

Youth Activism

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Anti-Nazi Youth Resistance. The young dissenters who opposed the Nazi regime were remarkably resilient in the face of Nazi oppression and manipulation. Despite the threat of punishment and the pressure to conform, many young people found ways to resist Nazi tyranny. At times this resiliency arose from a youthful rejection of authority, but it was also motivated by a well-developed ethical awareness. Youth resistance in Nazi Germany was not a cohesive movement. It was manifested in a variety of forms that ranged from politically nondescript youth cliques to



Adolf Hitler is saluted by members of the Hitler Youth in Erfurt, Germany, in 1933. Anti-Nazi youth resistance was also prevalent, as this entry describes. *Library of Congress*.

well-structured groups with politicized world views.

Since the late-nineteenth century, youth had held a valued place in German culture. Germany was home to thousands of youth associations, clubs, and leagues. Although the vast majority of these youth groups were associated with particular political and religious organizations, many others developed independently of any supervisory organizations. These relatively unstructured groups eventually came to represent a youth movement commonly referred to as the *Wandervögel* (wandering birds). To a large extent the movement was a reaction to the moral rigidity of conservative Wilhelmian society. Young people sought escape by slipping away from their jobs, schools, and parents for hiking expeditions in the countryside. Characteristically, many of the youth groups rejected not only conservative bourgeois values but modern urban life as well. Typically, the *Wandervögel* romanticized traditional pre-industrial folk art and culture. The movement did not survive the carnage of World War I when

thousands of young men lost their lives. Following Germany's defeat, many young men, now disillusioned and militarized, found themselves reentering the ranks of German society. In the years of the Weimar Republic, many of these still young men increasingly found their place in the organized national youth leagues (*Bündische Jugend*). Others would join various political and religious youth leagues such as the Catholic Young Men's Association (*Katholischer Jungmännerverband*, KJVD), German Communist Youth Organization (*Kommunistischer Jugendverband Deutschlands*, KJVD), and the Socialist Workers' Youth (*Sozialistische Arbeiterjugend*, SAJ). Although the philosophical currents of the German youth movement remained influential in many of the national youth leagues, the *Wandervögel* group itself never fully regrouped after the war. A void remained where the independent youth movement once stood.

Various political organizations formed or renewed their youth groups after the war. Perhaps the most fateful was that of

the National Socialist German Workers' Party (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*, NSDAP). The NSDAP understood the potential force that youth represented in German society. In 1921 the Youth League of the National Socialist Party was formed; the organization was later renamed the Hitler Youth (*Hitler Jugend*, HJ). The HJ actually encompassed four major divisions. Males between the ages of ten and fourteen made up the *Jungvolk*; those between the ages of fourteen and eighteen were considered *Hitler Jugend*. Females were divided similarly; those between the ages of ten and fourteen were in the *Jungmädchen*, and young women between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one were placed in the League of German Girls (*Bund Deutscher Mädchen*, BDM). Capitalizing on the frustrations of youth, the NSDAP began the HJ under a banner of rebellion. Young people were encouraged to defy their parents, teachers, and other authority figures when such individuals challenged Nazi views. Hitler Youth organized book burnings, challenged school teachers, and intimidated many of their adult neighbors. This new sense of power was a liberating experience for HJ members.

Having seduced young people through its rebellious rhetoric, the NSDAP turned its attention to solidifying its hold on their minds. The Nazi leadership focused on a critical area of youths' social development, their leisure time. The HJ bonded ideology to socialization through its many sponsored field trips, sporting events, and other extracurricular activities. During nighttime rallies, theatrical effects were used to give young people a sense of purpose. In this context youth stood not on the periphery of the Nazi movement but at its center. In addition to the political rallies, numerous film festivals drew youth in by the thousands. Accompanying this colonization of youth's leisure time was a massive propaganda effort. Wandering down a city street one was likely to encounter Nazi propaganda posters enticing boys and girls to join the movement. Images were used to imbue young people with a sense of agency.

The propaganda conveyed that youth stood at the forefront of a grand new movement in history. For many young people, joining the NSDAP's youth organization seemed like an opportunity to camp out forever.

Once the NSDAP consolidated its power in the Reichstag, all other youth organizations, with the exception of the Catholic youth leagues protected by Germany's concordat with the Vatican, were banned before the end of 1933. Employers and school officials pressured parents into enlisting their children in the HJ. Other youth organizations were offered the alternative of joining the HJ or disbanding. This process of consolidation resulted in an increase in the HJ's membership from 107,956 in 1932 to 3,577,565 in 1933 (Koch 1975). By March 1939, membership in the HJ was mandatory. National Socialist attempts to ideologically encode youth reflected Nazi indoctrination policies in general; however, the degree of attention paid to young people far exceeded that given to other segments of the population. Pressure to conform was also influenced by elements of terror. It is estimated that in the twelve years of Nazi rule over 3 million Germans were incarcerated. Thousands more were executed for the most trivial acts. Writing unfavorable remarks or speaking critically about the government could result in imprisonment, torture, or execution. Germans, regardless of their ideological views, were conscious of the state's police apparatus and the danger that nonconformity represented.

Despite the massive indoctrination effort by the NSDAP and the threat of punitive repercussions, many young people still rejected and confronted National Socialism. In the early years of the regime the vast majority of the young dissenters could be found in the disbanded political parties of the left. Although its membership stood at only 55,000, the members of the Communist Party's KJVD played a significant role in resisting Nazism (Zarusky 1997). The group held spontaneous demonstrations against the regime and actively dispensed anti-Nazi literature in cities like Berlin and Essen well

into 1934. The young Social Democrats of the SAJ, although not as confrontational as the KJVD, also continued their political activities. After being disbanded by the Nazis, many members of the organization regrouped in leisure and hiking clubs like the Friends of Nature, where they maintained their political views and expressed their disaffection with the government (Zarusky 1997). In Bremen, for example, young Social Democrats in a Friends of Nature hiking club united with Communist youth to form a larger resistance network called the *Bremer Gruppe* (Bremen Group). The organization disbanded after its leaders were arrested in 1936 (Marbolek and Ott 1986). By the mid-thirties, increased police persecution led to the dissolution of most of these groups. Despite the liquidation of illegal youth organizations, youth dissent in Germany continued in a less structured milieu.

As early as 1937, youth began to seek each other out in unauthorized gatherings, clubs, and cliques. In Leipzig working-class youth joined groups like the Leipzig Hounds. Although spontaneous in its formation, the group appeared to be influenced by young Communists. The Hounds acknowledged one another with the Russian Youth Pioneers' greeting and listened to illegal broadcasts from Moscow (Zarusky 1997). The Hounds were precursors to a trend that developed in the later years of the Third Reich. Groups of working-class youth, most between the ages of sixteen and nineteen, began to consolidate in a variety of cliques and gangs. The majority of these groups identified themselves collectively as the Edelweiss Pirates. Increasing numbers of unauthorized youth cliques appeared throughout Germany in the late 1930s and early 1940s. They were known by such names as the Black Hand Group, Death Head Group, and Navajos. Typically, they congregated in parks, cafés, and other areas free from Nazi supervision. On weekends groups of these working-class boys and girls banded together and traveled about the countryside. The Pirates came to constitute a youth subculture with a shared

identity that was expressed in their manner of dress, forms of cultural expression, and their celebration of freedom. The Pirates had a peculiar style that was antithetical to the Nazi image of youth. They typically wore checked shirts, dark short trousers, white stockings, and a variety of jewelry that usually included metal edelweiss flowers on their lapels (Peukert 1987).

The Edelweiss Pirates were not content to simply slip away from the control of adults and other authorities; instead, many chose to confront National Socialism. Pirates were infamous for attacking Hitler Youth patrols. These confrontations were often violent, and in some cases combatants were wounded or even killed (Becker 1946). Such incidents might lead some to believe that the Pirates' actions were merely examples of teenage hooliganism; however, when considered alongside their politicized rhetoric their motivations appear more complex. The Pirates demonstrated a politicized idealism that rejected Nazi authority, as the following lyrics demonstrate:

Hark the hearty fellow sing!
Strum the banjo, pluck that string!
And the lasses all join in.
We're going to get rid of Hitler,
and he can't do a thing....
Hitler's power may lay us low,
and keep us locked in chains.
But we will smash the chains one day.
We'll be free again....
We march by the banks of Ruhr and Rhine
and smash the Hitler Youth in twain.
Our song is freedom, love, and life,
We're Pirates of the Edelweiss.

—Edelweiss Pirate Song (Peukert 1987)

Although lacking a structured political ideology, the Edelweiss demonstrated a political stance. Actions that in normal times might be attributed to simple juvenile delinquency had serious ideological connotations in the Third Reich. The fact that the Edelweiss Pirates rejected Nazi authority in the face of pressure and repercussions is a testament to their ethical awareness. This political disaffection toward the regime became more apparent

at the end of the war when a number of Pirates were involved in raids on German military supply camps. On November 10, 1944, Barthel Schink, the sixteen-year-old leader of the Cologne Edelweiss Pirates, was hanged with thirteen compatriots for his involvement in raids. The types of resistance carried out by the Pirates ranged from common vandalism to overtly militant resistance. The fact that many of these youth chose a political tone for their actions indicates a conscious concern with the regime's despotic nature. Many of them could have carried out rebellious acts without political connotations. By choosing to denigrate National Socialism and Hitler, they placed themselves directly in the line of persecution.

Youth resistance to Nazism was not restricted to the actions of working-class youth. Middle-class youth also demonstrated resistance, albeit in a less politicized manner. The "swing movement" took shape in the German cabaret and nightclub scene in the late 1930s and managed to survive through World War II. Characteristically, swing youth enjoyed jazz music as well as American and British styles of dress. The swing youth represented all that was anathema to the Nazi ideal of youth. This is apparent if one contrasts a typical description of "swing kids" to that of the militant and masculine ideal of the Hitler Youth. The following appeared in a Hitler Youth report from 1942:

The predominant form of dress consisted of long, often checked English sports jackets, shoes with thick crepe soles, showy scarves, Anthony Eden hats, and an umbrella on the arm whatever the weather, and, as an insignia, a dress-shirt button worn in the buttonhole with a jeweled stone. The girls too favored a long overflowing hairstyle. Their eyebrows were penciled, they wore lipstick and the nails were lacquered. The bearing and behavior of the clique resembled their dress (Peukert 1987).

By the early 1940s the swing movement had a presence in most major German cities. Boys and girls drawn to this subculture challenged the conformist ideal of youth

advocated by National Socialism. Militant haircuts and uniforms gave way to long hair and stylish clothing. More importantly, these young people were embracing a jazz subculture that was, according to Nazi officials, the product of racially inferior blacks and Jews. Authorities were further enraged that boys and girls were interacting beyond the gaze of adult supervision. Ignoring the warnings of authorities, swing youth chose to maintain their uninhibited jazz lifestyle, thus challenging Nazi indoctrination efforts. In this sense they represented a cultural-resistance movement. Breaking the swing movement became a pet project of SS leader Heinrich Himmler, and by the end of the war many of the swing kids found themselves in Nazi prisons and work camps.

In addition to the semi-political opposition of the Pirates and the cultural defiance of the swing kids, spontaneous anti-Nazi youth resistance also manifested itself in more clearly defined ideological forms. The White Rose group is a clear example of this type of resistance. The organization's core membership, Hans Scholl, Sophie Scholl, Willi Graf, Christoph Probst and Alexander Scmorrel, were medical students from Munich University. The initial group consisted mainly of students of Kurt Huber, a philosophy professor in the university. The origin of the group's name remains unclear, but it is rumored to have been taken from one of the members' favorite novels. Between June 1942 and February 1943 they carried out a large-scale anti-Nazi propaganda campaign. Although the core membership was located in Munich, students in other German universities also became involved in the leaflet campaign. The group's leader appears to have been Hans Scholl, a medical student. Hans, a former member of the Hitler Youth, became disenchanted with Nazi conformity and intolerance. Later, as a young recruit on the eastern front, he was further disillusioned by the atrocities he witnessed. Together with his sister Sophie and several classmates, Hans distributed

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a series of six leaflets that criticized the German War effort, drew attention to the plight of Jews, and called upon the German people to overthrow the Nazi regime. The very first leaflet addressed the issue of Nazi crimes as follows:

Nothing is so unworthy of a civilized nation as allowing itself to be "governed" without opposition by an irresponsible clique that has yielded to base instinct. It is certain that today every honest German is ashamed of his government. Who among us has any conception of the dimensions of shame that will befall us and our children when one day the veil has fallen from our eyes and the most horrible of crimes—crimes that infinitely outdistance every human measure—reach the light of day (Scholl 1970)?

The White Rose's campaign came to an end on February 18, 1943, when Hans and Sophie were arrested. A porter employed by the university spotted the two dumping a suitcase of leaflets onto a school courtyard. The arrests were highly publicized and the government was determined to make an example of the students. Roland Freisler, the grand inquisitor of the Reich, was flown in to perform the trial. After three days of court proceedings Hans, Sophie, and their friend Christoph were beheaded, a form of execution reserved for German citizens. Several months later, Professor Huber would meet a similar fate.

The White Rose students were not the only group of young Germans who would lose their lives attempting to rally fellow Germans against the regime. Helmuth Hubener and his friends Gehard Duwer, Karl-Heinz Schnibbe, and Rudi Wobbe also engaged in an anti-Nazi leaflet campaign two years earlier in Hamburg. The young people, with the exception of Rudi Wobbe, were members of the Church of Latter-Day Saints. The fact that most of the clique's members belonged to a religious minority in Germany may have influenced their actions, but the primary motivation behind their actions appears to have been Helmuth's obsession with the truth. Together with his friends, Helmuth transcribed illegal allied radio broadcasts and

then disseminated the transcripts in local mailboxes, phone booths, and train stations. Helmuth also produced his own propaganda in addition to the transcripts. His leaflets shared much in common with those of the White Rose group; they called attention to the terrorist nature of National Socialism. One leaflet read:

German boys! Do you know the country without freedom, the country of terror and tyranny? Yes, you know it well but are afraid to talk about it. They have intimidated you to such an extent that you don't dare talk for fear of reprisals. Yes, you are right; it is Germany—Hitler Germany! Through their unscrupulous terror tactics against young and old, men and women, they have succeeded in making you spineless puppets to do their bidding (Holmes and Keele 1995).

Like the students of Munich University, seventeen-year-old Helmuth was decapitated on August 27, 1943. His young associates received prison sentences. The Edelweiss Pirates, swing youth, White Rose students, Helmuth Hubener group, and the many other young people who resisted the regime differed in the manner their resistance took; however, they each sought to maintain an independent identity outside of National Socialism. Resistance for the swing youth was primarily motivated by their desire to maintain a unique identity, but for the Pirates, White Rose students, and Helmuth Hubener group, resistance was fueled by ethical convictions. All these youth groups valued freedom over conformity.

What accounts for the sudden growth of youth cliques in the late 1930s and early 1940s? Disillusionment with the supposed revolutionary ideas of National Socialism is a primary factor. In the early days of National Socialism, the Hitler Youth group was presented as a revolutionary movement, an opportunity for youth to strike out against conventional authority. As the years progressed, the HJ became increasingly more demanding of young people's time and energy. The rebellious rhetoric and imagery of the organization lost its influence as

German society became increasingly conformist under the Third Reich. Having failed to maintain the interest of youth, the true nature of the regime became more visible. This development was no doubt compounded toward the end of the war, as the NSDAP's massive propaganda campaign became more transparent. Soldiers returning from the front lines of the war brought with them stories of defeat; such accounts conflicted with Nazi propaganda efforts. These factors contributed to a growing opposition against the regime by many of Germany's youth. The desire to escape the confines of the Hitler Youth and the party machine triggered more altruistic notions within young people. The majority of these young resisters had spent their formative years under the shadow of a massive propaganda machine that dominated their schooling and leisure time. Despite this intense programming, the Nazi regime was unable to completely control the consciences of all of Germany's youth. Many would resist the regime even at the cost of their lives. The youth resisters in Nazi Germany are not only significant because of their cultural, ethical, and political resiliency, they also impart an important lesson regarding the value of youth activism. Young people can play an important and positive role in society, this is evinced by the actions of those young people who chose to resist and confront Nazi tyranny while so many adults retreated into passivity.

See also Antiwar Activism; Eastern Europe, Youth and Citizenship in; Europe, Comparing Youth Activism in; European Identity and Citizenship; Immigrant Youth in Europe—Turks in Germany; State and Youth, The; Student Political Activism; Zionist Youth Organizations.

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Ron Van Cleef

Anti-Tobacco Youth Activism. Youth-led anti-tobacco activism is a movement to educate young people about the dangers of tobacco use and to empower them to take a stand against tobacco marketing campaigns that target teenagers. The Master Settlement Agreement—a landmark multi-state legal settlement against major tobacco companies to recover tobacco-related health care costs—spurred young people's creative energy to wage war against corporate tobacco and their products (i.e., bidis, cigarettes, cigars, kreteks, smokeless tobacco) by thinking outside of the box and sparking grassroots movements by teenagers for teenagers. In response to the tobacco companies' escalating investment in marketing to youth, young activists are striking back.

Findings from the Monitoring the Future survey reveal a steady decline in cigarette and smokeless tobacco use among eighth-, tenth-, and twelfth-grade students since its peak in 1996–1997; yet, a quarter of young people in the United States are still smoking when they graduate from high school. Furthermore, in the global context, one teen becomes addicted to tobacco every second.

The anti-tobacco youth movement can be subdivided into three principal domains: activism against corporate tobacco, participation in prevention efforts, and engagement in policy initiatives.