sup>

In the introduction to Yaron Svoray and Nick Taylor’s *In Hitler’s Shadow*, the account of an Israeli journalist who went undercover into Germany’s neo-Nazi movement in 1992 and 1993, Simon Wiesenthal, a Holocaust survivor who went on to become a “Nazi hunter”<sup>172</sup> writes:

History records that the people of Germany did not liberate themselves from National Socialism. It was destroyed from outside by the Allies. Today’s younger generation has the responsibility of making up for what their grandfathers and fathers failed to do: recognize and fight National Socialism

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<sup>170</sup> Heike Linde-Lembke. “Viel Applaus für die „Weiße Rose.“” *Hamburger Abendblatt*, 18 April 2006. Lexis-Nexis. Linde Lembke quotes Roswitha and Klaus Boese of Hamburg, respectively, who attended the play.

<sup>171</sup> Martin Thurau, “Weiße Rose in Beton.” (“White Rose in Concrete.”) *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 18 August 2006. Lexis-Nexis. Direct quote My own translation, „Die Medien wunderten sich, warum die Polizei erst Tage später mit dem Fall an die Öffentlichkeit ging.”

<sup>172</sup> “About Simon Wiesenthal.” Simon Wiesenthal Center, 2005. <http://www.wiesenthal.com/simonwiesenthal>

as an ideology based on contempt for mankind...[T]he future will be determined...by how many anti-Nazis, people of goodwill, there will be to confront [fascists, extreme nationalists, white supremacists, or Nazis].<sup>173</sup>

Svoray's investigation into the world of neo-Nazis "revealed Germany's neo-Nazi movement to be larger and more organized than previously believed, with worldwide links,"<sup>174</sup> a frightening and almost unbelievable discovery in the late twentieth century. The fact remains that some elements of Nazism did not die with Adolf Hitler, though many would, of course, rather believe otherwise. One German whom Svoray employed as a translator put the sentiments of disbelief at best when he said, "This is not happening in my country."<sup>175</sup>

Remembering the resistance, some Germans seem to believe, counters the neo-Nazi movement, because it inspires them to work against any remnants or resurgences of National Socialist sentiments and actions. The resistance also serves as inspiration for standing up to injustice in general. Even after the facts about many of the resisters' personal politics and goals came to light, for instance that not all of the resisters were concerned with what was happening to Jews throughout Europe, Germany still saw them as *Vorbilder*.

On July 20, 1994, Helmut Kohl stated, "Intolerance and contempt for others can never have a chance in Germany again."<sup>176</sup> More than a decade after he said those words, intolerance—and even hatred—still exists toward non-Germans (specifically immigrants such as Turks and other racial minorities in the country) and toward Jews in Germany.

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<sup>173</sup> Introduction by Simon Wiesenthal in Svoray and Taylor, *In Hitler's Shadow*, x.

<sup>174</sup> "Simon Wiesenthal Center: History." Simon Wiesenthal Center, 2005.  
<http://www.wiesenthal.com/site/pp.asp?c=fwLYKnN8LzH&b=242620>

<sup>175</sup> Svoray and Taylor, *In Hitler's Shadow*, 112.

<sup>176</sup> Speech by former Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl at the ceremony commemorating resistance, Berlin, 20 July 1994. Speech reprinted in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 21 July 1994. Lexis-Nexis. My own translation.

Helmut Kohl was concerned with *any* kind of extremism, both left- and right-wing. With the shadows of the communist GDR in Germany in the early 1990s, however, Kohl focused more on left-wing extremism, despite the escalation of violent neo-Nazi-related incidents into the thousands in the early 1990s. One of the worst incidents of right-wing violence occurred in 1992 in the city of Mölln, when right-wing extremists murdered several Turks. Kohl did not use the term “right-wing terrorism” (“*Rechtsterrorismus*”) until March of 1993. After the long overdue acknowledgement of the problem, more Germans reported violent incidents, which was part of the reason for the increase in numbers in the early 1990s.<sup>177</sup>

Right-wing violence was not limited to the early 1990s. In early December of 2006, schoolchildren of various nationalities in the ethnically diverse area of Kreuzberg, Berlin, spit on and swore at their Jewish peers on their way to school.<sup>178</sup> Even in the twenty-first century, racism reminiscent of the Nazi era still exists in Germany. The violent incidents have been a cause for concern for Germans, including the government, in the past decade. In 2006, the number of arrests or registered incidents of right-wing extremist activities—violent, destructive or otherwise—increased to 18,000, up from just under 16,000 in 2005.<sup>179</sup> Germany’s laws against hate crimes are tough compared to much of the rest of the world, but they still do not prevent the neo-Nazis—or the children of xenophobes—from committing offensive or even violent acts against Jews and immigrants in particular.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Svoray and Taylor, *In Hitler’s Shadow*, 114-115, 250, 266.

<sup>178</sup> Jan Friedmann and Björn Hengst, “Jüdische Schüler fliehen vor Nazis und aggressiven Muslimen.” Spiegel Online, 7 December 2006. <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,453133,00.html>

<sup>179</sup> “Rechtsextreme Straftate auf Höchststand.” Spiegel Online, 28 March 2007. <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,474351,00.html>

<sup>180</sup> For more information on anti-immigrant and anti-Jewish violence, see Meredith W. Watts, *Xenophobia in United Germany: Generations, Modernization, and Ideology* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997).

Germany's stance on extreme right-wing views, particularly those which are anti-Semitic and deny the Holocaust, remain unchanged since the mid- to late-1990s. When a conference began in December of 2006 in Iran questioning the reality of the Holocaust, German Chancellor Angela Merkel stated, "Germany will never accept this and will use all possibilities at its disposal to oppose it."<sup>181</sup> The National Democratic Party (NDP), one of Germany's extreme right-wing parties, has gained seats in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Angela Merkel's home *Bundesland* (state); in 2006, they received 38 percent of the vote in one town.<sup>182</sup> While they are far from gaining any significant number of seats and do not hold any seats in the national assembly, the far right has developed a significant following in Germany, not necessarily exclusive to a particular age group. The main focus of these far-right parties is anti-immigration; they want to see a Germans-only Germany.<sup>183</sup> Facing up to the existence of right-wing extremism was a challenge particularly for the Kohl government; the lack of acknowledgement up until early 1994 takes away from the credibility of some of Kohl's statements about the resistance. His inclusion of "right-wing extremists" in his July 20, 1994, speech had to do in part with the exposure of the breadth of the neo-Nazi movement in Germany:

When people indifferently stand on the sidelines and no longer stand up for democracy, the danger exists that the enemies of freedom, that left- and right-wing extremists will infiltrate and then destroy this system....All of us remain asked to resist ideologically based truth and power claims, and oppose all forms of fanaticism.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> "Outrage Over Holocaust Conference." BBC News Online, 12 December 2006. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/6172807.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6172807.stm)

<sup>182</sup> "Mal sehen, was die bringen." 18 September 2006. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. [www.sueddeutsche.de/deutschland/artikel/309/86223](http://www.sueddeutsche.de/deutschland/artikel/309/86223)

<sup>183</sup> Svoray and Taylor, *In Hitler's Shadow*. Statement repeated on several pages throughout the book.

<sup>184</sup> Speech by Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl at the ceremony commemorating resistance, Berlin, 20 July 1994. Speech reprinted in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 21 July 1994. Lexis-Nexis.

Kohl had only recently begun to step away from the “sidelines” and acknowledge right-wing extremism. Part of that was due to pressure from other politicians reacting to Yaron Svoray’s investigation. He could conveniently incorporate the need to address right-wing extremism into the July 1994 speech. The 20<sup>th</sup> of July, 1994, was the perfect opportunity to address the need to fight extremism. Since then, there was a clear connection between memory of resistance and intolerance of dangerous extremism. Kohl risked seeming hypocritical had he spoken about the need to follow the courageous example of the resisters when he had not done so himself. Because it was the fiftieth anniversary, it was the time at which a renewed interest in the event arose; the ceremony, therefore, received substantial media attention.

Kohl’s use of the fiftieth anniversary of the 20<sup>th</sup> of July as a multi-purpose political tool contributed to the increase in attention for the resisters themselves. His speech at the ceremony linked the resisters—in particular the army officers involved in the plot to kill Hitler—to the need to oppose dangerous left- and right-wing extremism. Commemoration of the resistance in general, such as the extensive commemoration of the White Rose, brings attention to current events, as the 2006 play in Hamburg did. In Germany, awareness of the existence of neo-Nazis is a part of the application of the legacy of the resistance to modern events, one which also contributed to the increased attention toward July 20<sup>th</sup> and the White Rose in particular. Kohl could not include the communists, and subsequently any other left-wing resistance associated with the GDR’s “anti-fascist” image, in his speech condemning extremism because he considered communism a form of extremism, which further pushed left-wing resistance as a whole into the background.

It was not until 2004, when Gerhard Schröder mentioned the communists in his July 20<sup>th</sup> commemoration speech, that the communist resistance gained definite recognition by a German chancellor. But the focus of Schröder's speech was not the neo-Nazis. By 2004, the resisters had come to serve as *Vorbilder*, though Germans such as those in the audience of the theater production of the "White Rose" in Hamburg would certainly say that they also serve as a present-day reminder that it is important to work against neo-Nazi and other "skinhead" violence. Had the play told the story of another resistance group, such as the Red Orchestra, the Kreisau Circle, the Baum Group, or the group around Helmuth Hübener, the audience would most likely come away from the play with the same message. But there has yet to be such a play. The White Rose and the 20<sup>th</sup> of July, in receiving the majority of the public attention directed toward the resistance, also serve as the representative *Vorbilder* against the ugly forces of injustice that still exist in Germany today.

## VII. The Legacy: “Admonition for the Future”<sup>185</sup>

*“It is good that the memory is kept alive.”<sup>186</sup>*

The desire to remember the resistance is no longer rooted in the need to show the “other Germany.” It is rather the basic principle of what they did—have the courage to stand up to tyranny—that gives them so much respect today. The one percent of active resisters, along with the countless others who protected Jewish neighbors, refused to fly the Nazi flag, or did anything else that did not support the Nazi regime, did not let the Nazis gain complete control over their lives. That attempt at the preservation of human dignity—at a time when millions experienced the dehumanizing effects of an unjust and twisted system, war, and genocide—is another reason why the resisters gained so much respect.

“The more that perpetrators of the Holocaust are demonized (as, for example, in the recent study by Daniel Goldhagen), the more we require saintly resisters to restore our faith in human nature,” writes Bonhoeffer expert Stephen R. Haynes.<sup>187</sup> German journalist Henryk Broder would agree; in July 2004 he stated: “Germans can’t go on forever feeling nothing but guilt – it’s not possible....We had the protestations of utter innocence immediately after the war, then the all-consuming guilt. It’s time for something different – it’s perfectly natural to want to start highlighting the positive.”<sup>188</sup> A 2006 work on Sophie Scholl and the White Rose, which provided an in-depth account of

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<sup>185</sup> Clarita von Trott zu Solz, wife of resister Adam von Trott zu Solz, in “Widerstand: German Resistance to Hitler.” Dir. Michael Kloft. K Chronos Production for Transtel Deutsche Welle & NDR, Germany. Köln, 1994. Video #7: “The End.”

<sup>186</sup> Ludwig von Hammerstein, surviving military officer involved in the July 20, 1944 plot, in “Widerstand: German Resistance to Hitler.” Video #7: “The End.”

<sup>187</sup> Stephen R. Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon: Portraits of a Protestant Saint* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 5.

<sup>188</sup> Quoted in Clare Murphy, “Emerging from the Nazi Shadow?” BBC News Online, 19 July 2004. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3897885.stm>



the group members' backgrounds and activities from the early days of the Third Reich up until shortly after the deaths of Hans and Sophie, earned praise as a "fascinating window into human resilience."<sup>189</sup>

Yet a politically motivated and biased view of the inspiring stories of the resisters creates distortions, as evidenced by the view of resistance in both the FRG and DDR prior to 1990, and the changes in memory since reunification. Non-documentary German films about the resistance have only focused on either the White Rose or July 20, 1944. While it of course would be impossible to make individual films about every single resistance group or resister, it is curious that Germany has not made a feature film about the resistance as a whole, considering the German film industry's obsession with the past. A film focusing on the Third Reich from the perspective of various resisters would provide the general public with a more balanced and accurate picture of history, as the general public often interprets history based on what they learn from films.

The history and memory of the resistance has undergone dramatic changes since the end of World War II. It is a constant reminder that history can be relevant to the present. A piece of history that some dismissed as insignificant became a tool of legitimization in both East and West Germany, and in reunified Germany was and is a source of inspiration as well as a political tool. One of the most important aspects of the legacy of the resistance is its ability to challenge people to think of what they are capable of doing in the most extreme of situations. The heroic legacy makes people ask themselves the question, "Could I have done that?" The fact remains that most people probably could not have, as was the case in Nazi Germany. The resisters pushed the limits of the environment in which they lived. They would not settle for indifference, and

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<sup>189</sup> Back cover of Annette Dunbach and Jud Newborn, *Sophie Scholl & the White Rose*.

they would not tolerate the injustice of the Nazi regime. They truly did dare “the decisive stroke” by choosing to act. Despite the failure of the resistance to bring down the Nazi regime, it achieved a posthumous victory: in Germany, it restored a faith in humanity, a faith that the conscience can prevail even in the worst of situations. Helmut Kohl wrote that the resisters “were all prepared to lay down their lives for liberty and dignity, for truth and justice. The lasting significance of the German resistance for the present and future is not measured merely in terms of what it opposed but also in terms of what the resisters stood up for. This is the legacy to which, in a reunited Germany, we all relate.”<sup>190</sup> Remembering the resistance provides a warning: Do not let Adolf Hitler happen again. It is important to remember, however, that thousands of Germans resisted the Nazis. Though they represented only a small percentage of the population, and their efforts to overturn the regime ultimately failed, their legacy of courage, of following their conscience in the face of tyranny, should not be forgotten and should not be limited solely to a select few resisters.

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<sup>190</sup> Helmut Kohl’s preface in Leber, Brandt, and Bracher, *The Conscience in Revolt*, ix. Much of this preface comes directly from his 1994 Bendlerblock commemoration speech.

**A Continuation of Selective Commemoration?  
List of Commemorations of the Resistance and Other Relevant Events  
Since Gerhard Schröder's July 20, 2004 Speech**

**July 20, 2004:** Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schröder gives a speech at the Bendlerblock recognizing every general category of resisters, including the communists.

**July 2004:** The SWR TV film "Stauffenberg" enjoys success in Germany.

**February 2005:** *Brigitte* magazine calls Sophie Scholl the "most important woman of the twentieth century" when Lena Stolze and Julia Jentsch, who played Sophie Scholl in "Die Weisse Rose" and "Sophie Scholl: Die letzten Tage," respectively, gave an interview saying it was an "honor" to have had the part of Sophie Scholl.

**July 20, 2005:** Annual speech at the Bendlerblock.

**October 2005:** Pope calls Clemens August von Galen a "courageous example" for today.

**2005-06:** "Sophie Scholl: The Final Days" wins several awards in Germany and is nominated in the United States for the "Best Foreign Language Film" Academy Award.

**April 5-6, 2006:** The Associated Press embarrasses itself when it has to correct Countess Nina von Stauffenberg's obituary, which referred to Claus von Stauffenberg as a "Nazi officer."

**April 2006:** The play "Die Weiße Rose" receives rave reviews in Hamburg.

**July 20, 2006:** Annual speech at the Bendlerblock.

**August 2006:** Vandals severely damage the White Rose memorial at the LMU; the event receives attention from the media once the police go public with it.

**November 15, 2006:** Exhibit opens in Stuttgart honoring Claus and Berthold von Stauffenberg.

**March 11, 2007:** Chancellor Angela Merkel gives the welcoming address at the celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of Helmuth James von Moltke.

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