Hard times; Hard duties; Hard hearts; The Volksgemeinschaft as an indicator of identity shift

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Hard Times; Hard Duties; Hard Hearts; The *Volksgemeinschaft* as an Indicator of Identity Shift

Kaitlin Hampshire

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

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To Mom and Dad, I do not know how I could have done this without you!
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Abstract

How can one nation define an ideal community? The Reich’s Propaganda Ministry of Nazi Germany knew. No cultivation of community, or Volksgemeinschaft in the case of Nazi Germany, is complete without the use of propaganda. Nazi propaganda posters played several different roles in the formation of the community, such as maintaining the military, as well as labor forces not in the military, perpetuating anti-Soviet and anti-Jew feelings, creating the Führer myth, and gaining the support of Germany’s youth. All of the messages displayed in the posters identified the values of the members of the ‘National Community’ or Volksgemeinschaft.

Propaganda posters are often neglected in academic literature. Scholars who do mention Nazi propaganda posters in their literature most commonly use the posters to support their research regarding a different topic from that era, not for the posters’ own merit. Despite the lack of attention given to the propaganda posters in academia, they were the most influential type of media that the Third Reich produced, and shed the most light on Nazi government motives.

My historical research concentrates on the changing definition of the Volksgemeinschaft in propaganda posters. After examining posters between the years of 1929 to 1945, a shift in the Nazi perception of the Volksgemeinschaft is clearly noticeable. This analysis will utilize an artistic approach to further the historical analysis. By analyzing the content and form, such as construction, color, text and subject matter, the evolving themes of the posters reflected how the Volksgemeinschaft was defined throughout the Nazi period can be determined and allow us to place those larger themes in historical context. Through this dual approach, this thesis will establish a greater
understanding of the content and context of Nazi propaganda posters, as propaganda posters ultimately inspire the changing identity of the Volksgemeinschaft.
This thesis is an analytical study of the propaganda posters of Nazi Germany, focusing primarily on how the artistry and subliminal messages of these posters helped express changes in the Nazi idea of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. The Reich's Propaganda Ministry of Nazi Germany 1933 to 1945 utilized media of all sorts in order to sell Germans their concept of the ideal state. No cultivation of community, or *Volksgemeinschaft* in the case of Nazi Germany, is complete without the use of propaganda.\(^1\) Many historians have focused on the role of new visual media in the promotion of the fascist state, such as radio and film. This ties in nicely with the themes of modernism at play within the formation of fascist states in the early 20\(^{th}\) century. This thesis focuses on a more traditional form of propaganda: the street bill and poster, those images and stirring phrases meant to evoke the patriotic emotions of the viewer.

Propaganda posters typically get few references in academic literature. Those who take up the subject mainly do so in support of a different topic and do not examine the posters as a subject of analysis within their own right. Yet propaganda posters were arguably the most influential type of media that the Third Reich produced, as they expressed Nazi messages the most clearly. Due to the Depression of 1929, most Germans could not afford to go to the movies or own a radio. Thus, posters on the street and in shops reached a larger audience than film or radio.\(^2\) Consequently, propaganda posters were the most ubiquitous form of propaganda, open to all persons, classes and genders as there are very limited restrictions to accessibility. In addition, the accessibility of poster

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\(^1\) *Volksgemeinschaft* literally translates to “People’s Community.” The Nazi regime uses this as a key definition that is distinctly their own to define the German People. Richard Evans, *The Third Reich in History and Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

\(^2\) During the Depression, the German economy collapsed and modern luxuries were given up in concession.
art as a form of propaganda was easy to comprehend. Regardless of the language barrier, visual symbolism in posters was a powerful tool that inspired either hope or fear; these images do not require the viewer to know the language, only to comprehend the visual message put forth.³

My historical research will concentrate on the changing definition of the *Volksgemeinschaft* through an examination of propaganda posters. Examining posters between the years of 1929 to 1945 shows a shift in the Nazi perception of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. The primary means of analysis will consist of using an artistic approach. First, this essay will analyze the content of each poster. Then, the essay will analyze the poster’s presentation: their construction, color, and text. Special attention will be given to both analyzing the specific subject matter of each poster, as well as its place in the broader historical context. Through this dual approach, the viewer will be able to achieve a greater understanding of the content and context of Nazi propaganda posters.

All propaganda posters created under the authority of the Reich Propaganda Ministry were to adhere to a strict set of guidelines put forward by the Ministry. These specific guidelines relayed towards all propaganda artists were sent through the branches of the Ministry with direct implications if they were not followed. The individual artist’s viewpoint was specifically what the Nazi party instructed them to have. As most artists were deemed “racially pure” by the government, their artistic expression would have outlined the party’s messages within the propaganda posters.⁴ As the needs of the Nazi

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³ Language barriers exist for different groups living in Germany, for example with the Polish population.
⁴ “Racially pure” is an ideology placed forward by the Nazi government to convey its hopes for a controlled population.
party changed over time due to the instability of the political climate, so too did the messages and images of the propaganda posters.

Images conveyed in propaganda through the street bill and poster allow for an artistic interpretation of propaganda posters. Artistic impressions of Nazi policies allowed the viewer to gain a deeper understanding into the inner workings of the Third Reich. In understanding messages displayed through subliminal messaging, the Party was conveying to its viewer its greater intentions. By placing a great importance on simple messages that conveyed the importance of organizations and ideals such as the Hitler Youth, Women and families, Industrial laborers and creation of the Führer myth, the Party specifically showed who they were targeting. This type of propaganda was not intended to make the mass public do something, such as buy war bonds, but it was attempting to make them be something. To understand this thought process, historians need not only understand the inner workings of propaganda and the role of policy within the Third Reich, but the role that imagery plays in creating and enforcing messages. These messages once again revolve around the actions and politics of the Third Reich, which ultimately feed into the preconceived idea of a “People’s Community.”

The focus of this thesis will be solely on the period between 1929 and 1945, from the electoral campaigns of the Nazi party through to the end of the war, as curated in the collection of propaganda posters from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the U.S. Library of Congress. Beginning the research in 1929 instead of 1933 when the Nazis officially came to power enables this study to highlight the key themes in early propaganda posters and see how they changed once the Nazi party was actually in
The themes of these posters revolved around the Hitler Youth, women and families, laborers, and creation of the Führer or a common enemy, and directly influenced the *Volksgemeinschaft*. Themes such as the “creation of the Führer” can only be understood fully by looking at the Nazi campaign propaganda that began in 1929. This timespan will help identify how the propaganda posters changed over time, as well as what stayed the same. Also important to this analysis will be an examination of the writings of influential Nazi leaders, such as Goebbels, Adolf Hitler, and Otto Dietrich.

It is my hope that this thesis will demonstrate the significance of propaganda posters based on their artistic merit and historical importance. Artistic merit is evaluated according to four categories, each extremely important within its own right. These four steps include beauty, skill and technique, inherent meaning, and fulfilled intent. Every skill can be used to evaluate a piece of artwork by itself, however a painting must be examined as a whole. Jean Hélion, a famous painter, uses a method of analysis called “double rhythm,” which he believes that “all great paintings must have – the rhythm of the whole, the rhythm of the part.” Jean Hélion was an abstract painter in the 1930s who later established himself as a leading modernist, and whose approach to double rhythm is the most absolute way to examine a painting.

The following four categories are all an elaboration upon the “rhythm of the part.” The construction, color, text and subject matter of a painting all clearly convey the “rhythm of the whole” within a completed propaganda poster. The category of beauty is

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5 1933 was the year that the Nazi Party was campaigning and winning elections.
7 Modernism (Art) is a philosophical movement in conjunction with cultural trends and changes that arose from large-scale transformations in Western society during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
concerned with the initial reactions towards a piece of art: Does the viewer’s eye respond to it? Is the viewer immediately captivated by it? If the viewer is taken in by this piece of art, the next method of analysis focuses in on skill and technique. Skill and technique cover how the piece of art is presented to the viewer. Is it a physical painting, print, or perhaps a photograph? This section identifies exactly what the viewer is looking at. The next stage is inherent meaning, which can be defined as hooking the viewer with its particular message. With inherent meaning, does the piece of art, in this instance the propaganda poster, have a clear message that the viewer can immediately ascertain? Now that the viewer is brought in with a firm understanding of what the propaganda poster is trying to convey, the poster must finally display fulfilled intent. Does the overall message of the poster, even its subliminal messaging, convey its intent to the viewer? This particular aspect of analysis is crucial for the Volksgemeinschaft idea, as it permeates the consciousness of the viewer without the viewer knowing.  

These four fundamental methods of analysis are crucial tools for understanding works of art. In addition, the influential art historian Meyer Schapiro known for his analytical Modernist analysis, also offers ways in which formal analysis of artists should be completed. By focusing on great masters such as Seurat, Picasso, Cézanne, Mondrian, and others, he elaborates upon the ways in which images can be analyzed through painted works and not through a systematic cold approach that removes the life from the artwork.  

Art is fluid, always interconnecting, never without purpose. Thus examining propaganda posters as pieces of art reveals more about their true intent than many other approaches could. This thesis will contribute to Nazi propaganda historiography by

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8 These four categories are common knowledge amongst every art student.
examining relationships, techniques, and influences, and thereby highlight the significance of this overlooked medium to our understanding of changing presentations and perceptions of the \textit{Volksgemeinschaft}; and how the wishes and ideals of the community change from the “Utopic” image to a militarized fighting machine.

In addition to understanding how the \textit{Volksgemeinschaft} changed over time, it is essential to understand that the idea behind the \textit{Volksgemeinschaft} was specifically created for the German government by the Third Reich. As the Reich Propaganda Ministry was in complete control of the “image” of the new German state, the myth of a unified \textit{Volksgemeinschaft} was easy to propagate. In creating this \textit{Volksgemeinschaft} myth through propaganda, the push towards an Aryan German utopia was seen to be an achievable goal for the Third Reich.

\textit{Volksgemeinschaft} literally translates to “People’s Community,” Volks meaning People and Gemeinschaft meaning Community. The idea of a German Volk originated in the Summer of 1914 within the first few weeks of World War I.\textsuperscript{10} In some translations the word \textit{Volksgemeinschaft} can also be referred to as the “National Community.” Within this particular thesis, the translation that will be followed is the literal, referring to “People’s Community.” This \textit{Volksgemeinschaft} identity offered by the National Socialists was largely popular due to the new national mood at the beginning of the first World War that primarily focused upon economic prosperity, social reform, and national integration for the people of Germany.\textsuperscript{11} In promotion of these fundamental aspects of a national community, the \textit{Volksgemeinschaft} played into strong convictions of public

\textsuperscript{11} Peter Fritzsche, \textit{Germans into Nazis} (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1998), 228.
idealism.\textsuperscript{12} The idea of the *Volksgemeinschaft* in turn is then used in an attempt to create the ultimate German utopia.

In “Nazi Propaganda and the *Volksgemeinschaft*: Constructing a People’s Community” and “Manufacturing a Consensus: Nazi Propaganda and the Building of a ‘National Community’ (Volksgemeinschaft),” historian David Welch has argued that the *Volksgemeinschaft* through propaganda posters had the largest effect on Catholics and Laborers.\textsuperscript{13} This thesis, however, will focus on how propaganda posters are so ubiquitous that they are available to all races, classes, and genders, in turn having a large-scale impact on every group within Germany. Hans Mommsen has argued the *Volksgemeinschaft* is actually a propagandistic concept that had the greatest effect on the bourgeois middle class as they were seen as susceptible to its “illusion of social integration.”\textsuperscript{14} Mommsen’s concept of an “illusion of social integration” is based on the notion that all German people were supposedly swept into the national Nazi fervor. This “illusion” as a propagandistic concept was meant to force the coercion of the entire population of Germany, in particular the middle class.\textsuperscript{15} However, the term *Volksgemeinschaft* should not be used in Mommsen’s opinion as it was too colored from the propaganda campaigns of Goebbels.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{12} Peter Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1998), 229.
The Vollengemach term, as understood by German historian Thomas Mergel, was seen as a ‘politics of promise’17 This “promise” was ultimately an inspirational concept that combined the existing social situation with the will to change.18 In addition, historian Detlev Peukert’s definition adds another layer of complexity to the term. To Peukert, the concept of the National Socialist Vollengemach was a utopia that sought the formation of a homogeneous, conformist, hierarchically structured society through educating the ‘worthy’ and disposing of the ‘unsuitable.’19 Unlike Peukert, within Hans-Ulrich Wehler’s definition we see the Vollengemach as an “appeal of modernity” to the mobilizing impulse. This impulse associated with the Vollengemach unleashed a transformative dynamic, which ultimately contributed to the legitimatization of the Third Reich.20

Prominent historian Richard Evans argued within his work The Third Reich in History and Memory that the idea of the ‘people’s community’ had a profound effect on the young generation of German workers. The Third Reich allowed them to improve their position within the Vollengemach with programs like ‘Strength through Joy’ that built upon the ideal of a ‘People’s Community.’21 Thus, Evans posits that the Vollengemach is both propaganda myth and social reality. When evaluating the Third Reich and various turning points within the war, the idea of social cohesion among

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21 Richard Evans, The Third Reich in History and Memory (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 139-140.
the German people evaporated at war’s end. This concrete ending moved the idea of the *Volksgemeinschaft* away from a realized social reality back towards a propaganda myth.\(^{22}\)

The importance of the *Volksgemeinschaft* within various historians’ research is extremely important to the overarching historiography of Nazi Germany. Two of the most important arguments come from historians Claudia Koonz and Michael Wildt. Within their respective works they discuss the importance of the *Volksgemeinschaft* idea/myth within German society.

In *The Nazi Conscience*, Claudia Koonz discussed how the Nazi government created its own version of morality based on the “Aryan” ideal. The aforementioned ethic, quite unlike the universal one, did not value the sanctity of human life, but thought that only certain individuals were worthy of enjoying life. This new Aryan faith would be transplanted into the realm of human life, effectively replacing all religions. The chosen citizens of Germany were not Christian or Catholic, but now would only be seen as nationalists of the state.\(^{23}\)

Finally, Michael Wildt in *Hitler’s Volksgemeinschaft and the Dynamics of Racial Exclusion* explores the history of the Volksgemeinschaft within the party and the impact it had on Nazi policy. Its origins begin in the spring of 1933, specifically the Reichstag elections of March 5\(^{th}\). Upon the seizure of power by Adolf Hitler, Germany was promised a socially inclusive *Volksgemeinschaft* as well as equality, economic prosperity and the restoration of both honor and pride. The people’s acceptance of their new dictator

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\(^{22}\) Evans, *The Third Reich in History and Memory*, 141.

and the fascist regime that he ruled under meant turning a blind eye towards the use of concentration camps, the SS (Schutzstaffel), and various other institutions. Systematic exclusion redefined German society, creating the perfect Volksgemeinschaft for those who were deemed worthy.\textsuperscript{24} The various anti-Jewish actions of the Nazi regime destroyed the civil and constitutional order, transforming the German nation into an aggressive and racist Volksgemeinschaft.\textsuperscript{25} The ultimate ideal of the “people’s community” came directly from the Reich Propaganda Ministry.\textsuperscript{26} The Volksgemeinschaft and the Weltanschauung or World View transition together seamlessly; there cannot be one without the other.\textsuperscript{27} The ministry then identified that the Volksgemeinschaft would be based upon ties of blood or race, a shared destiny, and a common set of values founded on the Nazi Weltanschauung. Through this “World View,” the role of propaganda under the concept of the Volksgemeinschaft was a crucial component of the Third Reich.

The historiography of the Volksgemeinschaft ideal is extremely important as it illuminates why the idea of the “People’s Community” played such a central role in Nazi propaganda. Overall, the Volksgemeinschaft was a propagandistic concept, an “illusion of social integration”, a “politics of promise”, a utopia, mobilizing impulse, propaganda myth and social reality, an “Aryan” image, and a “World View.” All of the previously stated factors are what historians argue composes the Volksgemeinschaft. These ideals

\textsuperscript{25} Michael Wildt, \textit{Hitler’s Volksgemeinschaft and the Dynamics of Racial Exclusion: Violence against Jews in Provincial Germany, 1919-1939} (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012); Wildt here is speaking to the literal translation of the word, not an interpreted one.
\textsuperscript{27} Weltanschauung means “World View.”
were the foundation for all actions that the Nazi Party took that fed into the Propaganda ministry.

Dr. Joseph Goebbels was the Reichsminister of Propaganda from 1933 to 1945. By playing to the emotions of the viewer in film, radio, and posters, Goebbels ensured that Nazi ideals had a prominent place in Germans’ everyday lives. Anything that was deemed against the social norm was illuminated through negative imagery, thus giving birth to the “common enemy” ideology. This tactic, particularly prominent in the United States and Great Britain in the 1920s, greatly influenced the propaganda of the Third Reich.

Examining Goebbels’ propaganda message communicated in his diaries provides a deeper understanding of the Volksgemeinschaft ideal. Nazi propaganda posters were used to convey several different messages, such as the need to maintain a strong military and workforce. Both goals were extremely important in supplying munitions to the front. Anti-Soviet and anti-Jewish feelings, the creation of the Führer myth, and gaining the support of Germany’s youth made up the remainder of most propaganda poster themes. All of the messages displayed in the posters helped to identify the preconceived values and members of the “National Community,” or the Fatherland. These messages in

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28 Over the course of his career Goebbels held numerous titles. The Reichsministry was the most important role of his career.
29 Consumerist tactics that I mention in this sentence refers to the type of propaganda used for sales. This came from influences based in 1920s United States’ commercial propaganda--specifically propaganda advertisements for different companies.
30 The Führer myth was also known as the “Hitler Myth” as described by historian Ian Kershaw. This particular myth describes Hitler as a demagogue figure and mighty defender, while also presenting him as a figure that embodied and shaped the German people, giving him the ultimate mandate to rule.
31 A National Community is composed of many different elements. Nazi propaganda posters combined these elements in order to show what the Nazis believed the community values were and present them as useful messages for the Reich. This is extremely influential while describing the Fatherland.
conjunction with the *Volksgemeinschaft* idea sets the importance of propaganda posters into the discussion of the art and history of Nazi Germany.

Each major propaganda theme is discussed in a separate chapter. Each chapter focuses on both the prewar and war year propaganda of that particular theme. Chapter One gives a brief history of Nazi Germany. All events discussed within the chapter influence the political climate, which in turn fostered propaganda posters. Chapter Two analyzes the theme of the Working Reich. Propaganda posters within this section focused on the role of the laborer within Nazi Society, especially those within the industrial occupations. Chapter Three examines propaganda focusing on Women and Families. It shows that the Third Reich placed special emphasis on the family and women’s roles within it in the construction of the “Aryan” utopia that the Third Reich promised. Chapter Four analyzes propaganda concerning the Hitler Youth. Posters within this section focused on the importance of the Youth as a source of power for the Reich. The final chapter deals with the Rise of Adolf Hitler and the focus on a common enemy during the war years. This chapter is the most crucial as it shows both the rise to power and the establishment of power within the Reich. The concluding chapter focuses on the various threads presented within this thesis and attempts to show that Nazi Germany created a social contract through the “Aryan” ideal that created the *Volksgemeinschaft*. In perpetuating this “Aryan” ideal, the social contract ultimately created an “other,” which is then examined within the Common Enemy section of this thesis.
Chapter One: History of the Third Reich

It is crucial when studying the Third Reich to understand the major shifts of power that occurred over its life span. These shifts of power occurred within the power structure of the Third Reich, ultimately within the various pieces of legislation. Although this particular analysis begins in 1929, the foundation of the Third Reich truly begins in 1919.  

The history of the Third Reich from 1929 to 1945 is replete with decisive moments that led to the infamy of Nazi Germany. This timeframe has many significant phases through various social, political, and military aspects. Five major shifts are the essential backbone of the Third Reich: Gaining Power, 1929-’33; Establishment of Power, 1933-’36; Enforcement of Power, 1936-’39; The Victories, 1939-’43; and The Defeats, 1943-’45. Within each phase is a substantial change that caused the history of Germany to veer off in a new direction. Such changes occur, for example, with Hitler becoming Chancellor of Germany, the 1936 Olympic games, large-scale law reform applicable to all Jewish peoples, and the outbreak and onset of World War II. These changes coincided greatly with the five shifts detailed above.

Leading up to World War II, the three phases of Gaining Power, Establishment of Power, and Enforcement of Power all demonstrated the values which defined the Third Reich. The values of each phase personified the lengths to which the Nazi Government was willing to go to push their Party agenda. The push to accept Nazi values led to unprecedented success in Germany with the Third Reich promoting their unique message

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32 1919 is the year in which the NSDAP was founded. The “Nazi Party” as it is called later owes its foundations to this year.
33 These five shifts are of my own creation and occur within natural breaks in the history of Nazi Germany.
of “Ein Reich, ein Volk, ein Führer.” At this moment, the establishment of anti-Jewish legislation created a strong Volksgemeinschaft that was inclusive to those deemed ‘worthy.’

The years of 1929 to 1933 are when the Nazi Party established control within Germany. 1929 was a year of complete and total desperation for the world. The Stock Market crash on October 26, in the United States, was the catalyst for global depression. US bankers called in cash loans leaving the German economy completely decimated. While the years of 1924-1928 hosted several years of economic prosperity for Germany, the economic situation of the country in 1929 allowed for the Nazi party to gain popularity. This economic hardship that fell upon Germany then became the ultimate catalyst for propaganda themes that will encapsulate the Volksgemeinschaft idea that is fundamental to the Nazi regime.

The Reich Propaganda Ministry was officially founded around April 27, 1930 and led by the Reich’s Propaganda Minister, Joseph Goebbels. Goebbels was rewarded for his loyalty to Hitler with the great responsibility of overseeing the Propaganda Ministry. This particular ministry was influential in establishing large-scale propaganda campaigns that were prominent especially during election periods.

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35 The Nazi Party will also be referred to as the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei or NSDAP.


so widespread that each regional headquarters within the NSDAP had its own
Propaganda department. As discrediting information form opposing political parties came
forward, the NSDAP would “use rumor and scandal” to immediately discredit their
opponents.\textsuperscript{39} The Reich propaganda headquarters had gained much-needed traction
within the fight to establish power over elections, essentially gaining the Nazi party a
majority as they were able to finally penetrate the hierarchy of the Reichstag by
becoming one of the largest parties represented.

The Reichstag, the definitive seat of German parliamentary power, was forever
changed the night of September 14, 1930. During this particular election, the Nazi Party
increased their standing, raising their votes from 810,000 to 6.5 million.\textsuperscript{40} This
unprecedented elevation in popularity raised the NSDAP to the second largest party
within the Reichstag, over the three traditional parties: the People’s Party, Democrats,
and Nationalists. All three traditional political parties at one point or another within their
histories held a majority within the Reichstag. With the majority came large numbers of
political seats, all of which were at the discretion of the majority to appoint, in turn
leading to more votes.\textsuperscript{41} However, high levels of investment and interest in the Nazi Party
were not limited to adults. Many children found themselves intertwined in the Party
through the newly created Hitler Youth.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{39} Noakes, \textit{Nazism 1919-1945: Volume 1}, 65.
\textsuperscript{41} Noakes, \textit{Nazism 1919-1945: Volume 1}, 70.
The Nazis’ newly minted power between the years of 1930 to 1933 allowed for a hotbed of turmoil among the citizens of Germany. In the three-year span, the Weimar democracy became increasingly unpopular through vigorous propaganda campaigns sponsored by the Nazi Party and desire for an authoritarian regime grew. Their propaganda proclaimed that the large-scale economic depression running rampant would only continue to worsen without the takeover and support of an authoritarian regime and depicted the Nazi party as savior of Germany. The campaign’s success culminated in Hitler becoming the Chancellor of Germany of the Weimar democracy on January 30, 1933. As Adolf Hitler gained power, the Nazi Party moved into the second phase of the Third Reich, “Establishment of Power.”

The three-year span from 1933 to 1936 created the perfect political storm for the Nazi Party. Adolf Hitler gained power as Chancellor of Germany, and within the first year of the Nazi Party taking power, they appealed to the German people.\(^{43}\) On January 31, 1933, Hitler described in a live radio broadcast the *Appeal to the German People*, as a movement that was attempting to project the image of the ‘national uprising’ through national unity and a determined government. This attempt to project a “unified” image established the *Volksgemeinschaft* idea early on within the Nazi majority.\(^{44}\)

The Nazi Party called for the dissolution of the Reichstag on February 27, 1933 following a fire to the parliamentary building, also known as the Reichstag Fire Decree. This subsequently followed the Decree for the Protection of the German People, which was issued on February 4, 1933. This imposed decree began as a temporary measure and


\(^{44}\) Noakes, *Nazism 1919-1945: Volume 1*,131.
eventually it grew into permanent legislation that actively encroached civil rights. The suspension of civil rights then continued with the banning of the free press, political meetings, and marches that were broken up by the police.\textsuperscript{45} Within this twenty-three day span, the Nazi Party flexed its political muscles by enforcing their ideals and ultimately forcing the dissolution of the Reichstag.

Upon the dissolution of the Reichstag that followed the formal call for votes on March 5, 1933, the Nazi Party moved quickly to implement their policies. March 5\textsuperscript{th} was the formal date on which the political leaders of Germany voted to end the Reichstag, at the urging of the NSDAP. The next three years saw the creation of some of the strongest anti-Jewish legislation that the Nazi regime developed. In varying degrees of oppression, the hammer began to fall on the Jewish people. As part of the “Aryanization” phase, the first laws that came into place were in April 1933.\textsuperscript{46} These began by restricting the number of Jewish students at schools and universities, as well as restricting the number of Jewish doctors within hospitals. By 1934, the restrictions became even more widespread. Jewish actors were forbidden to perform on both the stage and screen, and Jewish civilian workers were fired from the armed services. There was also a disruption of the Jewish dietary practice of Kashrut.\textsuperscript{47} By the next year, Germany would see the introduction of the Nuremberg Laws, harsh legislation that gave rise to extremely anti-Jewish sentiments

throughout the country, as well as the first concentration camp.\textsuperscript{48} December of the same year saw the publication of a decree straight from the Reich Propaganda Ministry that disallowed the names of Jewish soldiers to be printed on World War I memorials.\textsuperscript{49}

With the Nazi Party in full control of Germany by 1936, three things happened that defined its legacy. The first was the invasion of the Rhineland, in March of 1936; Germany was testing the land boundaries within which it was allowed to operate. Second, there was the preparations for Nazi Germany to appear on the world’s stage as hosts for the Olympic Games. In preparation for their duties as host country, many of the anti-Jewish measures were altered to accommodate visiting countries and to reassure Germany’s place in the world. Germany, now firmly under the control of the Third Reich, needed to show the world that the Nazi Party could return Germany to greatness. Finally, on October 18, 1936 came the Decree on the Execution of the Four-Year Plan.\textsuperscript{50} The goal to reform and rebuild Germany was underway, thus ending the need for the Nazi Party to prove itself.

Yet, it was the next three years, 1936 – 1939, where the Nazi Regime allowed the world to see the true face of their party. Within this Enforcement of Power stage, the rules against Jews increased, as well as the continued expansion of the military. The increased amplification of concentration camps that began to appear throughout Germany, indicated a step towards the final solution. This was followed by the push

\textsuperscript{48} Dachau is the first concentration camp under the Nazi regime, originating as a Prisoner of war camp originally. Over time however, it manifested into one of the deadliest death camps.


towards reclaiming the lands traditionally inhabited by the people of Germany, ultimately as part of the *Volksgemeinschaft* idea.\(^{51}\)

Between 1937 and 1938, there was an increase in oppression towards the Jewish people. An increased push in the “Aryanization” efforts started in 1937 and lasted until the end of the war. This same year, Jews were forced to register their property resulting in government seizure, which ultimately brought about the dismissal of both Jewish workers and managers from many companies. The seizure of these businesses led to the dismissal of both Jewish workers and managers of these companies. Jewish doctors had their licenses revoked and were unable to practice medicine. They were also prohibited from treating non-Jewish patients.\(^{52}\)

To further impose systemized “Aryanization,” all people of the Jewish race were being forced to carry identification cards that indicated their Jewish heritage, and were slowly stripped of their citizenship. By the Autumn of 1938, all Jewish documents, specifically passports, were to be stamped with “J.” Furthering the stigmatization, the government required that all Jewish men and women bearing first names of “non-Jewish” origin were forced to add “Israel” and “Sarah” to their given names by January 1, 1939. This systematic oppression would only worsen in the months to come.\(^{53}\)

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\(^{51}\) This push to reclaim land focused primarily on the land taken from Germany due to the Treaty of Versailles. The Treaty of Versailles claimed areas like the Rhineland and Sudetenland as punishment for World War I.


At the same time that all of the ordinances against Jewish people were occurring, the Third Reich was preparing to take over Europe. On September 30, 1938, Germany signed the Munich Agreement alongside British and French prime ministers, which allowed for the annexation of Czechoslovakia. This agreement avoided the second World War for the time being, although it was on the horizon. Germany thus began its power grab for land during this time.54

1938 brought one of the worst days for Jews living at the time, called Kristallnacht, or “Night of Broken Glass.” On November 9 and 10, 1938, a carefully organized set of pogroms occurred. Established by the Reich’s Propaganda Ministry and orchestrated by none other than Goebbels, Kristallnacht began. Within these two days 250 synagogues were burned, over 7,000 businesses were destroyed, and hundreds of men, women, and children were murdered. 55 Almost all Jewish cemeteries, hospitals, schools, and homes were raided while police and fire crews stood absently by. The following day consisted of approximately 30,000 arrests of Jewish men for being Jewish; those arrested were sent off to concentration camps. Jewish youth were also greatly impacted, as they were expelled from all of the public schools and barred from entering museums, playgrounds, and swimming pools.56 This branched out to systematically ban Jews from all aspects of a fulfilled life, such as attending university, cinemas, theaters, and sports.

55 Systematically organized massacre that targets a particular group, specifically applicable with the Jewish faith.
These new areas, the specified “Aryan” zones, created a utopian-like atmosphere. A utopian atmosphere, the ultimate Volksgemeinschaft in the minds of the Third Reich, was one with a completely “Aryan” identity. This “Aryan” identity would foster a nation of individuals completely dedicated towards the advancement of the Reich. Women would produce children; men would defend their nation in battle. All “Aryan” people within this new nation would descend from a pure bloodline, contain fair features, and would be peak physical specimens. These factors all composed the utopian-like aspirations that created the ultimate Volksgemeinschaft.

Between 1939 and 1943 the administration achieved several of its most important goals, as well as many inspiring victories, alongside the atrocity that was the final solution. Germany, having knocked everyone else out of the war, was facing only Britain in 1940. Constant air raids allowed German forces to have an upper hand with Britain, almost eliminating them from the war. Nazi Germany maintained this success for three years. The United States of America interrupted that success after December 7, 1941. This was the day that Japan, Germany’s ally, bombed the United States at Pearl Harbor naval base in Hawaii. The United States declared war on Japan, and Japan declared war on the United States, bringing about a transformation of the war. With an added country now invested within the war, as well as Russia changing sides, the downward spiral of this two-front war began for Germany.

1943 was the pivotal shift within World War II, particularly for Germany. In the three years from 1943 to 1945, the Third Reich began to fall. The involvement in a two-

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front war was too much to maintain. With Britain and Russia pushing in on each front, reclaiming invaded territory, Germany could not hold them off forever.

Germany’s battle on the Eastern front against Russia came to a screeching halt during the Battle of Stalingrad. The Battle of Stalingrad, taking place from August 23, 1942 to February 2, 1943, sparked the downfall of the Third Reich due to a devastating loss. From this point forward, Germany had relatively little success in all military endeavors. Both the Russian and combined Allied forces pressing in towards Berlin pushed the German forces into a defensive position rather than an offensive one. This ultimately came to a head with the invasion of Normandy. Under the code name of Operation Overlord, on June 6, 1944 the Allies successfully invaded France through five separate beaches: Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno, and Sword.

As the Third Reich started to slowly fall apart, the Reich’s propaganda ministry resisted the fall. The Propaganda that was produced during these final years can be broken into three separate themes: Atrocity, Exhortation, and Terror.58 The three spheres all depict the fading last days of the Reich, as well as the struggle to not let the regime fall.

Atrocity propaganda was instrumental in emphasizing the threat that the Bolsheviks posed to the Nazi regime. In an attempt to refocus on a recognized enemy, the Reich was able to rally the nation behind it. They did this through specific propaganda campaigns that focused on how the incoming Russian troops would destroy the German people. The aim of the campaign was to encourage civilians to assist the German troops

in any way they could to prevent mutual destruction. When this tactic slowly started to
decrease in effectiveness, the Reich moved into their Exhortation phase.59

The Exhortation phase was concentrated solely on trying to sustain morale on the
home front. In slipping back into propaganda tactics that call on the early days of the
Reich, specifically 1933’s ‘time of struggle,’ officials sought to illustrate the Nazi Party
as the only way to survive the war and emerge successful. These measures showed the
desperation that Nazi officials were forced into in the final years of the war. This specific
phase of propaganda tapped into the \textit{Volksgemeinschaft} idea that was so prevalent within
the Nazi regime: that together the people could accomplish anything and achieve the
ultimate victory. Closing in on the end, this type of propaganda was not enough, which
resulted in the move to terroristic tactics.60

The Terror phase was the last-ditch effort to reassure the people of Germany that
the Reich was not going anywhere, and neither were its people. However, as the Allied
powers retook all conquered territory and started moving in on German land, it gave great
cause for concern. Oblivious to the concerns of the people who were seeking refuge away
from the horrors of war, high-ranking officials such as Heinrich Himmler rebuffed these
citizens in a proclamation specifically defaming those who chose to desert the military
and, more importantly, their Reich; to Himmler, the latter was unacceptable. The hopes
that Hitler would save Germany were unfounded as his decision to commit suicide
alongside his wife, Eva Braun, occurred on April 30, 1945 as the Allies pushed in on the

city of Berlin. Taking the city was the symbolic end of the war as shortly afterward the effectively leaderless Nazi government fell on May 8, 1945.\(^6\)

The propaganda industry of Nazi Germany had the most important occupation within all of the Third Reich. Above all else, the job of the Propaganda Ministry was to create and manipulate the image of the Nazi government to both the German people and the world. To convey the ideals of Nazism, force was predominantly used to inspire fear and violence. In order to completely inspire fear and violence the ministry needed to create the myth of the *Volksgemeinschaft*.\(^7\)

In charge of the *Volksgemeinschaft* myth was Goebbels, the Reichsminister of Propaganda, and Otto Dietrich, the head of the Reich Press Office. Dietrich was head of the Reich Press Office from 1931 until the days of the Third Reich.\(^8\) Their relationship was a rocky one. Goebbels, the Senior Officer within the Propaganda Ministry, was answerable only to Hitler. Dietrich, on the other hand, was answerable to Goebbels as his commanding officer. This caused extreme conflict between the two men, as the message of the press strayed from the propaganda mission that was put forth by Hitler and extradited to Goebbels. As Dietrich was directly responsible for the press, the presentation of the war was completely within his control. Dietrich, however, had a habit of spinning wild tales that could not be properly sustained. Based on the personal writings of Goebbels' aid Rudolf Semmler; Dietrich caused many issues that were raised between the two men, such as battles over control of the propaganda message as he


\(^8\) Noakes, *Nazism 1919-1945: Volume 4*, 468; Semmler was Goebbels' personal secretary.
undermined Goebbels’ demands.\textsuperscript{64} Taking place towards the end of the war, this feud spoke to the struggle of maintaining morale in the war and the ultimate failure of Germany to do so.

Although the focus of this thesis begins in 1929 and propaganda begins long before 1933, the basic structure of the propaganda that would characterize the remainder of the Reich, began in 1929. The Reich Ministry was broken into seven departments with each having a specific focus. The propaganda sectors were as follows: Budget and Administration, Propaganda, Radio, Press, Film, Theatre, and Popular Enlightenment.\textsuperscript{65} Of these seven departments, Theatre composed a large majority of the monetary proceeds from the Propaganda Ministry. Overall, approximately twenty-five percent of the budget of the Nazi regime was funneled into the arts; this percentage was adapted for the war years as funding shifted to maintain the various fronts.\textsuperscript{66} Propaganda itself became extremely important for the Reich Propaganda Ministry as they obtained their own section of funding from the Reich. This was also important as the Propaganda Ministry had the added benefit of combining funding with the Press, Film, Theatre, and Radio Offices all ultimately relying upon the Propaganda department with its power and influence.

Radio was truly affected by propaganda in 1939 as the Reich Propaganda Ministry took control over all radio stations.\textsuperscript{67} By 1942, the Reich Radio Society moved

\textsuperscript{64} Noakes, \textit{Nazism 1919-1945: Volume 4}, 468.
\textsuperscript{66} Richard Evans, \textit{The Third Reich at War} (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009), 567.
\textsuperscript{67} Evans, \textit{The Third Reich at War}, 574.
to be directly controlled by the Reich propaganda ministry. Even though radio propaganda was controlled by the Propaganda Ministry primarily during the war years, it was just as effective towards the overall contribution to the propaganda mission of the Third Reich, as propaganda posters. Radio propaganda had a strong message that fed off of the political messages, however, not everyone was exposed to the live broadcasts. Despite the success of radio programs, they were nowhere near as powerful as propaganda posters, because the propaganda poster was ubiquitous, available to every type of person, class and gender, and ultimately extremely influential towards laborers.

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68 Evans, The Third Reich at War, 574.
Chapter Two: The Working Reich

As one of the most extensive areas that the Reich Propaganda Ministry concentrated on, propaganda for the working class was extensive. The working class was not relegated to one specific type of laborer, but included the entire labor force. This labor force consisted of the military, factory workers, and agricultural laborers. This section will focus on propaganda aimed at workers.

Beginning in 1932, this propaganda focused in on the nomination of Adolf Hitler for Chancellor of Germany. Within this specific timeframe there were two different posters that emphasized the need for the total control of Germany to be given to the Nazi party. As this propaganda was purely for the campaign, it displayed messages of a united Germany under the rule of Adolf Hitler. This message was conveyed by displaying the relationship between both hard laborers and the military. In displaying the laboring class as the backbone of the nation, the Nazi party constructed an image of strength and determination that would carry not only the nation but the people to prosperity. This ideal was demonstrated through imagery up until around 1936. As this was a time of great change, and the party was on the brink of establishing full power, messages that were shown up to 1936 conveyed the epitome of the Volksgemeinschaft idea.

By focusing on propaganda posters up to 1936, the Volksgemeinschaft idea strengthened in the Nazi Party, gaining traction. In establishing social integration and cohesion, a social hierarchy, a common set of values, and common blood ties, brought together with homogeneity and conformism to all Nazi policies on the brink of full
authority, allowed all propaganda posters up to 1936 to hold autonomy over the 
Volksgemeinschaft idea.

The working class as the most prominent demographic within Germany was the 
target of a majority of propaganda. A simple calculated move such as this allowed for the 
working class to feel needed after many years of struggling to survive. Unpacking the 
messages within these posters reveals how the working class was a crucial component to 
Nazi Volksgemeinschaft idea.

“Workers of the Mind, of the Fist, Vote for the Front Soldier; HITLER!” - 1932

In starting with the working class, we begin 
analyzing Felix Albrecht’s poster from 1932. 
Initially, this poster had a very welcoming feel 
to it. Its red, white, and blue colors were was 
not typical of the Nazi Party’s color scheme. 
The traditional color scheme of the Nazi Party 
usually focused heavily on the use of black and 
red. This particular poster has several different 
artistic design techniques woven into it. The 
first is the drawing that includes both male 
industrial workers. This image was taken 
from a sketch and layered into a prefabricated format for propaganda posters. This 
becomes quite evident as both the text and image are not seamlessly connected. However, 
they are arranged in such a way where it is almost impossible to tell that they are two
separate entities. The significance of the red and blue colors in this poster should not be lost upon the viewer. Red text has become synonymous with all Nazi propaganda posters and is a continuing trend throughout all propaganda within the Third Reich. Surrounding the poster is a blue border that constructs the framing of the image; this stylistic detail is incredibly important during this timeframe as it became synonymous with the Nazi Party’s campaign posters.

The image itself is set within a gray field. The workers are shown to have strong “Aryan” features, such as blonde hair, strong angular faces, and strong muscular bodies. The man depicted in the forefront is carrying a sledgehammer on his shoulder with his arm bent in such a way that the viewer’s eye is directed towards his strong arm muscles. Quite like other posters of this particular time, the eyes of the two men are drawn in such a way that they connect with the viewer no matter the angle.

As a campaign poster, this image is extremely important for Adolf Hitler as he attempted to gain the trust and support of the people. Gaining the support of the people would allow the Nazi party to work towards a new Germany, a Germany under the ideals of the Volksgemeinschaft. Workers such as the ones depicted here became synonymous with heavy labor factories, as well as construction sites. Factories and all types of industry were reliant upon a cohesive community that followed and respected its leader, in order to achieve great success. The text “Hitler!” comprises approximately 1/5 of the entire length of the poster. For all non-“Aryan” individuals this poster would have conveyed the shared message that laborers such as the ones shown had the full support of Adolf Hitler. Labor and laborers were the most important facet of the inner workings of the Third Reich, as well as the one thing that the Party stressed above all else. This is
shown fully with the full text of the poster that states “Workers of the Mind, of the Fist, Vote for the front soldier, HITLER!” Slogans such as these created the ultimate rallying point for the idea of the *Volksgemeinschaft.*

This poster expressed some of the core values of the *Volksgemeinschaft.* In displaying two “Aryan” laborers the poster called on the ideas of common blood ties, and a common set of values. The message of the poster specifically showed social cohesion within the Nazi party, and stressed homogeneity within the community. The overarching idea of the *Volksgemeinschaft* that was demonstrated through the theme of this poster was the need for conformity with government ideals. As these characteristics all demonstrate different aspects of the propaganda poster, taken together they demonstrated the idea of the *Volksgemeinschaft.*

*“National Socialism- The Organized Will of the Nation.”* –Pre-1933

Switching over to the propaganda artist Mjölnir, his poster titled “National Socialism- The Organized Will of the Nation” was one of the most successful propaganda posters within Nazi Germany. Dated pre-1933, this poster established the image of an organized powerful Reich that would achieve great success. As the poster is constructed predominantly out of a sketch, the major colors end

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up being those of the Party: black, red, and white. The sketched images of the poster reveal to the viewer the intense amount of work that went into this particular image. Pictured within the sea of red are three soldiers all shown to be members of the Reich’s military. All three soldiers are arranged in a way that presents their left side towards the viewer. Appearing to be standing at attention, the men are layered upon one another within the drawing. This layering technique allows for the creation of space, as well as demonstrating for the viewer the individual details of the soldiers’ uniforms.

Demonstrating the working Reich with examples from the military enforced the idea that National Socialism was for everyone. Depicting people from various demographic groups on propaganda posters, all sporting the same message of National Socialism, was crucial to the success of the Nazi Party. As the “Aryan” groupings of people were all who mattered to the party, these white soldiers displayed everyone who was welcome within the Volksgemeinschaft. This particular poster is said to have been one of the most powerful, as a highlight of the celebrated propaganda artist Mjölnir’s career, that the Third Reich had ever created. Overall, by depicting a militarized front the party was only displaying its strengths by working towards the “organized will of the nation.” Showing the power of the military through this propaganda poster ultimately shows how the military would be used to implement the “organized will of the nation.” If the people of Germany did not openly welcome the changes to the Volksgemeinschaft,

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70 Standing at attention is a military term for a full posture stance. This requires the individual to remain completely still and ready for action.
then they would meet military force. This organized will essentially boils down to the *Volksgemeinschaft* idea of a strong united Germany.\textsuperscript{71}

The idea of a strong united Germany under the ideals of the *Volksgemeinschaft* incorporated several different aspects. All three soldiers are depicted as “Aryan” which invokes the ideas of common blood ties. This also fits with the ideals that are shown to be military traits such as homogeneity, conformism, and a shared set of values. The ideals of the Nazi Party shown through forced social integration and cohesion also fit within the military. Ultimately, the combination of military values and those of the Nazi Party are meshed seamlessly together under the idea of the *Volksgemeinschaft*.

**“We’re for Adolf Hitler!”- 1936**

In continuing with the theme of the working Reich, we finish with the ultimate target of the party, the working class. Outwardly this particular poster does not have any intrinsic beauty to it. However, under closer scrutiny the sketch and painting techniques that compose the entire image allows the viewer to understand the deeper meaning behind the drab colors of gray and navy. Of the several working careers within the Reich, this poster chose to focus in on factories. The four men pictured within the foreground of the poster are staggered as if

\textsuperscript{71} “*National Socialism- The Organized Will of the Nation,*” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed June 15, 2016, [https://www.ushmm.org/propaganda/](https://www.ushmm.org/propaganda/).
filing out of a building. The man in the foreground is carrying a canteen as well as a lunchbox. All four men are clothed in factory attire and covered in soot. The background of the poster, pictured behind the men, illuminates large smokestacks billowing out smoke and what appear to be steel structures that could be from refinery plants or factories in general. The only color comes from the text overlaid upon the image of the poster. The text states “We’re for Adolf Hitler!”

In applying to the labor demographic, the Third Reich appealed to all aspects of the nation to try to gain favor amongst the people. As all people within the Reich were laborers of some sort, or laborers were part of their family units, and could in turn relate to the imagery of a factory, this poster would appeal to a large swath of people. As part of the great Volksgemeinschaft idea that the party put forward, the working class played a large role in the overall success of that idea. Without the working class, who composed a large percentage of the “Aryan” German demographic, the ideals of the Volksgemeinschaft could never be implemented. Now within the promises of a German utopia, this great Volksgemeinschaft, these factory workers were looking forward to being taken care of by the state as was promised. No longer being forgotten and essentially being referred to as the backbone of the nation by none other than Hitler himself, a majority of these workers would support the Nazi party. In the promise to be a crucial part of this new world, this Volksgemeinschaft, most Germans were not willing to turn it down.72

Backbone of the Reich: Laborers within the War Years

The strongest relationship during the war was the relationship between the industrial laborers and the military. This relationship was built upon the principles of supply and demand. The military required munitions, therefore, they relied on the laborers to fulfill that need. The laborers required jobs; they were dependent on the military to provide career opportunities. Overall control came straight from the government; therefore, this relationship was crucial to the overall success of the wartime economy. This relationship changed between 1939 and 1945. Specifically beginning in 1943, the push to maintain the Nazi ideals intensified in propaganda as the Wehrmacht began to suffer crushing defeats.

The end for the Wehrmacht began at the loss of the Battle of Stalingrad. In establishing a two-front war, the Nazis essentially weakened the hope of a German victory. From 1943 to 1945 the push to maintain the “Aryan” ideal increased with the intensity of propaganda messages. This increase was due to the mounting defeats Germany was facing. Without the strong relationship between industrial laborers and the military, the success of the Nazi party would have faltered.

The connection between industrial laborers and the military was stressed in many different themes in propaganda posters. Through the various styles of posters, the message of comradery between all laborers and the military could be easily understood by all viewers. Having a message that applied specifically to both laborers and the military in a split image shows the level of importance that the government placed on this

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relationship. A directive from The Führer’s Deputy Department M supports this point by stating:

The decisive factor in war is the belief in victory: the belief in
the victory of the men who are fighting and the belief in victory
of those at home who are a moral and material source of strength
for the front.\textsuperscript{74}

This quote directly speaks to the importance of “those at home” or the laborers as a pillar of strength for the military. Displaying this relationship of the laborers and the military in a positive manner elaborates further on the ideals of the “people’s community.” These ideals created a strong unified \textit{Volksgemeinschaft}, as well as a powerful imposing image of Nazi Germany. By creating a powerful image of Nazi Germany this relationship was then part of the ultimate \textit{Volksgemeinschaft}.

The role of the people played a significant part into the total control of Germany. Through their acceptance of the \textit{Volksgemeinschaft} the Nazi Party could continue to rise. All citizens were required to serve their government in some capacity; a majority chose to do so through industrial labor and the military. Industrial labor positions recruited a large number of people, most of whom did not meet the requirements to be conscripted into military service. Those unfit to serve were for the most part women, older men, and disabled veterans. Large numbers of laborers were needed to complete the extreme production demands to maintain the military’s momentum.

All able-bodied males were expected to either enlist or were conscripted into military service. Military service for those who were party members led to a role within the SS or SA. The men conscripted into military service went to serve within the Wehrmacht as a part of the greater military forces. Enlistment took precedence over conscription within the early years of the war. Beginning in 1943, there was forced conscription of every available male that was able to fight. This culminated in the Volkßturm or “people’s storm” with old men and children being forced to join the military to hold Berlin in the later days of the war.75

Since the nation was fully entrenched in the war effort, there was a substantial need to have as many laborers and soldiers as possible. Industrial workers were ultimately part of the crucial war effort to sustain the militarized government that was expressed through the military. Ultimately, the successful relationship between the two groups thus allowed the German government to maintain the illusion of victory through any means necessary.

“Build Weapons and Munitions for the Front.” -- 1941

Once again, this poster shows the depiction of the importance of the relationship between the laborers and military. Like other propaganda posters of the time, this poster is also split in half. By being split in half horizontally, the artist was making a connection between the top and bottom frames as a cause-and-effect narrative. This fluidity between the two frames allows this poster to be functional as well as aesthetically pleasing.

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Composed of a blue and gray color scheme, the only pieces of color come from the text “Produce Weapons for the Front.” This text, like many other propaganda posters, is bright red in contrast to its gloomy background. Red is the color that the viewer sees first. This color scheme only adds to the text of the poster, as it is also very fitting for the situation. The blue-gray palette of colors is stereotypically what one thinks of when confronted with the image of the military as well as factories.

Propaganda posters illuminated through their imagery the fundamental need for a good relationship between factory workers and the military in order to maintain a stable Volksgemeinschaft. This particular relationship is shown at its best within this poster. Positioned within a diagonal the viewer can see the laborer on the bottom left-hand corner stretching up towards center frame. Meanwhile, the soldier pictured in the top right-hand corner leans down towards the center. In meeting in the middle, the two men, experts within their fields, are exchanging hand grenades for the preservation of the military effort.

The older man pictured at the bottom left is a laborer, as well as a man not typically expected to be out fighting for his country. Right now, this man's job within the
factory was one of the most important in Germany. In supplying weapons such as hand grenades, factories like the ones shown in the background behind this man were actively supporting the war effort. The viewer can see they are active due to the billowing smoke venting through different chimneys as it rises into the air, creating the barrier between the laborer and the soldier.

The young man pictured in the top right corner that completes the diagonal is a soldier who is out actively fighting for his country. He is shown carrying a rucksack along with a rifle as he bends forward into the center frame to receive the weapons from the laborer. The way in which the artist has chosen to situate this particular soldier shows the need for this exchange to be a quick action, so that upon receiving the weapons the soldier can take off running and rejoin the unit that is pictured behind him in the background. In the background is a flurry of activity, as there happens to be a live exchange of fire. This can be seen through the placement of two soldiers as they bound through the field trying to hold it at all costs. It can be seen, however, that several soldiers did not make it, as their bodies litter the field from this active situation.

Through this exchange of materials, the weapons created and received are the difference between life and death on the battlefield. Thus, the factory worker becomes the most crucial aspect of the success of the soldier on the battlefield. The government for the greater good of the Reich established the social contract that existed between the laborer and the soldier. However, everyone was expected to do their job whether their part was big or small. This new elaboration upon the social contract that existed between the people and the government then became a need to help protect those serving within the
military. For if, ammunition was not supplied quickly enough, or in the quantity that was required, the very real possibility of thousands of soldiers dying was manifested.

This new very real transformation of the *Volksgemeinschaft* for this militarized nation held all “pure” Germans responsible for the fate of their neighbors. This people’s community could not exist without the proper relationship and care of the ‘People’s Community.’ This became ironic when at the end of the war it was revealed that all “pure” Germans allowed for the mass extermination of their neighbors.76

“Winning at any Cost!” – 1942

Cementing this relationship, propaganda posters greatly elaborated on the close ties that this partnership could provide. This is directly seen through posters such as “Winning at any Cost!” As the epitome of Reich ideals, the black and red colors expressed within this poster fit into those of the Party. The party was pushing the strong relationship between laborers and the military.

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This poster continues with the theme of labor producing military weaponry, and, like other propaganda posters, needed to adapt to emotionally appeal to all who saw it. Like other posters during this time, this poster is conveying a double image. This double image is reflecting the cause-and-effect narrative that is crucial to the success of the relationship between laborers and the military. Overlaid within this cause and effect are the images of the laborers and a soldier. By displaying both together, this poster shows how the success of the laborers dictated the success of the military. Like many other posters, the viewer can see both the soldier and the laborer together within these images, as they were both crucial to the overall message of the propaganda.

Since they are split between the foreground and background as spheres of influence, both the military and laborers are equally represented here. Each piece of the poster has its own individual world within which it exists. By placing both worlds together, the artist expressed the notion that each individual’s success was reliant upon the other. Situated within the foreground of the poster art are two laborers, a man and a woman. Both individuals are depicted within a gray field almost as if they are charcoal sketches come to life. The man is pictured on the right-hand side to be older, wearing a dark apron and holding a hammer with his eyes raised toward the sky. To his right, is a younger classically Aryan-featured woman. This woman can be seen rolling her right
sleeve upward as she prepares for hard work with the same hand braced against the machine bed. The woman, an ideal of German society, is also pictured looking upward. Below both the man and woman are the words “winning at any cost” which show the enthusiasm of the “Aryan” community to win the war by unconditionally supporting the military.

This young woman is depicted as an ideal of German society as she is conforming to modified gender roles. As a woman in Germany it would have been her duty to take care of the house and children while her husband was away. In times of war, this also meant securing his job for him as well. In picking up a traditionally “male” job within the factories, her labor would be easily replaceable with a male at war’s end. This woman, having taken a job, is an ideal as it showed everyone within Germany supporting their nation by doing their part. This imagery of an ideal German woman would have been comparable to the image of “Rosie the Riveter” within American wartime propaganda. A unified Germany would illuminate the need for a Volksgemeinschaft through propaganda posters such as this.

Pictured above both laborers within the background of the poster is a military scene. Within the scene are two German soldiers in the heat of conflict. The most prominent soldier of the two is the one situated above the woman on the upper left-hand side of the poster. This soldier is in an active motion as he goes to throw from his right hand a hand grenade forward out of sight of the poster. The soldier behind him is crouching as if to prepare to shoot or run forward. Both soldiers are shown against a gray background, as if they are also sketches that have come to life.
The subtle arrangement of the subject matter within this poster is the most important message that can be taken away by the viewer. As previously expressed, both laborers are looking up into the sky, which contains the soldiers. The unknown artist through this subliminal messaging conveyed how laborers were constantly aware of what German soldiers were doing, and needed to produce munitions to help aid them in doing their job defending their homeland. The aid of the military as shown within this grouping of posters became an adaption of the Volksgemeinschaft ideal. 

“Hard Times; Hard Duties; Hard Hearts.” -1943

In the final years of the war, propaganda began to have an increased presence in daily life. This particular poster from 1943 is the government’s way of encouraging war through more enlistment into the military, under the theme of labor. Posters made an effort to enforce winning at any cost, by increasing involvement in the war effort. The title “Hard Times; Hard Duties; Hard Hearts” illuminates the need for a social contract, founded upon the ideals of the Volksgemeinschaft, that encourages the ultimate sacrifice for one’s country.

This poster in particular uses predominately shades of blue, green, and gray. The only exception is the Nazi party flag flying in the background that is depicted in a brilliant shade of red. Unlike many of the propaganda posters that fall with the category of the military and laborers, this poster is almost the complete personification of the Nazi vision of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. In displaying a flurry of activity, this poster is showing the moment where a laborer transitions into a member of the military. This transfer of power is part of the key to the success of the relationship between the laborers and the military.

The primary focus of this poster concentrated upon three men positioned on the right. All three men make up approximately 75% of the space on the right of the poster. Subsequently, the large crowds of people that are also depicted are positioned behind those three men. Every figure within the poster is facing towards their left side, and glancing away from the viewer. Of the three men, the one pictured in the very front displays the typical “Aryan” features that were so crucial to the idea of the German identity. All “Aryan” features within this new nation would be meant to describe people from a pure bloodline, with fair features, and peak physical form. Within his hands, the man in front carries a helmet, knife, and rifle. The two men behind him are trading away hammers and wrenches for military materials that the first man is carrying. Of the three men, only two are plainly seen; the third has his face hidden by the first man. Encouraging all able-bodied males to commit their lives to the military by removing their identities as laborers enforced the need for a unified *Volksgemeinschaft*.

The crowd of people directly behind the three men charging off into battle form a mixed group. Two individuals are plainly seen, as they are directly behind the three men. They all happen to be women. These women are the ones who were picking up the
hammers and wrenches from the men going off to fight. This small action is showing the importance of women’s roles within the Reich, especially when the men go off to war, but also relaying once again the strong need for a steady relationship between laborers and the military.

Overall, the idea of the *Volksgemeinschaft* expressed in this poster is shown through a subliminal message from the artist. In the background of the poster is the flag of the Nazi Party. This flag stretches the entire width of the poster and hovers over the population. In draping the Party’s flag over everyone, the artist is suggesting that the Reich will provide and take care of all its citizens, for within this new *Volksgemeinschaft* the “pure” German people will prosper.78

“For Freedom and Life, People’s Storm.” – 1944

Once again we see artists such as MJÖLNIR with this poster titled “*For Freedom and Life, People’s Storm*” depicting the power of the people through propaganda. Overall, this poster has subdued coloring, as the message behind the artwork needs to be concentrated in such a way that the viewer is not overwhelmed. This particular poster is set in a gray background, once again the only exception being the bright red text that is synonymous with all propaganda posters. Like so many others, the construction of this

poster is based on sketches and painting that have been transferred over into a larger poster-sized format. As a stylistic feature of the artist MJÖLNIR, the two men in this poster are positioned in such a way that they appear to be layered upon one another.

The two men pictured counterbalance one another, as one is younger while the other is an older man. Both men are shown from the chest up with their backs faced toward the viewer and their heads turned to the left; this position emphasizes their “Aryan” features. These “Aryan” features described people from a pure bloodline, with fair features and in peak physical condition.

The men are shown carrying military-grade weapons. The eldest man wears an armband that says “Deutsche Volkssturm Wehrmacht,” better known as the German People’s Storm Army. This particular group within the larger German army was comprised mostly of older men, those who had been wounded, and younger male children. These groups became significant largely towards the end of the war once the German forces had suffered great casualties.

Posters like this were to demonstrate the need for all Germans to help protect their homeland. In protecting Germany, they are protecting the “Utopic” image that the government had created. By enlisting the help of the people, the government was indirectly trying to push to maintain this ideal Aryan community. Ultimately, this
changed the social contract between people and the government, as they were now required to assist the government in every way, no matter what. Through this “People’s Storm” the citizens of Germany would fight for “freedom and life” at all cost.

Propaganda posters that were published from 1944 onward displayed darker messages that forced the complete and total cooperation of the German people in an effort to win the war and maintain the Aryan way of life. Ultimately, posters such as these greatly influenced and affected the idea of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, as well as the roles of women within society.⁷⁹

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Chapter Three: The Role of Women and Families within the pre-war Reich

The propaganda posters within this section tell the stories of the idealized role of the family within the Third Reich. Within family roles there is an added concentration on the role of the mother within the family, as well as her importance to the overall success of the nation. However, the role of mother was not the only one for women. Women in general were being asked to help support the regime through any and every means necessary. These propaganda posters show throughout various points in time the consistent need for the support of the “Aryan” family from women.

Beginning in 1932, the support of the “Aryan” family was crucial to the success of the party as they began to rise to power. In working towards the election of 1933, the starving families affected by the great depression were in need of a savior, according to the Nazis. Thus, the two posters from 1932 reflected the need for a strong central government under the influence of the Nazi party. The last poster for this section focuses on the year 1935. With the passing of the incredibly Anti-Semitic Nuremberg Laws, propaganda increasingly reaffirmed traditional family values as shown in the third and final poster in this section. Traditional family values essentially depicted the Father figure as patriarch of the family, as well as the sole provider. Women in this context are shown as subservient to their husbands, and the caretakers of both the home and the family.

Overall, the role of women and families within the Third Reich is an extremely important theme of propaganda. The constant pressures for women to not only provide for their family, but for the Reich as well, while the men were away were deeply driven into the psyche of the people. Women were encouraged to have as many children as
possible and maintain the labor force while the men were away fighting wars for the government. This became extremely prevalent in the war years.

“We Women Are Voting Slate 2 National Socialists.” - 1932

The poster titled “We Women Are Voting Slate 2 National Socialists” shows the important role of women within the Third Reich. This particular poster was created for the 1932 election. The poster expresses a light femininity. This femininity is shown through light airy colors and the way the women are depicted. The only disruption of this beauty is the vibrant red text. This red text, indicative of the party’s colors, subtly pushes forward the message of the Nazi party. The bold red text in sharp contrast to the light and airy colors of sky-blue and cream that dominate the background seems out of place. However, the composition of this poster relies heavily upon sketching as well as watercolor techniques. The water color technique adds greatly to the air of femininity. The two women pictured are positioned diagonally within the picture frame. Both women appear to have light “Aryan” features such as, fair hair and eyes. The eyes of the two women are one of the most unique aspects of this poster, as they are constructed in a manner that creates an unbreakable connection with the viewer no matter what the angle the poster is seen from.
The emphasis on “Aryan” features underscores the message the poster is trying to convey. As women comprised approximately 50% of the population, the Third Reich needed to make sure that those who fit the “Aryan ideal” would come to represent the party in its time of need. Feeding into this sentiment were posters such as this one that allowed the government to manipulate the people to its benefit. This time of need coincided greatly with the election of 1932. Created by Felix Albrecht, this poster is one of few to have survived with a unique message marketed specifically to women. This poster displays the need for total and complete cooperation with the Nazi Party to help obtain the ideal of the Volksgemeinschaft. Only through complete support of this “pure” community could they rise to power uninhibited. The Nazi Party, with votes from women like the ones depicted, would be able to completely take power over Germany in the coming election.

“Women! Millions of men without work. Millions of children without a future. Save the German family. Vote for Adolf Hitler!” – 1932

Another propaganda poster created by Felix Albrecht moves away from a focus on individual women to women with families. As the Third Reich saw these women as the potential for their future, they were to be addressed in the manner and respect they deserved. Overall this poster is beautifully composed. With yet another color scheme of blue, cream, and bold red, it sets Albrecht’s pieces of propaganda apart from those of various other artists. The watercolor technique also adds a flair of distinction to the poster.

However, unlike the first poster that was examined, this construction has watercolor elements as well as strong structural lines that add great detail and depth to the young family of four that is pictured. This particular poster was published in 1932, only four years after the global economic crash that left Germany destitute. By advertising in a campaign year, the Nazi party was taking advantage of the economic disarray of the time by urging those in financial trouble to turn to Adolf Hitler. The young family displayed in the center of the poster takes up approximately one third of the overall space. The father is pictured slumped over the table, with a defeated look etched upon his face that physically depicts his discontent. Pictured above him is his wife carrying their youngest child. The woman, who has a stern look on her face, looks determinedly off into the distance, while her oldest child looks worriedly at the father. In displaying a young family such as this, the Reich showed the need for women to step forward and assist the “German family.” The poster urges: “Women! Millions of men without work. Millions of children without a future. Save the German family. Vote for Adolf Hitler!” This family can only benefit from the new world order that Adolf Hitler has proposed. This new German order would be defined only as the *Volksgemeinschaft*.

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In comparing this poster against the ideals of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, several different factors emerge. By displaying a family unit, the topic of common blood ties becomes apparent as this poster conveys an “Aryan” family. However, from the scene displayed we as the viewers can also ascertain how a lack of homogeneity and a broken social hierarchy play to the advantage of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. This dysfunction as personified by the “Aryan” family could only be repaired by the Nazi Party, mainly Hitler and his *Volksgemeinschaft*. The Volksgemeinschaft did conform to the needs of this particular “Aryan” family and all “Aryan” families within the Third Reich.

“The NSDAP protects the people’s community. Your fellow comrades need your advice and help, so join the local party organization.” – 1935

The propaganda poster displayed is one of the most powerful propaganda posters within Germany's arsenal. Viewers once again see the display of the German family, only this time they are enveloped in a bright golden light. Upon closer examination, the details can be seen as though the image that is being portrayed was once a detailed painting. This piece of art is constructed using mostly warm colors, with everything wrapped in a shimmering golden light.82

https://www.ushmm.org/propaganda/.  

82 Warm colors refers to the use of Red, Orange, and Yellow etc.
The most prominent aspect of this poster is the family pictured. A young family of five: father, mother, son and daughter, along with a brand-new baby, depict the hoped-for “Aryan” family. All members of the family are shown with blonde hair and fair features, as was expected of the “purest” Germans. Pictured around this family is the powerful symbol of the Reich eagle. The eagle is pictured as the largest figure within the drawing. It stands fixed behind the family, wings outstretched curling forward as if to enclose the family within its protection. The eagle is also staring off into the distance with a determined look upon its face. As we know the Eagle as one of the many symbols of the Third Reich it can only be perceived as the symbolization of the German family being taken in by the government and provided with aid. As the poster states at the bottom “the NSDAP protects the people…” This poster greatly urges families, like those pictured, to come out and support the Party; in turn they will be taken care of. This poster, which was constructed in 1935, seems as if it is a continuation of the family portrayed in the 1932 poster. The echoes between the two families are shown through the mere passage of time. As three years pass, the family grows from four members to five, with the baby from 1932 now a bouncing smiling toddler. The growth seen within this family is echoed throughout the nation as poverty becomes prosperity, redefining the Volksgemeinschaft.

While this particular poster displays values of the Volksgemeinschaft, it also contains “Volksgemeinschaft” within its text.83 The poster states, “The NSDAP protects the people’s community. Your fellow comrades need your advice and help, so join the

local party organization.” The Nazi Party was officially behind this propaganda poster’s vision of what a “People’s Community” should be by depicting an “Aryan” family showing a shared set of values, common blood ties, homogeneity, and a social hierarchy. All the values that allowed the Volksgemeinschaft to take hold within Germany were contained within the “Aryan” family. The protection of the Nazi Party was also offered as part of this new “People’s Community.”

By focusing on the ideal “Aryan” family as promoters of the Volksgemeinschaft, mainly the family unit, the Nazi Party was clearly fixated on an image for its “People’s Community.” This image given to the Volksgemeinschaft would be extremely important as time moved forward and as propaganda posters were affected by the war years.

**The Matriarchal Family**

Nazi Germany during the onset of World War II was struggling to maintain the patriarchal system on which its values and traditions were based. This struggle was primarily due to the need for all able-bodied men to serve within their nation’s military. This lack of men within the labor force was acutely felt within the family unit as well. With the lack of a father figure and provider for the family, society would change primarily into a matriarchy. With the family now headed by the mother, the need to maintain gender roles was in active conflict with the need to provide for the family.

In an attempt to alleviate the conflict, the Nazi government stepped forward as the ultimate paternal figure. The government as the ultimate patriarchy stepped into the lives of these families and women as the ultimate father figure. Although women did their best by displaying photographs of their father, regularly talking of him and working tirelessly
to maintain his presence within the family unit, the men were still absent.\textsuperscript{84} This intervention by the government stressed the need to maintain normalcy. Normalcy in this instance was the idea that there was a family unit led by the father with the mother existing only within the private domestic sphere her primary role was to care for the home and children.\textsuperscript{85}

“As housewives.” One historian wrote, “women could contribute to the war effort by behaving responsibly as consumers and keeping the family clothed and fed in difficult economic circumstances.”\textsuperscript{86} This establishes the context for which the posters in this section ultimately conformed to the Nazi ideal through the reinforcement of gender roles.

Throughout the entirety of the Third Reich many different government-sponsored programs helped maintain normalcy in the lives of Germany’s women. The original start of policy relating to traditional gender roles was the \textit{Law for the Encouragement of Marriage} of 1933. This policy, along with the governmental loan of 1000 marks that did not have to be paid back, was crucial for “pure” Germans to be able to financially afford large families.\textsuperscript{87} Also, in conjunction with the \textit{Law for the Encouragement of Marriage} was the \textit{Lebensborn} program in 1935. This program ensured that biologically and hereditarily valuable children were brought into the protection of the Third Reich. These children came from women with families, as well as single mothers.\textsuperscript{88} In emphasizing the role of the family and the importance of traditional gender roles, the government was

\textsuperscript{84} Richard J. Evans, \textit{The Third Reich at War} (New York: Penguin Press, 2009), 546.
\textsuperscript{86} Evans, \textit{The Third Reich at War}, 360
\textsuperscript{88} Stephenson, \textit{Women In Nazi Germany}, 42.
establishing a narrative throughout the regime that they would rely upon for the next twelve years.

In the early years of the war there was an incentive known as the Motherhood Cross. First distributed in May of 1939, the Motherhood Cross was a medal designed to encourage women to produce as many children as possible. This three-tiered medal had several levels of significance; the gold and highest tier and was reserved for mothers with eight or more children was the most prestigious.89 The honor of this medal was comparable to the Iron Cross. This push for large families was to help increase the extremely low birth rates that Germany had suffered in the wake of World War I.90 In compliance with Germany’s new views on what it meant to be “pure,” a law was passed in 1943 that demanded that all fathers of children needed to be “racially pure.”91 In promoting this racially pure society, the government stressed to women not only the importance of bearing children, but also the need to make sure they maintained the “Aryan” ideal.

Overall, the role of women was absolutely critical during the war years. Although women were not actively involved in combat roles, that did not mean that they didn’t play a significant role within the war effort. Women were expected to be caretakers, providers, mothers, and the breadwinners of their families as well. As one historian has noted,

If they served as air-raid wardens, then they did so to protect the German

89 Stephenson, Women In Nazi Germany, 31.
90 Evans, The Third Reich at War, 543.
91 Evans, The Third Reich at War, 543.
family; if they made munitions in a factory, then they were supplying the nation’s sons with the arms they needed to survive in battle. Selfless sacrifice was to be their lot.\textsuperscript{92}

The propaganda posters in this section explore “Aryan” society, in particular the attention they paid to the women within that society. Many of these posters focus on how the women of Germany maintained the “Aryan” ideal under the supervision of the government.

\textbf{“Help Too!” - 1941}

One area of propaganda that remained unchanged from the prewar years is one that targeted women and families. This poster from 1941 concentrated on the important role of women within German society. By focusing on the important roles of women during the war, the Reich Propaganda Ministry was actively expressing its need for “Aryan” women to carry on with their lives while the men were gone.

One consistent trend with the many other propaganda posters of the war years, has been the split perspective shown in the posters. This split perspective offered a larger view of several actions taking place at the same time. For example, within this poster the viewer sees two separate images. The images show three women of separate backgrounds marching arm in arm with each other, while overhead the depiction of a German soldier

\textsuperscript{92} Evans, \textit{The Third Reich at War},360.
floats as if a cloud in the sky. The text of this particular poster “Help Too!” deeply encourages all women to participate in the war, or at least in the war effort.

In the foreground, is the three women are immediately apparent, all are depicted from different walks of life. These women are placed on a pencil-sketched gray background. From left to right are depicted a woman who is a laborer, followed by a war nurse, and ending with a farmer. These three women dressed in the clothing of their professions become the ideal backbone of Germany. All three women are dressed in very bright colors in contrast with the background that they are placed upon. In shades of blue, tan, white, and red, they are the ideal for the Volksgemeinschaft. These particular women are also shown to have very particular features that reflect the “Aryan” values of Germany. Their status as providers during the war cannot overshadow their femininity, therefore the viewer must be reminded of the sacrifice that they are making.

The depiction of the three women shown in this poster is ideal for the Volksgemeinschaft due to several contributing factors. By displaying several women of different backgrounds, the poster is displaying social integration within its “Aryan” population. As all three women are all shown to be close with one another, with their arms interlocked, this depicts the ideal of homogeneity within the “People’s Community.” As all women are depicted to be “Aryan,” they in the eyes of the government share common blood ties with one another. These various factors are what create the ideal for the Volksgemeinschaft.

This sacrifice is directly related to their soldier who is off fighting in the war. This is depicted in the imagery as a whimsical memory floating amongst the clouds. The
clouds depict a typical German soldier who would be familiar to all German women. This soldier was meant to represent every husband, father, brother, son, and significant other of every woman in Germany. The soldier is depicted to be as unassuming as possible, therefore he would represent all “Aryan” males within Germany that were of fighting age. This particular composition played into the ideas of gender roles for women, as well as for men. As all men should be serving within the military, so this soldier could represent any man. The women are portrayed in typical gendered clothing, with the main example being the nurse. They were still waiting for their soldiers to return home, in the meantime doing their part for the war effort.

By demonstrating this overtly emotional message in propaganda posters, the Reich’s Propaganda Ministry reminded every woman to not only do her part, but to remember those who were fighting for her freedom as well as her place in society.93

“For Mother and Child” - 1942

As the role of the family provider was left solely to the women, the propaganda of the war years attempted to comfort these women by assuring them of the Reich’s support. This poster, like so many others, also employs the split perspective technique. A large eagle occupies approximately three fourths of the

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entire space. In the background is situated a family of four, consisting of a mother and her three children.

This poster’s black and white color scheme is unique to only a select number of propaganda posters, and lacks the normal pop of vibrant red text that is normally present. This design feature accentuates the larger-than-life eagle. The eagle as the primary focus of this poster takes up the entire right side of the picture frame. As one of the primary symbols of the Third Reich, the eagle’s presence in a poster about the importance of family subliminally showed the power and protection that the Nazi party could and would provide.

The “Aryan” family shown within the background as previously mentioned is a family of four composed of a mother with her three young children, the youngest barely a year old, who sleeps in a cradle pictured beside the mother. The two other children, a boy and girl, are both playing with a toy, both not appearing to be older than five. Such young families, lacking the support of a father figure as all men were off fighting the wars, were in need of both financial and emotional support. The mother is shown doing her part in raising all three children while simultaneously keeping her family together. This matriarchal role of women during this time was crucial to the overall success of the family, as families were dependent on women to maintain societal norms.

In combining the imagery of the Reich’s eagle with the now matriarchal family, posters such as these stressed the importance of the positive relationship between the two. By encouraging women to take care of their families, the Reich, portrayed as the Eagle,
was there to support and protect them. As the text of the poster boldly states “For Mother and Child,” the Reich will be there in times of need.⁹⁴

“Victory or Bolshevism” – Aug ’42- Feb ‘43

MJÖLNIR as one of the most prominent propaganda artists created several posters of great significance throughout his career. “Victory or Bolshevism” became one of the most prominent posters within his repertoire. Mass-produced from August 1942 to February 1943, this poster celebrated not only the highest military successes, but also anticipated the crushing defeats that were imminent for the Nazi party.

This particular poster incorporated the same split image that became such a developing trend in German wartime propaganda. The split image that displayed a cause and effect scenario became enormously popular. In this instance, the cause-and-effect image is demonstrated through the use of light and dark. On one side, viewers see the vision of victory that is surrounded in a golden halo of light. On the other, they see Bolshevism that is portrayed by darkness. As one cannot have one without the other, Nazi Germany was in this instance striving towards the light.

This light is shown through the idea of an ideal “Aryan” family, with a mother holding a small child. Both have “idealistic” features such as light hair and blue eyes. This child personifies Germany’s future; she is raising her arms into the air. As the poster is split down the middle, the child’s left arm is stricken from view, thus leading the viewer to have a clear glimpse of the child’s right arm that is raised up almost as a salute. The mother shown holding her child can only be seen as the ideal image of motherhood. This small family is pictured without a male figurehead as all able-bodied men were out defending their country. Germany during this time is also shown to have a less restrictive idea of family values. This shift in the definition of family values was due to the need for more children, as well as the push for a completely “Aryan” society. Such changes led to the government sanctioning children by those considered “pure” by any means necessary.

“Family values” was a perceived societal norm in which two individuals, a man and a woman, essentially marry and then produce children. A less restrictive idea of family values essentially meant that the Third Reich seemingly allowed individuals who were pure “Aryans” to produce as many children as possible; sponsoring the Lebensborn program. The Lebensborn program was a directive issued by the SS in order to repopulate Germany with those deemed racially “pure.”

The word “Sieg,” which translates to mean ‘victory,’ provides a subtle reminder that the “Aryan” way of life was the ultimate goal. The opposite dark side displays Bolshevism, dramatically different from the “victory” side because this part is shown only in black and white. The most prominent aspect of this poster is the large looming

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figure of a “Bolshevik.” Displayed below him is a group of men and women who are assumed to be Germans cowered on the ground in fear. This poster ultimately displayed the Russians as the biggest threat. This is personified through one woman in the group who is shown to be on her knees, with her hair and clothing in tatters as she reaches to her face, her mouth gasping open in fear, as she stares at the Bolshevik. This looming figure is shown to have a communist star upon his hat, as well as a dirty appearance with a stereotypical “Jewish” nose.  

In combining the hatred of Bolshevism with the continued persecution of the Jewish race, propaganda posters were ultimately aiming to have the German people associate the idea of Bolshevism with their hatred of Jews. Ultimately, the social contract that had been created between the German people and government was to preserve the Volksgemeinschaft. Achieving victory, fostered by the “People’s Community” was the only way to survive, or else everyone would end up at the mercy of the “Bolshevik barbarians.” This threat was intentionally more violent to women and children as they would be the first casualties of war. As casualties of war, women and children would face risks of being captured, raped, or murdered in the attempt to claim territory. In an attempt to ready the nation and its future, all children were required to serve in the Hitler Youth movement if deemed “racially pure.”

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Chapter Four: The Hitler Youth

The youth of Germany was one of the most important demographics to the Nazi party, quite like the previous generation represented by the working class. Therefore, propaganda directed at the youth had to be implemented in a tactful manner. To sway the opinions of the next generation, the Nazi party had to in a way completely brainwash the children of the Reich. For if the Third Reich could control the thoughts, ideas, and actions of all children within Germany, their idea of the thousand-year Reich would continue to live on.

The implications of maintaining a “racially pure” society derived specifically from what the Volksgemeinschaft represented. Those who did not fit those ideals, or actively chose to go against them, were then classified by the regime as the “other.” The “other” then expanded to include all of the social outsiders within Germany.

In dealing with propaganda, beginning with these particular examples in 1933 and ending in 1937, the will of the Third Reich could be seen in how its propaganda reached the children. In 1933, the campaign process shown through propaganda posters was dictated to all students in Germany, particularly those in the Hitler Youth. In establishing a pre-existing relationship through propaganda with the youth of Germany, the party could manipulate their messages based on the needs of the community. Once power was firmly within reach, the years of 1936 – 37 were when messages to the children become more earnest. Several posters analyzed here are prime personifications of the “Aryan” image. Posters such as these would then go on to influence and manipulate the social contract by subtly encouraging the “pure” German ideal.
An “Aryan” nation concentrated upon the success of its future through the endeavors of its children, thus transforming Germany in the eyes of the government into the ultimate *Volksgemeinschaft*. This became paramount in all posters that deal with the Hitler Youth as well as the *Bund Deutscher Madel*. *Bund Deutscher Madel* known as League of German Girls was the female branch of the overall Nazi Party's youth movement. The small sampling of posters demonstrates the Hitler Youth over the course of the Third Reich primarily in this section on the Pre-War regime.

*“Students, Be the Führer’s propagandists.”* - 1933

In beginning the discussion about propaganda posters within the Third Reich focusing primarily on the Hitler Youth, we turn to Ludwig Hohlwein’s poster dated 1933. This particular propaganda poster focused on the children that were enrolled within the Hitler Youth programs in Germany. In comparison to other propaganda posters during the Third Reich, the style and form that is unique to Hohlwein is quite unlike anyone else’s. The overall composition of the poster has an intrinsic modernist quality to it, quite like the modernist and surrealist masters such as Picasso.\(^97\) Painting techniques that rely on the modern techniques that Hohlwein used, create space within very small areas where two dimensions became three. As pictured this three-dimensional student almost breaks

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\(^{97}\) Artists like Picasso were singled out as “degenerate” within both the art world and the Nazi Party. All such artworks were destroyed under the Nazi regime.
away from the page. The positioning of the students figure is quite original as well. The
boy is positioned on an off-centered diagonal within the rectangular poster. Situated in a
contrapposto position his left arm is outstretched piercing through the top of the poster.98
Dressed in a school suit, the student carries with him a briefcase that is emblazoned with
the Nazi logo of the swastika. His face is positioned looking over his right shoulder
towards the imagined crowd as if to cheer them on. This is once again echoed through his
outstretched arm. On the lapel of his jacket is pinned the same swastika logo he is
carrying.

The coloring of this poster is simple in the fact that it revolves primarily around a
gray frame, situated upon a cream background. The only color comes from the boys’ face
as well as the blazing red swastika he is carrying. This particular poster was made to
coincide like many others with the 1933 elections. It was meant to gather children in
support of the party. Having the party’s support of the youth was paramount to its long-
term success. In advertising that students should be propagandists for the Führer, it was
ensuring the youth’s compliance with the new “pure” Germany. The Volksgemeinschaft
as aided by the Hitler Youth transformed the government’s wish and the people’s need
for a true “People’s Community.”99

“The German Student” -1936

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98 Contrapposto is an asymmetrical arrangement of the human figure in which the upper body contrasts against the balance of the lower body.
The Hitler Youth, which was a primary focus of the Party with students like the ones pictured on this poster, was the epitome of “Aryan” features. The composition of this poster is extremely pleasing to the eye, as is the overall image which is achieved by a mixture of sketching and painting. For the most part this notable poster was the epitome of what the Nazi party was trying to accomplish with its youth.

As this poster is dedicated to the prosperity of the Hitler Youth, the color scheme revolves heavily around the use of black, red, and white alongside the iconic look of the brown uniforms. Concentrated in the middle of the poster is the depiction of the idealized Hitler youth member. As previously established, those considered to be “Aryan” had a fair complexion, blonde hair, an angular face, and a toned physique. This student displays all of the “Aryan” features and is essentially the personification of the true German in the mind of the Reich. This student is what the government deemed to be the ideal. This student, the hope of the government, stands proudly presenting his Hitler youth uniform, as well as the pen of membership clipped to his tie. Trailing behind the young man is the bold red flag of the Reich. Upon further examination, the student as the main focus of the poster comprises approximately 75% of the space in the picture frame. The text of the poster reads “the German student, fights for the Leader and the People.” With this
idealized version of what the “Aryan” community should look like, as displayed within this propaganda poster, the Reich could then move forward by not just indoctrinating the youth, but every man and woman into its fold. In the end, this German student is the epitome of “Aryan” ideology. This becomes an extremely important idea in regard to the changing Volksgemeinschaft.100

The Volksgemeinschaft as it was interpreted for the youth differed dramatically from various other aspects of life by enforcing a social hierarchy through the structure of the Hitler Youth as well as encouraging conformity, a shared set of values, and common blood ties. This established a social dynamic that was purely a “utopian” concept.

“You too belong to the Führer.” -1937

Other propaganda posters that address the youth advertise the role of female children as members not only the Volksgemeinschaft, but of youth organizations such as the Bund Deutscher Mädel. Like propaganda posters of the working labor force, this poster displays the same color scheme. The colors blue, red, and white compose the color palette for this particular poster. Unlike a majority of the propaganda posters that have been previously examined, the technique used in this poster is quite different. The image of the poster is quite different. The image of the

young girl appears to be superimposed onto the background. A technique such as this only adds to the lifelike quality of the image, allowing the viewer to have a very personal connection with the ideal German female.

The main focus of this poster is a young girl, presumably a member of the Hitler youth. The viewer can infer this because of the dress that she wears, as it is indicative of those worn by members of the League of German Girls. The little girl has a fair complexion and blonde hair. As she looks off into the distance, she is glancing over her right shoulder smiling sweetly. The poster reads “You too belong to the Führer.”

Posters such as these, in conjunction with posters of the Hitler youth, were to show that both boys and girls were needed for the Reich. Both men and women were equally important to the regime. Female children that were in possession of “Aryan” features were expected, just as much as males, to uphold the social construct of the People's community.

The social construct was just as important to female members of the “People’s Community.” Since girls within the Hitler Youth organization were expected to accomplish only one task within their lifetime, and that was to bear children. As part of the Hitler Youth, girls were prepared to accept their roles as mothers and providers for the Reich. Thus in accomplishing this all-important task they upheld the social construct of the “People’s Community.” This ultimately can be seen solely through the text of the

101 A section of the Hitler Youth Organization.
poster “You Too Belong To The Führer!” If female children belong to the leader, then they are required to follow him in all things, once again feeding into the idea of “Ein Reich, ein Volk, ein Führer,” as all are one and the same.

**The Hitler Youth: The War Years**

Ultimately the Hitler Youth and League of German Girls illuminate the idea of the “people’s community” in the propaganda of the war years. This *Volksgemeinschaft* shows that every person had a role to play in the war, especially those involved in the Hitler Youth movement. For no matter the involvement, whether their part was large or small, all “pure” citizens of Germany had a place in the war effort.

“*Youth Serves the Leader: All 10-year-olds into the Hitler Youth.*” -1939

Hitler was reintroduced back into propaganda posters during wartime. However, unlike the propaganda of the prewar years Hitler was now teamed together with the Hitler youth. Produced in 1939, this propaganda poster was created at the beginning of the height of Germany's success in the war.

This particular propaganda poster was a direct advertisement for the Hitler Youth. Unlike other posters of this time, this poster appears to be two posters in one. The background, composed solely of the larger-than-life
face of Adolf Hitler looking off into the distance, is the lightest part of the poster.

Situated within the foreground is a portrait shot of a young boy no older than ten years old, also looking off into the distance. Both the member of the Hitler Youth and Adolf Hitler appear to be two photographs taken and layered upon one another.

The central figure of the poster is the member of the Hitler Youth. This boy is shown wearing his brown-shirted uniform with strong “Aryan” features, and blonde hair. The boy, glancing over his left shoulder, is also looking off to the distance and illuminated in a golden light. Situated in the lower left corner, the golden light strikes him from the left. By emphasizing the importance of children like the boy pictured here, the Reich pushed the notion that all children should be involved in either the Hitler Youth or the BDM.

All children were involved in the inner workings of the Reich in some way, as the government stressed the importance it placed on the future of the Third Reich. Without the Hitler Youth programs there would be no hope for the continuance of the Nazi Regime, ending the vision of the thousand-year Reich. The government’s idea during this time was that the “Youth Serves the Leader.” All male children, above the age of ten especially, were perceived as the ideal members of the Hitler Youth and thus seen as perfect candidates to serve the Reich.

Overall, the role of the youth remained unchanged from the pre-war years up until 1939. The government required participation from their youngest followers as they were the future and easily malleable. This increased pressure redefines the social contract between the people and the Reich. Now the Volksgemeinschaft would be virtually
impossible without the support of the youth, for as they grew older, they would be the ones to continue to redefine the fluid definition of the “pure” \textit{Volksgemeinschaft}.\footnote{“Youth Serves the Leader: All 10-year-olds into the [Hitler Youth]” (Propaganda Poster), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed June 25, 2016.}

\textit{“We All Helped! War of the Hitler Youth!” – 194-}

The Hitler Youth as one of the biggest organizations within the Third Reich was a large target for propaganda schemes. By targeting boys and girls under the age of eighteen in the Hitler Youth and League of German Girls, the Reich was channeling support in its youth for the continuation of the Nazi party. Programs such as the HJ and BDM were designed to exert total control over their youth, largely through taking away their individual identities and focusing solely on the identity of the Reich. This new identity was tied directly into the social contract that ultimately transformed the \textit{Volksgemeinschaft} by achieving total social cohesion. This complete social cohesion based on a common set of values thus created a “People’s Community” of one mindset.

The images portrayed within this poster illuminate the propagandistic ideal of the Hitler Youth within the \textit{Volksgemeinschaft} of Germany. In concentrating on the various youth groups that were now depicted as full adults within this poster, the Reich Propaganda Ministry portrayed its ideals for the future. Composed primarily of a charcoal
sketch turned into mass media propaganda, the main color palette is one reflective of the party: red and black. Using this particular style during the propaganda of the war years is directly reflective of the need for a strong unified Reich, as well as a sense of realism within the posters. This realism is completely apparent within the image of the young Hitler Youth leader that assumes a prominent place in the poster. As an important youth leader, this man’s figure takes up about seventy-five percent of the entire space of the poster.

In the background stand other members of the Hitler Youth who are now full-fledged members of the Nazi party, and have become the soldiers they were raised to be. They stand to the right of the youth party leader. The left side shows former members of the BDM who have taken up jobs as laborers, as the woman in front carries a shovel. All of the young Germans that were shown have distinct “Aryan” features that was commonplace among members of the Hitler Youth and BDM, to promote a “pure” German Reich.

The text of this poster is unique. In stating, “We all Help! War of the Hitler Youth,” it shows the importance that the full-grown members of the Hitler Youth could play in society. This encouraged younger members of the different organizations to stay the course and continue to support the Reich through various means. As the needs of the Third Reich changed to incorporate the ever-changing political policies and whims of the Führer, the identity of the Volksgemeinschaft would remain fluid to accommodate it. This implies that all “pure” Germans associated with the Hitler Youth and League of German
Girls were welcome members of society and part of the fluid identity of the

_Volksgemeinschaft_.

In moving away from the Hitler Youth and onto the outcasts of Nazi Germany, the next chapter focuses on the “other.” The “other” eventually expands to include all of the social outsiders within Germany including the Bolsheviks, the Jews, traitors against the nation, etc. These individuals as the “other” of society then became a common enemy for the Reich and its people.

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Chapter Five: The Will of the Reich

The role of the nation and its leader is one of the most extensive topics treated in Nazi propaganda. As the most extensive of the pre-war propaganda categories, understanding the “Will of the Reich” worked ultimately towards understanding the Volksgemeinschaft that is extremely prevalent within propaganda posters.

The posters produced between 1932 and 1938 provide a long detailed look at the inner workings of the Third Reich. Of the six posters in this section, approximately half include a physical representation of Adolf Hitler. These posters coincidentally happen to be created within two years of one another. In displaying the image of Adolf Hitler as a strong, powerful leader, the nation could only rally behind him as the posters pushed to fulfill their Volksgemeinschaft. The remaining three propaganda posters all display aspects of the Third Reich that call upon the various ideals of the Volksgemeinschaft. Propaganda posters within this section display themes such as swearing allegiance to the Führer. In conjunction with the traditional street bill, film and radio propaganda made an appearance in propaganda posters discussed here. Together these posters created a more complete image by connecting various aspects of media to them to provoke the attention of the German citizens.

The theme of the Will of the Reich is the most expansive one in the propaganda posters and it is ultimately the most important. This group embodies the ideas of the Volksgemeinschaft as it represented the Third Reich’s intent for the German government. Propaganda posters elaborated upon the importance of displaying all aspects of life within the Reich. This particular category evolved from pre-war propaganda to wartime
propaganda, as the wishes and ideals of the community changed from the Utopic image to the image of a militarized fighting machine.

“HITLER” - 1932

Nothing could have demonstrated the ideals of the Nazi party better than the image of Hitler. As this was the prominent image in 1932, the campaign propaganda played upon both the image and the name of Hitler. This propaganda poster from that election was created by Hans Hoffman. Arguably one of the most iconic propaganda posters of the Third Reich, this message is plain and simple. The only words written upon the poster are those written in a white text on a black background that just simply says “Hitler.” The only image that is pictured alongside the text is the simple headshot of Adolf Hitler's face. Overall, this poster with its great popularity promotes Hitler as the only candidate for Germany. Even though the message is simplistic it is one of the most concrete and imposing. As the face of the Volksgemeinschaft the people of Germany could do no wrong in electing him Chancellor.\textsuperscript{106}

“We will take the fate of the nation into our hands, Hitler for President of the Reich.”

1932

Pictured here is one of the party’s oldest campaign posters, presented in an elegant, understated way through black and white. Dating to 1932, this poster shows the importance of electing Adolf Hitler as the Reich's president. This is shown particularly through the image of Hitler standing at a podium looming in the sky. Set above the many factories of Germany on the right side of the poster, several of the NSDAP’s flags are shown to the left. In once again stressing through subliminal messaging the need and importance of the working class, Hitler is directly calling them to action. Hitler’s imposing presence in this poster shows the iconic movement of his right hand as it is raised in the air as a gesture of conviction.

These subliminal messages coincide in the text of this poster, which states “…we will take the fate of the nation into our hands, Hitler for Reich’s president.” In challenging the masses to support him, this allowed for the people of Germany to move forward out of national depression and work towards a harmonious government and life. Under the guidance of Adolf Hitler, the public would live the ultimate way of life, a utopia, and would finally regain their national identity. In his campaign, Hitler assured the people of Germany of their Utopia, which was only possible through his Volksgemeinschaft. In the social contract that was constructed in the early years of the campaign, the party implied that their supporters would be taken care of for the rest of
their lives. This form of hope is not easily relinquished in times of struggle. As this poster demonstrates, Hitler would provide. Adolf Hitler in control of Germany would provide the people with an identity, national community, a shared set of values, and, most importantly, common blood ties.

“*Yes! Leader, We Follow You!*” - 1934

Once again moving forward through time the German people were presented with yet another campaign poster promoting the role of both Chancellor and President, again depicting Hitler. This poster, like many others, has a very simplistic color scheme as it is white, black, and red. All posters rely upon the Party’s color scheme of red, black, and white in some capacity for their foundations. As in other Nazi Party posters, the text consists of bright bold red letters, with the simple message “*Yes! Leader, We Follow You!*” Adding to this message is a background of a large crowd of people that surround the large imposing figure of Adolf Hitler. Hitler’s image takes up approximately two thirds of the poster space, making him a godly spectacle among men.108

107 “We will take the fate of the nation into our hands, Hitler for President of the Reich,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed June 15, 2016, [https://www.USHMM.org/propaganda/](https://www.USHMM.org/propaganda/).
The way Hitler was depicted also changed significantly between 1932 and 1934. In this 1934 poster, Hitler appears as an apt military leader who is shown in his military uniform. This is a far cry from the 1932 presentation of Adolf Hitler the politician; we have arrived at Adolf Hitler the Führer. The party’s propaganda team made Hitler out to be the most benevolent leader a nation could ever have. This hope of a strong Reich fed into the idea of the Volksgemeinschaft under the leadership of Hitler. This propaganda chain of posters fueled the “Ein Reich, Ein Volk, Ein Führer” mindset that was prominent through all forms of propaganda.¹⁰⁹

“Ein Reich, Ein Volk, Ein Führer” translates to “One Nation, One People, One Leader.” Unpacking this phrase reveals the values that drive Nazi propaganda. Slogans such as this are extremely similar to those of the Volksgemeinschaft. In the notion of one nation, forged together by one people and led by one leader is an important part of the Volksgemeinschaft identity. In “One Nation” we can clearly see the connection to homogeneity and conformism, as well as social integration, cohesion, and hierarchy. This is then reinforced by “One People,” which in turn connects the ideals of common blood ties, as well as a shared set of values. Finally, in combining under “One Leader” the Volksgemeinschaft idea is clearly communicated by the Nazi Party.

“Triumph of the Will” -1935

This propaganda poster is of extreme importance to the Third Reich, not only within the realm of paper propaganda but film propaganda as well. It is the poster for Lenni Riefenstahl’s “Triumph of the Will”, symbolizing the “Aryan” opinion of what it meant to be part of the Third Reich as a whole.

Within this poster there are many different symbolic figures that display Riefenstahl’s message. First, a prominent SA official carries the party’s colors. The man is bracing his left arm across his body to firmly grasp the flagpole he carries, as the flag ripples in the imagined breeze behind him, almost as if to show the parading of the party’s colors on the Nuremberg grounds, where Triumph of the Will, the propaganda movie was filmed.

Looming over all in the background is one of the greatest symbols of the Third Reich, the eagle holding a swastika. Light emanates from the background, allowing the symbols to glow in an ethereal way, illuminating the background in a silvery blue light. Overall, the message of this specific poster was meant to convey the power and ability of the Third Reich. In displaying the true value of the “Aryan” civilization that the Nazi party was
trying to convey, the idea of the Volksgemeinschaft became synonymous with this vision as it was displayed at the height of the Reich.¹¹⁰

“All of Germany Listens to the Führer with the People’s Radio.” - 1936

In communicating the notion of a national community, the radio, or as it was known in German Volksempfänger, added greatly to this message and to propaganda itself. Again, this poster demonstrates the useful capabilities of layering photographs upon one another to create the finished image. A larger-than-life radio occupies the middle of the poster; positioned within a sea of people the radio takes the stage as the main attraction. The large crowd has eyes only for the receiver, giving it their full and undivided attention, as a supposed broadcast from the Führer fills the square. The viewer can only see the backs of the crowd, who are carefully positioned in the forefront of the poster. This poster, though black and white, contains large amounts of detail.

The text of the poster states that “…all of Germany listens to the Führer with the People's radio.” By commanding a large presence in print, the poster stressed the importance for every person to obtain a radio. However, the Party dictated all messages

through propaganda prints to allow the country to be made aware of all new ventures. Since the radio had just been released in Germany, not every individual had access to one, therefore, prints such as this poster were the only way to freely gain access to the Party’s message. This print is unique, however, in the way that it stresses the importance of Adolf Hitler, without showing his physical presence. The mentioning of his name is enough to command respect within the propaganda regime.111

“Greater Germany: Yes! on 10 April” -1938

In the last poster concentrated on the Will of the Reich, the artist Max Eschle keeps the message extremely simple by working within a bronzed palette. The only piece of vibrant color comes from the word “Yes!” that is spelled out in bright red coloring. The artist Eschle was simply marketing the vote for the annexation of Austria that was taken during the Anschluss to the greater German people. This vote was personified through the hail of hands in unison towards the upper right corner of the poster. As this was the last election the people could vote in, by voting for the NSDAP their actions were directly responsible for the success of the Reich.112

This particular propaganda poster is unique in that it displays complete conformism with the Nazi regime. In encouraging viewers to vote in this particular election for the Nazi Party, the poster actively encouraged the ideals of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. Championing the rise of the Fuhrer then made it easy for the government to have turned the public against a common enemy.

**A Common Enemy**

Throughout wartime “a common enemy” has been the recurring theme of “enemy” propaganda. The propaganda artists during this time had been leaving “the enemy” open to interpretation, until an “other” had been brought directly into question. Many threats to the “Aryan” way of life were shown through the danger the “enemy” posed. Even though it was left open to interpretation, the Nazi party stressed the dangers of not only the Bolsheviks but the Jewish race as well; the two appear most prominently in propaganda during the war years. This relationship is often referred to as “encirclement.” Encirclement claimed that Germany was the victim of a conspiracy by the Bolshevik Russians that was ultimately organized by the Jews.\(^{113}\)

In singling the Bolsheviks and the Jews out as enemies of the state, the Nazi party gave their administration the ability to create fear of an “other” through propaganda posters. Compliance with this notion meant “unconditional enthusiasm for Nazi ideology, and unquestioning support for the military conquest and racial supremacy.”\(^{114}\) This “other” could also include anyone or anything that did not fit the stereotypical norm. This

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\(^{114}\) Evans, *The Third Reich at War*, 563.
norm was whatever the Nazi party dictated it to be, usually conforming to the “Aryan” ideal.

“Enemy” propaganda posters typically focused on messages that were anti-Bolshevik, anti-Semitic, or both. The combination of anti-Bolshevik and anti-Semitic messages culminated in propaganda that displayed a stereotypical Jewish looking man that spouted communist beliefs. A great deal of propaganda emerged in the winter of 1943, and concentrated fully on the Jewish people.115

Horst Seemann, a regular contributor to *Die Judenfrage* or “The Jewish Question”, an extremely anti-Semitic Nazi publication, drew conclusions in his article on January 1, 1943 about “world Jewry and of its determination to “exterminate” Germany by delivering it to Bolshevism.”116 In taking a combined approach to discredit the Jewish peoples and Bolsheviks through propaganda posters such as this one, propaganda was turned into the ultimate political weapon for the Third Reich. The ability to discredit all opponents through propaganda was an attainable goal for the Reich. As Goebbels told his staff, “Our struggle against Bolshevism must now dominate all propaganda media as the great and all-pervading propaganda theme.”117 No one is safe from the propaganda weapon, not even those who were chosen to be “racially pure.”

The Nazi propaganda posters that identified a common enemy turned the identities of those classified as degenerate into “others.” Thus, the individuals associated with these messages became the social outsiders within greater German society, breaking

116 Herf, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust*, 185
117 Herf, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust*, 191
the social contract. The social contract made no allowances for those deemed to be “others” within the Volksgemeinschaft. As Hitler stated in his 30 January speech, “in this war there will be no victors and vanquished, but only those who survived and those who were exterminated.”

“The Great Bolshevism…” – 1940

This poster, one of the most appealing posters within the German arsenal, was created in 1940 only a year into the war. It was meant to inspire a common enemy among the people. Bolshevism, as seen by the Germans, was to be destroyed at all costs. Identifying the Bolsheviks as enemies of the people gave the Nazi Party ultimate control over the thoughts and emotions of its people.

This particular poster refers to the Great Anti-Bolshevik Exhibition created by Joseph Goebbels. This particular exhibition as shown through a vigorous propaganda campaign declared that Bolshevism and Jewry were one and the same. In announcing to the world that Bolshevism and Jewry were the evils of the world, Nazi propaganda had successfully created an “other.”

Propaganda that focused on the threat of Bolshevism is crucial to the overall task of identifying a common enemy to the German people. The Bolsheviks were always

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118 Herf, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust*, 187
conveyed in propaganda with the colors of communism: red and yellow. In identifying the Bolsheviks as spiders, and in this instance as one colossal spider enveloping the world, the poster portrays the Bolsheviks as a global infestation that must be terminated. The head of the spider, which consists of a skull with its mouth dripping blood, sports a helmet with the communist red star. This Bolshevik spider is raining blood down upon the globe as it takes over, its legs digging into the world claiming it.

In displaying the Bolsheviks as vermin that needed to be eliminated, the Nazi government became relentless in its attacks against all undesirables. The Bolsheviks happened to be the most pressing threat during the war years, one that did not relent and would ultimately outlive the Nazi party.119

“Germany’s Victory, Europe’s Freedom” – 1941

Anti-Bolshevik feelings are also expressed strongly in this poster. The title “Germany’s Victory, Europe’s Freedom” describes the achievements of the German military forces while they “stomp out” communism.

This poster, unlike many of the other wartime propaganda posters, is composed of many bright colors with bold construction of figures. The primary figures being shown here are a larger than life German solder, a brilliant Communist dragon, and an agricultural laborer.

The German soldier painted and detailed in shades of green is seen to be the personification of Blitzkrieg. Pictured larger than life, this German soldier occupies approximately seventy-five percent of the poster space. With his hands raised high in the air, two bolts of lightning rain down from the sky, crashing into the back of the skull of the red Communist dragon. From the origin of the lightning strikes in one hand is a hand grenade meant to wreak destruction on the communists.

In the background of the poster is a small pocket of golden yellow light. Within this small beacon of hope lies the agricultural farmer off in the distance, representative of home and the support to their soldiers. In providing for the success of the German people in both agricultural pursuits and military victories, this poster offers hope of a world without an “other.” The hope of the German people lay in the liberation of Europe. By liberating all of Europe from both the communists and the Jews, the Nazi party was seen to be the caretakers of the continent.

Without the power and influence of the Volksgemeinschaft shown through the image of the laborer, all of Europe would fall to the Bolsheviks. Ultimately, it was not
just the influence of the agricultural laborer, but also that of the relationship between the laborer and the soldier.120

“He is to blame for the War!” – 1943

In the final years of the war in final acts of desperation, the increased use of atrocity/enemy propaganda doubled. Like the poster just discussed from 1941, the blaming of the Bolsheviks was also tied to the blame of the Jews.

This poster places the direct blame of the war on the Jewish people. Of all the common enemies of the German people, the Jewish race was the largest. Of the poster uses basic sketching and paint within a typical Nazi party color palette of black and red. In the upper right corner a right hand, pointing in accusation, belongs to the Nazi party. The subject of the hand’s ire is none other than the man positioned in the lower left corner. This man is a Jew, as is apparent by the yellow Star of David branded to his chest stating “Jude.”

This Jewish man can be seen cowering in fear as the hand comes after him in an attacking gesture. This is shown through background and the colors around it. Bright red

pools appear in the background behind the Jew as if to show the amount of blood spilt at this time was his fault.

Jews as worse than communists needed to be taken care of and were the ultimate enemies of the state. Many communists were seen to be Jews, and it was the ultimate disrespect to be singled out as such. The Volksgemeinschaft idea is crucial here as it demonstrates how much better an “Aryan” society would be to the people. An absence of Jews, as they were “the ones to blame,” fit the ultimate ideals of the Nazi Party.121

“Traitor” – 1944

Propaganda posters also demonstrated the dangers of improper use of the radio. This particular poster, created in 1944, continues the trend of a split image. As a wartime propaganda technique, this device allowed deeper messages to be conveyed to the viewer by showing two separate activities taking place in the same time and place.

The top of the poster consists of a light-colored area. A man at a microphone with a swirling message behind him is pictured. This world message is displayed like circular radio waves containing messages that suggest radio stations, most notably “Radio

London.” The text “Radio London” wrapped around the microphone emphasizes that the message was coming from the Allied networks.

As the viewer’s eye travels down the poster, the image slowly fades from light to black. The only light comes from a panel on the front of a radio; this light then illuminates a man hidden in the shadows. Branded underneath him in a brilliant bold red text are the words “Traitor.” As the two pieces of the poster are essentially split in half, it can only be assumed that it is a part of the same event. Thus, the man hidden in the shadows is presumed to be listening to the radio broadcast above. This is almost assured as the text labels him to be a traitor. In committing treason against his fellow man and nation, this man is everything the Reich has been warning the public against.122

In listening to these broadcasts, the people of Germany were effectively disrupting the community and government by allowing outside forces to influence the image of total control that the Third Reich was trying to create. The Nazi government could not keep people safe unless it had the complete and total faith of its “pure” German people. By allowing the people's thoughts to be poisoned against the Reich, this gave the Allies power to undermine the whole system of government. In redefining the social contract to empower the people to safeguard their community by weeding out all traitors, they were effectively stabilizing the Volksgemeinschaft.

The change from prewar propaganda to the posters of the war years demonstrated an overall transformation in attitude within the posters messages. The messages began to concentrate only on the programs that would have great benefit to the party. This was

important in the relationship between industrial laborers and the military, as well as the
Hitler Youth. Most propaganda within the Nazi regime then defended the ideals of the
Volksgemeinschaft and the idea of the social contract.

Compared to the propaganda posters of the prewar period, the posters produced
during the war years convey several ideals that changed to fit the Volksgemeinschaft, as
most of the posters discussed in some fashion the role of common blood ties, and a
shared set of values that demonstrated the “Aryan” ideal. Propaganda posters moved
away from convincing the people of Germany of the need of for “Aryan” society, to
believing that it exists within the war years.

Social groups such as Laborers, Families, and the Military changed to meet the
needs of the Volksgemeinschaft within the war years. Laborers adapted to transform
normal production needs to those required to fuel the militarized fighting machine.
Families learned to be able to cope without family members as they were off at war,
accepting the new social hierarchy. The military, now at full capacity, changed from
preparedness to active combat situations, actively having conformity, homogeneity, and
social cohesion as part of everyday life. This is also seen at the peak of the war years
when two social groups worked together to accomplish social cohesion, as the Military
and Industrial Laborers did.

Most importantly, the role of the Hitler Youth changed the most from the pre-war
propaganda to that of the war years, as the youth moved from being depicted as malleable
children to being shown as part of the adult world. During the war years, the children of
the Hitler Youth were now expected to live up to the ideals of the “Aryan” society,
including traditional gender roles. Having been engulfed in propagandistic messages for their entire lives, the children who had now become adults were depicted as total supporters of the society as they conformed to the *Volksgemeinschaft*.

In sharp contrast to the prewar propaganda posters, the visual aesthetic changed subtly over the course of the regime. Prior to 1939, the propaganda posters had lighter colors that emitted an optimism that was crucial to their “Aryan” message. After 1939 there was a changeover towards largely darker colors and themes. Through the party colors of red, black, and grey, the ideals of victory showed the overarching influence of the government on every aspect of society.

Overall, the role of propaganda posters within the war years was crucial to the success, as well as the defeat of the Nazi regime. By creating a social contract with the people of Germany, the ideals of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, the brainchild of the party, could be enforced. It also sponsored rebellion in adults and youth organizations that never conformed to the *Volksgemeinschaft* ideals, ultimately causing the downfall of the Third Reich. The subliminal messages that were conveyed through visual aesthetics of the poster such as color, positioning, and imagery all helped to tie the “Aryan” vision to propaganda.
Conclusion

Propaganda posters were the most important tool in the German military arsenal during World War II. The posters conveyed beliefs that were to the ultimate benefit of the militarized nation, by emphasizing a strong military, and by emphasizing a strong society as well. German society in the period leading up to World War II had undergone considerable changes.

Beginning in 1918, with the fall of the German monarchy, through the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II, to the reconstruction of Allied-occupied Germany in 1945, there were large governmental changes. In the span of less than thirty years, each generation of German society had experienced a new form of government. The chaotic fluidity that plagued the German people left them with a lack of identity. This identity was strongly tied into the idea of nationalism and the Volk. Hitler recounts in Mein Kampf how he “understood the difference between dynastic ‘patriotism’ and Volkish ‘nationalism’; and even then I was interested in the latter.” Without a strong national Volk, the people of Germany struggled to form an identity.

One thing that Hitler successfully gave to his people upon his rise to power was the idea of a strong centralized national community. This national community would be primarily for the people, a true Volksgemeinschaft. The Volksgemeinschaft would be founded upon the ideals of blood, race, shared destiny, and a common set of values. As a branch of the ideals of the Weltanschauung, the Volksgemeinschaft would rally the people under the construct of the Aryan race. The establishment of the Volksgemeinschaft

123 Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf, 13.
in relation to race reveals the true purpose beneath the national identity of Nazi Germany: the ability to create the “other.”

Ultimately, the “other” was what helped identify the social outsiders that resided within the Nazi regime and those who broke from the social contract. This social contract in combination with the Volksgemeinschaft would demonstrate the importance of the propaganda messages to the community. Hitler stated early on in Mein Kampf, “propaganda must be adjusted to the broad masses in content and in form, and its soundness is to be measured exclusively by its effective result.”\(^{125}\) As it is virtually impossible to measure the effectiveness of propaganda at present, this quote is also extremely relevant to overall propaganda messages that the government focused on as key to maintaining their Volksgemeinschaft.

Throughout the Nazi regime there had been several significant areas of focus in propaganda posters, many altering their message depending on whether they were created during the pre-war period or during wartime. In the chapters of this thesis we see themes in propaganda that show the role of women and families, the working Reich, Will of the Reich, and the Hitler Youth. The previous four categories highlighted the ideals of the rising Reich pre-war. As the Nazi party gained a following in Germany, ultimately gaining more and more power, these ideals are what allowed the regime to succeed. Applying the Volksgemeinschaft principle to propaganda posters of the pre-war period established the belief of the government in successfully creating a true “people’s

\(^{125}\) Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf, 342.
community.” This ideology was crucial in the *Gaining Power* phase that began in 1929 and lasted until 1933 of the Nazi Party.

Overlapping slightly was the *Establishment of Power* phase beginning in March of 1933. This particular phase of the Nazi party was truly where propaganda fitting the *Volksgemeinschaft* ideal began to emerge. Rising above class conflict after 1933 was essential for the new order, and the *Volksgemeinschaft* was essential in order to restore the former greatness of Germany. This was done through various social groups that banded together for the greater good.\(^ {126} \) Various social groups such as the laborers, the Hitler youth, etc. all were displayed as established groups representative of class and gender that are part of the “Aryan” image. Taking active roles in propaganda, these categories displayed through various posters the wishes of the government.

This “Aryan” image, now completely in control of the government and the people by the end of 1936, ushered in the *Enforcement of Power* stage of the regime. Lasting from the end of 1936 to the beginning of World War II in 1939, the Nazi party was flexing its political muscles by instituting policy to promote the *Volk*. By having firmly established their rule, the Nazi party now needed to put forth propaganda that firmly pushed the “Aryan” ideal that reinforced its *Volksgemeinschaft*.

Chapter three essentially splits the war into two spheres of influence. *The Victories* section spans from the second half of 1939 to 1943. Within this time the German military forces or Wehrmacht were virtually unbeatable. The propaganda machine that was partially connected to the Reich’s Propaganda Ministry would have

\(^ {126} \) Salter, *Nazi Propaganda*, 88.
directly influenced these victories. Through the ministry the focus on matriarchal families, laborers and the military, a common enemy, and the Hitler Youth all deeply influenced the war effort, both at home and abroad. During the war, Goebbels had told his Lieutenants within the Reich’s Propaganda Ministry that “propaganda does not have anything to do with the truth! We serve truth by serving a German victory…” Victory was the most important aspect of war time Germany, thus relationships like the one between industrial laborers and the military became the key to that success.

The years of success ultimately culminated in large-scale failure during the Defeats from 1943 to 1945. In reality, these crushing defeats signaled the end of the war and an end to the Nazi regime itself; even though the message of victory was stronger than ever. The divisive shift in propaganda came in the final year of the war between Goebbels and Dietrich, who by March had fallen from favor. Goebbels had successfully convinced his Führer to dismiss Dietrich calling it “the final result of long and determined efforts.” The two men thought of themselves not as colleagues but as rivals and as both the Press and Propaganda departments shared a budget, they could not be separated. This split between propaganda and the press weakened the propaganda ministry and eventually the government as the party began to crumble.

At the end were propaganda masterminds Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels, both dead by their own hands. Thus, the propaganda dream of the Volksgemeinschaft was all but dead. The only exception lay with the Reich Press Chief Otto Dietrich. Dietrich at the end of the war was removed from power by force and ultimately arrested and charged at

127 Baird, 4
128 Bramsted, 108
129 Bramsted, 109
the Nuremberg Trials for crimes against humanity. After being sentenced to seven years in prison for his crimes, Dietrich revealed the secrets of the propaganda machine that fueled Germany for over fifteen years.

The propaganda machine was none other than Adolf Hitler himself, with his ideas and clear vision of a “pure” Volksgemeinschaft. Dietrich wrote in *The Hitler I Knew* “only a thorough and uncompromising knowledge of Hitler’s personality, of his innermost nature and his true character, can explain the unexplainable.”

Hitler was the ultimate key to the success of propaganda; without him the system could no longer go on. His “Utopic” “Aryan” ideal of a Volksgemeinschaft died with him, only living now through the posters themselves, and revealing that the propaganda posters were the ultimate tools for promoting and preserving the Nazi ideal of the Volksgemeinschaft.

Examining the propaganda posters of the Third Reich and evaluating them individually shows the way in which the Volksgemeinschaft changed over time. Only by looking at individual components that comprised the “rhythm of the part” to construct the “rhythm of the whole” could the viewer understand the messages being marketed specifically to the military, family units, laborers and social outsiders. Then by unpacking the Volksgemeinschaft idea we can understand the social integration, social cohesion, social hierarchy, and homogeneity, conformity, shared set of values, and common blood ties hidden within the messages of Nazi propaganda posters. Tying the examination of the Volksgemeinschaft into the artistic interpretation of propaganda posters reveals a great deal about the government of the Third Reich, showing how, through artwork, how the

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ideals of the people had moved away from a racially pure Utopia to a militarized fighting machine.
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