The trajectory of male homosexuality in Nazism

Goral Bhatt

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The Trajectory of Male Homosexuality in Nazism

By

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Abstract

Nazism redefined gender and sexual politics for society during the twentieth century, which determined the trajectory of male homosexuality under the Third Reich. While the party did not actively promote homosexuality, early Nazism valued hypermasculinity and homosocial relationships. Right-wing veterans of the First World War were attracted to the Nazi paramilitary unit, *Sturmabteilung* (SA), led by Ernst Röhm, a well-known gay man. The SA leaders promoted close male bonds among the members, which led to homoerotic relationships. If homoerotism was permitted within the early Nazi Party, why was there a steady decline in the treatment of gay men under the Third Reich? Based on personal narratives, memoirs, and official documents, this study demonstrates that the party became increasingly violent against gay German men because Heinrich Himmler, leader of the paramilitary group *Schutzstaffel* (SS), was obsessed with controlling sexuality to advance the Aryan race.
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Introduction

Heinrich Himmler, the leader of a paramilitary unit, the Schutzstaffel (SS), was a central figure in the persecution of gay German men. His personality allowed him to successfully rise in the Nazi Party and create a bureaucratic system of oppression against male homosexuals. Himmler grew up in a strict middle-class conservative Catholic home. His traditionalist upbringing informed his ideas regarding gender roles and sexuality. He was also a fervent reader; therefore, Himmler also formed much of his beliefs on race, gender, sexuality from the numerous books he read as a young man. A look into Himmler’s psyche throughout his life helps demonstrate his actions as Reichsführer of the SS. Heinrich Himmler is vital to the study of gender and sexual politics in the Nazi Party.

It is essential to understand that while the study of gender and sexuality under Nazism is advancing, it is relatively new to Holocaust studies. There is much more that is still unknown about gender and sexuality in the Third Reich. Regarding the gay victims, as is the case for most of the study of non-Jewish victims, some Holocaust historians are concerned that research on homosexuality in Holocaust studies is a distraction from the mass destruction of six million European Jewish people. As a result, these scholars believe that Holocaust studies should only focus on the Jewish victims.1 Without developing comprehensive research on the many diverse groups of Holocaust victims, Holocaust studies is minimal, including the analyses on the Jewish experience. The experiences of each group form a clear view of the entire Holocaust and must not be ignored, including the gay victims. In “Holocaust and the History of Gender and Sexuality,” Elissa Mailänder states, “perpetrators are indeed so much more complex than

historians used to think, and zooming in on gender and sexuality really nuances the picture.”

Gender and sexual politics played a significant role in Nazism. To view the Nazis’ actions through a narrow lens of simply the Jewish experience is a disservice to the entirety of Holocaust studies.

We cannot refute that an in-depth analysis of the mass destruction of European Jewish people is vital to Holocaust scholarship. However, the study of the Holocaust is incomplete without incorporating the gay and other non-Jewish victims of Nazism. Many historians acknowledge the importance of researching various victims, not only the Jewish victims. Michael Berenbaum argues, “Only by understanding the fate of others who suffered, where it paralleled the Jewish experience and more importantly where it differed, can distinctive character of the Jewish fate as a matter of historical fact be demonstrated.”

A Mosaic of Victims is a compilation of scholarly essays that explore the major victim groups of the Nazis. In this work, Berenbaum states that many Jewish survivors worry that the Holocaust would lose the Jewish aspect, and the world would overlook the unique struggles they faced when attempting to take into consideration “the universality of victims.” He notes that some Jewish survivors also hold resentments against other victims as possible collaborators with the Nazis. The other victimized groups, in turn, feel resentment because they believe that the Jewish struggles are the central focus in historical studies. A Mosaic of Victims, Berenbaum says, is the result of a dialogue between these combative groups.

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Gender and sexuality studies also benefit from research into gender and sexuality in Nazi Germany. The subject of sexual and gender norms is an essential part of how societies operate. In “Holocaust and the History of Gender and Sexuality,” Anna Hájková states,

It’s really worthwhile to think about the meaning when people are rendered “monsters” on the basis of their sexual behaviour. When we look at what it is that a society marks as perverse, we can draw conclusions about how societal norms are made and what the role of these norms is. Social rules are something that defines what a society is, and they can be otherwise really hard to get at. Gender and sexuality indeed work as a litmus test and are thus key to our understanding what is at the heart of society.\(^5\)

Gender is a particularly vital subject to investigate when examining any community. Another historian, Doris Bergen, notes,

For me, thinking about gender has been incredibly valuable for addressing that persistent question: how did the Holocaust happen? Rather than looking directly at the killers, I focus on what you might call supporters and enablers of the Nazi system: the German Christians, the Volksdeutschen (ethnic Germans) and the Wehrmachtchaplains. In every case, I’ve been struck by how people invoke and perform gender to navigate extreme circumstances, justify and cover up violence, and shift blame.

Bergen gives an example for religion in which “gender is a powerful normalizer” since it is integrated into daily lives. It is also “enshrined in the frameworks people use to make sense of their lives through judgments about tradition, morality, legitimacy and honour.”\(^6\)

Evidence that gender and sexual politics determine how a society functions can be seen in twentieth-century Germany. In the wake of World War I, under the Weimar Republic, primarily in Berlin, women and sexual minorities enjoyed a relative sense of freedom. Germany was a haven for the sexually marginalized throughout Europe and the United States. Attitudes towards homosexuality were changing under the Weimar regime. One reason why Germany became a beacon for sexually marginalized groups was scientific research. A lawyer and the first man in modern history to openly acknowledge his homosexuality, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, became the

\(^5\) Anna Hájková, “Holocaust and the History of Gender and Sexuality,” 80.
first activist for the legal emancipation of gays and lesbians in Germany. He had pamphlets, petitions, and public endorsements that spoke about the fact that same-sex love is innate, not a vice, perversion, or sin. Though the medical establishment usually snubbed Ulrichs’ ideas, he influenced a progressive group of psychiatrists and legal professionals. Ulrichs’ most significant contribution to German gay rights was inspiring the Institut für Sexualwissenschaft, Institute for Sexual Science, led by the famous sexologist Magnus Hirschfield. The second reason why the gay subculture was thriving under the Weimar government was that on November 12, 1918, the Weimar Republic eliminated censorship in media, which allowed authors, activists, and publishers to have open discussions about homosexual themes. Finally, vagueness and lack of enforcement of Paragraph 175, which criminalized homosexual acts between men, allowed sexual minorities to live in peace. By 1886, in Berlin, police commissioner Leopold von Meerscheidt-Hüllèssem had a policy to tolerate homosexual establishments. Police also found that it was hard to enforce Paragraph 175 since illegal sexual acts were committed privately.

Nazism drastically changed how sexuality was perceived; gender became an essential aspect of male homosexuality. Militarized masculinity in Germany normalized intense male bonding and male homoerotism. A Männerbund, which was the concept of an all-male society adopted during the eighteenth century, was a large part of German military culture. From the early nineteenth century, nationalist intellectuals thought of close male friendships as the most significant expression of patriotism and believed that these bonds were more critical than familial relationships. Counter to heterosexual relationships, these close friendships embodied

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male solidarity and guaranteed dedication to collective goals. By the beginning of the twentieth
century, Männerbund societies gained new life.¹⁰

For some veterans of the First World War, homosocial relationships became an essential
aspect of their post-war lives. Paramilitary organizations, formed by men who could not adjust to
civilian life, promoted the Männerbund ideals. They categorized those who fought at the Front as
truly masculine, while others were deemed feminine. Right-wing veterans were particularly
angry with women. Historian Andrew Wackerfuss states that these men rarely wrote about
women, and on the occasions, they did write about them, the men lamented that women could
not understand them since they did not share the experiences of fighting in the war.¹¹ The
racialist and nationalist veterans of World War I joined the Nazi Party paramilitary unit,
Sturmabteilung (SA), which permitted homoerotic relationships for their members. Chapter I
explores the dynamics of male bonding in militarized masculinity and the role of gender and
sexual politics within the SA. This chapter will begin by demonstrating the trauma soldiers and
officers endured while at the Front. The horrendous experiences of trench warfare shaped how
some of these men interacted with society when they returned to Germany.

Völkisch, racialist groups, used propaganda to perpetuate the idea that men who fought in
the First World War had a special bond and all those at the Home Front sabotaged their efforts
during the war. This chapter will demonstrate how these tactics were used to recruit former
soldiers to join the racialist nationalist cause. It will explain how the SA and Ernst Röhm, the SA
Chief of Staff and a gay man, shaped gender and sexuality in early Nazism. Eventually, the Nazi

Party assassinated Röhm and other SA leaders during the Night of Long Knives. The purge was a catalyst to the systematic persecution of gay German men under the Nazi regime.

After the Night of Long Knives, Adolf Hitler raised the SS status, which was founded after the SA. Unlike the SA, the SS was less erratic and more bureaucratic. Himmler formed a system to erase homosexuality from the Third Reich. He was a meticulous man who perceived himself to be a level-minded person. Himmler believed that his racist, anti-homosexual, and sexist ideals were based on logic rather than aggression. Chapter II includes evidence of Himmler’s experiences with sexuality and race, which helped create his anti-gay views. This chapter will also investigate his psyche, which shows how Himmler developed his fanaticism for race and sexuality, leading to the death and destruction of so many homosexual men in Nazi Germany.

The SA orchestrated assaults on gay institutions and rights leaders shortly after Hitler became chancellor in 1933. Though the SA permitted homoerotism for the leaders and members, the acts were only permissible because they were considered hypermasculine. Therefore, the SA did not align itself with “effeminate” mainstream gay rights movements. However, gay Germans were relatively safe until Himmler formed an effective bureaucratic system of oppression against homosexual men. Chapter III explains the progressive changes in policies, which steadily made life for gay German men more and more difficult. It presents the policies and the firsthand experiences of homosexual men affected by Himmler and the Nazi regime. This chapter also demonstrates that Himmler believed male homosexuality was a biological condition, and contaminated the German people. The actions of the SS and Himmler shifted how society under Nazism viewed and reacted to homosexuality. This chapter aims to present the culmination of the trajectory that gender and sexuality took under Nazism.
In Chapter I, this study extensively uses the work of Andrew Wackerfuss’ *Stormtrooper Families: Homosexuality and Community in the Early Nazi Movement*, which utilizes personal correspondences, personnel records, autobiographies, published and unpublished memoirs, court records, and police surveillance records to explain “the truth behind the connection between sexuality and Nazism.” Through several biographical works, Chapter II references Himmler’s diaries in which he obsessively wrote about daily experiences to understand his mind and motivations. Himmler’s journals from his adolescent years provide insight into how and why he became a prominent and dangerous Nazi leader. The third chapter utilizes several official documents, speeches, memoirs, and other forms of primary sources to demonstrate the system of oppression that was created against gay men in Nazi Germany.

The historiography on homosexual victims of the Holocaust is becoming more and more expansive. Richard Plant is a scholar who conducted a comprehensive study of homosexuality under the Third Reich in *The Pink Triangle*. Plant was himself was a young gay Jewish German who was fortunate enough to have escaped Germany in 1933, on the day the Reichstag burned to the ground, and Hitler subsequently became chancellor. He was able to stay in contact with family and friends back home who kept Plant updated on the events occurring in Nazi Germany. In 1986, Plant presented a concise study on the significant aspects of the victimization of gay Germans. Plant’s work is a chronology of how the lives of gay Germans became progressively threatened by the Nazi regime. In *Lost Intimacies*, William Spurlin presents intriguing arguments regarding the Holocaust and queer studies. First, Spurlin argues that the question of homosexuality for Nazi power must be analyzed with racialization. Scholars

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must view homosexuals as a victimized group because of who they were rather than a persecuted group because of what they did. In Holocaust studies, if sexual minorities are considered in terms of race, then there can be a better understanding of why the Nazis made homosexuals enemies of the state. Spurlin then argues that homosexuality in the Third Reich must be reexamined to incorporate the homoerotic male bonding in the early stages of Nazi fascism. Laurie Marhoefer’s *Sex and the Weimar Republic: German Homosexual Emancipation and the Rise of the Nazis* provides insight into homosexuality in Germany under the Weimar Republic and during the rise of early Nazism. *Sex and the Weimar Republic* is vital since it allows a view of a far more progressive Germany, which changed drastically when the Nazi Party came to power. Dagmar Herzog, an eminent historian, has written extensively on gender and sexuality and Holocaust memory. Her comprehensive work, *Sex after Fascism*, divulges into the sexual politics of Nazism and how they were interpreted by postwar Germany. These are a few of the scholarly works on gender and sexuality in the Third Reich. The goal of this project is to add to the expanding histography. This thesis also seeks to present a comprehensive view of how gender and sexual politics shape societies. The downward trajectory of how sexual minorities were treated in Germany during the first half of the twentieth century shows the drastic changes Nazism caused in German society.

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Chapter 1: 
The Politics of Gender and Sexuality in Early Nazism

Gender and sexuality were complicated matters for the Nazi Party, especially in early Nazism. The party strictly prohibited homosexuality, proclaiming that it went against the Nazis' core values. However, its paramilitary branch, the Sturmabteilung (SA), had members who engaged in same-sex relationships. This chapter will demonstrate that gender and sexuality were used as political tools by early right-wing organizations that flourish in Germany after the First World War. Many German citizens who felt a lack of stability were eager to return to old German traditionalist ideals, which meant they embraced traditional militarized masculinity. World War I had a devastating effect on Germans, particularly veterans of the First World War. Psychologically and physically traumatized by their experiences at the Front, several former soldiers and officers felt disillusioned. These men were tormented, battle-weary, and thought they did not fit into the post-World War I era. Many veterans who were angered by the state of Germany directly after the First World War and who sought to reclaim their self-identity formed paramilitary, far-Right organizations with hypermasculine ideals. While several Germans clung to traditionalism to cope, many others were incensed with the war and advocated for pacifism. German socialism gained traction with anti-war sentiments, leading to a revolution. To stop the Revolution, the social-democratic government used paramilitary organizations to violently suppress the German Revolution. When Adolf Hitler formed the SA, these groups grew, and many of these right-wing veterans joined this hypermasculine unit of the Nazi party.

In a society that classified male homosexuality as feminine, Ernst Röhm formed politics based on hegemonic masculinity to shift the perception of male homosexuality. Though Nazism repulsed many gay citizens, Röhm attracted some homosexual Germans to early Nazism. Though Hitler and Röhm were close, when the SA began to oppose the Führer's decisions to compromise with traditional conservatives of the Reichswehr, German Armed Forces, Hitler had Röhm, and other prominent SA leaders captured and murdered, during an event known as Night of the Long Knives or Röhm Putsch. The purge was the definitive event that began the violent persecution of gay men under the Nazi regime. Röhm and the SA officers, many of whom were veterans of the First World War, were instrumental in helping form the German extreme Right and nationalistic movement; however, by 1934, they became a threat to Hitler's leadership.

The violence and extremism seen during the Night of Long Knives were the norm for Germany during the twentieth century and the First World War was the catalyst. The Great War was particularly devastating because it was a war of attrition; the enemies belligerently wore down troops. Scholars acknowledge that the conditions in trench warfare, continual barrages from artillery, the high rates of killing from unnecessary advances towards barbed wire and machine-gun fire, and overall strain from living for long periods at the Front contributed to the disillusionment of many soldiers.

Some middle-class volunteers and conscripts who lived in larger cities like Berlin had mixed emotions about the war. Though they had trepidations for modern warfare conditions,

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these young men were full of hope and romanticism. Walter Limmer, who was a law student from Saxony, stated in a letter to his family,

Every soldier must, to start with, be, as I was a week ago, oppressed by the first mental picture of horrors which are no longer mere possibilities, but actually approaching realities; and on the day of the first battle the feeling of dread is bound to try and get possession of one's heart again, but now it won't find us shaky or unprepared.

Limmer went on to explain that after a few days, "I personally have entirely regained my self-possession. I have thought out my position as if I had already done with this world---as if I were certain of not coming home again; and that gives me peace and security." Limmer began romanticizing the idea of fighting at the Front, "and this feeling is universal among soldiers... we were so full of excitement, fury, and enthusiasm. It is a joy to go to the Front with such comrades. We are bound to be victorious!" Some found strength from their belief that they were fighting for a just cause. Arthur Schicht, a reserve officer, was convinced that "holy Germany" was "the principle Kulturvolk or civilized people in the world." He believed that the "main powers of Europe and Japan" would not destroy Germany.

Generally, young men who went to war in 1914 felt anticipation, dread, or a mixture of both; however, most were horrified when they reached the battlefield. The trauma of the war gradually weighed on many young German men who were fighting at the Front. Limmer's attitude drastically changed as soon as he experienced the war: "This ghastly battle is still raging—for the fourth day! Up till now, like most battles in this war, it has consisted almost entirely of an appalling artillery duel." Schicht was well aware of the desolation caused by the

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20 “Letter from Walter Limmer, 8.7.1914,” quoted in German Students’ War Letters, 2.
war. He explains having "a peculiar feeling when one stands for the first time under fire and the bullets are whistling over your head." Though the reserve officer was full of the patriotic fervor, he was depressed to see the wounded. Schicht stated, "The groaning and pain ripped open my heart so that I could not open the eight items of post that had arrived; I felt so exhausted and assaulted by everything that had happened to me on this hot day."

Willy Tharann, a former supporter of the war, wrote about how the soldiers' moods shifted after their first encounters on the battlefield. He explains, "Many of the young war volunteers cursed under their breath or whimpered quietly, and their enthusiasm was extinguished long ago." Tharann goes on to state that two months into the war, there were only a few "for whom it is still a matter of great, bloody seriousness, for whom German idealism has not gone up in smoke."

While the First World War inflicted devastating physical harm to the troops, it also caused debilitating mental illnesses. The clinic director for nervous diseases in Tübingen, Robert Gaupp, reported on the soldiers who suffered from the warfare's psychological strain. He stated that from late August 1914 until Christmas 1914, most patients were men with nervous system or brain injuries. Gaupp noticed that initially, there were very few soldiers with mental ailments. He explained,

Only when the heavy artillery battles commenced in the Champagne in December 1914 and when the artillery superiority of our Western enemies increased to devastating heavy barrage, the hospital trains brought a rather large quantity of uninjured but mentally ill officers and soldiers. Henceforward, their number has increased more and more rapidly.

Gaupp stated that the growing number of men with psychological issues forced the military to open specialized hospitals:

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A hospital has opened, and very soon it is full and more space must be provided. Now we have the situation that the patients with mental diseases are, in terms of their numbers, the most important group of all sick army members and that the military hospitals for mentally ill soldiers are the only ones that are always fully occupied.  

After the war, the men who returned from the Front with psychological trauma struggled to reintegrate into normal society. Ernst Simmel, a neurologist, and psychoanalyst provided an analysis in which he noted that a German veteran had to contend with "a world changed by the war and with which it must struggle, a struggle in which the victim of war neurosis succumbs in silent, often unrecognized, torment." Simmel explained,

he departs from the arena of war as one branded with a so-called 'functional' illness, war neurosis. The damage which the war neurotic carries home with him as a result of his fighting on the lines can befall a single organ, or it may encompass the entire person.

Those at the Homefront also faced a great deal of trauma from the First World War. The German people had immense social and economic strife after the war ended. The government was responsible for the pensions and benefits of approximately 2.7 million disabled veterans and several widows and orphans, which led to a strain on public finances. For most veterans and families of those who died at the Front, the pensions only secured enough money for bare essentials. Inflation caused by the war, which continued to increase until 1923, was particularly hard for those who relied on pensions. It was nearly impossible for those seeking an income to supplement the meager amount of money they received from the government. The labor market was stretched thin by a high unemployment rate. The war victims were growing resentful, which led to the German citizens mobilizing a wave of political movements.

31 Benjamin Ziemann, Introduction, German Soldiers in the Great War, 29.
33 Ziemann, Introduction, German Soldiers in the Great War, 29.
During the war, antiwar sentiment began to grow traction in Germany. The Bavarian city of Munich became the epicenter for political movements, and in February 1916, pacifists began passing out flyers and posters, urging an end to the war.\(^3\) Socialists took on the banner of the antiwar campaign. In April 1917, German leftists formed the Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD). Kurt Eisner, who would later become the Bavarian Prime Minister, took charge of the movement.\(^3\)

In January 1918, the socialist movements inspired factory workers to go on strike. From January 28 to February 4, millions of workers throughout Germany, including those that worked in the armaments factories, walked out.\(^3\) The nationwide strikes were not merely about working conditions and low wages; the workers demanded an end to the war and that Germany sign a peace treaty.\(^3\) On January 31, Munich workers went on strike, and by the afternoon, approximately nine thousand people took to the streets, demanding a revolution. As a countermove, the authorities arrested Eisner and other members of the USPD that night. With support from the more conservative Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), the Bavarian government used force and vague concessions to squelch the workers' strikes. For the next eight months, Eisner and other radical socialists were under police custody, and the leftist movement was temporarily on hold.\(^3\) Many soldiers rejected the mass strike because it coincided with the military's plan for a major offensive, which the soldiers hoped would end the war. One man stated,

As they already say in the newspapers, there is a lot going on in Germany. But they should keep quiet just during these few weeks until the war is over. For if they don't want

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\(^3\) David Clay Large, *Where the Ghosts Walked: Munich's Road to the Third Reich* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 65.

\(^3\) Large, *Where the Ghosts Walked*, 66.

\(^3\) *German Soldiers in the Great War*, 172.


\(^3\) Large, *Where the Ghosts Walked*, 68.
to work any longer they can come here. We would rather like to go home and work, since this is our fourth year that we have been out here.\textsuperscript{39}

Not all German men fighting in the war felt the mass strike was terrible. On the contrary, some mentioned that they were hopeful that the conflict in Germany would force an end to the war:

Hopefully the riots will help in all countries to finish it at last, since the government has now to accept that the people are fed up with the war and that continuing the war further will come to nothing. Because even the planned offensive will not bring us peace, if it can't be gained by other means.\textsuperscript{40}

By September, the Kaiser and his generals were resigned to the fact that Germany's loss and the Armistice were imminent. They agreed to place a civilian government in charge of arranging a peace agreement with the Allies, which would act for the Reichstag. The Kaiser and his men hoped that moderate democratization would stop those demanding a German republic.\textsuperscript{41}

Like the Reich, the Bavarian government was also attempting to reform. Bavaria was going to have a parliamentary government. On October 1, the government sought to appease the left by releasing Eisner from prison to campaign for a vacant seat in Munich Reichstag. Unfortunately, the reform had little impact on the German people, who were suffering through the war and the nation's inevitable loss. A German revolution was far more enticing than a government reform.\textsuperscript{42}

In October 1918, radical left groups were preparing for a revolution. Socialists were forming several plans to start a revolt. The time came in November, and surprisingly, the Revolution began within the Imperial High Seas Fleet. Like other high naval officers, the chief of staff of the High Seas Fleet, Admiral von Trotha, fantasized about launching a full-scale


\textsuperscript{41} Large, \textit{Where the Ghosts Walked}, 72-73.

\textsuperscript{42} Large, \textit{Where the Ghosts Walked}, 74-75.
attack against the British fleet. The hope was that the element of surprise would help defeat the more powerful British Royal Navy. Even if the Allies destroyed the German fleet in the attack, the "officers and men would be lying in immortal fame at the bottom of the sea instead of having been preserved to cover itself in cowardly fashion with disgrace." Large sections of the fleet's sailors believed the Admirals were suicidal and balked at the plan. Rumors began to circulate that the German fleet would engage "in a final encounter, in which the German fleet would triumph or die for the glory of the 'Kaiser and the Fatherland.'" One by one, the rank-and-file sailors of the ships started to mutiny. The sailors were passing around petitions, which demanded that commanding officers release imprisoned comrades. The officers were losing control over their subordinates. Sailors organized together to form the beginning of a German Revolution. Once they reached land, these men spread the news of the Revolution throughout the German cities, towns, and villages. They set up a Sailors' and Workers' Council. Inspired by the naval soldiers, working-class citizens revolted against those in charge. The revolutionary uprising reached Bavaria. On November 7, one hundred thousand people gathered in Munich, demanding an end to the Kaiser's government. Under Eisner, the people elected delegates. On November 8, the Kaiser was out, and, in his place, the People's Republic of Bavaria took control.  

Though the Revolution mobilized many German citizens to take action against a failing system, the leaders of the mainstream SPD could not allow the far-leftist to take control of the country. Unlike the Workers' and Soldiers’ Councils and more left-leaning USPD, the SPD were

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44 Horn, *The German Naval Mutinies of World War I*, 206.
bureaucrats that belonged to a conventional bourgeois form of the political system. The SPD leaders were fearful of the revolutionary crowds and the demands of their more leftist opponents. They turned to the Imperial Army, then later right extremist paramilitary units known as the Freikorps, Free Corps, to help stop the Revolution. On November 10, the Social Democratic leader, Friedrich Ebert, conversed with the Prussian General Groener. The details of the call are unknown; however, the general later indicated that it was about a pact. Ebert wanted the Army to attack the revolutionary movement, and in return, he allowed the Army high command to survive.

In Berlin, during December 1918, a conflict with the People's Naval Division, known as "Ebert's Bloody Christmas," shifted the Revolution and allowed Ebert and his circle in the SPD to control the upper ranks of the government. The People's Naval Division was considered the military elite of the Revolution. The government regained an agreement with the Division. In retaliation, the sailors captured Otto Wels, the Commandant of Berlin, and two Social Democratic leaders. They also took over the Chancellery and the central telephone and telegraph offices. Ebert contacted the Supreme Command, and the military dispatched regular troops to free Wels. However, the Republican Soldiers' Army, armed workers, and the chief of police's Security Force came in as reinforcements to support the sailors. The sailors and their supporters forced the troops to retreat. As a result, military leaders increased their efforts to organize the Freikorps to fight against perceived anarchy. After some negotiations, the People's Naval Division agreed to take no further action against the government and lost its status as a political force. The only three USPD members in the government were angry to learn that the SPD gave

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47 Pelz, A People’s History of the German Revolution, 79.
49 Pelz, A People’s History of the German Revolution, 81-82.
the Minister of War full power to suppress the sailors. They had no way to curb the SPD, so the Independent Social Democrats resigned.\textsuperscript{50}

The citizens grew more frustrated with the government and felt betrayed by their leaders, and thousands marched through the streets, protesting against the SPD. The SPD leaders were fearful of the crowds. They made the mistake of authorizing the \textit{Freikorps} to suppress the rebellion.\textsuperscript{51} The leaders did not understand what they unleashed on the German people. The Bavarian politician Johannes Hoffmann called for Bavarian men to gather their weapons and wipe out the "Munich disgrace." Hoffmann was afraid of the revolutionaries, stating, "in Munich there rages a Russian terror, directed by alien elements." Like many other SPD leaders, he did not understand that the men in the \textit{Freikorps} were not only aggressively anti-Communist, but they were also, for the most part, vehemently racist and anti-democratic.\textsuperscript{52}

Right extremism was gaining momentum at the same time as the leftist movement. Various \textit{Völkisch} groups started emerging throughout Germany in 1919. Disillusioned veterans of the First World War found solace in right-wing nationalism. These men believed that restoring national pride would help reclaim what they lost from the war. The ex-soldiers reestablished the \textit{Freikorps}, which became an essential part of German politics after the war. The post-World War I \textit{Freikorps} were right-wing paramilitary units that recruited "reliable" former Imperial Army officers and soldiers and younger men who coveted military experience.\textsuperscript{53} When the veterans returned after the Armistice, they saw unrest within Germany and at its border under the newly formed Weimar Republic and sought to stop the internal conflict. They created hundreds of

\textsuperscript{50} Pelz, \textit{A People's History of the German Revolution}, 83-84.
\textsuperscript{51} Pelz, \textit{A People's History of the German Revolution}, 85.
\textsuperscript{52} Large, \textit{Where the Ghosts Walked}, 116.
Freikorps units, each under the leadership of a commander. The Freikorps members were volunteers, primarily former servicemen and officers, unemployed and seeking adventure, and students who wanted to show their prowess. These men could no longer return to the routine of civilian life. With high unemployment in Germany, many professional service members and officers wanted to keep the prestige of being men in uniform. They could not face the shame of unemployment as civilians.

The government encouraged the Right paramilitary units. Social Democrat leaders even dispatched them to combat the revolutionary crowds. The New National Defense Minister Gustav Noske officially authorized the Freikorps on January 4, 1919. He made them the defenders of the newly formed Weimar Republic. The Freikorps units would help Noske stop radical socialism. Noske used the violence from "Ebert's Bloody Christmas" as an excuse to destroy the Revolution. On January 15, 1919, the Freikorps arrested and murdered prominent socialists Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, and Wilhelm Pieck in Berlin. The Social Democratic leaders were glad about the assassinations of Luxemburg and Liebknecht. Major Waldmer Pabst supervised the murders, and he reported directly to Ebert and Noske. In his memoirs, Pabst claimed that both SPD leaders congratulated him and were happy with the outcome. All those involved in the violence and the murders were encouraged to continue since the brutality went unpunished. The Freikorps killed many other socialists, including Eisner.

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55 Lepage, Hitler’s Stormtroopers, 62.
56 Liulevicius, War Land on the Eastern Front, 227.
58 Jones, The Birth of the Nazis, 74-78.
The paramilitary organizations used false claims to portray their victims as villains, and the press, big businesses, and government enabled their malicious behavior. The ordinary citizens followed the counter-revolutionary aggression. The suppression of the leftist Revolution heartened the Völkisch groups. They strove to manipulate the German people and veterans to join their cause by playing on the citizens' anger and frustration.

There was widespread "internal denial of peace" among the German citizens, which pushed parts of the population, including some veterans, towards right-leaning ideology. Many could not concede that Germany lost the war and could not accept the peace treaty's terms. Germans vehemently opposed the Treaty of Versailles. The citizens were angry about the central aspect, which placed all of the blame for the war on Germany. The treaty stated,

Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany and her allies causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the as imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies.

Though the German people were vocal about their resentment towards the treaty, the denial of peace went beyond its stipulations. According to the historian Richard Bessel, the most significant consequence of the war was that Germans were unwilling to confront structural issues left behind after the war. Bessel contends that rather than understanding that the war and its aftermath restricted their lives, "Germans retreated into an illusory world in which their problems were invariably the fault of others and, by extension, would be eliminated in only the external burdens, imposed by the world by the vengeful Allies, could be lifted."

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64 Bessel, *Germany After the First World War*, 282-283.
Feelings of defeat, humiliation, and guilt helped propagate the "stabbed-in-back" myth. The myth illustrated an image of heroes coming home from the trenches to their fellow Germans who were disrespectful, scornful, and did not appreciate what these men did for their country. "Stabbed-in-back" was a popular form of political vocabulary in the Weimar Republic, especially with the Right. The term fits in with the assertion that Germany was defeated. Soldiers and officers believed that while they served their country honorably, some Germans shamefully participated in unpatriotic movements and lacked dedication. Some veterans felt betrayed by the brewing revolution back home. One soldier explained that he was hopeful that a final offensive move by the Germans would win the war but lamented the January 1918 mass strike. He stated,

I think it will be quite a spectacle when it starts. This time Michel will make a good job of it and will smash everything that stands in the way. If only the idiots at home had not stabbed us in the back with the strike. Such a**holes!  

Though these soldiers felt they acted honorably and heroically, only to be betrayed by those at the Homefront, evidence throughout Germany proves the "stabbed-in-back" claims were utterly inaccurate. German citizens most likely felt a sense of patriotism and guilt when German veterans returned from the war because they exhibited public displays of gratitude throughout the country; however, many veterans did not show up for these displays. These men also held a distorted idea of employment for demobilized soldiers. There were images of veterans returning, usually disabled, who were forced to beg in the streets. In fact, jobs were reserved for World War I veterans, and they returned to a bountiful labor market in the early 1920s. Though most soldiers did not experience hostility from the civilian population, some

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65 Bessel, *Germany After the First World War*, 263.
67 Bessel, *Germany After the First World War*, 263.
officers did face unpleasant situations when they returned home. Unfortunately, these poor experiences framed how the First World War factored in the political framework of German society.  

The Völkisch groups also used food shortages to convince the German people to join their ideology. The Allies had a blockade in place, and they did not lift it until July 1919. Many felt that this measure was directed against ordinary German citizens. The Freikorps and the military manipulated the food supplies for whole towns, which garnered support from the populace and renewed the anger towards the Soldiers' and Workers' Councils, who the people blamed for the loss of lives during the first nine months after the war ended.

One form of manipulation was the myth of "comradeship," which began to take form among former soldiers and the German army officers. "Comradeship" was a propaganda tool to convince veterans the hyper-masculine, ultra-right, nationalist cause was for them. The concept claims that men who fought at the Front during the First World War had eternal bonds with one another. Most Germans agreed upon the core idea of "comradeship." It was revered "as the model of altruistic male solidarity, of quasi-sacred community, of humanity, of moral goodness." During a war, the men that "performed good comradeship" were "morally sacrosanct and granted the ultimate experience of communal security." The radical Right propagated that the benefits from good "comradeship" were reserved for those men who surrendered their identity, their desires, and agency to their collective of comrades. The myth forced German soldiers who conformed to the idea of "comradeship" to join or look the other way when their Army waged a

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68 Bessel, *Germany After the First World War*, 264-265.
criminal and genocidal war.\textsuperscript{72} Under the Nazi regime, teenagers and adults were forced into a training program, which taught the participants that "comradeship" was a core virtue. Sebastian Haffner recalled having to join in 1933. He stated that all members were forced to do everything together, with no time or space for themselves. Haffner mentioned that when someone acted against "comradeship," the perpetrator was sent to the barracks for nighttime court, where he was judged and condemned to corporal punishment. He observed that the ideal "actively decomposed individuality and civilization" when his comrades displayed contempt towards civilians and their morals and manners. The ideology "relieves men of responsibility for their actions, before themselves, before God, before their conscience. They do what all their comrades do. Their comrades are their conscience and give absolution for everything."\textsuperscript{73}

German soldiers had varying ideas regarding "comradeship." One veteran of the Second World War described what "comradeship" meant to him in a letter to German newspapers that came out in the spring and summer of 1995. He stated that it gave them "the emotional strength and the morals to fight their fight."\textsuperscript{74} It seems that World War II German veterans and their families believed "comradeship" meant that these men were selfless; they either gave or risked their lives to save their injured comrades. However, most had different ideas about what the term truly meant.\textsuperscript{75} Herbert Reinecker, a Waffen-SS officer and former war correspondent, who later published a memoir in which he apologized for his actions during the war, also commented on the concept. He stated in a letter, "Kameradschaft is a concept that only continues to exist as an empty notion, it is detached from its meanings, hovers somewhere in the air, available for

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{72} Kühne, \textit{The Rise and Fall of Comradeship}, 10.
\item \textsuperscript{73} Sebastian Haffner, \textit{Defying Hitler: A Memoir} (New York: Picador, 2002), 257-291.
\item \textsuperscript{74} "Letter from Hans Joachim Mischke to \textit{Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung}, April 29, 1995," quoted in Kühne, \textit{The Rise and Fall of Comradeship}, 3.
\item \textsuperscript{75} Kühne, \textit{The Rise and Fall of Comradeship}, 3.
\end{itemize}
dissection on a desk." He claimed that people from the postwar generations cannot understand
the meaning of the term. Even soldiers of the Second World War used the word "without
knowing that they devalue the term just by using it. You certainly wouldn't know either, unless
you had an idea of what it means, how you feel, if you are in a landscape of death together with
somebody else. . . this poor sod next to you."^{76} The right-wing paramilitary groups worked to
form a sense of commonality and shared values, and a sense of exclusivity. They used it to
convince the former soldiers and officers of World War I to join their cause.

The stories of veterans' experiences were used to manipulate the German people. Reports
from the Front were transformed into memories and public displays of remembrances to make
sense of the constant presence of death and destruction, which lingered and gave meaning to
those that died in the war. Through the media and public rituals, the *Kriegserlebnis*, combat
experiences of former soldiers at the Front, created the symbolic representation of the Front
generation. Unfortunately, soldiers and officers who survived the conflict falsified their accounts.

^{77} The extreme right groups used these accounts as manipulation tactics.

The term *Volksgemeinschaft* became vital to these ultra-right movements, especially in
the 1930s, for the Nazi utopian ideology for a united and racially "pure" Germany. However,
*Volksgemeinschaft* did not originate from the Nazis. It was developed before 1914 and became
popular during the war. *Volksgemeinschaft* fused with the concept of *Volk*, people, and
*Gemeinschaft*, community, which was an attempt to extend a sense of unity throughout
Germany. The idea helped various political groups work towards the common goal of
overcoming strife caused by political, ideological, and social oppositions. It worked to ease class
issues by using the welfare state. *Volksgemeinschaft* was also seen as a way to bring peace among

^{77} Ziemann, Introduction, *German Soldiers in the Great War*, 33
nations as well as Germany. The rightist movements, on the other hand, wanted the exact opposite of the term. They sought a dictatorship or monarchy, not a democracy, unity under the same ideology. Finally, rather than reconciling with the rest of the world, they wanted to start a war that would overturn the Versailles Treaty.  

Later, the Nazis sought "to strengthen the mythical unity of the nation by fashioning a true community of the people, a real Volksgemeinschaf." Hitler and his circle sought to resurrect the supposed cohesiveness of World War I and "comradeship" to create nationalist pride. The Volksgemeinschaf would transcend social division, eliminate class warfare, and unite under a common cause. For the nationalistic right movement, the community went beyond the past ideological and religious division that hindered unity. The idea convinced many Germans of a people's community.

Hyper nationalism was not a new occurrence in Germany; Pan-Germanism was popular for many years before the First World War. Munich, the birthplace of the Nazi Party, had one of the largest branches of the Pan-German League, which was established in the mid-1890s. In 1918, the Munich chapter sponsored rallies demanding unlimited use of submarines, airpower, and poison gas against the Allies, "total war." The city was becoming a bastion for the extreme Right. Significantly, the Thule Gesellschaft, Thule Society, was founded on August 17, 1918. It claimed to be a "study circle" that followed early Germanic history and culture. Thule was a semi-secretive sect that promoted German power overseas and racial purity at home. The name referred to an ancient land, Thule, where it was believed the original Nordics resided. It

78 Kühne, The Rise and Fall of Comradeship, 49-50.
80 Large, Where the Ghosts Walked, xxiv-xxv.
81 Large, Where the Ghosts Walked, 69.
supposedly vanished but could be recovered through magical rituals once Thule's secrets were revealed to present-day Nordics, enabling Germans to create a new master race. Prospective members were forced to prove that the last three generations of their ancestry were German, making membership small and "pure."^{82}

Anton Drexler, a mechanic for Munich's railway yards, was a "guest member" in the Thule Society. He became a prominent figure in the radical nationalist movement during the last year of the war.^{83} Along with Karl Harrer, a journalist who also belonged to the Thule Society, he formed the Workers' Political Society with a small group of men, mainly railway repair workers. In late 1918, Drexler decided to expand the group. He suggested making the group into a political party to present nationalist and antisemitic ideas to a larger audience. On January 5, 1919, Harrer and Drexler founded the German Workers' Party (DAP), which was later renamed National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP); Harrer was the National Party chairman and Drexler as chairman of the Munich branch.^{84}

In September 1919, Adolf Hitler, a soldier, was asked by the Army to report on the German Workers' Party; he attended one of the meetings. Hitler impressed Drexler with his public speaking skills, so he asked the soldier to join the DAP. Hitler was attracted to the party because it emphasized antisemitism and their pursuit to win over the masses. He quickly rose to become an executive member; by the end of 1919, he was propaganda chief.^{85} By mid-1921, Hitler established himself as a critical figure in the party with his ability to raise membership and

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^{82} Large, _Where the Ghosts Walked_, 70.
^{83} Large, _Where the Ghosts Walked_, 71.
his valuable connections with the Army through Captain Ernst Röhm, who was also a member of the DAP.86

In July 1921, Drexler and other NSDAP leaders favored merging the NSDAP with other National Socialist parties as a unified völkisch movement. However, Hitler regarded other racialist organizations as too bourgeois and too academic. He felt that a merge would dilute the party's energy and drive and threaten his high standing. In 1921, while Hitler was away in Berlin, Abendlandischer Bund, Western League, leader, Dr. Dickel, persuaded Drexler to merge the NSDAP with his group. Hitler returned, but he could not convince the committee to change their minds about the merger; therefore, he resigned and threatened to begin his own party. Instead, Hitler returned with a list of ultimatums for the party leaders.87 One of his demands was to be given the position of "the post chairman with dictatorial powers for the immediate establishment of an action committee which must ruthlessly purge the Party of foreign elements which have now penetrated it." Hitler also refused mergers with other organizations. He demanded that they join his party:

> All further attempts at such a fusion between the National Socialist German Workers' Party and the movement which unjustifiably calls itself the German National Socialist Party must in the future cease. The Party can never agree to a fusion with those who wish to make contact with us; they must join the Party. Reciprocal gestures on our part are out of the question. . . 88

During a meeting on July 29, 1921, Drexler attempted to stop Hitler from expelling some of his colleagues from the NSDAP; however, he swiftly changed his mind and backed Hitler. Drexler

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realized that Hitler's talent for public speaking and the need for aggressive mass propaganda were too valuable. The party elected Hitler as chairman of the NSDAP at this meeting.\textsuperscript{89}

On January 7, 1922, Hitler stipulated in a memorandum that the NSDAP was a new type of party, a movement for the people, and a party of action. He complained that "the racialist movement also, just like the bourgeois national parties, utterly failed in its main task of winning the broad masses for the national cause. Responsibility for the collapse lies with the bourgeoisie." Hitler stated that the German racialist movement leaders were honorable but "fantastically naïve men of learning, professors, district, councillors, schoolmasters and barristers—in short a bourgeois, idealistic and refined class." He lamented that "it lacked the warm breath of the nation's youthful vigour. The impetuous force of headstrong fire-eaters was rejected as demagogy." According to Hitler, the new movement under his leadership aimed to be "a racialist movement with a firm social base, a hold over the broad masses, welded together in an iron-hard organization, instilled with blind obedience and inspired by a brutal will, a party of struggle and action." He wanted the movement to "become great and important" and aimed to "be propagated with fanatical ardour."\textsuperscript{90}

On August 3, 1921, Hitler formed a special unit whose members emulated the youthful vigor and blind obedience he sought for his party. Hitler recruited men from the armed squads that protected the NSDAP meetings from opponents and formed a group under the cover name "Gymnastic and Sports Section." The unit was renamed\textit{Sturmabteilung} (SA) in October. The SA attracted many ex-soldiers and ex-\textit{Freikorps} men who were not interested in politics but were seeking violent action since the dissolution of the \textit{Freikorps}. Thus, the SA became the

paramilitary unit for the Nazi Party with military ranks, uniforms, and marching in formation. The unit's founding was announced in the Nazi newspaper, *Völkischer Beobachter*, which stated that the young members of the party can become a single-minded force of "strength at the disposal of the whole movement." The SA members were right-wing veterans who felt that women could not understand their war experiences; therefore, they were useless.

Men who joined paramilitary units were attempting to reestablish the "virtue" of masculinity. They were unable to fathom that traditional gender roles were no longer the norm in German society. When men came back from the Great War, they found that women were challenging traditional male roles. Germany was also experiencing a movement for birth control and sex education. In 1932, gynecologist Hans Lehfeldt wrote an article which spoke about the movement under the Weimar Republic. It was broad and diverse with 150,000 members. The movement was another form of liberation for German women. Hundreds of thousands of women independently managed their households. While the men who were fighting lost the war as well as their ideals of heroism. Therefore, at the end of the war, in both the public and government sectors, women were portrayed as easily seduced, pleasure-seeking, frivolous, and potential or actual sex workers. Many of these men felt the need to reassert their dominance and authority over those traditionally expected to be socially, economically, and sexually submissive. The right-wing organizations like the Nazi Party wanted to convince Germans that society should embrace hypermasculinity. As a result, they were able to popularize the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is a type of male identity, which allows men

93 Bessel, *Germany After the First World War*, 239.
95 Bessel, *Germany After the First World War*, 239.
who conform to traditionally masculine traits personal, political, and economic power and control over women, children, and nonconforming men.\textsuperscript{96} Hegemony can only work when the reigning power can persuade or manipulate the masses that a hierarchy of this nature is "normal," "ordinary," or "natural."\textsuperscript{97}

The SA attracted young nationalists who believed in an aggressive masculine paradigm. They felt the Weimar Republic was feminine and sought to redeem Germany's honor by upholding militarized masculine values and male bonding.\textsuperscript{98} Male bonding included homoeroticism, which was not a new phenomenon in Germany; instead, it was a part of the imperial military, schools, social relationships, and public service well before World War I.\textsuperscript{99} The SA members embraced the concept of a \textit{Männerbund} society, presented by a psychologist Hans Blüher in his book \textit{The Role of the Erotic in Male Society}. Blüher argued that same-sex affections between males provided superior social and political cohesion, more than that of a heterosexual family. He contends that a system that segregates male and female spaces would promote social, patriotic, political, and military advances.\textsuperscript{100} In his work, \textit{The Sexual History of the Great War}, Mangus Hirschfeld states that the German authorities promoted an abstinence campaign for soldiers and officers, believing that self-denial would "treasure up the best powers of the body" to fight in the war.\textsuperscript{101} However, the abstinence campaign was a failure since men in the trenches continued to have erotic dreams and fantasies, same-sex relationships, and

\textsuperscript{98} Wackerfuss, \textit{Stormtroopers Families}, 50.
\textsuperscript{99} Wackerfuss, \textit{Stormtroopers Families}, 49.
Hirschfeld noted that "it will not escape even the most superficial observation that in a war where tremendous masses of men were deprived of every contact with the other sex, homosexuality would be bound to play an important role." Hirschfeld's work contends that heterosexual men fighting at the Front indulged in homosexual acts, situational sexuality. The number of openly gay men who enlisted in the military increased as well. Hirschfeld claimed that fifty percent of homosexual scientists and staff that worked at the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee enlisted in the military when the war began.

Militant homosocial relationships between men were normalized in the 19th century. However, during this new era, the SA members faced the problem of being seen as a group of homosexuals. Under the Weimar Republic, gays and lesbians identified themselves, and German gay rights groups gained awareness. However, the German standard view of masculinity saw homosexual men as weak and effeminate, threatening the legitimacy of the SA. Gay rights activists like Hirschfeld made matters worse for the SA members by strongly supporting a feminized view of homosexuality. For the SA, homoeroticism and homosocial relations were not feminine; instead, they represented the height of masculinity.

Ernst Röhm, the SA leader, developed a political ideal based on hypermasculinity and masculinist homosexuality. He valued traditional values of masculinity, like honor, honesty, obedience, courage, and "comradeship." "Comradeship" and discipline were an integral part of Röhm's rhetoric. He felt that National Socialism was rooted in the "virtues" men developed from their traumatic experiences at the Front. Masculinity was also associated with discipline and femininity with a lack of discipline. Therefore, Röhm believed in a state where women have no

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102 Wackerfuss, *Stormtroopers Families*, 47.
say and should be kept silent. He felt feminine values had no place in the public or political sectors.

Typical of his generation, Röhm believed in the importance of the male social world. It is unclear if Röhm knew about German theorists like Blüher, but many of his ideas coincided with Blüher's concept of Männerbund societies. The ideal state was centered around this notion. He also believed that all organizations outside of the family sphere had male homoeroticism and that these types of feelings were transferred from leaders to followers.\textsuperscript{106} Röhm's writings do not explicitly refer to homosexuality. However, he does attack conventional morality. "This prudery certainly does not seem revolutionary to me, rather . . . reactionary." Röhm told his men to act as revolutionary fighters, not agents of moral campaigners, "bearers of repressed complexes."\textsuperscript{107} He spoke about young men driven to suicide because the state attempted to regulate sexual drives and interfered in citizens' private lives. According to Röhm,

"The struggle against pretense, deceit, hypocrisy and dissimulation of this society must take its starting point from that which is most basic in life, the sexual desires; only then can it be led generally with success in all human life. If the struggle in this area is successful, then the masks can be torn from the illusions in all areas of human social and legal order."\textsuperscript{108}

Röhm was a decorated war veteran and thought of himself as an eternal soldier; therefore, he became an asset to Hitler and the Nazi Party. When Hitler formed the SA, he realized that the SA could not be a credible force without help from the Reichswehr, the armed forces. Röhm was the Bavarian Reichswehr's chief liaison with the racialist community. He joined the DAP in 1919, and when the SA was created, Röhm took the paramilitary group under his wing by

\textsuperscript{106} Hancock, ""Only the Real, the True, the Masculineheld Its Value,"" 617-620.
\textsuperscript{107} Ernst Röhm, Die Geschichte eines Hochverächters, (Detmold: Eher, 1934), 236 quoted in Hancock, ""Only the Real, the True, the Masculineheld Its Value,"" 23.
\textsuperscript{108} Röhm, Die Geschichte eines Hochverächters, 237-238 quoted in Hancock, ""Only the Real, the True, the Masculineheld Its Value,"" 23.
providing regular subsidies to the SA. He became a close friend of Hitler. It is unknown if Hitler knew about his friend's sexuality, but if he did, it never impeded their relationship.\textsuperscript{109}

Eventually, Hitler and Röhm disagreed on the party's actions. From November 8 to November 9, 1923, Hitler and the Nazi Party executed the Beer Hall Putsch. The putsch was an attempted coup against the national government in Berlin, which failed and removed the extreme Right.\textsuperscript{110} Hitler and other leaders were arrested in Berlin, and the Nazi Party with its 55,000 members was banned.\textsuperscript{111} In 1925, Hitler returned to Munich and compelled Prime Minister Held to reinstate the Nazi Party. He apologized for the putsch and promised Held that his only target was Marxism, and he supported the government in expelling the "plague." The prime minister acquiesced, hoping that the Nazis could become an asset to the state if properly controlled. The NSDAP was reestablished on February 27, 1925.\textsuperscript{112} Hitler's decision angered many in the völkisch community. Many believed that Hitler had been corrupted and was catering to Held to bring back the party. Röhm also denounced his friend for abandoning a coup against the government to gain power. He established a new paramilitary unit, Frontbann, overseeing the SA and preparing them for another putsch attempt. However, in April 1925, Hitler gave Röhm the option to either accept the new policy or resign as ab SA leader. He chose the latter and went into semiretirement for four years.\textsuperscript{113}

In 1930, Hitler asked Röhm to return and appointed him the official leader of the SA.\textsuperscript{114} As a top official in the Nazi Party, Röhm was targeted by the Social Democrats. A Social Democratic paper, Münchener Post, began a campaign against Röhm, villainizing him for his

\textsuperscript{109} Large, Where the Ghosts Walked, 148-149.
\textsuperscript{110} Documents on Nazism, 1919-1945, ed. Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, 64.
\textsuperscript{111} Documents on Nazism, 1919-1945, ed. Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, 61.
\textsuperscript{112} Large, Where the Ghosts Walked, 202-203.
\textsuperscript{113} Large, Where the Ghosts Walked, 204.
\textsuperscript{114} Large, Where the Ghosts Walked, 224.
sexuality and stating that he was corrupting the youth.\textsuperscript{115} Social Democrat and former Nazi Dr. Helmut Klotz published letters between Röhm and a man named Karl-Günther Heimsoth, which spoke about homosexuality a few days before the presidential elections in 1932. Dr. Klotz expressed that Röhm did not possess "the moral qualities which are indispensable in a leader."\textsuperscript{116} Hitler was livid but decided not to reprimand his friend. Instead, he told Röhm to confine his sexual activities to only grown men.\textsuperscript{117}

The relationship between Hitler and the SA, especially Röhm, began to falter in 1933. The SA and SS used violence and intimidation to help Hitler become Chancellor in 1933 and consolidate power; however, Hitler knew that he could not succeed in expanding German territories without the traditional elites of the \textit{Reichswehr}. Initially, German conservatives supported the Nazi Party to reassert conservative and nationalist values. However, by the time they realized the Nazism was a totalitarian movement, not a conservative movement, Hitler was already in power. His followers in the SA and the party wanted to dispose of the traditional elites, abolish or take over their organizations, and introduce anti-big business policies. Instead, the Nazi take-over was more of a compromise between Nazi leadership and traditional elites who kept their positions for supporting the Nazi regime.\textsuperscript{118} Röhm expressed his disillusionment with the compromise and wanted to continue their revolution. He stated in a newspaper, "The SA and SS will not tolerate the German revolution going to sleep or being betrayed at the halfway stage by non-combatants." He implored that if the revolution was stopped "by reactionary opposition, incompetence, or indolence," Germany would fall into chaos. Röhm complained that "for this reason the fantasy in the minds of some 'coordinated' people and even some low-level dignitaries

\textsuperscript{115} Large, \textit{Where the Ghosts Walked}, 228.
\textsuperscript{116} Hancock, “‘Only the Real, the True, the Masculine Held Its Value,’” 629.
\textsuperscript{117} Large, \textit{Where the Ghosts Walked}, 228.
calling themselves National Socialists, that to keep calm is the first duty of a citizen, is a betrayal of the German Revolution." 

Hitler, on the other hand, was more concerned about the stability of the Nazi regime. On July 6, 1933, he gave a speech to the Reich Governors, formally ending the revolution. He stated, "Revolution is not a permanent state, it must not develop into a lasting state." Hitler went on to say that "the present state of affairs must be improved and the people embodying it must be educated in the National Socialist conception of the State." 

In the autumn and winter of 1933, when Röhm was appointed a Reich minister, the SA began exerting its own power, interfering with the various levels of government offices. They also intervened in the judicial process by forcing prosecutors to drop charges against SA members. In addition, the paramilitary unit established its own police force, the Feldjäger, which claimed jurisdiction over SA matters. The Gestapo reported that German citizens were dissatisfied with the undisciplined behavior of the SA members and with authorities for their inability to control these men. With his new title, Röhm also sought to elevate the status of the SA as the Reich's military force. He wanted to absorb the relatively smaller Reichswehr and its generals. By early 1934, the SA had more than three million members, while the Reichswehr only had 100,000 professional soldiers. During 1934, the SA and Reichswehr had an escalating rivalry for Hitler's favor. On February 28, 1934, in a keynote speech, the Führer rejected Röhm's goal to make the SA Nazi Germany's military force. He stated that Reichswehr would continue to be Germany's regular armed forces. 

In March 1934, the Minister of Defense of the Reichswehr, Werner Eduard Fritz von Blomberg, warned Hitler that the SA was intensifying

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military activities. He called attention to "the significance of the armed staff guards of the SA. According to an order of the Chief of Staff [of the SA] every Obergruppe and group is to set up its armed staff guards with a heavy machine gun company."\textsuperscript{123}

Despite Hitler's later allegations that the SA was planning a coup, there is evidence that Röhm was not preparing for another putsch. On the contrary, he announced in June 1934 that he was taking a leave of absence for his health. Röhm advised "all SA leaders to begin organizing leave already in June. Therefore, for a limited number of SA leaders and men, June, and for the majority of the SA, July will be a period of complete relaxation in which they can recover their strength." He wanted the men to return "completely rested and refreshed in order to serve in those honourable capacities which nation and fatherland expect of it."\textsuperscript{124}

Hitler decided take action against the SA organization. From June 28, 1934, to July 3, 1934, Hitler, the Army, the SS, and other Nazi leaders, Himmler, orchestrated the Night of the Long Knives bloodshed to wreck the SA and execute Ernst Röhm. On June 28, Hitler flew to Munich with other Nazi leaders and a small group of SS officers. He informed the Bavarian minister of interior to have the local SS armed and ready. Hitler and his men murdered several SA leaders, including Röhm. Some weeks before the Putsch, Hitler had picked Röhm's successor, an obedient Victor Lutze.\textsuperscript{125} On July 13, 1934, after Röhm was murdered, Hitler justified his actions with a fictitious plot that Röhm and the SA were planning a putsch and needed to be stopped. In his statement, Hitler explained,

Without once informing me and at a moment when I had no thought of any action, Chief of Staff Röhm entered into relations with General Schleicher through an utterly corrupt and

\textsuperscript{125} Plant, \textit{The Pink Triangle}, 53-54.
dishonest go-between, a certain Herr van A. It was General Schleicher who spelt out the secret aims of Chief of Staff Röhm.

He fabricated a plan, which included unifying the army and all national associations as a single group, making Röhm the Vice-Chancellor and making changes in the Cabinet of the Reich, and allowing Hitler to remain in power for the time being then oust him later.126

Once the SA had been neutralized, Hitler raised the status of the SS on July 20, 1934. He was repaying the SS and Himmler for their role in Night of Long Knives by separating the group from the SA and granting the SS the status of an independent unit. Under Himmler's leadership, the SS was far more coordinated, systematic, and sophisticated. While the SA fruitlessly attempted to take control of the State administration through SA delegates, the SS adopted a policy to infiltrate the bureaucracy and control segments of the government; they began with the political police.127 It was not long after the Putsch before Himmler used the threat of Röhm's homosexuality, which was a contentious matter for the Third Reich, to activate the persecution of German gay men. He played on the fear that homosexuals could dominate the regime and subvert Nazism with homosexual activities.128 The Nazi Party no longer permitted the traditional hegemonic masculine idea of *Männerbund* societies.

Many former soldiers and officers of World War I were traumatized when they returned from the Front but found solace in intense male relationships with each other. These men believed in the myth that they were the victims of sabotage by socialists and civilians back home. Hitler relied on the vigor and need for violent action to gain and consolidate power. It seems he and other early Nazis allowed the SA their homosexual relationships. Röhm was able to shift the

narrative of male homosexuality by distinguishing that militarized masculinity allowed men and boys to develop closer bonds, more profound than the bonds they had with women or others they deemed feminine. According to the idea of a Männerbund society, homoerotic relationships between masculine men or boys were healthy and normal. The existence of the SA did not necessarily destigmatize "feminine" gay men, but the government did not systematically persecute them. After the Röhm Putsch, Himmler made certain to relentlessly attack German homosexuals.
Chapter II:  
Into the Mind of Heinrich Himmler

The Night of the Long Knives was the defining event that became a catalyst for the persecution of homosexuals throughout Nazi Germany. Strict laws against homosexual acts between men were enacted precisely one year after the purge.¹²⁹ This chapter will explore the man who was the main perpetrator of the direct, as well as indirect attacks against homosexual men under the Third Reich, Heinrich Himmler. The Reichsführer of the Schutzstaffel (SS) was ruthlessly calculating and obsessively motivated by his extremist beliefs and overzealous need for power. We can trace the evolution of these personality traits back to Himmler’s childhood. His incredibly detailed diaries, which Himmler wrote throughout most of his life, allow deep insight into this sadistic Nazi official. These diaries are a vital source for scholars. The journal from his adolescence into his early twenties is particularly enlightening. It provides a glimpse into a time in his life that impacted who Himmler was to become. His life story demonstrates how this man developed such fanatical beliefs regarding race and sexuality. These beliefs influenced his decisions as a high-ranking Nazi official and caused the murder of millions of people, including hundreds of thousands of German homosexual men. He always exhibited the traits for which he is notoriously known as the Schutzstaffel-SS, but they became far more pronounced as he finally found his place in the völkisch movement. It is not surprising that he was so attracted to the German far-right movements as a young man and eventually became a bureaucratic mass murderer.

For such an infamously malicious man, Himmler had a surprisingly normal childhood with two loving parents. Heinrich Himmler grew up in a typical Bavarian bourgeois family. His

¹²⁹ Plant, The Pink Triangle, 69.
father, Gebhard Himmler Sr., was a schoolteacher, and his mother, Anna Himmler, was a housewife. While Gebhard Sr. and Anna were caring and attentive parents, they did adhere to a strictly ordered lifestyle. Gebhard Sr. was a very pedantic man not only with his work but also at home with his sons. He was obsessive about setting rules and that the children followed every directive, paying particular attention to their education. Anna Himmler paralleled his husband’s personality. She was an attentive housewife who was also fastidious regarding the children’s needs as well as providing them with proper manners and middle-class etiquette.\(^\text{130}\)

The Himmlers were a part of the Catholic conservative class; therefore, they certainly believed in traditional gender values and most likely opposed the emancipation of gay Germans. Before World War I, there was a debate between conservatives who believed Christian values should govern gender and sexuality and citizens who felt such laws should be secular and based on science and individual rights.\(^\text{131}\) By 1913, sex became a contentious issue for German politics.\(^\text{132}\) During the late imperial era, conservatives resisted reforming gender and sexuality. In 1914, they formed the *Sittlichkeitsbewegung* or “moral purity movement.” It had separate groups for men and women, and Protestants and Catholics, worked to eliminate female sex work, ban “filthy” and “trashy” media, suppress contraception and abortions, curtail extramarital affairs, and combat gender equality and homosexual liberation.\(^\text{133}\) Later in life, Heinrich despised Christianity; however, his ideas regarding gender and sexuality were informed by his upbringing in the conservative Christian community.

\(^{131}\) Laurie Marhoefer, *Sex and the Weimar Republic: German Homosexual Emancipation and the Rise of the Nazis* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 22.
\(^{133}\) Marhoefer, *Sex and the Weimar Republic*, 24.
Heinrich learned to be unusually meticulous from his parents. During one of the family’s many long summer holidays in 1910, Gebhard Sr. instructed young Heinrich to start writing in a diary. He entered the first entry to show his son precisely what he expected Heinrich to write. Gebhard Sr. went on to read and correct his entries for several years. Even after his father stopped enforcing the diary, Heinrich continued to write about his day-to-day events, monitoring himself. He continued logging every detail well into adulthood.

Though Heinrich attempts to portray his parents as decent people in his entries, Gebhard Sr. and Anna also had flaws that they passed onto their second son. Both his mother and father were highly ambitious. The intended to elevate the family’s standing in Bavarian society. In 1894, Gebhard Sr. gained a prestigious position as Prince Heinrich’s private tutor. Prince Heinrich was the son of Prince Arnulf of Wittelsbach, the later King Ludwig III of Bavaria’s brother. When young Heinrich Himmler was born in July 1898, sixteen-year-old Prince Heinrich accepted the role of his godfather. For Gebhard Sr. and Anna, this was a very strategic move. Through the new familial relationship with Prince Heinrich, the Himmlers received a close connection with the court and were able to strengthen their societal status. As seen throughout his life, Heinrich exhibited very similar qualities of excessive ambitiousness. His parent’s influence can be seen even at an early age. For instance, Heinrich was very conscientious about mentioning the title and status of whomever he introduced in his diary. While others may see Gebhard Sr. and Anna Himmler’s obsessive need for social climbing as a flaw, Heinrich was

proud of this trait in his parents. As a young boy, Heinrich was content in his comfortable status-driven middle-class lifestyle.

While much of Heinrich’s boyhood seemed idyllic, he suffered from a frail constitution. His ailments began at the age of two when the family moved to Passau. He became ill with an acute lung infection from which there was a serious possibility of contracting tuberculosis. Anna took Heinrich and his older brother, Gebhard Jr., to a village called Wolfegg in Allgäu for a cure. Though his health improved when they returned home, from then on, common childhood illnesses were an issue due to his weakened state. His parents became more attentive towards Heinrich. In 1904, the family moved to Munich. At this time, Gebhard Sr. and Anna were no longer as overprotective towards their second child. They were far more concerned with Gebhard Jr., who had fallen ill with several infections. During this period, Anna was also pregnant with Heinrich’s younger brother, Ernst, who was born in December 1905. His parent’s attention was now focused elsewhere. Heinrich’s illnesses were his time to reclaim Gebhard Sr. and Anna’s attention, which may be the cause of future psychosomatic ailments.\textsuperscript{138}

Despite exhibiting a sense of superiority due to Himmler’s supposed high standing in society, insecurities about his weak physique plagued him. George Hallgarten, a classmate at the Wilhelms Gymnasium, provided his recollections of young Heinrich. Hallgarten described him as of scarcely average size, but downright podgy, with an uncommonly milk-white complexion, fairly short hair, and already wearing gold-rimmed glasses on his rather sharp nose; not infrequently he showed a half-embarrassed, half sardonic smile either to excuse his short-sightedness or to stress a certain superiority.\textsuperscript{139}

At the Wilhelms Gymnasium, he did very well academically. He was considered a Star, which is a Bavarian term for a pupil who was highly regarded by his teachers but lacked manliness. While

\begin{itemize}
\item Longrich, Heinrich Himmler, 15-16; Padfield, Himmler, 21; Smith, Heinrich Himmler, 21-22.
\end{itemize}
he excelled in other courses, Himmler struggled in his gymnastics class. His instructor, Carl Haggenmuller, was extremely aggressive with Himmler. Hallgarten speaks of a particular instance that allows a glimpse into Himmler’s struggles with his physique. During an attempt to preform knee circles on a horizontal bar, which according to Hallgarten, Himmler could never achieve, he twisted forward and was hanging from the bar with one knee. The gym instructor swung Himmler’s other leg up and down until his face turned blue. When Haggenmuller finally helped the boy back up on the bar, Himmler “totally finished, looked down at the hooting class with a strange expression of mixed anger and disdain in his short-sighted eyes.”

In a society that was deeply rooted in aggressive masculinity, young Himmler had to endure several other similar instances. Frequently having to suffer through these types of situations, being coddled by his mother and nurse, and feeling academic pressure from a strict father must have severely affected Himmler’s mental state.

Scholars have attempted to analyze Himmler’s psychology as a child to determine how a seemingly normal young boy could transform into a calculating mass murderer. Historians were baffled by the inconsistencies between a young Heinrich Himmler who “was to all appearances a normal human being” and the adult who became such a sadistic and inhumane man. In “The Unsuccessful Adolescence of Heinrich Himmler,” Peter Loewenberg argues that through psychoanalysis of the details in Himmler’s diary from ages 14 to 24, we can “demonstrate an emotional coherence and internal consistency of personality between the adolescent and the adult Himmler.” Himmler presented as a normal child in a middle-class Bavarian society where discipline and self-control were deeply valued. Loewenberg states that in his writings, Himmler

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141 Padfield, Himmler, 24.
also had aspects of “reactive pity, conscientiousness, and precision that are prototypical of character ‘armor’ against underlying aggression.” It is clear from the diary that young Himmler did not exhibit typical emotional angst as is normal for the adolescence stage.\textsuperscript{143} Psychoanalyst Peter Blos states that the diary of an adolescent should have various dreams, events, and feelings that the child is unable to express with others. It is meant to be a relief. He contends,

“The diary . . . serves the . . . psychological purpose [of] . . . filling the emotional void felt when the novel instinctual drives of puberty can no longer be articulated on old objects and cannot yet be articulated on new objects, so that fantasy life assumes a most important and essential function.”\textsuperscript{144}

Himmler’s writings, on the other hand, were void of emotion. Rather than acting as an emotional release, his diary had a tranquilizing effect, which allowed Himmler to stay contacted to reality. He was obsessive about recording every aspect of his life. Himmler spoke of politics, sexuality, and religion; however, he does not indicate any personal feelings or ideas on these topics.\textsuperscript{145}

Historian, Peter Padfield contends that Himmler must have hated himself for his short-sightedness, podgy body, physical weakness, and lack of athletic prowess. He may have hated his father for not being a military officer. Himmler may have hated either both or one of his parents for passing on these perceived inferior qualities.\textsuperscript{146} Hallgarten recalls, “Haggenmuller, after putting Himmler through an overlong session of knee-bends, asked him what he wanted to be. Close to tears, Himmler got out, “naval officer.””\textsuperscript{147} The Navy was expanding and recruiting from non-nobles who belonged to the educated middle class; for those who would not be able to join the Army. Himmler’s poor eyesight alone made him ineligible for service.\textsuperscript{148}

\textsuperscript{143} Loewenberg, “The Unsuccessful Adolescence of Heinrich Himmler,” 613-614.
\textsuperscript{145} Loewenberg, “The Unsuccessful Adolescence of Heinrich Himmler,” 614.
\textsuperscript{146} Padfield, \textit{Himmler}, 25.
\textsuperscript{147} Hallgarten, “Mein Mitschüler Heinrich Himmler,” 6, quoted in Peter Padfield, \textit{Himmler}, 25.
\textsuperscript{148} Padfield, \textit{Himmler}, 25.
In 1914, Himmler became captivated by the armed forces when the First World War broke out. Like most other young Germans, he fantasized about becoming an officer in the Bavarian military. Himmler fervently wrote in his diary about what was occurring at the frontlines and about his patriotism. He and his friends played games that blended with the realities of the war. In an entry from August 26, 1914, he reported, “Played in the garden with Falk. 1000 Russians captured by our troops east of the Vistula. Austrians advance.”149 A few days later, he spoke of playing war: “Played at sword-fighting with Falk. This time with 40 army corps and Russia, France, and Belgium against Germany and Austria. The game is very interesting. Victory over the Russians in East Prussia (50,000 prisoners).”150 Young Himmler's voracious interest in the war started to diminish over time; however, he was still excited about military action. When his older brother turned seventeen the next year and joined the Landsturm, which was a branch in the Army’s reserve, Himmler expressed his enthusiasm to join as well: “Oh if I were only as old I would have been out there long ago.”151 In 1915, from spring to fall, he joined the Jugendwehr or Cadet Corps. The students were given basic military training in preparation for the Army. Himmler played with toy soldiers and had a routine of daily dumbbell exercises. Himmler showed a great deal of enthusiasm for the physical aspect of Jugendwehr, despite stomach aches, which he suffered throughout his life. Himmler sought to overcome his physical weakness and prove himself to be capable of military training through exercise.152

To his envy, Gebhard Jr.’s reserve group was called to join the armed forces. In May 1917, he joined the 16th Bavarian Infantry Regiment in Passau, where he did his first stage of training. Himmler’s best friend, Falk Zipperer, also began his officer candidate program with the

150 “Heinrich Himmler’s Diaries, 8.29.1914,” quoted in Longerich, Heinrich Himmler, 22.
151 “Heinrich Himmler’s Diaries, 7.29.1915,” quoted in Smith, Heinrich Himmler, 36.
152 Smith, Heinrich Himmler, 38; Longerich, Heinrich Himmler, 22.
2nd Bavarian Infantry Regiment in Oberpfalz after dropping out of Gymnasium, grammar school, in April 1917. Himmler wanted to take the same course; therefore, he implored his parents to allow him to drop out and join a training program as well. Though his father would rather Himmler completed Gymnasium, Gebhard Sr. eventually accepted his son’s request and began the application process for Himmler’s acceptance into an officer candidate program.¹⁵³ In 1916, Prince Heinrich was injured in action at Verdun and transferred to Romania. However, after a short stint in Romania where he proved to be a heroic officer, Prince Heinrich succumbed to his injuries and passed away. He died not long before Himmler became legally eligible to serve in the war.¹⁵⁴ Since Prince Heinrich died in action, Gebhard Sr. contacted Princess Arnulf, his mother, for assistance in Himmler’s preregistration into the 1st and 2nd Infantry Regiment. The princess acquiesced by having her chamberlain send a letter to the 1st Regiment’s commander, urging him at her behest to accept Himmler’s preregistration as an officer candidate. Acceptance into the 1st Regiment’s training program was a most sought-after position.¹⁵⁵ The princess’s chamberlain also gave young Himmler 1,000 marks in German war bonds for the admission fee as a gift from “his late godparent, his Royal Highness Prince Heinrich of Bavaria.”¹⁵⁶

Though Gebhard Sr. utilized every high-level relation at his disposal, including references from a minister of state, the chamberlain to Princess Arnulf, and Anna’s uncle, Generalarzt Patin, Himmler did not get accepted into the 1st Regiment.¹⁵⁷ Gebhard Sr. felt humiliated that his influential connections were not good enough for the 1st Regiment. He was also concerned because if Himmler did not begin an officer training program by his seventeenth

¹⁵³ Smith, Heinrich Himmler, 47; Longerich, Heinrich Himmler, 23.
¹⁵⁴ Smith, Heinrich Himmler, 45.
¹⁵⁵ Smith, Heinrich Himmler, 47-48.
¹⁵⁷ Smith, Heinrich Himmler, 48.
birthday, he would be up for conscription into the ranks. Therefore, Gebhard Sr. identified all Bavarian regiments within the town and all the influential person he knew, then applied to every single regiment. Himmler returned to the Gymnasium in September 1917. At this same time, rejections were coming in from many of the programs. He applied to do auxiliary work for fear of being conscripted. With his birthday approaching, Himmler went to work at the Kriegsfürsorgebüro, War Welfare Office, where they assisted widows, orphans, and the disabled. While he was working at the Kriegsfürsorgebüro, the government announced that Gymnasium students were ineligible for the draft. Himmler returned to school in time to complete the fall semester.\footnote{Padfield, Himmler, 29; Smith, Heinrich Himmler, 49.}

Finally, during Christmas, Himmler received his acceptance letter to the 11\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment. On January 1, 1918, he was to report at the Regensburg training camp as an officer trainee, Fahnenjunker; this was only possible through his father’s connections with the Bavarian court.\footnote{Padfield, Himmler, 23-24; Smith, Heinrich Himmler, 50.} During his training, Himmler continued to demand attention from his parents. Despite finally being granted admission into a regiment and making attempts at becoming more masculine and independent, he sent letters to his parents daily complaining about having a difficult time. If his parents did not regularly respond or fulfill Himmler’s requests, he would act hurt and belligerent. He was also able to return home on the weekends. When the training at Regensburg came to an end, Himmler hoped he would go to the front, just like his older brother. Unfortunately, he had to do more training at Freising, which was near his family home at the time in Landshut. Though in Freising, Himmler expressed in his letters that he was coping much
better with life in the military, he continued to show a desperate need for love and attention from his parents.  

In late August, as Himmler’s training in Freising was coming to an end, he became anxious about the future and whether he would finally be able to go to the West and fight in the war. However, his next assignment was a course in the usage of machine guns in Bamberg. It was becoming clear that things at the front were quite grim, and Himmler realized it might have been too late for him to join the fight. After the machine gun course ended in October, he went back to Regensburg. While awaiting his next assignment, he and a friend, Robert Kistler, were tasked with drilling recruits. Though he and Kistler were close friends, Himmler makes it clear that he was not above attempting to outmaneuver his friend for special attention from the officers to gain an assignment at the front.  

He met a Fähnrich and a lieutenant who offered a glimmer of hope in fighting at the Western Front via a transfer. They were creating a replacement unit and allowed Himmler to join. However, the Allies were gaining victory, which delayed departure to the West. Eventually, due to the armistice and revolution which removed Germany from the war, the unit was disbanded, and Himmler, along with the other officer candidates, were sent home. He returned to Regensburg on December 1, 1918. Himmler heard promising rumors that many of the officer candidates were going to a school in Munich that specialized in war. He was biding his time at Regensburg working for his cousin, Lieutenant Ludwig Zahler; however, as time went on, it became clear that there would be no special school. The officer candidates who were born after

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162 Letters from Heinrich Himmler to Gebhard Sr. and Anna Himmler, 10.16.1918, 10.17.1918 and 10.23.1918, quoted in Smith, *Heinrich Himmler*, 57.
1899 would not be completing their training. On December 17, to Himmler’s dismay, it was declared that all Fahnenjunker within his age group discharged from duty. Though he continued to pursue a career as an officer long after being discharged, it was becoming less and less probable that he would ever achieve his greatest goal in life. Regardless, Himmler continued to focus on achieving a military career, as well as prominence and status.

When Himmler returned home to Landshut, he was determined to complete high school. He had successfully finished seven years and was able to take special classes for students who had done service for the war. This honor also allowed Himmler to receive his certificate of completion without having to take the actual exam. Since a career in the German military was becoming less of a possibility, he decided to continue with his education. During the summer of 1919, Himmler went on to the Technical University in Munich, where he studied agriculture. Agriculture was a seemingly unusual choice for the status-driven Himmler. However, several disbanded officers went into this field of study. Himmler desired to be surrounded by those like him who were waiting until the outbreak of another war. As seen later in this chapter, he became deeply involved with reserve officers and paramilitary activities even before starting his program at the university. Himmler was required to complete a one to two-year practicum before beginning his coursework. His father wanted to help Himmler find a safe and respectable assignment. Gebhard Sr. obtained a teaching position in Ingolstadt, where he planned to move the family in the summer of 1919. Himmler was able to start his practicum was under an acquaintance, Ökonomierat Winter, who owned a farm in Oberhaunstadt, which was only three kilometers from Ingolstadt. Himmler was very enthusiastic about beginning the work. He sought

163 Smith, Heinrich Himmler, 58-59.
164 Smith, Heinrich Himmler, 60.
165 Longerich, Heinrich Himmler, 27.
166 Longerich, Heinrich Himmler, 28.
to overcome his weaknesses with the vigorous labor that he was required to do during the
practicum. Letters home say that the work was challenging, but he felt very proud of his
achievements. By the second weekend, Himmler was already starting to feel ill. In less than five
weeks, he became seriously ill, requiring hospitalization. In September, the family traveled to
Munich to have Himmler checked out by their family doctor, Dr. Quenstedt. The doctor’s
diagnosis was that Himmler had an enlarged heart, which was nothing too concerning. Quenstedt
told Himmler to take a break from work and study. Himmler convalesced until October 1919,
when he enrolled in university. He deferred the practicum for another year. While recuperating,
Himmler read with great voracity. Himmler found inspiration through books that espoused
morality and patriotism.\footnote{Longerich, \textit{Heinrich Himmler}, 29.}

He began the next practicum in August 1920 on a farm in Fridolfing that belonged to a
couple called the Rehrls\footnote{Smith, \textit{Heinrich Himmler}, 95.}. He was very excited to start his work on the farm. In a letter to his
parents, he wrote,

\begin{quote}
Realize, that it is a year in which nerves and soul can be rested in nature and in the
seriousness and joy of agricultural life. Where the body will be strengthened by the
precious peace and made tougher through hard work.\footnote{A Letter from Heinrich Himmler to his Parents, 9.15.1920, quoted in Smith, \textit{Heinrich Himmler}, 95.}
\end{quote}

He developed a close relationship with the husband and wife. Though he was required to perform
some hard labor, the Rehrls created a comfortable situation for Himmler. He did not have to
complete unpleasant tasks such as cleaning stables, or housekeeping because his parents hired a
maid to clean his room. In the field, Mr. Rehrls avoided giving Himmler strenuous tasks. He was
kept busy; however, he was not overworked or forced to become bored by staying at a single job
for too long. He found this time to be quite enjoyable. Himmler’s experiences there were
reminiscent of his vacations as a young boy, and he relished the pure traditionalism to which he could escape. Himmler carried these ideals with him throughout the rest of his life. He became immersed in the peasantry traditions, which strengthened his belief in the “correct” way to live.\textsuperscript{170}

This belief that one must live as a traditionalist greatly influenced his relationships with women, in particular in terms of how a “good” German woman and a “good” German man must behave. From his diary entries, it is clear that he was very judgmental towards his friends in this regard. He was a prudish man who only wanted platonic and friendly relationships with women, which were predominately, just polite interactions. Himmler mentioned, on numerous occasions, that he was seeking “the one” and he did not want to commit to a woman unless she proved to be his ideal woman. He praised women he felt were good and decent. When Himmler began his coursework in Munich, he took his meals with a widow, Frau Loritz, and her two daughters, Käthe and Maja, at their residence. Himmler notes in his diary that as a woman, Frau Loritz was the epitome of traditional decency. Years later, Himmler writes that in Käthe, he had found his ideal woman. Unfortunately, she was engaged to Himmler’s friend Ludwig.\textsuperscript{171} In his diary, Himmler wrote about an evening with Käthe:

\begin{quote}
We got on really well. . . we talked about a lot of things, a lot of intimate things as one does between friends. Little Käthe was very sweet. In this way I was able to tell her a lot and this time we definitely got close. Naturally, whether it remains to be seen. But we have formed an intimate bond.\textsuperscript{172}
\end{quote}

Himmler was also obsessed with seeking out representations of this ideal woman through his reading. In books such as Enrica von Handel-Mazzetti’s \textit{Poor Margarethe} and \textit{The Saint and the

\textsuperscript{170} Smith, \textit{Heinrich Himmler}, 96-97.
\textsuperscript{171} Longerich, \textit{Heinrich Himmler}, 50.
\textsuperscript{172} “Heinrich Himmler Diaries, 1.22.1922,” quoted in Longerich, \textit{Heinrich Himmler}, 50.
Fool by Agnes Günther, he was able to validate his need for the perfect woman.\textsuperscript{173} Though Himmler found some women appealing, he felt he could not become involved as any more than friends.\textsuperscript{174} As a way to suppress the topic of sexuality and women, Himmler focused on his career aspirations. His main fear was a long courtship, which would inevitably end in marriage before he could pursue and train for his desired military career.\textsuperscript{175} He felt strongly about being conscious of sexual attractions and their consequences. Himmler believed it was his duty to be responsible and have self-control when dealing with women.\textsuperscript{176} His thoughts on sexual intercourse before marriage were also quite chaste. While exploring the topic of sexuality, Himmler read books about sex. One book by Hans Wegener called \textit{Wir jungen Männer, das Sexuelle Problem des gebildeten jungen Mannes vor der Ehe} or “We Young Men: the Sexual Problem of the Educated Young Man Prior to Marriage” resonated with Himmler because it talked about the dangers associated with young men having sex before marriage. He commented that it was “A book of the highest ideals. Elevated but rich and surely right. Certainly the most beautiful book that I have read on the question.”\textsuperscript{177} Himmler’s friends raised questions regarding his behavior towards women and sex. A friend accused him of disliking women, and he responded that this was true. However, he felt there were ways in which a “true” man loved a woman, and he did not want to explore this until he was married. He told his friend that a man should love a woman by first treating her as a child, showing her the correct manner in which to live and discipline her when needed. He must protect her as a child because Himmler felt women were weak. Then, he said, a man should love a woman as a wife who helps him with his

\textsuperscript{173} Longerich, \textit{Heinrich Himmler}, 44.
\textsuperscript{174} Longerich, \textit{Heinrich Himmler}, 51.
\textsuperscript{176} Manvell and Fraenkel, \textit{Himmler}, 9.
\textsuperscript{177} Heinrich Himmler’s Book List, Item 50, quoted in Smith, \textit{Heinrich Himmler}, 86.
struggles. Finally, he should worship her as a wife, who gives him strength. Himmler seemed to envision, creating the perfect mate from a child-like person.178

Along with his thoughts on women, Himmler was also cultivating his beliefs regarding homosexuality. While in Munich in 1920, he read a book, which spoke about a priest having an affair with a boy. The book and the description of homosexuality horrified Himmler. He felt it glorified the act. He wrote, “An idealization of homosexual men. Awful pictures.”179 Another encounter with homosexuality was through Hans Blüher’s called *The Role of Eroticism in Masculine Society* that he received from a friend. It theorized that intense homoerotism was the unifying factor within masculine organizations such as youth movements and the military. In the book, Blüher says these attachments were conducive to the prosperity of these institutions. Though the book bothered Himmler, he admired the author’s deep understanding of human eroticism. He also believed, “That there has to be masculine society is clear. But I’m doubtful whether that can be labelled as an expression of the erotic.”180 As shown in Chapter I, Blüher’s ideas regarding an all-male society and homoeroticism were common among the hypermasculine SA.

Himmler must have been aware of the struggle for homosexual emancipation in the Weimar Republic. He would have known that homosocial bonds and male eroticism were common for right-wing military institutions. Material about sexuality would have been readily available to Himmler. When he was a young man, censorship was relatively lax. Germans were able to discuss topics like sexuality in print openly. Even Imperial Germany produced several scientific, literary, and popular works on sexual minorities. The Weimar Republic eliminated

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censorship, which allowed authors, activists, and publishers to work more freely. Based on his reaction to the book about the priest and his analysis of Blüher’s book, it seems Himmler did not condone homosexual acts between men but praised male-only communities. At this time, he rarely spoke of homosexuality in his diaries. Himmler was far more vocal about his anti-gay views when he became Reichsführer.

It was also during his time at university when Himmler formed his racial theory, which played a significant role in how he conducted himself as a high-ranking Nazi officer. Though he was not necessarily raised to be such a fervent anti-Semite, as many other Germans in 1919, Himmler was intrigued by the “Jewish problem.” He believed the primary issue with the “Jewish question” was the presumed role the Jewish community had with all contemporary problems in Germany. According to his diary entries, it seems there were several conversations with friends and family, which always included the Jews. Heinrich was becoming a bit obsessive, so much so that he was starting to develop an eye for determining who was Jewish among those he met. Himmler commented on an interaction with a lawyer in January 1922, “he cannot deny his Jewishness. . . this thing lies in the blood of these people.” Himmler confirmed his views on the Jewish community through several books; however, two anti-Semitic works were particularly impactful. He read Judas Schuldbuch, Book of Jewish Guilt, by Wilhelm Meister, which was a collection of alleged Jewish racial traits and offenses. Himmler stated, “What one suspects but continually forgets. A splendid collection of sources.” On Race and Nation by Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Himmler commented that “It is true and one has the impression that it is objective, not just hate-filled anti-Semitism. Because of this it has more effect. These terrible

181 Beachy, Gay Berlin, 164.  
182 Heinrich Himmler’s Diaries, 1.12.1922, 2.4.1922, and 6.15.1922, quoted in Smith, Heinrich Himmler, 122.  
183 Smith, Heinrich Himmler, 91.  
184 Heinrich Himmler’s Book List, Item 106, quoted in Smith, Heinrich Himmler, 122.
Himmler felt that he should be more impartial about his views. He was concerned that the rude insults and random acts of violence were too “vulgar.” As was a significant part of his personality, Himmler sought to be coldly logical about his views and his actions. These racially charged sentiments were becoming more and more frequent in his diaries.\(^\text{186}\)

Himmler was also starting to make references to the importance of race and blood in his journals. He was reading numerous racist writings, including propaganda of the time. In one comment, he praised an author named Hermann Brute for being a “racial German.” Brute wrote a book called *Wiltfeber, der ewige Deutsche, Wiltfeber*, the eternal German.\(^\text{187}\) He was also finding inspiration for these beliefs in books about Nordic-Germanic heroes. A novel by author Verner von Heidenstam, which is about the Swedish king Charles XII was particularly inspirational for Himmler because it is a “story of an iron man, who with his mind and will inspired a people up to the last day of his life and led each of these brave men on to be heroes—A man sorely needed in our time.”\(^\text{188}\) He also noted another book about the Goths called *A Battle for Rome* by Felix Dahm, stating that it was a “gripping and vividly written story of a splendid, fine and truly Germanic people.”\(^\text{189}\) He felt inspired by stories that detail the importance of blood. Himmler enjoyed *Women of Tannö* by Ernst Zahn’s, which is a story about an entire village whose residents suffered from hemophilia, making the decision not to have children to avoid passing it on to the next generation. He stated, “The fight against the power of the blood. How this battle if fought. From the most noble silence to the point of succumbing. An excellent novel.”\(^\text{190}\)

\(^{185}\) Heinrich Himmler’s Book List, Item 107, quoted in Smith, *Heinrich Himmler*, 122. 
\(^{186}\) Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler*, 59. 
\(^{187}\) Heinrich Himmler’s Book List, Item 110, in Smith, *Heinrich Himmler*, 123. 
\(^{188}\) Heinrich Himmler’s Book List, Item 53, quoted in Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler*, 44. 
\(^{189}\) Heinrich Himmler’s Book List, Item 90, quoted in Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler*, 44. 
\(^{190}\) Heinrich Himmler’s Book List, Item 92, quoted in Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler*, 45.
An emergence of nationalistic ideals and radical political ideals were coinciding with Himmler’s increasing racist beliefs. When he started university in Munich, Himmler participated in various paramilitary and political organizations continuing to aspire to become an officer.\textsuperscript{191} Like many other Germans, Himmler was shocked by the results of World War I in 1918, the Germany Imperial Army’s surrender to the Allies, as well as Kaiser Wilhelm’s abdication. As mentioned in Chapter I, Germany was further rocked and angered by the Treaty of Versailles in June 1919. The treaty forced the Germans to relinquish all colonies and a part of the homeland. It also made German commanders cut down the army, leaving only one hundred thousand volunteers. Himmler was affected by these events on a personal level because it further dashed his dream of having a military career.\textsuperscript{192}

Himmler first became involved in the radical right after the turmoil caused by World War I and the Treaty of Versailles. He saw the state of anarchy in Bavaria, and the extreme right paramilitary groups and \textit{Freikops} form after the war. Himmler wholeheartedly supported these groups and sought to join \textit{Freikops}. He was already involved in conservative politics since before this conflict began. While at Regensburg, Himmler became a staunch supporter of the conservative party, \textit{Bayerische Volksparei (BVP)}.\textsuperscript{193} When he returned home, he began working hard to gather support and new members for the Party. Himmler was becoming enthralled in the excitement.

Gebhard Sr. was able to deter his son from actively participating with these extreme-right organizations. Though he sympathized with overthrowing the communist regime in Bavaria, Gebhard Sr. did not want Himmler to be distracted from his education. However, when these

\textsuperscript{191} Smith, \textit{Henrich Himmler}, 123-125.
\textsuperscript{192} Longerich, \textit{Heinrich Himmler}, 27; Padfield, \textit{Himmler}, 30.
\textsuperscript{193} Longerich, \textit{Heinrich Himmler}, 26.
groups began preparations for the attack on the left in Munich, and it emerged that paramilitary units may be able to join the official armed forces or Reichswehr, Himmler’s father could no longer stop his son. Himmler saw a chance for his greatest dream coming to fruition.¹⁹⁴ Not long before he began his studies at the Technical University in the summer of 1919, Himmler joined the Freikorps Landshut and the Oberland reserve company. Though he was not involved in the violent attack against the communists, Himmler stayed with Freikorps Oberland for two more months hoping to still have a career as an officer. Reichswehr allowed members of Freikorps to join; however, Oberland did not get adopted by the German armed forces.¹⁹⁵

Like several other Technical University students, Himmler became a member of the League of War Veterans. He also joined a Reichswehr reserve unit, the 14th Alarm Company of the 21st Rifle Brigade. Himmler was able to practice alerts and shooting exercises.¹⁹⁶ He stayed optimistic about being called into action. In December 1919, there seemed to be the possibility of a putsch, and his unit was on standby. Though Himmler eagerly waited for something to occur, the putsch did not happen. He stated in a diary entry, “Went at half past 3 with Lu to the alarm call. Out to the Pioneers’ barracks. Guns delivered but nothing more was done. Perhaps something more will happen this year.” Himmler did not feel deterred; he was determined to be a soldier: “Lectures till 10, then put on the king’s coat again. I am after all a soldier and will remain so.”¹⁹⁷ He was becoming more and more involved in the growing influence of the paramilitary groups.

On January 16, 1920, Count Arco was sentenced to death for the murder of Bavarian Prime Minister Kurt Eisner in February 1919. The extreme Right became outraged at the

¹⁹⁴ Smith, Heinrich Himmler, 65.
¹⁹⁵ Longerich, Heinrich Himmler, 28.
¹⁹⁶ Longerich, Heinrich Himmler, 31.
¹⁹⁷ “Heinrich Himmler’s Diaries, 11.4.1919,” quoted in Longerich, Heinrich Himmler, 32.
announcement. Technical University students started protesting in the streets. With support from the military, they formed a plan to release Count Arco from prison and possibly begin a putsch.\textsuperscript{198} Himmler took part in the commotion. He wrote in his diary, “Put on my uniform. At 8 there was a big meeting of all the students in the university’s main lecture hall to bring about a pardon for Arco. It was a brilliant patriotic meeting.” Though officers deputized the student at this meeting, and they were excited to take action, the court commuted Count Arco’s sentence to imprisonment on the same day. Himmler stated, “However pleased we were, we were equally sorry that the business passed off so uneventfully. Oh well, there will be another time. But people have seen how tremendous Germany’s universities are.”\textsuperscript{199} During the spring of 1920, the Allies forced all reserve units within the Reichswehr to disband. Himmler transferred to Einwohnerwehr, Residents’ Reverse, which was created by the Bavarian government to circumvent the ban. He also joined another paramilitary organization, the Freiweg Rifle Club.\textsuperscript{200}

Though Himmler had leanings towards nationalism throughout his time at university, it was in the summer of 1922 when he became active within the völkisch movement.\textsuperscript{201} Himmler was far more confident with his role in the community through the Freiweg Rifle Club. He was also becoming acquainted with Ernst Röhm, who, as seen in Chapter I, was a highly influential figure in the nationalist circles.\textsuperscript{202} While Himmler was finding his standing in politics, he was struggling to find work after graduating on August 1. His increased involvement with rightist groups did not provide sufficient employment. On August 16, Himmler received a letter from a former Gymnasium teacher, Professor Huolezech, regarding an opportunity to work with a

\textsuperscript{198} Longerich, Heinrich Himmler, 32.
\textsuperscript{199} Heinrich Himmler’s Diaries, 10.17.1920, quoted in Longerich, Heinrich Himmler, 32.
\textsuperscript{200} Longerich, Heinrich Himmler, 33.
\textsuperscript{201} Longerich, Heinrich Himmler, 60.
\textsuperscript{202} Smith, Heinrich Himmler, 126.
fertilizer company in Schleissheim. It was this move to Schleissheim that would create a path towards Himmler’s career in the Nazi Party.²⁰³ Schleissheim was the center of all right-wing activities, and Himmler became affiliated with several organizations. There was a great deal of infighting among these groups. Himmler felt conflicted and could not decide which political path he should pursue. Eventually, he found solace in following Röhm, and by the summer of 1923, Röhm was leaning towards the NSDAP. The Nazi Party was steadily growing in numbers but remained one of several radical organizations. Going along with his mentor, in August 1923, Himmler joined the NSDAP as member number 42404.²⁰⁴

Himmler’s evolving interest in völkisch ideology enhanced the most detestable aspects of his personality. He felt that he was a warrior for the Germanic cause, an all-knowing figure that could dominate over others. As a student, Himmler was eager to classify others based on his perception of their moral failings. When he became enamored with the idea of völkisch and the radical Right during 1923-1924, Himmler became more ruthless. At this point, he was attempting to compel people to bend to his way of thinking aggressively.²⁰⁵

He exhibited this behavior in one memorable instance involving Himmler’s older brother and his brother’s fiancé at the time, Paula Stölzle. Gehbhard, Jr., suspected Paula of having an affair with a teacher, Reiger. He asked Himmler to see her and fix the issue. Himmler relished taking control of the engagement. He sent Paula a letter, which was rude and pessimistic about the future of Paula and Gebhard, Jr.,’s future. With pomposity, he told her,

> If your union is to be a fortunate one for you both and the health of das Volk, which must be built on healthy, moral families, you must curb yourself with barbaric severity. Because you are not strict and hard enough with yourself and only control yourself to a small degree, and your future husband, as I have already said, is too good for you and

²⁰⁴ Smith, *Heinrich Himmler*, 133-134.
possesses too little knowledge of people and will not learn it because it cannot be learned in this age, someone else has to do it. Because you both turned to me and drew me in to this affair, I feel bound to do it myself.\footnote{\textit{Unfinished Draft, Schleissheim, 4.18.1923},” quoted in Padfield, \textit{Himmler}, 60.}

Surprisingly, Paula responded with a letter telling Himmler that she was grateful to him for helping reconcile her relationship with Gebhard, Jr.

The issue continued in early 1924 when Himmler perceived that Paula had broken her promise while in Munich. He convinced his parents to end the engagement, then went to his brother, Gebhard, Jr., allowed his younger brother to influence his decision. While the two were discussing the issue, Paula was in the next room and must have heard the conversation.\footnote{Padfield, \textit{Himmler}, 61.} She sent Gebhard, Jr., a letter ending the engagement. Paula told him that due to his behavior with Himmler, she had lost all respect for Gebhard, Jr. She stated that she would never have esteem for him again: “By your helpless attitude to me more than once and the way you put up with Heinrich’s tutelage and suffered him to come between us.” Paula complained to Gebhard, Jr., that “your two-year-younger brother imagined he had to educate me on your behalf according to his experience of life and his best methods.”\footnote{“Letter from Paula Stölzle to Gebhard Himmler Jr., 3.4.1924,” quoted in Padfield, \textit{Himmler}, 61.} Though the engagement was over, the whole affair was still very much alive for Himmler. He was paranoid that Paula and her father were spreading terrible rumors about the Himmler family. Himmler went as far as hiring a private detective to keep tabs on the Stölzle family so that he may have ammunition against them. He was obsessed with making sure that nothing besmirched his family’s name.\footnote{Padfield, \textit{Himmler}, 61.}

Himmler’s sense of superiority was not limited to his ideologies; he also had the unlikely goal of gaining a prestigious position in the field of agriculture. He felt insecure regarding his employment prospects. In June 1924, Himmler was finally able to combine his political and
employment aspirations. The leader of the Nationalsozialistische Freiheitsbewegung (NSFB) and the Gauleiter of Lower Bavaria, Gregor Strasser, was seeking an assistant. Himmler got the position and moved to Landshut, where Strasser had his main office.  

The new job was the beginning of his infamous career with the Nazi Party. When Himmler assumed the role of secretary to Strasser, he worked to make sure the office ran efficiently. He was also able to take part in other NSFB activities. In October 1924, after the Reichstag dissolved, Himmler started to help with the campaigning for the election. He took on this role with a sense of zeal. He tried to be directly involved with the campaign, even going on speaking tours to rural villages and towns. There was such dedication to the cause that when Röhm left the movement and ended his connection with Hitler, Himmler switched his fidelity. He was not disturbed by Röhm’s departure from Germany. Since his mentor left the cause, he no longer deserved Himmler’s loyalty. He was more inclined to rise in the ranks. In 1926, Himmler got a promotion to Deputy Gauleiter of Lower Bavaria. Though at this time, he was considered to be a simple low-level official, Himmler was gaining a considerable amount of respect from Strasser, as well as others who would become significant figures in the party. Himmler was near Munich, the Nazi Party’s headquarters. He had access to every major official in the party and all of the action, satisfying his compulsion to be meddlesome. Himmler’s relationship with Strasser continued to enhance his standing within the Party. In March 1927, Himmler was named deputy to the Reichsführer-SS, Erhard Heiden. Scholars know little about Himmler’s actions as deputy; however, there is evidence that shows he focused on restricting the

210 Smith, Heinrich Himmler, 152.
211 Padfield, Himmler, 80; Smith, Heinrich Himmler, 155.
212 Smith, Heinrich Himmler, 157.
213 Padfield, Himmler, 82.
entire organization. In January 1929, Heiden was relieved of his position, and Himmler became the leader of the SS.\textsuperscript{214}

Once he was Reichsführer-SS, Himmler had no qualms about instructing the torture and killing of his victims. Chapter III will demonstrate how he systematically oppressed homosexual men in the Third Reich. Himmler felt justification for his heinous acts, believing that it was for the good of the völkisch. He was unlike most of the other Nazi officials, who, at times, based their decisions on emotional responses. According to Carl J. Burckhardt, a Swiss diplomat, and historian,

\begin{quote}

    Nevertheless, he radiated something much more insidious than did ‘his Führer.’ Whenever I met Hitler, I always had the feeling of a certain weakness, and of being with an obsessed man. . . . Himmler didn’t seem obsessed. He was sinister through the degree of concentrated subservience, through a certain narrow-minded conscientiousness, an inhuman punctiliousness about which there was something of an automation.\textsuperscript{215}
\end{quote}

Though Himmler’s drive in life was power and his sense of morality, he never allowed emotion to weigh on his decisions. His pedantic nature, a single-minded sense of purpose, unyielding ruthlessness created opportunities to gain the power he so desired. Himmler cultivated these character traits throughout his life. In the 1930s, Himmler was no more radical or fanatical than he was before he joined the Party. I contend that as a pragmatic man, Himmler simply knew to shift his moral standings to fit in with the Nazi agenda. To help determine why hundreds of thousands of homosexuals died under the Nazi regime, we must seek to understand the mind of Reichsführer-SS Himmler.

\textsuperscript{214} Longerich, Heinrich Himmler, 113

Chapter III:
The Nazi Assault on Homosexual Men

Shortly after the strategic murder of all high-ranking *Sturmabteilung* (SA) leaders during the Night of the Long Knives on June 20, 1934, the crusade against gay men began in earnest under the Third Reich. Within a few months of the assassinations, when Heinrich Himmler established the *Schutzstaffel* (SS) as an independent organization under his directive, he made the complete elimination of male homosexuality from the Germanic people a crucial mission for the Nazi Party. Himmler believed that homosexuality was a hindrance to the progression of the Aryan race, and eradication was imperative for the racial purity of the Germanic people to truly flourish. Therefore, as Himmler’s scope of power steadily expanded, so did the persecution of German homosexuals.\(^{216}\) In this chapter, I argue that Nazism became progressively more antagonistic and violent against homosexuality because of Himmler’s intense obsession to regulate sexuality for the advancement of racial purity.

While combating homosexuality did not become a primary objective for the Nazi Party until after the Night of the Long Knives, and Himmler’s consolidation of power which allowed his ascent to elite status as a Nazi officer, there were assaults against sexual minorities that occurred not long after Hitler became chancellor of Germany in 1933. Initially, some German homosexuals did not feel threatened when Hitler become chancellor. Homosexuality was still illegal; however, the fact that Ernst Röhm was openly gay caused these particular gay men to feel a sense of security. Many interpreted the initial attacks on sexual minorities as only provoked by anti-Semitism, not anti-homosexual sentiments.\(^{217}\) The others realized the implications of the Nazi control of the Reich. In 1933, when the Nazis gained power and violent

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\(^{216}\) Pretzel, “Persecution of Homosexuals in Berlin, 223.

\(^{217}\) Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 52.
assaults against sexual minorities had begun, there were those within the community who
realized that they were in danger. One German homosexual man recalled:

1933 was the starting point for the persecution of homosexuals. Already in this year
we heard raids on homosexual pubs and meeting places. Maybe individual, politically
uneducated homosexuals who were only interested in immediate gratification did not
recognize the significance of the year 1933, but for us homosexuals who were also
politically active, who had defended the Weimar Republic, and who had tried to forestall
the Nazi threat, 1933 initially signified a reinforcing of resistance.²¹⁸

The first act against sexual minorities after Hitler’s ascension was the banning of all
homosexual rights institutions, including all activities by the League of Human Rights. This
organization established itself as one of the greatest allies for sexual minorities, even publicly
advocating for the repeal of Paragraph 175.²¹⁹ Party members then began raids on gay, lesbian,
and transgender establishments. Ironically, the same branch of the Nazi Party where some
members participated in homosexual relationships, the SA, were the assailants who perpetrated
these raids throughout Germany.²²⁰ One particular assault was most devastating for the gay,
lesbian, and transgender community in Berlin. In May 1933, the Nazi fanatics unleashed a
frenzied attack on Magnus Hirschfield’s famous Institute for Sexual Science. An eyewitness
account stated, “On 6 May at 9:30 a.m. several vans with roughly a hundred students and a brass
band appeared before the institute. They took up a military-style position in front of the house
and then forced their way into it to musical accompaniment.” The witness went on to explain that
the students destroyed the entire Institute. They split ink on papers and the carpet. Then, these
students pulled books they found offensive from the bookcases and stole the others. They also

²²⁰ Plant, Pink Triangle, 52.
threw a large number of boards with pictures of intersexual images and a life-sized model of human internal organs out the windows, as well as tore down photographs and pictures from the walls. Along with the rest of the stolen property, they took a bust of Hirschfield’s head and other artworks. Later in the day, SA men arrived to further ransack the Institute and help move the stolen contents into trucks. Then, three days later, they burned writings and pictures from the Institute on the Opernplatz. Fortunately, Hirschfield was out of Germany at the time of the rampage. When told he was overseas due to a bout of malaria, the SA men responded with, “Well, then hopefully he’ll snuff it without our doing anything; we won’t even need to string him up or beat his brains out.”221 They intended to symbolically as well as destroy his life.

Hirschfield represented two forms of enemies for the Nazis, as a Jewish man and as a prominent figure in the movement for sexual enlightenment and an advocate for sexual minorities.222

There were also bans on displaying newspapers, magazines, and books deemed as “indecent publications” at kiosks, libraries, bookstores, and magazine stands. The government decreed, “The display of such publications and pictures involves a not an insignificant threat to public order. . . . In the interests of the moral renewal of the German people, such displays can therefore no longer be tolerated.”223 This ban, of course, targeted gay, lesbian, and transgender publications. In a letter, Adolf Brand, the gay publisher of DER EIGENE, described the strain this new law exerted on his publications and notes that he would no longer be able to work under the new National Socialist regime in Germany. Brand stated that from May to November 1933, there were five instances of the police unexpectedly coming to confiscate his work. He lamented, 

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I was completely cleaned out by these five confiscations: I have nothing left to sell and am now ruined from a business point of view. I do not even know what I and my dependents will live on in the future. . . . Most of my followers do not even have the courage to write me a letter, and certainly not to give any financial support for my work. The loss I have suffered from the numerous confiscations and bans comes to some ten thousand marks.224

The Nazis escalated to rounding up all leaders of gay rights organizations and sending them to concentration camps. In response to the prisons becoming overcrowded with enemies of the Nazi Party, Himmler began construction of concentration camps, starting with the Dachau camp. Some of the first prisoners were these gay rights leaders. Though Hirschfield was able to avoid being harassed and arrested by the Nazis, other notable figures in the sexual enlightenment movement were not as lucky. The main targets were Hirschfield’s successor, Kurt Hiller, Felix Halle, who was a legal advisor for the Institute, and an influential scholar on sexual reform, Max Hodann. The Gestapo arrested Hiller in July 1933. They tortured him in camps and prisons before he was finally released nine months later, after which he left Germany.225 These initial assaults against homosexuals were predominantly strategic attempts to repress and eliminate evidence of their existence in the Reich.226 The trajectory towards more violent actions against gay men, specifically, became evident after the Night of the Long Knives. However, even before the official establishment of Nazi totalitarianism, Himmler was creating an environment within the party that regulated sexuality racial purity.

Once he became involved in the NSDAP, Himmler fully immersed himself into the notion that the German people possessed an ancient and powerful bloodline. Himmler’s theories on the “pure” blood of the Nordic people came from two men, Walter Darré and Alfred Rosenberg.

224 Letter from Adolf Brand, “All that was ‘aimed only at the ugly excesses of the movement’, ” quoted in Hidden Holocaust?, 34-36.
225 Plant, Pink Triangle, 106-07; Marhoefer, Sex and the Weimar Republic, 200.
Rosenberg was an editor for two of Hitler’s journals. He also wrote a book called *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* in 1930. *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* criticized Christian ideals. Rosenberg stated that Christians were too soft and humane and also taught that all people were equal. Europeans needed to rid themselves of these inadequate beliefs. Rosenberg declared that the Germanic people had a religion based on blood. They needed to return to the basics of the world and accept that the most superior race was the Nordic race. Rosenberg was Darré’s mentor. Darré wrote a book called *Blood and Soil* in 1929. He was an Argentinian agriculture expert who had a significant impact on Himmler as well as on the Third Reich as a whole. The book, *Blood and Soil*, spoke about peasantry and how it was the basis for the Nordic race. In *Blood and Soil*, Himmler was able to reference back to his experiences during his practicum at school, when he first learned about peasantry life. Darré continued with Rosenberg’s philosophy. He believed, as Rosenberg before him, that the Nordic people roots to the earth. These ideas became essential aspects of Himmler’s core beliefs. The goal of “purifying” the German race became an obsession, and this belief informed every act as Reichsführer-SS.

At the end of 1931, the size of the SS was rapidly increasing, with ten thousand members and inundation of daily applications from prospective recruits. For Himmler, it was becoming imperative that his SS force transformed into the racial elite. He submitted a draft of the regulations he sought to set in place for the new elite Order of SS. Himmler proclaimed that from then on, the organization only admitted those who satisfied the strictest of guidelines. In a speech during wartime, he said: “We went about it like a nursery gardener trying to reproduce a good old strain which has been adulterated and debased; we started from the principles of plant

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selection and then proceeded, quite unashamedly, to weed out the men who we did not think we could use for the build-up of the SS.”\(^{229}\) The only real criterion was their race. Himmler envisioned the idealized image of a Nordic warrior, which Richard Walther Darré portrays in *Blood and Soil*. He formed *Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt der SS*, the Race and Settlement Office of the SS (RUSHA) in 1931 to discover his Nordic heroes. This new bureaucracy was to research and establish the factors which defined the Germanic race. Himmler believed the SS officers were meant to be a group of elite men who would be a puissant force in creating the formidable Germanic state.\(^{230}\) Under the leadership of Darré, who became the head of the RuSHA, examiners created a grading system that identified racial traits. Applicants were required to take a medical exam, as well as present a detailed familial genealogy chart along with photographs of themselves. Examiners in the Munich office would search through these photographs for superficial traits that would indicate those considered to be of the Nordic race. The ideal characteristics included blond hair, blue eyes, long head, a flat forehead, a narrow face and nose, a sharp chin, thin lips, and a slender and tall body. There was a one-to-nine grade scale for their physiques, and a five-point scale system rating from “pure Nordic” to “suspected non-European blood components.” Another component of the grading system included searching for congenital diseases in family medical histories. The RuSHA granted green cards to those deemed acceptable, and red cards to those that they rejected.\(^{231}\)

Himmler was significantly concerned about his elite men. He feared and hated homosexuality so much so that he made sure to immerse the SS officers in masculine ideals. He also felt relationships between his SS men must be void of emotion. Himmler did not want his

\(^{229}\) Speech given on January 18, 1943 by Heinrich Himmler, quoted in Höhne, *Order of the Death’s Head*, 52.

\(^{230}\) Höhne, *Order of the Death’s Head*, 52.

men to form bonds.\textsuperscript{232} He feared the bonds created among his SS men would revert to previous acts of homoerotic relationships among the Nazi Party before Himmler rose up to power. As noted in the second chapter, Himmler learned about the idea that masculinity and homoerotism could be linked together in Hans Blüher’s book. He was concerned that if not adequately deterred, members of his elite men were in danger of participating in homoerotic relationships, just as some former Nazi members. The SS men were forced to endure rigorous testing to determine their elite status were highly encouraged to marry a “proper” German woman.

In keeping with the arduous nature of the grading system to find the perfect SS officers, it was axiomatic that the future wives of these elite officers fit the same criteria. On January 1, 1934, a policy was formed to ensure that SS marriages would be racially pure. Himmler proclaimed an “Engagement and Marriage Decree” the evening before the official establishment of this law. It delineated criteria for the formation of marriages within the SS. The decree commanded that marriage certificates be issued personally by Himmler. It stipulated that the SS officers had to be racially vetted as “definitely Nordic German men selected according to certain principles.” The goal of the law was “to create a hereditary healthy clan of a definitely Nordic German type.” The decree made sure to state that the certificate would be based only on “racial health and heredity.”\textsuperscript{233} Himmler and the RuSHA were adamant about being involved in the sexual relations between German men and women, especially those of the SS. This aspect of the Race and Settlement Office was particularly crucial to Himmler. In a speech given in November 1936, he spoke with Gruppenführer, telling these high-ranking officers to counsel young SS men that “those girls who gad about at balls and in society one does not marry.” He explained it was

\textsuperscript{232} Longerich, \textit{Heinrich Himmler}, 237.
acceptable to become friends with these women; however, SS men would avoid making a lifelong commitment to them. Himmler goes on to state that an officer must not immediately marry a girl whom he perceived to be of Germanic blood because she might have issues within her family genealogy. He told them that continuation of the procedure for marriage requests was of the utmost importance because he was unable “to make good in three years the false and stupid views of three centuries.”

The primary purpose, stated in the “Engagement and Marriage Decree,” was to create racially pure German children. Himmler feared the Germanic people would be lost because countless men had died during World War I. It was immensely crucial to Himmler to increase the German birthrate. Sexual relations were for the sole purpose of reproductive needs. The population policy foresaw families with as many children as possible. According to the Race and Settlement Office, it was the obligation of the SS officers who had been definitively distinguished as racially pure Nordic men to procreate to the utmost of their abilities. This desire was so great that there were locations established in the Waffen-SS unit where SS officers could congregate and have medically supervised sex with their wives. They were meant to come together and have sex in ways that were most conducive to producing children. When the RuSHA examined women for marriage with SS officers, the main concern after their family history and genealogy was their health and their ability to reproduce.

In 1935, Himmler founded the Lebensborn association. It was a place where unwed pregnant women who were racially acceptable mothers and the pregnant wives of SS officers received care during their pregnancies. If desired, the babies of the unwed mothers were taken by

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234 “Speech given by Heinrich Himmler on November 1933,” quoted in Padfield, Himmler, 169-70.
235 Bleuel, Sex and Society in Nazi Germany, 159.
the association and given to “good” German parents. After creating the *Lebensborn*, Himmler sent out a memorandum telling SS leaders about the association. In this message, he stated that it was essential to encourage many “births of good blood.” He explicitly said, “multiplicity of children is not a private affair of the individual, but his duty towards his ancestors and our people.” In the document, he told the SS leaders that at least four children must be produced “for a good sound marriage.” If this was not possible, then every SS leader must adopt “pure-blooded” children. The association would aid these families in the adoptions. Himmler detailed the responsibilities of *Lebensborn* in the memorandum. It was there to help a “racially and biologically and hereditarily valuable family” have children. It was also meant to support and care for “racially and biologically and hereditarily valuable women” give birth to “equally valuable children.” Lastly, it was there to take care of the children and their mothers. *Lebensborn* was formed to aggressively combat the lack of “pure” German children, which Himmler partially blamed on gay German men. For Himmler, the association was to help remedy the millions of children that were lost because of male homosexuality.

While it was Himmler’s policy to vehemently to encourage healthy sexual relationships between SS officers and their wives, he was also a proponent of bigamy and adultery between Nordic men and women. During discussions with Dr. Felix Kersten on the effective progression of the German people, Himmler stated that marriage laws were immoral and were a product of the Christian church. He told Kersten a man who was obligated to stay with his wife for their entire lives would “drive him first of all to deceive her and then make him a hypocrite as he tries to cover it up.” Himmler worried this would create great strife between the martial couples,

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putting an end to their desire to have sex and, most importantly, causing them to “stop producing children.” He reasoned this was the explanation for millions of children never being born, “children who the state urgently requires.” Himmler also informed Kersten that it was his belief a man would try to avoid having children with the woman with whom he was having an affair, and if they did have children, the children would be considered illegitimate. He believed more legal and societal leniency towards multiple wives and sexual partners would support the procreation of more German children. At the end of October 1939, he sent of order to the SS and police

Beyond the boundaries of perhaps otherwise still necessary bourgeois laws and customs it will also outside of marriage be an important responsibility for German women and girls of good blood, not lightly, but rather in profound moral seriousness, to become the mothers of children of soldiers who are going to the front and of whom fate alone knows whether they will return or fall in battle for Germany.

The need for more German children was so vital to Himmler’s plan that he reversed what he so vehemently believed as a young man that men should find the “perfect” woman and should stay chaste until marriage. According to Himmler, the Catholic Church was to blame for standing in the way of Germany’s biological advancement. Along with accusing the Church of having a “homosexual male order,” Himmler blamed growing up in Catholicism for his former prudish beliefs, which led to a delay in his sexual growth. He also felt restricted by Christian morality when Himmler was losing interest in his marriage of ten years. “Germanic” virtues allowed him to reject and reconstruct the moral system in which he had grown up. When he joined Nazism, Himmler reevaluated his beliefs and moral codes. He pragmatically shifted his ideals to match

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239 Bleuel, *Sex and Society*, 172.
those of the Nazi Party. Himmler was no longer interested in the idea of chaste marriages because his primary goal became the mass production of “pure” Aryan children.

For Himmler, this agenda to attain Germanic racial purity by rigorously regulating sexual relationships would, of course, include the complete eradication of homosexuality. After the Night of the Long Knives, Himmler was able to implement far more severe state-sanctioned legal actions against gay men in the Reich. In the autumn of 1934, the Gestapo, the Secret State Police, sent a secret letter to police departments throughout Germany, stipulating that they must submit lists of men who were known to have committed homosexual acts. Local police had compiled these lists for years. Shortly after that, Himmler officially established a special department within the political headquarters of the Gestapo in Berlin to combat homosexuality and abortions. Department II S was under the command of SS captain Joseph Meisinger. Together, the Gestapo and the SS perpetrated raids on the homosexual community. Arrests resulted, and the officials sent some of the detainees to concentration camps. Many suffered torturous interrogations at the Gestapo house prisons in Columbia Haus and Lichtenburg concentration camps, which led to several confessions and several more arrests.

In his memoirs, Pierre Seel, a gay man in Mulhouse, a French city near the German border, speaks about his horrendous experience of being detained and interrogated by the Gestapo. The Gestapo summoned him, and when Seel arrived, he was forced to sit in a room with an SS officer, where the interrogation commenced:

The SS man facing me instantly called me Schweinehund (dirty bastard), filthy faggot. The interrogation was only just starting. Did I know other homosexuals? What were their names and addresses? Had I heard about so-and-so? Wasn’t it true that a certain churchman liked young men? Where were our meeting places? He knew a lot more than I did. I remained silent.

242 Plant, Pink Triangle, 211.
Seel could not deny being a gay man. When he was seventeen years old, during an incident in which someone stole his watch in a known homosexual gathering area, he was forced by the police to sign a document identifying himself as a homosexual. In his memoir, Seel said that several SS officers violently attacked him: “The blows came raining down. Behind the desk, each SS man followed the last in an even rhythm. Each time, the grilling started from scratch: last name, first name, date of birth, names, and addresses of homosexual acquaintances.” They attempted to “corner us, exhaust us, quell any resistance.”243

Within Germany, approximately a thousand suspected homosexuals had been arrested by mid-1935 and detained in “protective custody.” By spring of that year, the majority of the prisoners in “protective custody” in Lichtenburg concentration camp were gay men.244 In 1934, Himmler proudly reported that the party was successfully combating homosexuality. He proclaimed,

As National Socialists we are not afraid to fight against this plague within our own ranks. Just as we have readopted the ancient Germanic approach to the question of marriage between alien races, so, too in our judgement of homosexuality—a symptom of racial degeneracy destructive to our race—we have returned to the guiding Nordic principle that degenerates should be exterminated.245

The most significant legal action against homosexuality was the revision of Paragraph 175. This revision was especially foreboding because, before the rise of Nazism, liberal Germans were actively seeking as well as succeeding to abolish the law entirely. During the medieval and early modern eras, communities penalized homosexual acts with death. The Enlightenment and French Revolution precipitated a change in certain German states. In 1831, beginning with Bavaria, homosexuality was becoming decriminalized. Legislation in Prussia, however, carried

245 Speech by Heinrich Himmler, quoted in Plant, Pink Triangle, 111.
the archaic law into 1871 and established Paragraph 175 of the Reich Criminal Code. The first law stated that “an unnatural act of sexual indecency committed between persons of the male sex or by persons with animals is punishable by imprisonment; a loss of civil rights may also be imposed.”

Despite the existence of Paragraph 175 and the danger of being a sexual minority in Germany, a homosexual subculture was flourishing in the Reich, primarily in the bigger cities. Within the culture, a homosexual rights movement was formed. While the movement for the liberation of gay Germans predates the late 1800s, Magnus Hirschfield and his associates created the first association for homosexual rights in 1897, the Scientific Humanitarian Committee. This association petitioned the Reichstag to repeal Paragraph 175. August Bebel, a socialist leader who was the first German political party leader that endeavored to understand the plight of gay Germans, most notably supported the petition. By the 1920s, the new democracy of the Weimar Republic under the Social Democrats allowed Hirschfield to achieve progress in the quest to repeal Paragraph 175. Though the Reichstag initially denied the request to strike down the law, activists were able to successfully campaign the idea that rather than religion, science should determine state and social laws on sexuality. Their efforts convinced the government to reduce restrictions on allowing sexuality in the media. By 1929, the Reichstag Penal Law Commission voted on the proposal to abolish Paragraph 175. The Commission agreed that the law would be replaced with Paragraph 297. This new policy criminalized homosexual acts if a man over the age of twenty-one had sexual relations with a man under the age of twenty-one if a man used a position of power to pressure sex acts from another man and in cases of male

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prostitution. The committee had agreed to remove the law from the federal criminal code, but after the Nazis took control of the Reichstag in the 1930s, they did not allow the revision of the code, and Paragraph 175 remained in effect.\textsuperscript{250}

On June 28, 1935, Paragraph 175 was amended, creating parameters in which all forms of actual or perceived acts of homosexuality were illegal. The first part of the revision stated that “any man who shall engage in an indecent sexual act with another man or who shall allow himself to be coerced into an act with another man shall be punished by imprisonment.” It also stipulated that a person under the age of twenty-one might be exempt from prison only “in particularly mild cases.” The second part stated a person would receive “penal servitude” for up to ten years and no less than three months. It specified this sentence for “acts of sexual indecency,” which included instances of a man forcing another man to be used without his consent, a man being threatened, a man abusing his power over someone beneath him, or a man over twenty-one with a man under twenty-one.\textsuperscript{251} Under the Third Reich, authorities were able to arrest any man on trumped-up charges. Without any form of official criminal procedure, the courts and judges were able to dictate criminal offenses based on their own beliefs. These revisions meant that any acts, even those not sexual in nature, could be seen as criminally offensive, and the judges were able to dispense justice based on their belief of what Hitler would have intended.\textsuperscript{252}

In 1936, Himmler rose to further prominence in the government as the chief of the entire police force. He sought to use the persecution of gay men as a means to gain more influence within the criminal investigation police. The special squads from the department for combating

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\textsuperscript{250} Marhoefer, \textit{Sex and the Weimar Republic}, 120. \\
\textsuperscript{252} Plant, \textit{Pink Triangle}, 110.
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homosexuality at the Berlin Gestapo were dispatched nationwide to advance the attack against gay German men. To consolidate homosexual persecution, in October 1936, Himmler created *Reichszentrale zur Bekämpfung der Homosexualität und der Abtreibung*, the Reich Central Office for Combating Homosexuality and Abortion. He took command of several crime specialists to create a centralized system. The Reich Central Office was not only responsible for registering possible offenders in homosexual acts, investigating, and subsequently arresting them; it was also meant to implement a new policy of prevention.253

For Himmler, homosexuality and abortions caused the same degree of damage to the good of the German people: they both hindered the procreation of Nordic children. He sent a directive to the SS in Berlin on the creation of the division. It stated the danger to the population policy and public health arising from a large number of abortions, as well as a larger number of homosexuals. He emphasized to the SS the need for more action to combat both. Himmler first declared that both offenses were under the local jurisdictions. However, believing the task vital to the Nazi agenda, he ordered both to be combated by guidelines stipulated in the Reich Central Office. If the state police were needed, they were to notify Gestapo, and the Department II S would be dispatched. Finally, SS captain Joseph Meisinger would direct both the Reich Central Office and the special department in the Gestapo.254 Gestapo detectives were “trained” to seek out homosexual men. They were to look for overt stereotypically homosexual actions among men. These officers were instructed to look for any intimate interactions between men, such as verbal or physical acts of affection.255 Under the command of Himmler, police action based on Paragraph 175 grew steadily over the years. In 1934, 766 men were convicted and incarcerated

254 “Heinrich Himmler on Homosexuality and Abortion,” quoted in Third Reich Sourcebook, 375-76.
255 Spurlin, Lost Intimacies, 35.
for homosexuality. During 1936, the number surpassed 4,000; furthermore, in 1938, there were over 8,000 convictions.\textsuperscript{256}

One of the most notable cases of homosexuality involved army Commander-in-Chief, Werner von Fritsch, which became an enormous blow to Himmler and his career. In November 1937, Hitler was formulating a plan for aggressive military expansion of Germany. The military leaders, including Fritsch, expressed concerns about such an endeavor. At this point, Hitler became convinced that his policy would only be possible if he were able to replace these men as the military chiefs.\textsuperscript{257} With the possibility of a violent attempt to overthrow the High Command, Reinhard Heydrich, a high-ranking SS officer, was tasked with surveilling Fritsch. Heydrich found supposed evidence against Fritsch that implied he was a homosexual.\textsuperscript{258} In 1935, there was a professional blackmailer known as Schmidt who, under interrogation, admitted to blackmailing Fritsch for homosexuality. On January 26, 1937, Schmidt was brought back in to identify Fritsch as the man he was blackmauling. In the presence of Hitler, Himmler personally charged the commander of perpetrating homosexual acts. Though charged, Fritsch was put on leave until investigators conducted a further inquest into the allegations.

The Gestapo conducted further investigation into Schmidt and found that he made a mistake during the 1935 deposition. The man whom he had been blackmauling was not Werner von Fritsch. It was a retired cavalry officer named Captain von Frisch. The officers obtained the address of Captain Frisch’s home and found the new evidence to be true. Since this destroyed the Gestapo’s case against Fritsch, Hitler allowed a joint investigation by the Army and Ministry of Justice. The new assessors also found that there did exist a Captain von Frisch and placed him

\textsuperscript{256} Wippermann, \textit{Racial State}, 192.
\textsuperscript{257} Longerich, \textit{Heinrich Himmler}, 398.
\textsuperscript{258} Manvell and Fraenkel, \textit{Himmler}, 62.
under arrest.\textsuperscript{259} Though the court acquitted Fritsch of the charges in 1938, the entire inquest and trial greatly affected the morale of the armed forces. Fritsch was never publicly vindicated of the accusations and was no longer the Commander-in-Chief. He received a transfer to his old regiment as a colonel.\textsuperscript{260}

This trial against Fritsch caused major devastation for Himmler and his career as well. He vehemently believed Fritsch was guilty from the very beginning and worked to ensured that the investigation had a one-sided bias against the commander. Fritsch placed all of the blame on Himmler for his demise. He declared that Himmler was the “main villain,” blaming him for prejudice in accusing Fritsch as guilty.\textsuperscript{261} According to Joseph Goebbels, the Reich Minister of Propaganda, Himmler felt “very depressed. Fritsch has still not confessed.”\textsuperscript{262} Goebbels also noted, “The trial of von Fritsch is going very badly. The whole thing seems to be based on a case of mistaken identity. Very bad news, particularly for Himmler. He is too quick to act and also too prejudiced. The Führer is very annoyed.”\textsuperscript{263}

The Fritsch affair was made even more of an issue because, simultaneously, Himmler was facing allegations of tolerating a homosexual within the high ranks of the SS. In February 1938, he suspended \textit{Gruppenführer} Kurt Wittje for allegedly committing homosexual acts. He conducted vigorous investigation and found Wittje guilty. Wittje was relieved of his duties in the SS. The issue with this case was that in 1934, Himmler knew about Wittje's past termination from the \textit{Reichswehr} for suspected homosexuality. In the 1938 report on the case, Himmler justified his actions in 1934 by stating that after a thorough examination of the initial

\textsuperscript{259} Manvell and Fraenkel, \textit{Himmler}, 63-64.
\textsuperscript{260} Plant, \textit{Pink Triangle}, 142-43.
\textsuperscript{261} Longerich, \textit{Heinrich Himmler}, 399.
accusations, he was forced to conclude that they were unfounded.\textsuperscript{264} This matter greatly affected his reputation for his aggressive stance on male homosexuality.

Himmler was extremely vocal regarding his pathological loathing of homosexuality and, on various occasions, would launch into a diatribe about the German homosexual male. At a conference of SS officers in 1937, he gave a particularly passionate speech about the racial and ideological reasons he believed homosexuality among the German men was such a significant concern for the preservation of the Reich. According to Himmler, in addition to the consequence of losing two million healthy German men during the First World War, there were, by his calculation, two million homosexual men within the German population. Therefore, the German “sexual balance sheet” was deficient, since there were “four million men capable of sex” who had died fighting at the front or “renounced their duty to procreate.” Himmler believed that the Reich could not afford to have such an imbalance of German men and women. In the speech, he goes on to warn that all issues concerning “the sexual sphere are not the private affair of the individual, but signify the life and death of the nation, signify world power and world domination.”\textsuperscript{265} With this concern regarding the “death of the nation,” Himmler came to the conclusion that homosexuality “undermines performance and any system based on performance and destroys the foundations of the state.” Additionally, he stated that “homosexuals are psychologically sick to the core.” He thought of them as cowards, as well as pathological liars. He stated, “homosexuality leads to a complete unsoundness of mind, I might almost say, craziness.”\textsuperscript{266}

\textsuperscript{264} Longerich, \textit{Heinrich Himmler}, 400-01.
\textsuperscript{266} Longerich, \textit{Heinrich Himmler}, 233.
With Dr. Kersten, Himmler expressed other concerns he held regarding homosexuality in German men. He told Kersten it was essential to the Reich that the government eliminate all gay men. Himmler explained that if one man had homosexual leanings, then he would pervert the world and “drag down 10 other men with him.” Kersten brought up the existence of German bisexual men by stating they were capable of getting married and producing plentiful children. Himmler remarked this was far worse because the children of these men would genetically inherit homosexual tendencies. During their private conversation, Himmler progressively became agitated with Kersten because the doctor questioned Himmler on his notions of homosexual men.267 He seemed to believe homosexuality was a biological trait that could rapidly contaminate the German people if not contained. He was, of course, able to wield his abundant power within the criminal justice system to impede the imagined contagion of homosexuality in the Reich.

While Himmler believed his hatred of male homosexuality was completely justifiable, those who suffered through the arrests, convictions, and detainments as homosexuals very likely disagreed. In his memoir, Heinz Heger explained his experiences as a gay man in the Third Reich, including what he was forced to endure as a convicted homosexual. Heger spoke of being detained and arrested by the Gestapo in 1938 as a young homosexual man in Vienna, Austria. He described his encounter with the Gestapo at his home: “With a curt word ‘Gestapo,’ he handed me a card with the printed summons to appear for questioning at 2 p.m. at the Gestapo headquarters in the Hotel Metropol.” Heger stated that the man stayed near his home, seemingly to make certain Heger would not attempt to flee. He explained that this was extremely uncomfortable, and that he “could already feel the threatening danger.” When he arrived at the

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267 Kersten, Kersten Memoirs, 200.
hotel and presented his summons, they took him to Department II S. There he met with a
“doctor” whom Heger stated, “stared at me with cold gray eyes: ‘You are a queer, a homosexual,
do you admit it?’” When Heger denied the accusations, the “doctor” presented a photo of him
together with his romantic friend. The photo had a message to his friend on the back that read,
“To my friend Fred in eternal love and deepest affection!” When the “doctor” confirmed that the
photo was his, the official made Heger sign a sheet of paper. Officers, then, took him to a police
prison.268 Later, he was convicted of “homosexual behavior, and sentenced to six months’ penal
servitude with the added provision of one fast day a month.” Heger was sent to the Vienna
district prison to serve his sentence.269 He stated that during the time he spent in the Vienna
prison, “we were treated with perfect correctness. Even though the warders were strict in
enforcing regulations, they often had a friendly word for us prisoners. Not once during my six
months there did I hear of a prisoner being beaten.” 270

This experience in the criminal justice system would change immediately following
Heger’s release from prison. After a joint conference in March 1937 where Himmler conveyed to
the criminal investigation department and the Gestapo the importance of success in the
homosexuality and abortion department, the Reich Central Office began implementing new
policies for the persecution of homosexuals. The policies focused on protecting public health
from these “public enemies.” The aim was for prevention, which allowed the advancement of
“preventative detention” in the concentration camps. After mid-1939, police were able to transfer
convicted gay men to the camps directly after their release from prisons or penitentiaries.271

268 Heinz Heger, The Men with the Pink Triangle: The True, Life-and-Death Story of Homosexuals in the Nazi Death
269 Heger, Men with the Pink Triangle, 24.
270 Heger, Men with the Pink Triangle, 25.
Where the traditional European prison system was established to punish, to prohibit criminals’ access to society, and possibly to reform, the objectives of concentration camps were far different. Their purpose was to isolate and neutralize, subdue completely, and many times eliminate those deemed enemies of the state.\textsuperscript{272} The day of Heger’s release from prison, he “was informed that the Central Security Department had demanded that I remain in custody. I was again transferred to the ‘Liesl’ for transit to a concentration camp.”\textsuperscript{273}

Homosexual prisoners experienced trauma just as all new inmates when they would arrive at the camps; however, the homosexual and Jewish inmates were forced to endure the most violent beatings.\textsuperscript{274} When Heger first arrived at Sachsenhausen, he and the other prisoners were lined up in rows. In his memoir he stated, “then we had a roll call, having stepped forward and repeat our name and offense, whereupon we were immediately handed over to our particular block leader.” When the officer called his name, Heger had to state that he was there due to offenses against Paragraph 175. The officer immediately yelled, “You filthy queer, get over there, you butt-fucker!” Heger was then violently beaten by an SS sergeant. Those in his block had to take off all of their clothing and lay it on the ground. It was in January, and the temperature was “a few degrees below zero, with an icy wind blowing through the camp.” The corporal, who was in a fur coat, would walk over the intimates’ bare feet with his boots; those who cried out in pain suffered an immediate beating. The officer told them, “You queers are going to remain here until you cool off.”\textsuperscript{275}

These initial traumas were only the beginning of the terrible conditions homosexual inmates were forced to endure in the concentration camps. In the summer of 1933, Theodor

\textsuperscript{272} Plant, \textit{Pink Triangle}, 161.
\textsuperscript{273} Heger, \textit{Men with the Pink Triangle}, 25.
\textsuperscript{274} Plant, \textit{Pink Triangle}, 163.
\textsuperscript{275} Heger, \textit{Men with the Pink Triangle}, 32.
Eicke, an Oberführer of the SS, was appointed commandant of Dachau concentration camp. Eicke transformed Dachau into an organized system of ruthless punishment and deprivation. In April 1934, Eicke was tasked by Himmler to reorganize all camps. His policies would inform the oppressive aspects of the concentration camps, which made them into vital instruments of terror for the Third Reich. In his memoirs, Rudolf Höss, who had been Eicke’s student at Dachau and would later become the commandant at Auschwitz and Sachsenhausen, spoke about organizing the treatment of homosexual prisoners in the camps. Höss explained that the gay inmates were completely sequestered into separate barracks, away from the other inmates to squelch the so-called homosexual epidemic from flowing into other areas of the camps. If other inmates exhibited homosexual behavior, the guards transferred them to this section to prevent it from spreading any further. He stated, “With one stroke the homosexual epidemic ended.” Höss went on the say that “Even though now and then this unnatural activity took place, they were only isolated cases. In their barracks they were so carefully watched that it was impossible to engage in these activities.”

Not only were the gay prisoners separated in their barracks, but they also had work details completely removed from the other inmates. These work details were invariably the hardest and most dangerous. Ferdinand Römhild, a non-gay inmate at the Buchenwald camp, has recorded his observations of the homosexuals’ experiences in the camp. He noted, “In October 1938 they were transferred as a group to the punishment company and have to work in the stone quarry, whereas previously all other work details stood open to them.” He went on to state that others sent to the punishment company “had the prospect of being transferred to a normal block

276 Plant, Pink Triangle, 156.
278 Höss, Death Dealer, 105.
after a certain time and through it into significantly better living and working conditions. This possibility never existed for the homosexuals. Thus, in the most difficult years, they were the lowest caste of the camp.”

These isolated work details, which were far away from the barracks where middlemen could intervene, allowed the SS officers to inflict extreme violence on the gay inmates.

This segregation also allowed SS guards who were gay to take advantage of the homosexual prisoners. Römhild stated the isolation “offered certain creatures without conscience who exercised power over them an opportunity for shameless extortion, abuse, and rape.” The gay SS guards would also make some of the younger prisoners their Pielpel or “dolly boys.” These young men were forced to have sex with the SS guards. For their sexual favors, they would receive better treatment, such as easier work details and extra food. The other non-gay prisoners would become enraged by such acts, and the gay prisoners would be held accountable. These inmates saw the gay SS guards as the homosexual inferiors, and the crimes of these guards tainted the gay prisoners.

The establishment of Nazi totalitarianism signaled the abrupt end to a burgeoning German gay rights movement and the beginning of the complete loss of autonomy for gay men under the Reich. While it cannot be said that the Nazi persecution of homosexuals was on the same scale as the systematic annihilation of European Jews, the progressively worsening treatment of this minority group was still quite a horrific event. This chapter not only details the deteriorating state of life for homosexual men in the Third Reich, but it also attempts to prove

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280 Plant, Pink Triangle, 174.
282 Plant, Pink Triangle, 166-67.
that the actions of a singular figure, Heinrich Himmler, greatly precipitated this decline. As Himmler gained influence in the Nazi criminal justice system, he was able to implement many policies on race and sexuality, which aligned with his fanatical ideas, including horrendous policies against male homosexuality; he was the “uncompromising pursuer of homosexuals.”

This man’s zealous pursuits completely obliterated the lives of hundreds of thousands of gay men.

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283 Longerich, Heinrich Himmler, 400.
Epilogue

The end of Nazism freed most of the victims persecuted by the regime and gave them a platform to tell the world about their horrendous experiences. Unfortunately, the gay survivors were not afforded the same sense of liberation when the Third Reich fell.\textsuperscript{284} For a short time after the war, gay men experienced freedom and openness; however, it did not last long. During the postwar era, anti-Semitism was largely pushed to the private sphere. It was replaced with superficial Judeophilia, interest, and appreciation of the Jewish community.

On the other hand, the West German government renewed the commitment to criminalized homosexual acts between men.\textsuperscript{285} Postwar Germany was aware of the violent impact the revised version of Paragraph 175 and 175a had on gay German men under the Third Reich. Initially, during the postwar period in Germany, courts across the country gave varying sentences for Paragraph 175 offenses. Some upheld the harsh sentencing from the Nazi era; often, the courts gave elaborate reasons for keeping the outdated law. Other courts opted to reject jail or prison sentences, instead ordered psychiatric treatment. In a few cases, the judges challenged the legitimacy of the law by setting the culprits free with a small symbolic fine. It was clear to all involved that sentencing varied based on region and individual judges. As a result, the administration of Paragraph 175 was in a state of limbo, which placed defendants in a precarious situation. They had little way of knowing what defense strategy would be most effective. Some defendants used the same method developed under the Nazi regime, insisting that they were actually heterosexual and simply had a momentary lapse. Others emboldened that Nazism was

\textsuperscript{284} Plant, \textit{The Pink Triangle}, 1.
no longer in power, acknowledged their homosexuality, and felt they had no choice but to stand against the law.  

As was the case under the Third Reich, the anti-gay prosecutions were restricted to gay men; lesbians were generally exempt from legal action. In 1957, the West German Federal Constitution questioned why male homosexuality posed a threat to society while lesbians were harmless. The Court posed this question in response to the case of an appeal by Günter R. and Oskar K., two men charged under Paragraph 175 in the early 1950s. They argued that the Nazi’s revised version of the law embodied the National Socialist racial doctrine and violated democratic principles. The appellants also argued that the prohibition of male homosexuality went against Grundgesetz, the Basic Law, adopted by the West German constitution in 1949. It promised that all citizens had the right to autonomy. Since lesbians were exempt from prosecution, Paragraph 175 violated the Basic Law, which guaranteed gender equality. The appeals process went on for more than six years. The only other information available about the case was that Oskar K. passed away a year before the Court reached a decision; therefore, it concluded that his case was “settled.” The Federal Constitutional Court rejected all parts of the appeal. The judgment was that criminalizing male homosexuality did not violate the Basic Law nor undermined democracy and freedom.

Unfortunately, Paragraph 175 was not modified until 1969. During the 1950s and 1960s, the police registered 100,000 cases of male homosexuality; there were between 2,500 and 3,500 convictions each year. Historian and activist Hans Joachim Schoeps notes that for gay German

286 Herzog, Sex after Fascism, 90.
288 Moeller, “‘The Homosexual Man Is a “Man,”’” 396-397.
289 Moeller, “‘The Homosexual Man Is a “Man,”’” 421.
men, “the Third Reich actually only ended in 1969.” In his memoir, *The Men with the Pink Triangle*, Heinz Heger stated that the Allied forces knew that gay men were among the prisoners in the concentration camps and marked with a pink triangle. Though they were released from the camps, “their persecution continued, first under the Allied military government of Germany, later under the German authorities.” Heger stated, “Within the realm of Holocaust research, gay men belonged for a long time to the so-called group of forgotten victims—those groups of Holocaust victims who for a long time were not acknowledged as such.” He contended that gay men were not “forgotten victims.” The postwar government did not simply forget about them; it continued the oppression and made efforts to justify the Nazis’ actions against homosexuals.

Scholar, Richard Plant, notes that Heger’s work was the first full-length account of the Nazis’ gay victims, and it did not appear until late 1972. His memoir was translated and published in Britain and the United States in 1980 but was largely ignored. In 1979, a play by Martin Sherman called *Bent* was somewhat based on Heger’s book. Though the memoir was not widely known, the play became a popular topic of discussion. It forced the public to acknowledge that the Nazi Party victimized homosexuals. In 1977, an investigative report, “Homosexuality and Society” by Rüdiger Lautmann, was the first reliable source for statistics on the persecution, arrest, imprisonment, and the experiences of German and Austrian gay men in the various camps. A few historians attempted to shed light on the experiences of gay inmates; however, Lautmann and associates were the first to bring their conclusive study to a larger audience.

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Heger explains in his memoir that gay Holocaust survivors were in constant fear after the fall of Nazism. They were “never legally acknowledged as victims of the Nazi regime. For them, the fear did not end with the forces of liberation. They lived in continual fear of being re-arrested. Some were treated as repeat offenders after the war.” Some men could not face the second wave of persecution by the German government; therefore, several gay concentration camp survivors committed suicide. Some other victims chose to get married or go into isolation. Heger stated, “exclusion from the memory of the Holocaust took a toll of individual memories.” Most of the gay victims were reluctant to tell their stories for a long time. Immediately after World War II, gay men and women were eager to forget about the Nazi era; therefore, initially, they were not compelled to speak about their experiences publicly. It was not until the 1980s and 1990s, decades after the Holocaust, several gay and lesbian survivors felt comfortable writing about their experiences in memoirs.

As the gay rights movements began to flourish in West Germany and the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s, gay and lesbian activists compiled historical evidence of the atrocities against homosexuals within the Holocaust. In the 1970s, they established archives, research projects, and collections of oral history. The emergence of this newfound history provided connections to contemporary injustices against queer people and examples of past strategies for the emancipation of the LGBT community.

The pink triangle became a symbol of remembrance for the gay Holocaust victims and raised current political consciousness for the LGBT community. In West Germany, the mark

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293 Heger, *The Men with the Pink Triangle*, iii.
294 Heger, *The Men with the Pink Triangle*, xi.
represented a reminder for activists to be cautious of the government; it signified the continued legal persecution of homosexuals from the Nazi regime to the postwar government.\textsuperscript{298} In 1993, an American gay magazine, \textit{10 Percent}, criticized the modern use of the pink triangle as a trivialized emblem for the queer community.\textsuperscript{299} One reader responded that the symbol was used to remember all hate crimes against LGBT people.\textsuperscript{300} Another stated that the pink triangle compels the community “to take action against homophobic trends.” The reader is referencing the contemporary attempts to pass anti-gay initiatives throughout America.\textsuperscript{301} These letters show that gay men and lesbians viewed the oppression of sexual minorities in Nazi Germany as a part of a long historical pattern.\textsuperscript{302}

In May 1969, the West German government decriminalized male homosexual acts for men over twenty-one. The following year, parliament changed the age of consent to eighteen. Gay magazines began appearing once again, some gay student groups were formed, and an active and vocal gay liberation movement emerged. In 1971, inspired by Rosa von Praunheim’s film \textit{Nicht der Homosexuelle ist pervers, sondern die Situation, in der er lebt}, a group men created a radical gay liberation organization called Homosexuelle Aktion Westberlin (HAW). In West Germany, activist groups like the HAW initially paid little attention to the Nazi persecution. There was very little information on the subject at the time. The new gay liberation movements also regarded the older generation as conservative and perhaps secretly fascist. Their attitudes towards the experiences of gay Holocaust victims began to change when Heger released

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{298} Jensen, “The Pink Triangle and Political Consciousness,” 326.
\item \textsuperscript{302} Jensen, “The Pink Triangle and Political Consciousness,” 320.
\end{enumerate}
his book in 1972. His individual memory gave the framework for the larger collective memory. For the first time, the HAW urged gays to wear the pink triangle and understand that they would be recognized, discriminated against, and oppressed while wearing it. A HAW activist, Andreas, recalled that he would hide his homosexuality to avoid difficult situations. When he wore the pink triangle, he was forced to stand up for himself and not deny who he truly was.\footnote{Jensen, “The Pink Triangle and Political Consciousness,”324-325.}
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