Mothers of the Nation: The Ambiguous Role of Nazi Women in Third Reich

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Abstract
Women in Nazi Germany during the Third Reich adapted to the ever-changing demands that were placed on them by political and economic restrictions as well as the events of World War II. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the role of women in Germany through the years of 1933 to 1945, and how they were able to cope with the social separation between themselves and the men in their society. Often forgotten about in the discussion of Nazi history, German women played a significant role in the development of the Nazi Party along with providing a substantial contribution to the war effort. The events of the war shifted the role of women and placed them in a battle of their own on the home front. The women of Germany developed their own place in history by displaying their strength and dedication to their families and country.

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Final Project

Mothers of the Nation: The Ambiguous Role of Nazi Women in Third Reich

by

Samantha Schuring

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Liberal Studies

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Abstract

Women in Nazi Germany during the Third Reich adapted to the ever-changing demands that were placed on them by political and economic restrictions as well as the events of World War II. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the role of women in Germany through the years of 1933 to 1945, and how they were able to cope with the social separation between themselves and the men in their society. Often forgotten about in the discussion of Nazi history, German women played a significant role in the development of the Nazi Party along with providing a substantial contribution to the war effort. The events of the war shifted the role of women and placed them in a battle of their own on the home front. The women of Germany developed their own place in history by displaying their strength and dedication to their families and country.
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Introduction

The role of women during the Third Reich was often overlooked when discussing the history of the Nazi Party. With an abundance of research completed on Nazi Germany and the leadership of Hitler, women were rarely the topic of historians, until recent times, when social historians began to widen the lines of the discipline. Often women are portrayed as victims in historical research when it comes to what their role was in certain points in history that is recognized for their suppressive behavior. Some historians have concluded that German women were victims of some of the terrible things the Nazi Party did to them, while others overlook their role entirely.

My research, drawing on recent social history as well as contemporary source and memoirs to illustrate that women played a significant role in the Nazi Germany, including the Nazi Party, and were crucial during the war years. This is a study of how the women of Germany adapted and evolved during the Third Reich, confirming to the demands of the Nazi Party and German society. They were the caregivers, the factory workers, the protectors, and the rebuilders. In the early years of the Reich the Nazi Party sharpened the separation between the sexes by pushing women out of the public sphere and into the private sphere. Deeming women to be the “mothers of the nation” and emphasizing their role to be in the private sphere, the Nazi Party created an image for the German woman to follow. Many women did so willingly. But the demands on German women changed during the last years of the Third Reich as conditions deteriorated during the war and in postwar period, changes that affected women in a major way.

Before 1933, during the Weimar Republic, a new liberal modern type of women was beginning to develop in Germany. The Weimar Republic is usually revered for being a time of
women’s individual freedoms, but in reality, the two sexes were not seen as equals at this time. Women struggled to be heard on the political stage as well as striving for the ability to receive equal employment opportunities. The Weimar Republic was never strong and had to deal with the repercussions of the loss in the First World War as well as mass inflation in 1923 and terrible economic depression at the end of the decade. By the early 1930’s, people were looking for a change. Hitler’s Nazi Party made a convincing argument with the promise to provide better jobs for the people and also to bring back German greatness.

The Nazi Party made it clear from the beginning, that its vision of society called for women to focus more on the bearing and raising of children than on the notion of individual development, including working outside of the household or engaging in political issues. Even knowing that their primary role in society would be out of the public sphere or limited to low-level white-collar jobs, many women became Nazi Party members. One woman, Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, embraced the Nazi ideals on women so actively that she became one of the few women recognized as a top Nazi official. Hitler often reiterated that he did not see women as equal to men. He also said that their opinion did not matter in politics. Speaking as modern day female who has grown up in the United States, it is hard to imagine a woman being satisfied with a kind of government that so openly placed women in a subcategory in society. However I am aware that this kind of attitude towards women was a reflection of the times because women around the world were fighting against much the same kind of discrimination. Even women in the United States were struggling to receive equal rights. However, the limitation on women and the restricted role officially set out for them was most severe in Germany.

But World War II changed the fact if not the theory of women’s place in Nazi Germany. It created a demand for women in the labor force a demand that had also existed during the First
World War, but not as strongly. In the beginning years of the war, 1939-1943, Germany did not mobilize a mass number of women into the labor force because the regime continued to focus on the traditional Nazi ideals of keeping women in the home bearing and raising children. Also Germany’s military plan was that of the idea of short battles, and the blitzkrieg type of war, which did not call for a large amount of workers at first. Although there were many women workers in Germany during the war, most were foreign women from Poland and the Ukraine. It was not until the war started to take a downward turn for Germany that the regime decided to launch a propaganda campaign to bring sections of the German population from the German cities into the war industries. This shift to a demand for female labor created another role for German women. Many women willingly volunteered for work because they wanted to feel they were a part of the war effort and sought to establish a connection to their loved one who was in the army.

The Nazi Party actually created some job opportunities for women during the war, which young women saw as saving them from domestic service or limited work opportunities and opening up more exciting careers. The large number of nurses needed for the war, along with non-combatant jobs in the military, gave women the chance to get out of the rural areas in Germany or escape from harsh conditions in urban areas. This idea of adventure proved to be very appealing to German women. These new job opportunities became one of the main reasons for the appeal of the Nazi Party among women. They saw some of the opportunities that the party supplied and they were able to take advantage of them. The Nazi Party gave women a structure that in a way protected them but also gave them the ability to become involved in ways they otherwise would not have had. These job opportunities were appealing to the German women and helped strengthen their support for the Nazi Party. However, although the party did
provide some avenues for women it still continued to separate them from the men and keep them out of positions of power.

By 1944 to 1945 as the war continued, the living conditions for people who remained in the cities of Germany worsened. The intense Allied air raid bombings affected a great deal of the urban German population. With the majority of population being women and children, they were the ones who suffered the most. Life on the home front became a sort of battle all in its own as women tried to look after their children’s survival as well as their own. With bombings both day and night in the later part of the war, a large part of the life of people was spent in the bunkers. This time period of the war truly gives a new shape to the role of women in Germany because they had now become the protectors of the city as well as of their families. The restless nights followed by the endless days took a big toll on the women of Germany. With men fighting on the battlefield, a woman’s only of protection was having a little bit of luck. They had to hope and pray that the bunker they were staying in did not get hit by a bomb, because if hit straight on a bunker became more of a coffin then a shield. Often the battle that women faced during the war is not acknowledged as highly as it should be because they too suffered a great deal and they fought in their own kind of war.

One of the most troubling moments for women in Germany history is the period in which the Russian Army conquered Germany and carried out mass of rape of women of any age. Women became spoils of war, where age was not a factor, and those as young as twelve and as old as sixty became victims of gang rape. Some women resorted to “undesirable” behavior. Because there was little they could do to stop the treatment, they created a way to make it bearable by receiving goods and protection from the men in exchange for sex. The end of the war truly showed some of the women’s strength.
Over the twelve-year period where the Nazis were in control they placed women in many different categories and asked a lot of them. I hope this study can make it evident that the women who lived in Germany during the Third Reich were able to accept the changing demands imposed on them and to survive by accepting the ambiguity involved in the Nazi view by the role of women.
Chapter I

Background: World War I and the Weimar Republic

The German Empire in the nineteenth century, like many countries, did not give women the right to vote nor did it recognize them as equals in the public sphere. World War I brought the issues of women’s rights into public view. In 1916, the German government began to show concern about the exploitation of labor and the effects that it had on women’s, health and encouraged employers to establish an eight-hour workday limit.¹ With the war bringing a large number of women into the workforce, issues such as labor laws became visible to the government and the public.

World War I created a variety of opportunities for women to gain employment in the public work sphere outside of the domestic and agriculture industries. But this was not only an effect of the war, and continued earlier trends. Although, the war did create an opportunity for more women to work outside of the home, there is also evidence that women were becoming more involved in the workforce before the war. For instance, in 1914, early in the war, the steel industry had already increased its female labor force by 23 percent, and also the electrical industry had grown by 55 percent.² These statistics show that the increase in female labor started before the mobilization of women was in full effect. A large number of women worked in agriculture and in domestic services before the war and this of course, continued. The mobilization of women for the war effort did create more opportunities, but it was not be solely responsible for the rise in female employment.

Throughout the nineteenth century women were becoming more and more present in the work force. By 1915 nine million men had been drafted into the armed forces and with a

¹ Ute Frevert, Women in German History: From Bourgeois Emancipation to Sexual Liberation (Oxford: Berg, 1989), 158.
² Ibid., 157.
majority of those men being married, they left the women to depend on the small salary that soldiers received, which forced many women to look for jobs outside of the household. In 1916, the government passed the Auxiliary Service law, which was created to mobilize the remaining male labor force, and to move workers from the civilian industries into the more necessary military industries, and by 1917 women were included in this law. This created a large market for women’s employment in industrial jobs. The desire to obtain women workers led companies to establish different incentives for their workers. For example, some enterprises created social facilities such as factory housing, and even offered women an increase in pay for their services. By 1917, over 700,000 women worked in engineering, metallurgical, iron and steel, and chemical and mining industries. This was six times higher than the number of women working in 1913.

Overall, the mobilization of women during World War I brought more women into the work place by offering them more of an opportunity to gain employment in a variety of jobs that might not have been available before the war.

The demand for women in the labor services was brought to the attention of more women because it was more publically known through government-sponsored women’s employment agencies, which helped draw more women out of the domestic and agricultural industries and into the urban areas. World War I did help the women become more recognized in the public sphere and in many ways it helped initiate a more rapid development of female labor but it was not entirely responsible for the women’s movement. Statistics show that the women’s movement was already in development before the war had started. After Germany’s loss in World War I, it was necessary to rebuild the country by establishing a new democratic political system that gave more rights to the people.

3 Ibid., 154.
4 Ibid., 155.
5 Ibid., 156.
The Era of the Weimar Republic

The German Revolution of 1918 brought the Social Democratic Party to power and also enabled the voices of the many previously silent people to be heard. Women took an active role in the revolution by participating in rallies and political activities, but in the end it was mainly a military revolution. It started with mutiny of the Keil sailors, which led to the involvement of the home army. The Social Democratic leader Clara Zetkin sought to make women’s issues known to the public and she demanded that the government acknowledge women’s issues. But when the General Congress of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils met in Berlin in 1918 out of the 496 delegates, only two were women, Kathe Leu and Klara Noack. Women’s issues were pushed aside at this meeting, because the congress had to deal with bigger issues regarding the state’s economy and forming an efficient government. On January 19, 1919, the Council of Emissaries of the People granted women the right to vote and nearly 90 percent of the female population voted in the first election. This was the highest that the women’s vote would be for the next fourteen years. It seemed that after the initial excitement of receiving the right to vote women became less interested or did not see a change in their public policies and saw voting to be of limited values, because the percentage of women’s votes decreased over the years.

In 1919, Germany set out to create a new liberal constitution. Drawn up in the liberal city of Weimar, the constitution gave its name to the next dozen years in German history. The Weimar Republic is often said to be a time of political and social empowerment for the women in Germany. With women earning the right to vote and participate in government, some significant political changes did occur. Women were now represented in political councils and

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6 Ibid., 168.
7 Ibid., 169.
were able to be heard in the public sphere. One of the biggest political improvements was that the Weimar Constitution said equality of the sexes was considered as a basic right. This law did not truly mean that both sexes were considered equal in all respects, but rather that each had its individual value. Women did not have extensive property rights or rights in family law. Wages, labor conditions, job security also tended to be more in favor of the men. Legislation regarding female health concerns and childcare did not pass in the Reichstag. Although women’s issues continued to be brought up at the government level, little was done to improve their situation. By not granting full empowerment in the eyes of the law, the constitution left room for legal separation between genders. The constitution symbolized the idea that women could be recognized in the government but it also did not grant the complete emancipation of women that many had hoped. Thus, there were significant gains for the women’s movement but still many distant factions.

Earning the right to vote in a government election was a huge accomplishment for women in 1919. Women’s suffrage was gaining ground all over the world and Germany was one of the leaders in this political change, as can be seen by comparing it to other countries, after World War I, most countries were going through the same type of political changes in regards to women’s rights. The United States and Britain’s women earned the right to vote about the same time, but France did not grant its women the vote until 1944. Germany was one of the countries that recognized that women should be granted similar rights as men but women rarely filled leadership roles in political life. Thus, Germany had not granted full emancipation of women, but they did recognize them on the political level.

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8 Ibid., 170.
With women now able to hold government positions, women began to be voted into office. In 1919, two women served at the provincial assembly level and by 1930 there were almost 52 female office holders. At the beginning of the Weimar Republic only 386 women served on city councils, but that number grew to be 506 by 1924.\(^{11}\) The large increase in women involved in politics in the decade of the 1920s was an accomplishment for the women’s movement. Other countries allowed female participants in politics as well. For instance, in the United States between the years 1919-1925 six women were elected to Congress.\(^ {12}\) Germany seemed to be moving at a very progressive pace in terms of the emancipation of women.

With more women serving on political bodies, it was anticipated that more women’s issues would be solved. However, this seems not to have been the case, especially in the basic issues of job security, receiving equal wages, and health care. On these matters there seemed to be little change in the political direction of women’s rights. The women who were elected to office seemed to have little say in making the policies. They seemed to be there only as symbols of women’s equality rather than as effective policy makers. One female members of the Reichstag described her experience as ineffective. “The men are pleased if we don’t make any demands on their time at all. At meetings they debate for hours on the most trivial matters. But if we want to discuss our concerns, then time suddenly runs out and the comrades have to go home.”\(^ {13}\) This woman struggled with her new position in government because, although the law said she had a right to be involved in politics, the men in charge seemed not to care. Male

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politicians often talked about women’s issues in campaigns to gain their votes but there was little change in actual policies once they were elected. This was a new challenge for the women in Germany, because with previous laws they fought to gain a voice, now they had to fight to have their voice mean something.

Gaining rights and equality in the labor force after the end of the war was a major issue for women after the soldiers returned home. Having mobilized for the war effort, gaining public recognition for their hard work and patriotism, women found themselves struggling to keep the jobs they had just acquired. Men returning from war expected to return to their jobs and found that women had taken their place. Women gradually started to find themselves out of jobs or receiving lower pay compared to men. In factory jobs the wages paid to women in 1920 were 30 to 40 percent lower than those of men. Later, after the Depression hit Germany, many people lost their jobs, making having a job desirable, so a woman could not quit her job because of a difference in pay. Therefore, women continued to work in poor conditions in order to make ends meet. With the growing industrialization and economic consolidation during the 1920s, many companies were absorbed into larger corporations. The nature of work also began to change into a more male-dominated type of labor. Between 1925 and 1933 in the steel and iron industries, men became the primary workers due to the inability of women to handle heavy physical labor.

Women found themselves in jobs that did not require strength, but also that did not pay as well. Job qualifications became based on gender rather than the actual skill of each individual person. For instance, white-collar jobs as typists, shop assistants, tailors, or secretaries came to be held increasingly by women. These jobs came to be categorized under feminine work because they did not require manual labor. Women who worked in this type of trade were considered to

14 Bridenthal and Koonz, _Beyond Kinder, Küche, Kirche_, 49.
15 Ibid., 50.
be more respectable than the women in the factories and thus more desirable, despite low pay.\textsuperscript{16} Many women were drawn to the idea of working in an office because it would be a more refined social environment.

The image of the “new woman” was also created at this time, which was the idea of a more modern liberal woman. A more “modern” woman would have her hair in a bob, smoke cigarettes, and wear casual clothes. This woman worked in the public sphere and embraced the rights she was given by the Weimar Republic. Women were more independent as they went out and made their own money. In 1925, according to the census, over one-and-a-half million more women were in full-time employment compared to in 1907.\textsuperscript{17} The younger generation of German women indulged in the new idea of a modern society. During the 1920’s, sexual liberation was also occurring in Weimar Germany. Women were being educated on contraception and the idea of family planning. With more women in the work place, a decrease in family size occurred in Germany. By 1929, the average married couple had only two children.\textsuperscript{18} Women were becoming knowledgeable about the ability to practice safe sex and were better able to control their family size. Family planning gave many women the opportunity to work outside of the home even after they had children. The “new woman” was the idea that women could establish a sense of independence and did not need to rely so heavily on men.

Although the Weimar Republic made strides towards the emancipation of women in Germany, particularly by granting them a voice in the government and giving them more of an opportunity to work, it still struggled to keep a strong economy. The 1920s was a complex time of transition in Germany, economically and socially. Even with women now a part of the work force, the traditional beliefs about women and their place in the home lagged behind. After a

\textsuperscript{16} Frevert, \textit{Women in German History}, 181.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 176.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 186.
long eight-hour workday a woman was expected to come home and care for the members of her family.

During the runaway inflation of 1923 the rate of inflation went up every day, which made it hard for many people to maintain a suitable income. A young girl recounted the struggles of her mother trying to battle the rapid rise of prices.

As soon as she graduated from grade school, Mutti began to work six days a week in a small factory that made bed and table linens. She was barely tall enough to reach the sewing machines, inflation grew worse by the hour. When she received her week’s pay in the morning, she had to wait until her lunch break to run with her wad of paper money to the nearest bakery. But by that time the Reichsmark, the German currency of the time, had fallen so far that she could not buy a single loaf of bread with her six days’ wages.¹⁹

This is just one example of the type of life some people were trying to fight against and they became desperate. By the end of the 1920’s people in Germany were looking for a change that would improve their style of living and when Hitler started campaigning for the Nazis to come to power he promised a better life. In the tough economic problems of the Depression, anything that was different was appealing.

In summary, from the later nineteenth century women in Germany made significant strides towards independence by fighting for their rights to as well as having more opportunities to work in industries that were outside of the domestic service. The First World War gave women more of an opportunity to move and work in more of an urban setting. With men being sent off to war, the need to mobilize the women in the country to add to the war production helped bring women’s employment to the public eye. The modern liberal image of women that was developed after the war gave women a sense of empowerment and independence over their own lives. Although the Weimar Republic did not grant women the complete emancipation of

women in the public sphere it did grant them the right to vote and the ability to hold a position in a political office. With Germany’s economic roller coaster in 1920’s the first huge inflation and the deep depression people were struggling to make do with the life they were given. A need for a change in government provided a window of opportunity for Hitler and the Nazi Party. Women were strong supporters of the Nazi Party because they did not see their current living situation to be anything worth fighting for.
Chapter II
Women in Hitler’s Germany and the Nazi Idea of the Woman’s Role

Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi Minister of Propaganda, spoke to the women of Germany on March 18, 1933, six weeks after Hitler was appointed chancellor. In his speech Goebbels set out the expected image of women and proper duties that were to be carried out by women. Goebbels’ speech is a demonstration of how Nazi leaders saw women.

It is a happy accident that my first speech since taking charge of the Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda is to German women. Although I agree with [the historian] Treitschke that men make history, I do not forget that women raise boys to manhood. You know that the National Socialist movement is the only party that keeps women out of daily politics. This arouses bitter criticism and hostility, all of it very unjustified. We have kept women out of the parliamentary-democratic intrigues of the past fourteen years in Germany not because we do not respect them, but because we respect them too much. We do not see the woman as inferior, but rather as having a different mission, a different value, than that of the man. Therefore we believed that the German woman, who more than any other in the world is a woman in the best sense of the word, should use her strength and abilities in other areas than the man.\(^\text{20}\)

Goebbels made a strong statement when he said that women are not important in terms of history and the things that they do in society have no true effect on society. He asserted that the only thing that women do in history is raise the men who create it. This misogynistic view of women is exactly what the Nazi Party thought of women and their roles in society. He said that he respected women too much and that is why Nazis kept them out of the political sphere. But this idea of defining women only as mothers was really just limiting their independence and presence in the public sphere.

With the strong idea about women presented by leaders of the Nazi Party, one would ask what influenced women to support the party. A large number of women became party members or enrolled in the Nazi women’s organization. Through different avenues of propaganda, Nazi

officials were able to convince women that their place in society lay in the private sphere and that they should remove themselves from the public sphere. By placing enough of a priority on the role of women as mothers to the nation, Nazism was able to gain strength and grow across Germany.

Irmgard Hunt was a young girl who grew up a devoted Nazi during the Third Reich. Her parents were both party members and strongly believed in Hitler and what he could do for their country. Irmgard remembers that her father and mother had a deep devotion for Hitler. “Mutti and Vati praised Hitler for saving Germany.”21 Her parents were a part of the generation that grew up during the Weimar Republic, suffered through the runaway inflation and also remembered the struggles of trying to find a job in the Depression and the difficulty of keeping food on the table. Irmgard’s grandparents had a strong dislike for Hitler, which was common among the older members of the population. She recalled that her grandfather “maligned everything the Führer had done.”22 The distinction between the two generations is clear, based on the level of devotion to Hitler. The Nazi Party in many ways was a movement that was brought to life by the younger generation of people in Germany.

One of the main focuses of Nazi ideology was the teaching of Nazism to youth. With the emphasis on the young, it was important to gain the support of the mothers and young women in the country. Propaganda posters and pamphlets were distributed widely, preaching the values of Nazism for women and their need to reproduce and raise strong “Aryan” children. “Aryan” was the term used by the Nazis to show their racial superiority over other people. These people were described as having blond hair and blue eyes; the “Aryan Race” was what the Nazis deemed to be pure German people. Women were seen as the ones who were responsible for increasing the

22 Ibid.
birthrate of the “Aryan race” as well as teaching their children Nazi values. The Nazis emphasized this role again and again. Hitler talked to the Nazi women’s group in 1935 and said, “When our opponents say: You degrade women by assigning them no other task than that of childbearing, then I answer that it is not degrading to a woman to be a mother. On the contrary, it is her greatest honor. There is nothing nobler for a woman than to be the mother of the sons and daughters of the people.”23 By focusing attention on how important the raising of German children was, he was trying to show that their role in society was significant and valued. An article written by Erna Gunther in 1934, titled “We Women in the Struggle for Germany’s Renewal,” published in the Nazi Party magazine *NS Frauen Warte* gives a glimpse into what type of written propaganda was used. “The motherly spirit is the source of all that is eternal. Just as the farmer is deeply bound through the land to the primal forces of nature, a mother receives the rhythm of her life from god’s hand.”24 Women were constantly being reminded how important their role was to society through propaganda in the media and in speeches by Nazi leaders.

Nazi officials were able to place enough emphasis on the crucial role women played in the progress of Germany that many went along willingly. Women were encouraged to leave their jobs and become devoted mothers and wives. They were told their position in society was in the private sphere rather than in the public work force. Goebbels said in a speech in 1934, “Woman’s proper sphere is the family. There she is a sovereign queen. If we eliminate women from every realm of public life, we do not do it in order to dishonor her, but in order that her honor may be


restored to her.” Goebbels made a very bold statement when he said, “we eliminate women,” a phrase that shows how serious it was for the Nazi Party to make sure that women were not seen in the public sphere. He placed major emphasis on the role of women in the private sphere and did his best to make it seem important and necessary. Goebbels, as the Minister of Propaganda, had the duty to ensure that women felt special and vital in their role as German citizens. He did his best to make it seem as if the woman was the ruler of the home and that is something that no man could be.

The distinction between the public and private sphere is a key concept when talking about the image of German women during the Third Reich. The two spheres are completely different in terms of how German women were represented in both the political and personal settings. In the public sphere of the Nazi Party, women were expected to remain silent and not to have a role in the Reichstag or to hold any other political office. It was also expected that women would not work as lawyers or doctors. Nazi officials made it very clear that women were to remain out of public life and to be satisfied with having a family and taking care of their husbands and children. Hitler said in his 1934 Party Day speech, “Man’s world was the state, women’s the home, and the two worlds complemented each other. Women ought not to attempt to penetrate the world of men.” Women and men were considered to be two completely separate classes and they both were important in their own way. Hitler emphasized that women were important, but only in the home setting, and they were to remain in the household. Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, head of the Nazi Women’s Organization, said in her speech at the Nuremberg Party Rally in 1936, “It is therefore our task to awaken once again the sense of the divine, to make the calling to motherhood the way

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through which the German woman will see her calling to be mother of the nation. She will then not live her life selfishly, but rather in service to her people.”

Scholtz-Klink pushed the idea that having and raising children was the way to increase the superiority of the German people, thus giving women a vital role but keeping them in the private sphere and out of the force. (See the next section for biographical information on Scholtz-Klink.)

The Nazi ideal said women had a special job in German society and it was not to cure the sick or free the innocent, it was to bear and raise children and to continue the teachings of the Nazi ideology in the home life. The private sphere of women was to be centered on the children they raised and their devotion to their husbands. To continue to produce “Aryan” children was considered to be one of the highest honors a woman could achieve in Germany at this time. Nazi leaders wanted to increase the German population and restore the “Aryan” race. In order to achieve the greatness the leaders strove for, there needed to be an emphasis on the number of children a woman should bear. Women who had large families were idolized in The Nazi system.

Medals were introduced for a mother who had given birth to a certain number of children: a bronze medal for five children, silver for six, and gold for seven. As a sign of respect for mothers who received these medals members of the Hitler Youth were to greet them with the “Heil Hitler” salute. Another way to show public appreciation for German mothers was the celebration of Mother’s Day. This was a special day in Germany that was imported from America in 1922. Hitler changed Mother’s Day from May to August 12th because that was the

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28 Koonz, Mothers in the Fatherland, 186.
date of his mother’s birthday.\textsuperscript{30} Mother’s Day was made a national holiday and it celebrated the women’s place in society.

Marriage was also a way for the government to try and get women to voluntarily leave their jobs and become mothers and wives. In 1933 the Nazi Reich issued a law that offered a financial encouragement to couples who got married. The law stated,

German citizens who marry may receive, upon application, marriage loans up to the amount of one thousand Reichsmarks. The application for the granting of a loan may be made before the marriage takes place. The conditions for the granting of a marriage loan are: that the future wife has held a job in the country for at least six months in the period between June 1, 1931 and May 31, 1933; that a public declaration is made in the marriage-registration office by the future wife that she will give up her status as an employee not later than the time of the marriage, or that she has already done so when the application is made; that the future wife is forbidden to resume employment so long as the future husband has an income of more than 125 Reichsmarks per month and the marriage loan is not entirely redeemed.\textsuperscript{31}

The government had economic reasons for offering this financial incentive at a time of extremely high unemployment in the country because of the Depression. But the reasoning behind this loan also shows that the Nazis thought the labor of women was expendable for society. Couples were eligible for a loan only if the woman withdrew from the work force, but it placed no regulations on male employment. The loan was an incentive to many women because they were not making high wages in their jobs and with this loan they would be able to have a windfall of a decent amount of money, a nest egg to start their marriage. In a way, it was like a state-supported dowry on behalf of the women.

Nazi propaganda targeted women by appealing to their emotional side with speeches such as those given by Scholtz-Klink that labeled a mother who worked as selfish and neglectful of her natural duties. With Nazi leaders giving many speeches to women at the Nuremburg Rallies

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
the idea appealed to many women. Germany was struggling in hard times and the people were looking for any way out. With women earning less money in jobs than men it seemed that life could be better in the society Hitler described in his speeches. To a young German girl struggling to support herself, the idea of being seen as important in the private sphere was a tempting offer. Leaders were able to embellish the life of motherhood enough to gain significant support from the female population.

**The Nazi Women’s Organizations**

Creating a unified organization of women that was in support of the National Socialist Party was seen as necessary in order to grant the female population a sense of involvement. When the National Socialist *Frauenschaft*, the Nazi Association for Women, was established by the Ministry of the Interior in 1933, the first leader was Paula Siber. The *Frauenschaft* absorbed already existing women’s groups, such as the National Association of German Housewives, the Women’s League of the German Colonial Society, and the Association of Protestant Women of Germany. The Nazi Party combined all the groups and placed a Nazi official in charge. Siber, the woman in charge, was given the public title of Führerin but Nazi officials did not want a woman to have sole control, so they appointed a co-head, Dr. Krummacher to be the Führer of the *N.S Frauenschaft*. Dr. Krummacher was said to be a family man who had a large number of children. Women who supported the organization did not take well to Dr. Krummacher, especially after he made a negative remark about the lack of support the women gave to the soldiers during World War I. Women were furious about the comment and one woman from the

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33 Ibid., 62.
34 Ibid., 65.
audience said, “I could have gone up and beaten him.” A petition was drawn up for his removal from the organization. Dr. Krummacher was not happy with his life in politics and later committed suicide. Frau Siber was also soon ousted, and replaced with Gertrud Scholtz-Klink in 1934. Siber did not have the dynamic personality that was needed to head such a large organization, and Scholtz-Klink did.

Gertrud Scholtz-Klink was the ideal example of the “Perfect Nazi Woman,” a blond woman who was able to have many children and still devote herself to the Nazi Party. Born in 1909, in Baden Germany, she lived to be 90 years old and remained faithful to her Nazi beliefs until she died in 1999. She was a child of a civil servant who came from a humble background. She became a teacher and married at the age of eighteen her first husband, Fredrich Klink who was also a teacher. They had six children together, two of whom later died. Scholtz-Klink joined the Nazi party in 1929 with enthusiasm for the Nazi ideals and she became a loyal member of the organization. Both she and her husband took active roles in the party and recruited members all over Berlin. Later Scholtz-Klink became the head of the women’s section in Berlin. Klink died in 1930 and the death of her husband drove Scholtz-Klink deeper into her loyalty to the Nazi Party. She quickly remarried, to a doctor, Guenther Scholtz. Differences in their political devotion to the Nazi Party led to their divorce in 1938. After her second marriage ended, she married for a third time in 1940, to an SS Obergruppenführer named August Heissmeyer. Heissmeyer had five children from a previous marriage, which gave Scholtz-Klink a household of nine children in total. Having this many children and being married to an SS soldier, created a

35 Ibid., 66.
36 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
strong public image that fed into the idealistic image of what a German woman was supposed to strife to become.

The image of Gertrude Scholtz-Klink was perfect propaganda in itself. She had blond hair and blue eyes, was a loyal Nazi married to a SS officer with many children. To the public she was the perfect Nazi woman who looked the part as well as having a large number of children. She stood as a symbol for women all across Germany and gave women the sense that they had a voice in a masculine-dominated party. She was a strong figure for women to look up to. With all of her power, it was important that she be seen in a very feminine light as well, even though she was a woman in charge. With the separation between men and women in the public sphere women were to remain feminine and not give the impression of being overly masculine. In the same regard, the idea of the “New Woman” was rejected. Women were not to appear over-glamorous or show too much interest in their personal image.\(^\text{39}\) In 1937, Doris Kirkpatrick from The New York Times was able to interview Gertrude Scholtz-Klink. This was a rare occasion for an American and she was able to describe her initial thoughts when meeting the Führerin. She wrote,

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\text{One meets her surrounded by Nazi flags and uniforms. Her gentle femininity is a startling contrast to the military atmosphere. She is a friendly woman in her middle thirties, blonde, blue-eyed, regular featured, slender. She sits in a wicker chair on her little balcony and chats with her visitors. Her complexion is so fresh and clear that she dares to do without powder or rouge.}\(^\text{40}\)
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The imagery that Kirkpatrick used to describe Scholtz-Klink, a feminine woman in the military atmosphere with Nazi flags behind, is a true representation of what Scholtz-Klink’s role was in the Nazi Party. She was the female face to a male-dominated regime and she exuded the idea of the “perfect Nazi woman” from all angles. With her face looking clear and untouched by the

\(^\text{39}\) Kirkpatrick, Nazi Germany: Its Women and Family Life, 152.

contemporary uses of make-up, Scholtz-Klink demonstrated the ability to look pure and unaffected by modern society, keeping true to German traditions. Having her look the role of the ideal German woman made the propaganda that she was preaching more real and effective because she herself could be used as an example.

Scholtz-Klink represented the public image of women in Germany. She was a figure in the public eye who spoke on behalf of women. She praised Hitler and spoke often of the dedication that she had to him and her country. Scholtz-Klink looked like a Nazi official who had a voice in politics but, in reality, she had no part in creating government policies. During interviews she did not speak openly on government policies or express her thoughts on the matter. She gave answers that were publically acceptable. For example, when Doris Kirkpatrick asked her what were her feelings towards the possibility of Germany going to war, the Führerin responded with an answer that was publically acceptable rather than her actual thoughts. “She glances up at the swastikas and across at the black boots of the uniformed men beyond the doorway and she turns quickly away to hide the tears in her eyes. ‘I have sons,’ she says quietly.” Scholtz-Klink did not give a direct answer to the question about whether or not she was in support of or against war; instead she gave a vague response that showed more of her emotions. A woman was not supposed to engage herself in issues that were in the public sphere, so it would be inappropriate for Scholtz-Klink to give her thoughts on government policies. She was to remain the ideal German girl throughout her reign as leader of the Nazi Women’s Organization and she was to stay out of public policies.

Another women who was in the public sphere was Leni Riefenstahl, she is an important figure to look at when studying women in the Nazi Party because, although she was a woman, Hitler himself placed her in charge of a very important project. She directed one of the most

\[^{41}\text{Ibid.}\]
famous pieces of Nazi propaganda ever made the film *Triumph of the Will*. There were many male film directors at this time, yet she was the one hand-picked by Hitler. In a society where women were not seen as full-fledged individuals who were capable of working actively outside of the household, Riefenstahl was able to film several important documentaries for the Nazi Party. Soon after completing *Triumph of the Will*, she filmed *Olympia*, which was a documentary of the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin. She was also in charge of filming the arrival of Hitler after he had invaded Poland. Riefenstahl had become a celebrity in Germany because of the popularity of her films, and became another woman who was a public figure in a society who did not see that to be acceptable.

Riefenstahl was born in Berlin on August 22, 1902, and she aspired to be a dancer. After suffering from an injury, she dedicated her life to the art of film. She directed her first film in 1932, *Das Blaue Licht* (The Blue Light), and was then contracted by Hitler to produce a film that depicts Nazi Germany as a strong and unified country. *Triumph of the Will*, were filmed at the 1934 Nuremberg Nazi Party Rally. Riefenstahl utilized innovative film techniques, which is part of the reason for its’ popularity. Her work was one the most influential pieces of Nazi propaganda. She became another example of a woman being seen in the public eye with the approval of the Nazi Party.

The Hitler Youth, a large organization designed to involve the youth of Germany in the Nazi Party, began in the years of the Weimar Republic during 1922. It started out as a boy’s only organization and it was not until 1930 when the girl’s section was added. The girl’s organization of the Hitler Youth was called *Bund deutscher Mädels* (BdM). This program was run to be similar to a finishing school for young girls, where they were taught proper table and host etiquette.

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along with behavior standards. Physical fitness was also encouraged through sports, like gymnastic and dance. The group also participated in hikes and camping trips, it was noted that weekends were filled with activities that kept the young girls active.\(^{43}\) Keeping the activities fun made the BdM a positive experience for many of the girls who joined. Many girls joined because their mothers were involved in the adult women’s organization, while others joined because they saw it as a social event.

The girls were taught to be very soft and graceful people, one of the slogans of the BdM was, “Be Faithful, Be Pure, Be German!”\(^{44}\) Political training was not necessarily taught explicitly, but more subliminally through group events and the girls were taught to focus on the idea of teamwork instead of individual accomplishments. For example, the girls participated in team activities instead of individual sports and they were awarded Nazi badges for their accomplishments.\(^{45}\) An important lesson in Nazi ideology was working together and unity. Fashion was another way that limited the ability for a young girl to be seen as an individual. The fashion and ideal look of a German woman was a point of emphasis for the BdM. Nazi projected the societal image that proper German women did not wear make-up, smoke, or wear pants but instead they tied their hair in a bun and dressed tastefully with a slight elegance.\(^{46}\) The image of women was expressed to all the members in the BdM and they were expected to follow the regulations. Having a unified look among the young women would limit the idea of personal expression and would create a more universal look for girls.

The Hitler youth was designed to target children at a young age because the youth can be very impressionable and can quickly understand tough political ideas. The youngest division was


\(^{44}\) Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 196.

\(^{45}\) Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 82.

\(^{46}\) Ibid.
the Jungmdel or the Young Girls, which was for children between the ages of ten and fourteen. Another section of the BdM was called the Glaube und Schönheit, the Faith and Beauty, which was tailored to the girls who were between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one and focused on domestic advise.\textsuperscript{47} This subsection was created to teach girls who were approaching the age of marriage and needed to be prepared for life at home. Table etiquette, along with how to behave when one was a guest at a dinner party, was some of the main lessons taught to these women. Also another topic that was stressed was the importance of sexuality and the need for women to practice monogamy with a man of the “Aryan” race, so one would not infect the “Aryan” race with “non-Aryan” men.\textsuperscript{48} Teaching the youth the important Nazi ideals early on was designed to ensure that they would grow up into strong Nazi women.

The second adult women’s Nazi organization, the Mothers Service Department, established in 1934, was designed for women who were eighteen years and older to teach them the correct way to be a wife and how to run a proper household.\textsuperscript{49} In the Mothers Service Department, the dues and fees were paid by the participants and through community donations. The department was able to build and fund around 150 schools across Germany.\textsuperscript{50} Enrolling in the schools was not mandatory for the general public, but it was strongly encouraged. However, women who were married to SS officers were required to attend the classes. Although the schools were not a government-mandated program, there was no shortage of enrollees. In the first three years it was reported that about one million women were enrolled in the program. Although by 1936 the number decreased to around 673,074, annually it still was a very large

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 154.
\textsuperscript{49} Kirkpatrick, \textit{Nazi Germany: Its Women and Family Life}, 152.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 74.
program. Women enrolled in the schools of this department went to school but they did not learn the common education curriculum. Instead they were taught how to manage a household, with stress on cooking, sewing, caring for children, German customs, and first-aid. All of these skills were taught to women to ensure they would grow up to be successful mothers, which is what the party expected of women. A party periodical called the *Die Frau* stated, “The purpose of the National Mother Service is political schooling... [and] political schooling is shaping to a certain attitude, an attitude that out of inner necessity affirms the measures of the state, takes them into woman’s life.” This is evidence of the purpose behind the creation of the Mothers Service Department. Nazi officials wanted to instill and spread the ideology of Nazism and creating schools like this helped carry their message to the masses.

Different departments were created that targeted different age groups of women or focused on different needs for women. For example, the Folk Economy-Domestic Economy of the Frauenwerk focused on older housewives and it aimed to help women with understanding the health and well being of the nation. The Border and Foreign Department of the Frauenwerk founded in 1934, was an organization of women who showed great hospitality to foreign visitors. During a time when the foreign press reported negatively about German women this department was created to show how happy the women were. Another group that was outside of the Frauenwerk but under Gertrud Scholtz-Klink was the Woman’s Bureau in the German Labor Front. This department, also established in 1934, was responsible for looking after the protection of women in the work place. All of these departments were propaganda tools in Nazi Germany to spread the message of Nazism. In order to establish a strong following among the people, the

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51 Ibid., 75.
54 Ibid., 82.
young women needed to be taught early on the ideals and expectations they were expected to uphold. The older generation of women also needed to have certain organizations to go to fulfill their duties as a Nazi woman.

Programs like these were effective ways to teach Nazi ideology to a wide number of people. Also women seemed to really take to the idea of feeling involved with the party. Some women would go to more rural areas of Germany to spread the Nazi word, and they saw themselves as a type of missionary. It was a part of a woman’s duty to spread and teach Nazism to other people. Scholtz-Klink wrote about how women were “mothers of the nation” in many articles. She wrote in the Frauen Warte, “The woman, besides caring for her own children, should first care for those who need her help as mothers of the nation.”55 Women were the caregivers of the nation and it was their responsibility to help those around them. All women were seen as mothers in a way, even if they did not have children, because the role of women was to help those around them. All women were expected to have children but, as Scholtz-Klink stated, the first thing women needed to care for were the people.

Ideas like this placed women in the background in their own lives. They were told constantly to take care of other people, and there was no talk of them becoming individuals and pursuing their own happiness. They were told to place their husband’s and children’s needs before their own and that they were selfish if they did it any other way. Scholtz-Klink said, “It is therefore our task to awaken once again the sense of the divine, to make the calling to motherhood the way through which the German woman will see her calling to be mother of the nation. She will then not live her life selfishly, but rather in service to her people.”56 The term motherhood was used often in descriptions of what a woman was capable of doing. By saying

56 Ibid.
that it is the woman’s “sense of the divine” Scholtz-Klink was saying that it was the natural role for them to assume. The way she referred to motherhood sounds more like a religious calling than a political one. The argument that motherhood was a natural right enabled her to appeal to a large number of people. By elevating Nazi policy, to the level of eternal human duty allowed her to convince more people to join the movement.

Scholtz-Klink stressed that women worked for the state and that everything they did was for the betterment of the people. This was a theme in the ideology of the Nazi Party, which said that everyone was to work together to create a strong people and a strong nation. Scholtz-Klink just adapted this theme to the role of women, and encouraged them to abandon the jobs they had acquired during the Weimar Republic and to devote themselves to the Party, which valued them only as mothers. She referred to women in the Weimar Republic who had children and continued to work as people who did not care about the child’s happiness. She said that the Weimar Period had regarded motherhood as just a job, “Transforming the calling of motherhood to the job of motherhood left children joyless, unhappy, without strength or soul.”57 She used the guilt tactic to appeal to women’s emotional and maternal side. Any woman who is a mother would hate to be told she did not truly care for her children or was uninterested in their happiness. With Scholtz-Klink focusing on a personal and emotional issue like motherhood the argument seemed to be more realistic and effective.

Although Scholtz-Klink talked in detail about the importance of a mother who stayed home and took care of her family, she did not completely dismiss the women in the public work place; as long as a woman was able to devote herself to the party and contributed positively to the state she would be seen as a true German. In a 1936 speech she said: “women with children will become mothers of the nation, but rather each German woman and each girl will become

57 Ibid.
one of the Führer’s little helpers wherever she is, be it in the labor service, in a factory, at a university or in a hospital, at home or on the high seas.”

Scholtz-Klink was smart in the sense that she did not want to completely disregard women who did not have children or the ones with a job. Therefore she spoke of the important work that was done on behalf of the state and said that was a valid contribution to society. The Nazi definition of a good woman was flexible in the sense that it could apply to a variety of women. Yes, they wanted women to stay at home and have children, but they also did not ban all women from working.

Another women who was in the public sphere was Leni Riefenstahl, she is an important figure to look at when studying women in the Nazi Party because, although she was a woman, Hitler himself placed her in charge of a very important project. There were many male film directors at this time, yet she was the one hand-picked by Hitler. In a society where women were not seen as full-fledged individuals who were capable of working actively outside of the household, Riefenstahl was able to film several important documentaries for the Nazi Party. Soon after completing *Triumph of the Will*, she filmed *Olympia*, which was a documentary of the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin. She was also in charge of filming the arrival of Hitler after he had invaded Poland. Riefenstahl had become a celebrity in Germany because of the popularity of her films, and became another woman who was a public figure in a society who did not see that to be acceptable.

In many ways Scholtz-Klink was a hypocrite and did not practice what she preached. Yes, she had a large number of children and looked very maternal, but she was a working mother in the public sphere. She often traveled to various speaking engagements, which kept her away from her family, and their everyday needs. She preached the idea that a woman needed to place

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her family’s best interest first, but she seemed to be more involved in the Party than her home life. She was also a woman who worked in politics, which was supposed to only be acceptable for men. She may not have been in the policy meetings and was used more as a public image than an actual politician, but nonetheless she presented the idea of women in politics. She was a very smart and established woman but her own life was a contradiction to what she had told thousands women to do with their lives.

With a great deal of opportunity available for women to engage and to learn the proper Nazi ideals through different groups and organizations the overall image of women was easily spread throughout the population. By creating an environment for women to gather and participate in a type of school, the political party received an aspect that would draw more women into the groups by association. The different departments spread Nazi propaganda well because they were able to reach many women at one time. Women saw their involvement in the various groups as a way to be involved in the public sphere. The importance of these groups was made very clear through countless speeches and written articles. Women were constantly being reminded of what their role was in society and to remain in the private sphere. Creating these departments allowed women to get out of the house and feel as if they were contributing to the political movement.

In the film *Triumph of the Will*, director Leni Riefenstahl shows the German people and their reaction to Hitler; with it being full of symbolic images it presents Hitler as the savior of the nation. For the purposes of this study, it is important to address the way Riefenstahl depicts women in the film. When Hitler first gets off of the plane, he is welcomed warmly by a very loud and large group of people who have been awaiting his arrival. All the people cheer and demonstrate the *Heil Hitler* salute. Frequently shown in the film are women and children who
look to be overjoyed to see Hitler and greet him as he gets off the plane. The women are smiling and Riefenstahl seems to be highlighting the women in the crowd because many of the shots of the people are of the women and children. In these early scenes she shows three young women who are standing next to each other smiling. They are raising their arms in the *Heil Hitler* salute as high as they can in an effort to have Hitler notice them, and they move back and forth to try and get a glimpse of him. Then the film cuts to Hitler and the way the film is cut it looks as if Hitler is looking right at the girls, and then it is cut again back to the same group of girls and they are pointing and waiving to him. Riefenstahl is making a great point about how excited these young urban women are to see Hitler. Also the peasant women in the full costume, suggests support among rural women too. Although it has been said that the scenes shown in the film were staged, it is still important to see how Riefenstahl shows a variety of women and their expressions towards Hitler.

Throughout the film women are seen as people who are overwhelmed with excitement to see Hitler. One woman runs into the street with her child during the parade to greet Hitler while he is riding in his car. She shakes his hand and presents him with flowers. This is a powerful scene because not only is the woman giving the *Heil Hitler* salute, so is her young daughter. This woman was so excited to see Hitler that she could not stand on the side, and instead felt the need to run up to Hitler’s car and give him flowers. Riefenstahl showed women to be individuals who were enthusiastic about the Nazi Party and were overjoyed when they say Hitler. The way she in the film implies wide span support of all women for Hitler and the Nazis and sets up a model of the way that women were supposed feel about the Nazi Party. Film was a valuable medium for propaganda. It allowed filmmakers to show great enthusiasm about the party as well as Hitler. In the various organizations that were formed for women one of the main ideals that was taught was
the devotion to Hitler and the party. That is how Riefenstahl presented women in her film, as people who were very excited to be in the presence of Hitler and who were great patriotic supporters of Germany. *Triumph of the Will* helped demonstrate that a large group of people supported not only Hitler but also the Nazi Party she was also able to highlight women and their devotion as well.

It appeared that many of the German women in the society embraced the role of being the “mother of the nation” and were willing to sacrifice a great deal of their independence for their families and the Nazi Party. Scholtz-Klink and Leni Riefenstahl became public female figures who helped bring the female image to the public eye. With Scholtz-Klink large family and dedication to the Nazi Party she also could be seen as living proof of the ideal image of a women. Riefenstahl was also able to highlight the support that women had for the party in a major film. Her role in German was a public one as well as important. Scholtz-Klink talked to large groups of women and presented the many reasons why women should sacrifice themselves for their family and how it would in the end benefit the nation. The women of Germany were to embrace the idea of becoming the “mothers of the nation” if they wished to be accepted by their peers and members in society.
Chapter III
The Start of War

On September 1, 1939 German troops entered into Poland with an estimated one and half million men, crossing the border with large amounts of machinery both on the ground and in the air.\textsuperscript{59} German troops attacked Poland from three sides. The Poles were stretched too thin trying to protect their frontiers and the Germans easily broke through the Polish lines. With large amounts of artillery, soldiers, and high-powered aircraft, German armies easily overcame the Polish military resistance. The German Air Force included 897 bomber and 425 fighter planes in comparison to the Polish 154 bombers and 159 fighter planes.\textsuperscript{60} The Poles were outnumbered and unprepared to fight the strong and enthusiastic German Army. The Poles surrendered on September 27, 1939 in order to protect their people and the few facilities that remained after the swift German attack. This victory gave the German government a large boost of confidence and encouragement for their idea that expanding Germany’s borders was feasible.

Goebbels’ annual speech at the end of the year on December 31, 1939, summed up all the events of the past year. He commented how proud he was of the German people because of their devotion to the war. At the end of his speech, he spoke at length about the victories that had occurred in Poland and how the year of 1939 had been the best year for Germany. Goebbels declared, “Another year is behind us, the proudest and most important year of the National Socialist regime. We see it’s passing with honor and respect. It was a German year in Europe’s history.”\textsuperscript{61} His speech was an example of the constant encouragement and reinforcement of the idea of German superiority among the other European countries.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 4.
After the German invasion of Poland, Britain and France had declared war on Germany. Although Hitler knew that the war with Britain and France would be more challenging than the battle with Poland, he hoped to quickly achieve his military goals in the west and then return to the east to fight the Russians. The German Army invaded Denmark and Norway in April of 1940, but its main focus remained on its plan for a three-pronged attack on France, Belgium, and Holland. Wanting to avoid a two front war, that is, fighting against both the Western and Eastern countries Hitler put faith in his blitzkrieg style of warfare and moved rapidly into Holland and Belgium in May 1940. The Dutch army was no match for the German troops and surrendered by May 15, 1940. While the Netherlands and Belgium were being secured, Germany invaded France and its Panzer divisions rapidly moved forward, winning victory after victory against the French army and the British expeditionary force. After Dunkirk on May 30, 1940 the French army continued to retreat, giving up large amounts of land and military personnel. The French government knew its defeat was quickly approaching after German troops captured Paris in mid June and on June 24, 1940 fighting ceased in France. Thus, the fall of France was a huge victory for Germany, which had been defeated just two decades earlier in World War I. Germany was in control of the Western European countries except for Britain.

With Hitler was planning on winning the war in a short amount of time, the military was not prepared for the war to last as long as it did. Germany prepared for a series of short wars, which meant that at first it could avoid the mobilization of workers for the labor services and also a reduction in the mass weapon production. Additionally, with Hitler’s blitzkrieg war plan, he had hoped to catch his enemies off guard with the power of the German forces but he was not initially equipped to carry out long-term warfare against large and determined enemies. The lack

62 Evans, *The Third Reich At War*, 123.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid., 133.
of planning for a long war became one of Germany’s biggest downfalls in terms of their broad strategy.

Soldiers experienced high morale due to the swift victories as well as large paychecks for their services. The average soldier earned 50 reichmarks per month, an attractive wage for men who had been victims of the Depression, or who were working in the factories before the war where their wages were still low. German soldiers were encouraged to spend their wages on gifts and goods from the countries they occupied and send packages back to their families. The women back home who were generally the recipients of these packages, delighted in the desirable goods they received, such as tobacco, coffee, silks, and food. Many women felt that the packages they received were indications of how their men felt about them while they were away. One woman recalls how women would brag to each other about the gifts they received from their men. A woman named Liselotte S. was a young girl when her father was in the German army and she recalls the packages her father sent home while he was stationed in France.

I know that my mother sent my father money every month. He used it to buy things we lacked at home: coffee, cocoa, cheese, chocolate in various forms, shoes for my mother, for me, and our apprentices, fur-lined and plain leather gloves, once even motorcycle gloves. Every day packages from France arrived in the mail.

This recollection of the packages sent back to the families in Germany is a good indication why women on the home front might have positive feelings about the war at first. In their minds, they were receiving goods that they did not ordinarily have access to, as well as positive remarks from their loved ones in the army. Women and children were able to see the

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66 Ibid., 97.
67 Ibid.
benefits of war. As soldiers sent lavish presents, women back home might easily assume that the war was a positive event.

Soldiers were able to provide goods to their families that they were not able to have otherwise. In a way, the soldiers were providing specialty and scarce foods for their families back home, while also giving them a variety of consumer goods. For instance, Wolf Goette a soldier wrote back to his family, “I’ve noted your various requests. Yesterday I purchased four kilos of cocoa for you. A supply of perfume and eau de cologne as well as some light-colored leather gloves for Donna… a portable electric cooking stove together with a pot and a pan.” Goette was one of many soldiers who took requests from his family members to buy goods and send them back home. French historian Henri Michel observed, “Loaded down with heavy packages, German soldiers departed from the Gare de l’Est for home leave. Their luggage was crammed with lingerie, specialties from Paris, and luxury goods of every description. They had been acquired in countless petty transactions.” Gotz Aly argues that the fact that the German people received such extravagant gifts made the war seem to be very beneficial. For our purposes, it is worth noting that many of those receiving the benefits from goods sent home by soldiers were women. It gave them a stake in the war. Women on the home front got the impression that the war was going to last only a few months and that they were going to continue to reap the rewards from the victories of the military services.

Nazi propaganda emphasized all the benefits that came from war and many people were in support of its continuation. Germany seemed to be running unopposed in its’ quest to prove their superiority. Due to positive publicity regarding the army’s victories, many people looked at the war as a good event. The people of Germany reaped real material rewards from the

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69 Aly, Hitler’s Beneficiaries, 99.
70 Ibid.
victories in the West. Women became supporters of the war because they stood to continue to
gain from the rewards that German victories brought. Propaganda stressed that conquered lands
in the East were going to be available for the people of Germany, in order to spread the Aryan
race. Some women did not agree with some of the policies of the Nazi Party, to build new
homes in the countryside. After the victory in Poland, Poles were expelled from some areas and
new German villages were created for German people. Many people went into these territories
as volunteers for the Nazi Party and saw themselves as pioneers whose job it was to help move
the Polish population out of the newly acquired areas. Melita Mashmann, a woman who went
into the Wartheland territory of Poland in 1939, felt that it was her job to educate the Poles.

“ My colleagues and I felt it was an honor to be allowed to help in conquering this area for our
own nation and for German culture. We had the arrogant enthusiasm of the cultural
missionary.” 71 Mashmann viewed the expansion of the German borders to be a good thing and
believed in the dominance of the German race. She is a good example of how some of the
women in Germany benefited from the swift victories that were achieved by the military. Even
as late as November 1942 and March 1943, forty-seven villages in the Zamosc area were
cleared of their Polish population to make room for incoming German people. 72

Goebbels’ positive attitude towards the war was magnified by the end of 1940. His “New
Year’s” speech of 1940-1941 praised the superiority of the German army and its people. He
recognized the efforts of the German people, both men and women, and their dedication to the
war effort.

I greet the entire German people at the end of this great and eventful year. I greet the men at
home whose hard work supports the war, the workers at the wharves and munitions factories. I
greet the women who accept all the difficulties and challenges the war brings, who have jumped

71 Evans, The Third Reich At War, 40.
72 Ibid., 37.
in everywhere to replace the men who have gone to the front, who in the midst of it all still give birth.\textsuperscript{73}

Goebbels made an important statement about women in his “New Year’s” speech by acknowledging their ever-changing role in society. Women were being called on to replace men in the labor services as the war continued and more men were being drafted into military services. The societal demands on women at this time went far beyond expectations for them in the years before the war. Now, more and more women were being called into labor service positions in order to keep up with the demands of war. Having Goebbels say he appreciated women adapting to their changing roles shows an effective use of the positive propaganda towards women, continuing to encourage them to take an active role in the war effort.

The mobilization of women in the sense of drafting women into the labor services or enlisting them as factory workers did not happen in Germany in the early years of war, in 1939-1942. In the first years of the war Nazi propaganda still continued to stress family structure and the traditional domestic image of German women, although there was more emphasis on new areas. For example, women were expected to want to help out in the war production because it would be their way of helping their sons, brothers, and husbands who were fighting on the war front. A frequently quoted statement by a woman working in a factory said of her son who was off at the front: “I buttered bread for him, now I paint grenades and think, this is for him.”\textsuperscript{74} Propaganda continued to use the idea of women practicing self-sacrifice to benefit those around them. Women continued to be seen as mothers and caretakers for their loved one who were fighting, but given the current circumstances their job was to provide war products for them.

Gertrud Scholtz-Klink said, “Our men at the front do their duties in the face of death we women at home, with the same unflinching courage, go in whatever direction the Führer indicates.”

Nazi propaganda emphasized the notion that women were expected to fill the void left by the men who had gone to fight.

Rather than mobilizing women in the early years of the war into the labor services, Nazi propaganda targeted women as consumers to help boost the economy and to keep their families fed and clothed with German-made goods. With women being responsible for the grocery shopping and the overall consumption of their families, a large amount of propaganda was directed at them in regards to their ability to stimulate the economy. Women were encouraged to do their part as German citizens by buying goods from local markets. One slogan praised the German woman, “through whose hands, when she is shopping, passes the largest part of the German national income.”

Propagandists targeted women and proclaimed that their role as the housewife was to benefit all society by putting money into the economy when they bought from local stores. The campaign based on the idea of economic improvements, gave justification to the government encouragement for some women to stay out of the labor services. Telling women that they were accountable for the national income gave them a strong sense of responsibility in their own private sphere. With the role of the housewife being given such responsibility for doing right by her nation, the German woman was made to feel important and a part of the war.

Women were also taught how to conserve food and other goods in a variety of ways, such as knowing how to preserve foods and to make food go a long way. One women’s organization, the Folk Economy-Domestic Economy section of the Frauenwerk, was dedicated to the “health

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75 Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, “Zeit der Berwahrung” 5, quoted in Ibid., 117.
and economic well-being of the nation. On the eve of the war this organization had a total membership of around two million housewives; it targeted especially the older women in society. Housewives were taught how to shop according to a budget along with how to preserve goods in the home. All of the things that were taught dealt with how a woman was able to continue to feed her family even if she had few resources. This idea of teaching women how to conserve food on the home front was not just limited to Germany. Women in America were also urged to conserve food in order to be sure there was enough food for the military. All countries that were involved in the war were forced to make changes. Women were to remain strong and show their bravery by being able to support their children and continue to live their lives while their loved one was off at war.

As the war continued, the need for men in uniform continued to grow and this affected the women of Germany. Husbands, brothers, and sons were being called up to serve their country. Women were called into the factory, and into domestic, civil service, and agricultural industries. Germany needed a large agricultural labor force due to the large numbers of small farms. Agriculture already depended heavily on female workers before the war, with no fewer than six million women working in that industry. The number of women workers in agriculture steadily increased throughout the war as more and more men were drafted into the military services and by 1944, 67 percent of women worked in the agriculture industry. During the harvest season, the amount of female labor service rose even more, because of the high demand for labor.

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77 Kirkpatrick, Nazi Germany: Its Women and Family Life, 79.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
One of the main reasons German women were not called into the industrial labor force was because of the large number of foreign laborers brought into Germany, and from the first years of war many of these foreign laborers were female. Thus, women in the German industrial labor force increased from 37 percent in 1939 to 51 percent in 1944, but it was not German women who were employed. In May 1939, 14,626,000 German female citizens were employed in industry but, by September 1944 that number had only increased to 14,897,000. It was foreign women who were taking the jobs of the German men who had left to go to war. This was the case because foreign women were cheaper to employ and factory owners were not forced to grant them the same benefits as German citizens. The foreign workers came from several sources. Countries recently occupied by the German army sent large numbers of women to work in Germany, in particular large numbers of Poles and Ukrainians came to work in the factories in Germany. Also, many foreign women worked as domestic servants and served as a symbol of status for German families. Other Eastern European countries supplied foreign workers, who regarded the jobs in Germany as better than their opportunities at home. Eastern workers were cheap; they could work long hours and not receive a break and they also did not need to have holidays off as German servants did. The use of foreign labor including female labor was an important part of the reason that for most of the war it did not seem necessary to mobilize German women to work in the war industries.

In the early 1940’s when the war was going well for Germany, the women were able to reap the rewards from the victories and were under the impression that the war was going to be easily won. Women in Germany were not forced into mobilization in the beginning years because the demands of war were not as serious. There was a heavy dependence on foreign labor

81 Ibid., 361.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
and on the few remaining men who were still in the cities. Nazi propaganda continued to focus on the idea of women staying in the private sphere of their home and continuing to have children. Some women were still called into employment in the early 1940’s but it was a significantly lower amount than in the later part of the war when the demand for war production was high and labor was scarce.

**Teachers, Nurses, Secretaries, and Guards**

But factory jobs were not the only kind of work that a woman could go into during the war. Young girls saw the war as a time to expand their horizons and see what the world had to offer outside of the German farms, domestic service, or factories. There was a need for women to work at jobs such as nurses, secretaries, teachers, and even guards at the concentration camps. Women took these jobs very seriously and were very proud because these jobs made them feel a part of the actual war and gave them a feeling of importance. In addition some young girls saw becoming a nurse or secretary as a way to avoid having to become a domestic servant. The opportunity to enlist in some of the service jobs that the Nazi Party had created, gave a large number of girls working as domestic servants or on a farm the chance to becoming independent. The war created service jobs for women that were otherwise not there before when men filled those roles. White-collar jobs were now more available for younger unmarried women who wanted to become more financially independent. While married women could also take these positions, their focus had to remain on the raising of children.

Teachers played an important part in spreading Nazi propaganda because it was the teachers who taught the youth the proper Nazi ideology. Two-thirds of all German teachers had attended Nazi-run training camps where they were subjected to physical and ideological
training. Imprinting Nazism on the youth was a priority for the Nazi party so it was important to have the teachers become devoted believers. During the early part of the war, 1940 to 1943, teachers were sent to the occupied territories in Poland to spread Nazi ideal to the new German immigrants and even to the Poles, who were seen as “inferior.” Hitler, compared the expansion of the German borders to the westward movement of the Americans, and spoke of his goal as, being to Germanize the East by bringing in a large number of German immigrants, and to look at the Poles like the native Americans of the west.

Women became certified teachers so that they could work abroad. Igelene Ivans studied in Hamburg so she could be sent to work in the foreign services. In 1942 she received her orders to teach in Reichelsfelde, a Germanized village in Poland. Ivans was one of several hundred teachers from Germany who were sent to teach in the Wartheland region in Poland, along with thousands of teachers who were sent to teach in schoolhouses all over Poland. Nazi authorities saw it as a priority to continue to send teachers to Poland in order to develop strong ethnic Germanism in the new occupied areas. As early as March of 1940, some twenty-five hundred German women were working in German-only schools in one region of Poland. Women were finding their role to be very important in German expansion. But it made them part of the Nazi expansion and subjection of other peoples. In this case the Poles. The women that went to expand Nazi beliefs are what make women partly responsible for the terrible things the Nazis did. They were the ones who were put in charge of teaching Nazi ideals and that was seen as an honorable task among some German women.

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85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
A woman named Annette Schucking became a nurse in 1941 after she realized that her dreams of becoming a lawyer were not going to come true due to the domination of men in the upper-level jobs and because of Hitler’s bar against women practicing law. She felt she was called to participate as a wartime duty and, although she did not agree with the Nazi ideals, she said she was still a proud German woman who wanted to support her loved ones who were fighting. Schucking is an interesting case that shows that while some women were not loyal followers of the Nazi Party, they still had a sense of German patriotism that led them to want to help those men they knew overseas.

Another example of how the war opened up new opportunities for women is the story of Erika Ohr. Eighteen-year-old Erika, the daughter of a shepherder who lived in Ruppertoshofen, Swabia, believed that her only way out of an inevitable life as a domestic servant was to become a nurse. In 1938, she became a part of the German Red Cross, which Hitler had taken control of in 1937, placing it under the command of the army. This meant that Red Cross nurses could be called up for military service. Ohr was sent to the Ukraine in 1942, to fulfill her military service as a nurse. She was an idealistic girl who saw the Nazi party as a way to explore the world and to try new things that she would otherwise not have been able to experience.

The idea of youth seeing the adventure in war strengthens the idea of the Nazi Party as being a movement that reflected the aspirations of the youth. Nazi propaganda targeted young unmarried girls in a series of campaigns. A Nazi poster featuring a young girl dressed in a German military service uniform says, “Aid Victory by joining the air defense information” (Figure 1) (Figure 1) The date of this poster is undetermined but it is most likely to have been printed in the

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88 Ibid., section Nurses.
89 Ibid.
early 1940’s. The poster shows a young blonde-haired girl who seems very eager to join the air service. She gives the impression that she is more than willing to enlist in the military services and serve her country. This type of poster is what the Nazi propaganda put on display in order to gain more supporters in the war effort.

Working in the expanding Nazi Party bureaucracy gave many woman a way to be a part of the national effort, and this was highly encouraged by Nazi leaders. According to historian Wendy Lower in *Hitler’s Furies*, a young girl named Johanna Altvater, who had grown up as a member of the Hitler Youth, took strong pride in her Nazi beliefs and applied for service to work in the Nazi offices. The Westphalian town where she grew up in the 1930’s had suffered economically and the job opportunities were few. Altvater, who was at nineteen, was working, as a stenographer in 1938. But she grew restless and wanted to leave the simple life she had been living so she could see more of the world.91 Lower says that when the young Westphalian “realized that the Nazi Party membership would open up opportunities, perhaps in the newly annexed territories of Poland, Altvater filed her application.”92 Altvater’s case demonstrates the opportunities for women offered by the Nazi Party and one type of job that it offered. Many girls were looking to get out of the common drudgery of small town life or farm life and see what the world had to offer them. Altvater was a good example of young girl seeing benefits in aligning herself with the Nazi Party.

Working as a secretary in the Nazi Party offices was one of the most desired jobs because the pay was better than most jobs and it seemed to be safer than being on the actual battlefields.93 Working in the Nazi offices was not for everyone and the woman who worked in the offices had to be a certain type of girl. She had to have strong Nazi ideals, demonstrated in actions that dated

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91 Ibid., Kindle edition, section Secretaries.
92 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
back to before she applied for a job, and to be a girl who had been involved in the Hitler Youth program, or a member the Women’s Organization. Another criterion was that the woman had to look the part, that is, she had to look like the ideal German girl, with blond hair and blue eyes along with the appropriate body build.\textsuperscript{94} Altvater was a girl who fit the part the Nazi offices were looking for.

The secretary’s job also had a large amount of power, in contrast to other women’s jobs, in the sense that secretaries were able to be involved in or even made some decisions. In a world where women had little to say about what they wanted, secretaries were granted a small amount of power. Women who were asked to work for the more elite offices in the Gestapo or the Reich Security Main Office were required to take a vow of secrecy.\textsuperscript{95} As more men were called into duty more positions in the Nazi offices became available to women, creating a shift in the typical image of women in Germany. The women in white-collar party careers, with more opportunity to better themselves by working for the Nazi Party, were presenting an alternative to the traditional model of motherhood that had previously been the model for women. A portion of the younger generation of women who were not married found that becoming involved in the Nazi Party and enlisting in the work force was an excellent way to become independent and live on their own. This style of living among the unmarried women was not the traditional image of women based on the original Nazi beliefs, but as the war continued there was no other option but to accept these changes.

One of the most shocking jobs that women held during the war was working in the concentration camps. Many women volunteered for the opportunity to work as a guard in the concentration camps because it was seen as a powerful job that paid fairly well. The stories

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid.
recounted about some of the women who worked, as guards in the camps are appalling. Women
have been seen as soft and caring individuals throughout history and there is something almost
terrifying about the way some of these guards abused their powers on the Jewish prisoners.

The story of Irma Grese, born in the village of Wrechen in Mecklenburg, joined the
Hitler Youth in her early teens in the 1930’s. She found the Hitler Youth to be a great
organization for her and she became a fanatical member. When she was eighteen in 1942, she
was convinced to join the SS Female Helpers,’ a training SS guards who wanted to work in the
concentration camps. She started work at the women’s concentration camp Revensbruck and
then later moved to Auschwitz. Her training to become a guard included watching and practicing
cruelty on inmates and engaging in promiscuous sex with male SS guards. All of those things
were taught in order for the women to remove themselves from their morals and personal beliefs.
These behaviors go against everything that was taught to women. Working as a guard in the
camps placed women in jobs that gave them unlimited amount of power over other individuals.
This job created another dimension for women in the labor services because this was such a
violent job.

Irma Grese became known as the Beautiful Beast because she was so strikingly pretty.
One inmate recalls, “She was one of the most beautiful women I have ever seen. Her body was
perfect in every line, her face clear and angelic and her blue eyes the gayest, the most innocent
eyes one can imagine.” Grese was said to be one of the most brutal guards at Auschwitz she
was the youngest female guard there and in charge of 30,000 women. Stories have been told
by survivors of the camps that she seemed to enjoy beating and killing the prisoners. When the

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96 Kater, Hitler Youth, 70
97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
Quoted in Kater, Hitler Youth, 71.
British soldier liberated the camp, Grese was one of the first people put on trial and convicted for the crimes against humanity in the Bergen-Belsen Trial of 1945. She was sentenced to death and was hung in December of 1945 at the age of twenty-two.

The question of why she was so brutal comes to mind when trying to understand what drove another human to act in this way. Being that she was the youngest female at the camp, it could be she was looking to make a point by showing that she belonged with the men in the SS, and in order to do that she thought she needed to act more violent than the other guards. There is no clear answer as to why Grese committed such terrible crimes but it is clear that she deserved the punishment that she received. Women working as guards in the camps went against the expected and traditional roles of women in the early part of the regime. Working as guards was another example of women filling the jobs left by men who went off to fight in the war.

In the course of the war women were being pulled in all directions in terms of the roles they were asked to fill. With more jobs becoming available to them, employment became more of an option, but for them, they were also encouraged to continue to have children. An article in Frauen Warte, “Life Must Win,” published in January 1940, tried to persuade women that having children during a time of war was a good thing and would help the German population.

No one may take away the desire of German women to have children. Some may attempt to spread the idea that children born during the war will face hunger and a future wounded in body and soul, as happened during the [First] World War. But the government today sees in children its greatest wealth, and its highest task in caring for them. It will see that children born during the war will be protected, and can look forward to a happy Germany.101

This article seems intended to give women a sense of security that the government would help the new mothers if they were in need. Recognizing the great privation and hunger suffered by

German children during World War I, especially toward the end, the Nazi Party promised to provide protection for a new child.

The mobilizing of women into the labor force during the war involved contradictory expectations for German women. The government needed to increase war production but it also did not want to abandon the pronatalist policy and the maternal image of German women that they had created over the early years of the Third Reich. Even while women were encouraged to join the labor force, although not required to do so, Nazi propaganda still put the focus on the German woman as the “mother of the nation.” It encouraged women to participate in the total war effort, by saying how strong and brave they were. For example, one of the lines of propaganda directed towards women made a comparison between childbirth and men going to war. With childbirth being something dangerous that could easily take a woman’s life, propagandists linked the bravery that it takes for women to go through that to the danger a man faced going off to war. In 1942 the effort to connect the struggle of childbirth to men on the battlefield appeared in written campaigns.

How well can a mother understand the soldiers who are ready to sacrifice their lives for others! Is not every woman who brings a child into the world ready for the same sacrifice, does she not venture into the same dangers as the soldier in battle, the danger of losing her life? But she does not question this, because fate demands that she be brave.102

By presenting the idea of childbirth as an action as brave as fighting in a war, the propaganda campaign was able to maintain the traditional maternalist role for women, thus still defining women as mothers.

Women were seen as the “mothers of the nation” and that notion did not fade as the war continued. Starting around the year 1943 the main slogans were centered on a woman being a

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102 Rupp, *Mobilizing Women For War*, 121.
mother or wife to a soldier and also to the work on the home front in order to be a part of the total war effort. Woman were always linked to men by stressing how they were helping their loved ones. As the war advanced, they were seen as the mothers who were in charge of neighborhoods under attack by enemy air raids. For example, in there is an the image of a woman in a military uniform that gives the impression that she is soldier in her own way. (See Figure 2) When air raids would strike a city the women were the persons in charge and were the caregivers of people around them. The woman was to be the protector of her family thus adding to the idea that women were always linked to the idea of motherhood. The new role enlarged earlier images of women in the factories working to provide bullets for their sons. Throughout the Third Reich Nazi propagandists continued to use the model of motherhood that they had created because it seemed easier to gain female support if they were able to link women to their loved ones overseas by stressing an emotional connection. The idea of “mother of the nation” was now being used in a different way than before the war had started, making the role of women in Nazi Germany a very ambiguous one.

It is hard to discern the true feelings of German women at this because most of the published literature was Nazi propaganda and women later were often not willing to come forth as people who were pro Nazi during this time. Given the large number of women who participated in the labor services, we can conclude that a majority of women in Germany did support the Third Reich or at least believed that the work that they did helped their loved ones who were fighting. Because the Nazi government was able to shape the image of women at the time, it was able to convince many women that their role in life was to become mothers and to help the nation by giving birth and sacrificing themselves for the people around them.
Families were encouraged to honor their loved ones who had been drafted into the military. Having a soldier in the family was seen as something to be proud of and all members of the family were encouraged not to mourn the loss of their loved ones but to celebrate their heroism. Irmgard Hunt, a young girl who grew up immersed in Nazi ideas, remembered the day her father received his draft letter in 1939. She was seven years old. “I did not want him to leave at all, but I understand already that he had to do what the Führer wanted.” Her father died later in the war while he was stationed on the Western Front. In her youth she already realized what it meant to be a Nazi and to live life devoted to Hitler. The way she recalled her reaction towards her father’s death very interesting. She explained that she did not feel that she could express how sad she was because she had been taught for so long that her father’s death was honorable and it did not need to be seen as a sad thing. She remembers her father’s former boss saying to her mother, “Chin up, Frau Paul, chin up. He died for the Führer” She recalls another moment after the death of her father when she felt forced to remain strong and not show weakness.

I too received a lesson in heroism, a lesson in how to bear sacrifice and keep my head up. The morning after we got the death notice, my teacher, Fräulein Stohr, a fanatical Nazi, ordered me to stand up in front of the class and tell everyone how proud I was that my father had given his life for the Führer. I stood before those hundred children, my face burning, my hurt heart thumping. I clenched my fists and swallowed hard, determined not to cry or otherwise show anyone how I felt.

This passage like the one about her father’s boss shows a lot about the day-to-day social expectations members of a bereaved family faced. Her father had just died in the war and her teacher was asking her to stand up in the middle of the class to talk about it. This was all part of the idea that dying for the Führer justified anything, including death, and that somehow was supposed to make the passing of a loved one easier. It is sad to think that such a young girl was

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104 Ibid., 110.
105 Ibid.
not able to fully grieve the death of her father and that she had to remain strong because that is what she was clearly told was the right way to act. The description of fighting back the tears to make sure she did not show emotion is all a part of the Nazi ideal of what a young girl should be able to live up to.

The Nazi Party was in many ways a youth driven political movement and it gave young women the chance to break free from the traditional life on the farm by giving them opportunities to work in white-collar jobs in urban areas. Becoming a nurse for the military gave women the ability to engage in a life of adventure. This was an attractive quality of the Nazi Party and helped gather the support of the women and specifically the young ones. Jobs in nursing, teaching, or in an office as a secretary also offered a higher class of job compared to working in a factory. These jobs became highly sought after because of the pay as well as the social status. More and more women started to move into the work force in the later part of the war as a result of the high demand of labor and war products.

**Air Raids**

During the first years of war, Allied air raid bombings were infrequent and mostly daytime raids; they caused some damage but not a large number of casualties. Hamburg, Germany’s second city and the home of many industrial and trade buildings, which was relatively accessible to British bombers suffered most of the early attacks. The first attack on a German city, on May 18, 1940, by the British Air Force, was on Hamburg, and by the end of the year the city had been attacked 69 times. But in the first years the bombings did not have much effect on civilian life. Although they caused damage, they were regarded mostly as a nuisance, a kind of the harassment. But civil defense programs were quickly put into place.

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106 Evans, *The Third Reich at War*, 436.
poster from 1940 threatened people that if they did not turn off the lights then the enemy airplanes could see their homes and bomb them. (Figure 3) The poster shows a skeleton driving an airplane and throwing a bomb at a house with its lights on. The sign says, “The enemy sees your light! Black out!”

Before several key advancements in aerial navigation, it was also difficult for planes to fly the great distances to their targets without going off course. By 1942 Britain began to make significant advances in the manufacturing of bomber planes. Using new models such as the Avro Lancaster, the Wellington, and the Handley Page Halifax, planes were also able to produce a better rate of success while on missions. British forces were now able to carry out more destructive air raids on German cities, which in the end would be one of the most damaging aspects of the war for the German people. As the development of bombers advanced and became more accurate the effect of bombing on the people of Germany grew. The numerous attacks on German cities between the years 1943-1945 left many families homeless and caused a large number of deaths to German citizens. By the end of the war Allied bombers were dropping bombs over an entire area usually a city. Covering the entire area like a carpet. This technique of carpet-bombing was extremely destructive to urban areas.

Women in the cities were the ones who had to deal with the emotional and physical burdens of the bombing raids. Elizabeth Heineman best describes this burden in her article, “The Hour of the Woman.” “Germany’s city women, even if they and their homes were untouched by bombs, lived the second half of the war with little sleep and shattered nerves.” Many women and children were left homeless after the raids and were forced to move in with

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108 Evans, The Third Reich at War, 436.
110 Ibid.
whomever would take them. Official evacuations of cities were not allow for everyone to leave—only women caring for small children or unemployed women were allowed to be evacuated, while those who were working or did not have children were required to remain in the dangerous cities. Staying put on the home front could be nearly as dangerous as fighting in the actual battles.

The story of a family in Darmstadt gives an example of the destruction the air raids had on a family both in physical injuries as well as emotionally. Frau F. and her two children had taken shelter in September 1944.

On the night of September 11, 1944, their shelter was hit. They ran to another, from which they also soon had to flee. Willy’s clothes caught fire; as Frau F. beat out the flames, Gisela disappeared. She was never found. With burn wounds, Frau F. and Willy made their way the next morning to Frau F.’s sister-in-law, who, like Frau F., her mother, and two-thirds of Darmstadt’s population, had been left homeless by the previous night’s raid. All that the family had been able to save were a few linens and two suitcases full of clothing. Frau F. took her mother and Willy to relatives in the countryside; Frau F. returned, as required by law, to her post in Darmstadt.111

During the time of heavy and frequent air raids, women were to remain in the cities to take care of those who couldn’t take care of themselves. We can discern a shift in the image of women, from the previous ideal of being simply the housewife, to a new one of being the protectors of the city. In many ways, the women in the cities were soldiers in their own war. While the men in their life left them to fight on the war front, women were left with no guns or ways to protect themselves other than the minimal protection of a bomb shelter. While men were losing their comrades in the midst of battle, women were losing their children and loved ones. They felt they could not show their fear for they had the responsibility to remain brave in order to protect their children.

By early 1945 large numbers of Berliners were living permanently in the bunkers. The bunkers were usually crowded, filled with a large number of people in a relatively small space.

111 Ibid., 363.
There was a sense of order while the civilians were down in the bunkers because, despite the frequent attacks, it was necessary to establish a rhythm of routine and order. All shelters were supposed to have at least one nurse and appropriate supplies to be able to handle any injuries that might occur although in practice this was not always so. As the years went on the Berliners found different techniques that would help make the bomb shelters a little safer. Using candle flames as indicators monitored oxygen levels. A lit candle would be placed on the floor and if it were to go out, then children were to be moved to higher ground. A candle would be placed as high as chin level and if that were to go out, everyone in the bunker had to evacuate immediately.

A woman who lived through the 1945 American firestorm bombings on the city of Dresden explained her experience in a basement shelter.

Normally, there were only 20 to 25 of us down in the cellar. But now, with many people off the street, including those who'd stopped over at our house, there were about 100 of us. Nevertheless, no one panicked -- we were too numb and demoralized from the night before. We just sat there. The attack rolled closer, and then a bomb hit. It was like a bowling ball that bounced, or jumped perhaps, and at that moment the lights went out. The whole basement filled with dust. When the bomb carpet reached us, I crouched in a squatting position, my head between my legs. The air pressure was immense, but only for a moment. The rubber seals on the windows and the steel doors probably helped to absorb some of the impact. Someone screamed, and then it was quiet. Then a voice shouted, "It's all right, nothing's happened." It was the shelter warden.

This description of this woman’s experience is good indicator of what life was like while down in the bunkers. Words like “numb” and “demoralized” suggest those were the main emotions of the people of Germany.

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113 Ibid.
Bombings increased as the war went on. For instance, in the town of Munster in 1943 sirens went off 209 times, 329 times in 1944, by 1945 no less than 231 alarms had gone off in just four months. Bombings happened day and night, alarms sounded nearly every day and the much of these people’s lives were spent in a bunker. The constant fear and destruction brought on by the bombings led to a decline in morale among the citizens. Air raid bombing was a strategy used by both Allied and German forces and civilians in other countries, such as Britain, also experienced a heavy air raid bombing attacks. German forces bombed London heavily during the Blitz.

By 1943, after the defeat of the German army at Stalingrad, the war began to turn against Germany. At Stalingrad the German army had suffered many causalities and heavy losses of weapons supplies. Now the notion of total war was put into force, including the total mobilization of materiel and people for war. Germany faced the danger of a decline in war production because of the large number of men being called to the war front, which left a gap in the workers in the factories and in the agricultural industries. Nazi propaganda sought to gain support the people, who were starting to feel the negative effects from the war. With more men not returning from battle and the increased number of air raid bombings, German citizens needed to receive support from their government and the German state also was in desperate need of a surge of support from the public.

February 18, 1943, soon after the official surrender of the German army at Stalingrad, Joseph Goebbels gave one of his most famous speeches to a very large audience in Berlin, which was also heard on the radio. “A nation that has the strength to survive and overcome such

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115 Evans, *The Third Reich at War*, 455.
a disaster, even to draw from it additional strength, is unbeatable.” This speech really showed the serious turn the war had taken for Germany. Goebbels’ speech was lengthy and full of enthusiastic remarks about gaining the support of the German people and fully engaging in the total war effort. A large part of the speech spoke directly to the general public about how their contributions to society would benefit the state and the men fighting in the war. Goebbels acknowledged the strength the German people had shown at home and on that war front during the last four years. “In my speech to you and the German people, I shall remember the heroes of Stalingrad, who put me and all of us under a deep obligation.” He started off with these remarks to engage his listeners but to also plant the idea that they were indebted to the soldiers and needed to be willing to help any way they could. Goebbels did not truly acknowledge the severe impact of the loss at Stalingrad on the German army in his speech; rather he placed a majority of the emphasis on what the people of Germany could do to continue to help the soldiers and the Nazi Party.

Another tactic Goebbels used to gain the support of the public was to portray how terrible it would be if the Russians were to take over Germany and overthrow the Third Reich. “A Bolshevization of the Reich would mean the liquidation of our entire intelligentsia and leadership, and the descent of our workers into Bolshevist-Jewish slavery.” Goebbels also referred to the Bolsheviks as a group that was accepting of the Jews. Through the years of Nazi propaganda “Bolshevists” and “Jews” were the two worst groups for Germans to associate with. His speech was really an effort to drum up much needed support for the war. The method was to inspire fear of what could happen if the Russians were to gain control over Germany. By

117 Ibid.
118 Ibid.
explaining the possible repercussions of Russia winning the war Goebbels, sought to scare the people to fight to the very end to protect their country. Two days after Goebbels’ “Total War” speech, the Main Office for Propaganda printed a document explaining how important it was that the German army won. The center of this document talked about the terrible things that the Russian government would do to the German people.

The fate that would befall the German people, each person without exception, under Bolshevism must be made clear. As the Führer said in his proclamation, the lot of millions of Germans would be the hardest and most miserable slave labor in the Siberian tundra. The wretched existence of millions of working people in the Soviet Union, the ruthless system of forced labor, and the horrible conditions in the forced labor camps speak clearly and make brutally clear what the fate of our working people would be.119

Driving the people to participate in the war effort out of fear of what could happen if the Russians were to win the war was a tactic often used in Nazi Propaganda. Even if Germans did not support the Nazis, they would agree on not wanting to become slaves of the Soviet Union. Telling the people that the war could affect them even if they were not a part of it would lead a large number of people to join into the efforts.

Joseph Goebbels’ speech addressed the role of women by calling on them to engage more in the total war effort. They needed to work in the factories and on the farms in order to fill the void left by men. This speech came at a point in the war when the German situation was very different from that in 1939, when the war first started and women were encouraged to stay at home to increase the birth rate. Now the government needed women in the public sphere more than before. Instead of having women focus on household chores, the emphasis on work in the factories and in the agricultural industries had become more important.

For years, millions of the best German women have been working successfully in war production, and they wait impatiently to be joined and assisted by others. All those who join in the work are

only giving the proper thanks to those at the front. Hundreds of thousands have already joined, and hundreds of thousands more will join. We hope soon to free up armies of workers who will in turn free up armies of fighting front soldiers.\textsuperscript{120}

He created a direct correlation between the men on the front and the women working on the home front in order to create an emotional connection with the audience. Talking about tradition was another tactic used to gain support. Goebbels claimed there was, a long standing tradition of German women stepping up during time of war, which gave a foundation to the idea that it was women’s duty to help with the war effort in 1943. Goebbels saw the importance of having women enlist in the labor forces in order to keep up with the heavy demands of the war production as a way to develop new sources of strength in order to compensate for the defeat in the East and to put Germany back on the path to victory.

Another aspect of Goebbels’ speech was an implicit threat against women who chose not to work and who thought that they were above working in the fields or factories. A woman who thought she was too good to work in the war effort was said to be a traitor, disloyal to her countrymen and more importantly to her loved ones fighting in the war. The tactic of guilt and emotional connection between the people at war and those on the home front was one of the main methods of propaganda during this time. Goebbels developed this theme at length in his speech.

\textquote{I would think little of German women if I believed that they do not want to listen to my appeal. They will not seek to follow the letter of the law, or to slip through its loopholes. The few who may try will not succeed. We will not accept a doctor’s excuse. Nor will we accept the alibi that one must help one’s husband or relative or good friend as a way of avoiding work. We will respond appropriately. The few who may attempt it will only lose the respect of those around them. The people will despise them.}\textsuperscript{121}

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid.
Goebbels made it clear that anyone who tried to get out of war work would not succeed and if any women tried to skip out on their duties they would be taken care of “appropriately,” a threat that would be taken very seriously. This speech by Goebbels seems to have been an effort to keep up the morale of the people in the cities. He gave the people of Germany false hope with the idea that victory was possible and that, if people would continue to believe, then it was still possible for Germany to win the war.

As the war continued, especially in 1944 and 1945, Allied bombing raids were causing a great deal of damage. Women and children suffered significant damages as the war continued and the carpet-bombing increased. A new role for women emerged, as they became soldiers in their own kind of war. Women were trying to protect their families in the shelters as the bombs dropped as well as watching as their children starve to death because of the food shortages. Women not only had to survive for themselves, they had to survive for their children.

The Nazi propaganda placed an emphasis on trying to increase the morale of the citizens and trying to urge them to continue fighting. The need for women labor force by 1944 led to new calls on women to serve also forced women once again to adjust to the demands of the Nazi Party. Women became targets of a large propaganda campaign that pushed for women to do their part in war production. The propaganda continued to use the theme women sacrificing themselves for their loved ones who were fighting in the war. Even as the war dragged on women were still being seen as individuals who were there to help the men in their lives.
Chapter IV
Women in the Time of Downfall

Major defeats at Stalingrad, in Normandy, and then in the Battle of the Bulge, would lead the German people to lose, faith in the idea of Germany winning the war. Living conditions in Berlin, as well as other German cities, were becoming unbearable due to the heavy Allied air raid bombings and the limited food supply. The harsh conditions in the cities, as well as the new propaganda campaign made great demands on women. The people still in the cities, who were mainly women and children, saw conditions continually getting worse, with no end in sight. A mass campaign of Nazi propaganda started in 1944 even before the Allied invasion at Normandy in an effort to uplift the spirits of the people and also to engage them at an even higher level in the continuing war effort.

An article in *Das Reich* praised the strength of the German people as a way to keep morale up and build positive attitudes on the home front. The article titled, “The Party Overcomes Terror” written by Hans Uhle in May of 1944, spoke of how important the Nazi Party organization had been for the people in the cities during the Allied bombing raids. He mentioned women and children and how they were attacked by the bombings. The terrible conditions that women were going through were recognized in this article. By 1944, the war had shifted to an attack on the civilian population as well, because of the bombings. Women had to fight their own war at home. Uhle claimed that without the organization and leadership developed by the Nazi Party the people would not have been able to survive at all. He placed the Nazi Party on a pedestal in an effort to show people that they were right to believe in Nazism because it had gotten them through hard times.

No one today doubts any longer that this war of terror against the civilian population, against women and children, the old and the ill, would be impossible without the party. During the brief years of peace, some saw the party’s efforts merely as “organization.” Today, it has proved itself
a well-planned, beneficial community of fighting men and women who, in addition to full days at their jobs, are willing to sacrifice all their strength for the good of the community, proving it countless times through their actions.122

Uhle argued that the party was what had kept the people alive because it had been able to bring them together. He stressed the idea that the party was built on the idea of people sacrificing themselves for the greater good of the community and that was what was crucial in the present moment. The community and the people’s ability to sacrifice for one another was how people would survive the terrible attacks on civilians by the Allied bombers.

The war continued to worsen. On June 6, 1944, Allied troops, including a large American force, invaded the Normandy beaches, creating major problems for the German military. Some elements of the officer corps came to believe that the only way to save Germany was to remove Hitler. An assassination attempt on Hitler’s life took place on July 20, 1944, but it failed. After the attack on Hitler’s life, Goebbels tried to argue that it had only strengthened Germany. In an article, “The Call of Duty” in Das Reich published on July 20, 1944, he wrote,

A nation that after five years of such a war has no thought but to work harder and fight more bravely than ever before, and that responds to such an attack on the life of its Führer, and thereby its own life, with such a wave of confidence and faith, is certain of victory. It need only work resolutely and loyally, undismayed by the dangers and difficulties it faces. At the end of the war, the balance will be drawn.123

Goebbels was trying to turn the event into something that he could use to strengthen the will of the people of Germany and to obscure the fact that the German people were losing faith in their government. When Goebbels wrote “The Call of Duty” article he was trying to gather whatever support remained among the German people. Having people believe the attempt on Hitler’s life actually strengthened the regime, would deter anyone else from trying another attempt. Goebbels

believed the faith of the people could once again be restored if he were able to make the outcome of the July assassination attempt sound as if it could actually unify the troops fighting and the people. The effort was not really successful. Historian Richard Evans quotes one German woman as saying, “Why don’t you send us to Russia, turn machine-guns on us, and polish us off?”\(^{124}\)

A major problem that the German army faced was the shortage of fresh troops. In 1943, it had been considered a joke to talk about calling the old men of the country to fight in the war but by later 1944 the need for bodies of any age was necessary, leading to a call up of the older men and also boys. On September 26, 1944, Hitler ordered creation of the Volksstrum, the “People’s Storm,” which was a call to all males between the ages of sixteen and sixty to take up arms and go through training for the final stand of the war.\(^{125}\) All of the troops had to swear an oath of allegiance to Hitler, and they were told that it was their job to protect the German people against the attacks of Jewish-international enemies.\(^{126}\) The People’s Storm was a desperate attempt to gather more soldiers. Older men who were drafted into this military service were mainly between the ages of 44 to 60 years old, as well as some previously exempted for reasons of health. The boys who were called into duty were often very young. For instance, on March 17, 1945, all the fourteen to sixteen-year-old boys from the Napola secondary school at Oranienstein were enlisted to defend the western front.\(^{127}\) But The People’s Storm was not a successful organization and at this point in the war only minimal supplies were available for the soldiers. A boy named Ullrich S. saw a group of Volksstrum men marching through a city and described them as a group of misfit soldiers. “Tired and exhausted, most of them were wearing uniforms borrowed from the

\(^{124}\) Heinz Boberach, Robert M. W. Kempner, and Theo Rasehorn, Richterbriefe: Dokumente zur Beeinflussung der deutschen Rechtsprechung 1942-1945 (Boppard: Boldt, 1975), 6,030, quoted in Evans, The Third Reich At War, 452.

\(^{125}\) Ibid., 675.

\(^{126}\) Ibid.

\(^{127}\) Ibid., 678.
air force, or plundered. A few only had their mufti. I only saw five soldiers in all who were bearing arms, the rest were not even carrying a bayonet.”

The People’s Storm is portrayed in a modern day film, “Die Brucke,” or “The Bridge” (1959), by Austrian filmmaker Bernhard Wicki. This film depicts a true story of seven 16-year old boys who were drafted into the German Army during the final months of the war. The boys in this film were oblivious to the dangers of war and were very excited to be drafted into military service. They hoped to help defend their country. Nazi propaganda had worked wonders on these boys because they had no fear of dying for their country and saw it as a great honor to be in the army; they were proud Nazi boys. The boys all viewed going to war as a way to prove that they were real men and no longer children. “Die Brucke” does a fine job of showing the mindset of some of the teenagers in Germany at this time. Young people had been under Nazi propaganda for twelve years and it had made a lasting impact on their lives. This film, produces an ironic and bitter view a visual image of the fighting spirit that was called for by the authorities at the end of the war. The film helps paint a picture of the dedication of some of the young people in Germany even at the end of the war, demonstrating the effects of Nazi propaganda and how it had molded the minds of the young.

In the film the boys keep saying, “A soldier who defends just one square meter of ground defends Germany.” After one day of training in the barracks, when news came of an American unit approaching the city arrived, the boys were called to duty and they were left alone to defend a bridge that was connected to their hometown. All but one boy died in the fight against the American soldiers on the bridge, all of the boys fought until the end. Although this movie is a modern telling of a true story it shows the power of the idea of the People’s Storm and what

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129 *The Bridge*, DVD, directed by Bernhard Wicki (1959; West Germany: Fono Film).
Germany was willing to lose for the war. The film provides a picture of what the People’s Storm looked like and some of the effects it had on the young boys who were a part of it. It also shows how the people were misled into believing they still had a slight chance of winning the war. With propaganda telling them they had a chance people still continued to fight in battle.

The People’s Storm involved placing guns in the hands of boys who were too young to be fighting in battles and men who were too old to be able to meet the demands of war. But men were not the only ones called into war at this time. Some women were even conscripted into the military services as auxiliaries towards the end of the war. The jobs of the women varied and some of their duties included the burning of documents from the Nazi administrative offices. One twenty-three-year-old woman, Rita H., who had previously worked as seamstress, was put in charge of destroying incriminating documents. The women who were drafted in 1944 were there to help in any area where they were needed. Some women did learn how to fire weapons and were trained in some battle tactics. In the last months of the war, the People’s Storm reached out to pretty much any able body that was healthy enough to fight.

Newspapers in Berlin had slowly faded away as the war dragged on. Economic and resource shortages in Berlin made it difficult to produce newspapers regularly. However, the *Berliner Morgenpost*, was able to continue to publish. An article on October 5, 1944 tried to put a positive spin on the war by talking about Goebbels and his visit to some of the areas in Western Germany, close to the front lines. The article focused on the positive reaction of factory workers to Goebbels’s speech of resistance and strength. The article emphasized the importance of the work of people in the factories as they supported the men fighting on the battlefields. “The mass meeting was characterized by a fanatic spirit of resistance, and the determined will of the men and women of the border district to defend their endangered homeland, and to forge weapons for

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130 Evans, *The Third Reich At War*, 678.
the brave fighting divisions, despite the enemy’s threats and bombing terror. Their goal is to eliminate the threat and finally break the enemy’s attack on the border of the Reich.” With words like “fanatic spirit of resistance,” the emphasis on bravery and the urge to fight on, the article tried to strengthen the will of the German people to stay alive during terrible times. The article ended with a powerful statement: “This mass meeting near the front was a demonstration of the unbroken German will to never listen to the enemy’s slogans, and to defend the homeland bravely, fearlessly, and loyally.” The *Berliner Morgenpost* praised women workers as many in the efforts to lift the people’s spirits.

During November 1944, the Russians took a break from their rapid movement through the East to reorganize and regroup. Hitler saw an opportunity to try a final push in the West. German armies had been forced to retreat back behind West Wall by early December and were losing more ground every day. Hitler secretly massed fresh newly equipped to attack the Americans defenses to try to regain ground on the Western Front. He hoped to encircle the enemy forces and to push them towards back into France, which was similar to what had happened in the early part of the war. If this offensive strike was effective, Hitler hoped that it would lead the Allies to consider negotiation. German generals and commanders resisted the plan, saying it was unrealistic and arguing that the army would be unable to sustain an advance due to the shortage of men and supplies. But Hitler insisted, and in what became the Battle of the Bulge of December 1944, the Germans briefly seemed on the verge of breaking through. By the end of December the German advance had been throw back and now began the invasion of German territory from both the West and the East.

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132 Ibid.
133 Evans, *The Third Reich At War*, 678.
134 Ibid., 657.
By the end of 1944, the morale of the people in the cities of Germany was low and most people were suffering from the effects of the war. The increasing number of bombings raids, along with the poor living conditions, and high losses among the troops, during the years of the war had brought on terrible heartache. In Berlin, a bitter sense of humor manifested itself during the Christmas season in 1944 in the common joke, “Be practical: give a coffin.” People living in the bombed out cities were struggling to stay alive and did not see an end in sight and, more importantly, did not see a victory. Most Berliners had stopped using the “Heil Hitler!” greeting.

In 1944, Lother Loewe, a boy who was a member of the Hitler Youth remembered that he had walked into a shop and uttered the “Heil Hitler” salute and found that everyone had given him a strange look. That was the last time he used the sign except when he was on duty. There had been a dramatic decline in the belief in Hitler and his ability to lead Germany. German citizens were turning against Hitler and the people had lost all hope for the war. One citizen said, “It’s always being claimed that the Leader was sent to us by God. I don’t doubt it. The Leader was sent to us by God, not to rescue Germany, but to destroy it. Providence has decided to annihilate the German people, and Hitler is its executioner.” The several bitter jokes quoted here suggest that few had faith in the war and the government, a fact in contrast to the naïve faith of sound of the boys shown in “The Bridge.”

By the beginning of 1945, Berlin was suffering from terrible living conditions. There was little food, water, or suitable housing. Food was mostly a small portion of potatoes, milk, and bread. People lived in random empty apartments because their home had been destroyed in Allied air raids. People spent the majority of their time in the shelters. The bomb shelters were

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135 Beevor, The Fall of Berlin 1945, 1.
136 Ibid., 2.
often not safe and could do little to prevent death if they were hit with a bomb. A personal diary written by an anonymous woman who lived in Berlin through the end of the war and the beginning of the postwar period said that a shelter could be called a “cave, underworld, catacomb of fear, or mass grave.” With a large portion of the days spent in the bomb shelters it was natural for a sense of routine to emerge and to become regular, even in life-threatening situations. The woman’s diary told about how the occupants in each bomb shelter established their own way of life. Each shelter was different in a variety of ways, each had its own set of guidelines and routine during a bombing.

Every place has its own set of quirks and regulations. In my old basement they were obsessed with having water on hand in case of fire. Frau Weiers told me that in her shelter it’s the lungs. Here in this basement they’re all fixed on the walls. They sit with their backs against the outside wall. At the first explosion they move on to the next obsession: cloths--everyone has a cloth handy to wrap around their mouths and noses and then tie behind their heads.

The tone of this passage makes it sound as if no matter what these people did while in the shelters, nothing could help the people if they were actually hit with a bomb. She says that, “Wherever you turned you bumped into pots and pails and buckets and barrels full of murky fluid. And still the building burned like a torch. You might as well have spit on the fire for all that water would have done.” The sarcastic tone of the diarist indicates that the procedures that these people adopted were not beneficial because nothing could really save them if a bomb actually hit them.

With the greater part of the able bodied men, both young and old, involved in the military service, the only people left in the crumbling cities were the women. They were left to feed and

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139 Ibid.
140 Ibid.
shelter themselves, their children, and the elderly. In the last days of the Third Reich, women had to play the roles of both men and women.

**Women’s Experience During the Red Army Invasion**

As the Red Army started to march onto German territory in late 1944, they were driven to humiliate and punish the German people for what had been done to them and their families during the German occupation of Russia. The soldiers were told to keep “a book of revenge” that would remind them of the suffering they had gone through on behalf of the German soldiers. A slogan that was repeated among the Russian soldiers was, “We shall not speak any more. We shall not get excited. We shall kill. If you have not killed at least one German a day, you have wasted that day. If you kill one German, kill another--there is nothing funnier for us than a pile of German corpses.”¹⁴¹ It was clear that the Russian soldiers wanted to show no mercy to the German people. They did not see the Germans to be actual people, rather they saw them to be evil and an enemy that needed to die. Women quickly became the targets of the Russian revenge. They became the victims of a mass amount of rape and violence because they were defenseless, and thought to be weak.

Women who remained in the cities of Germany in the final months of the war were very fearful of the quickly approaching Red Army. Nazi propaganda over the years had depicted the Russian soldiers as cruel and terrible people who had no sense of humanity and would rape and kill all the women who were left in the cities. People were scared when they realized that soon the Red Army was going to be coming into their cities. News had spread of the large number of rapes of women and children in East Prussia after the Red Army had taken it over and fear

spread among all people still left in the German cities. In East Prussia women of all ages had suffered gang rape at the hands of Red Army soldiers. A German officer in East Prussia wrote, “Red Army soldiers don’t believe in ‘individual liaisons’ with German women. Nine, ten twelve men at a time they rape them on a collective basis.” The stories told by some of the women who were victims of rape are astonishing and unimaginable. These women were left defenseless against a very large and aggressive Red Army. All women were targeted by the men—no matter their age, girls as young as twelve and women as old as sixty were victimized. It was common for a woman to be raped in a single session multiple times by different men. For example, a woman named Emma Korn from East Prussia told the following story of her experience with the Red Army.

On 3 February frontline troops of the Red Army entered the town. They came into the cellar where we were hiding and pointed their weapons at me and the other two women and ordered us into the yard. In the yard twelve soldiers in turn raped me. Other soldiers did the same to my two neighbors. The following night six drunken soldiers broke into our cellar and raped us in front of the children. On 5 February, three soldiers came, and on 6 February eight drunken soldiers also raped and beat us. This experience was a typical situation for some women in conquered areas. Many of the Russian men would get belligerently drunk and then force themselves on to women. There were many stories like the one told by Emma Korn.

The behavior of some of the victorious Red Army soldiers towards women and children was indeed barbaric and terrible. German women were used as objects in the soldiers’ hunt for revenge on the German Army. The rape of women of all ages was a significant aspect of the war because it affected so many German women. The immediate postwar period was shaped by

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142 Marion Donhoff, Namen die keener mehr nennt (Munich: 1964), 18, quoted in Beevor, The Fall of Berlin 1945, 28.
people who were victims of such brutal behavior. However, in many ways the victimization of women when the Red Army took over the eastern part of Germany made the women stronger because it forced them to defend themselves and to create a livable environment out of an unlivable situation.

German women had heard rumors about the rampage of Russian troops from the German refugees streaming into Germany proper from German settlements in Eastern Europe. They were fearful as the Russian troops approached Berlin. Their fears were well founded. Not only had the men been away at war for many years, they were also looking for revenge against the German people for all of the terrible things the German army had done to the people of Russia. German soldiers were also scared of the approaching Red Army. One soldier fighting in the Eastern Front wrote, “We no longer fought for Hitler, or for National Socialism, or for the Third Reich or even for our fiancées or mothers or families trapped in bomb-ravaged towns. We fought from simple fear. We fought for ourselves, so that we wouldn’t die in holes filled with mud and snow; we fought like rats.”144 The fear of becoming slaves of the Russian Army was a real threat for the men, and to many that was something that was worth fighting against. Many people tried to escape west so they could be in an area that would be under the American and British forces, because life under their occupation seemed likely to be more bearable. But the people who were unable to leave Berlin and go west were forced to live under the occupation of the Russian Army.

Women became fed up with the constant brutal behavior of the Russian soldiers and had to find a way to survive. The diarist from Berlin had fallen victim to multiple incidents of rape from multiple men and decided that she was going to find a way to get through it alive. After being attacked by another a random Russian soldier she decided that if she could not stop the harassment then she would at least make it some what bearable, said, “No question about it: I

144 Beevor, The Fall of Berlin 1945, 11.
have to find a single wolf to keep away the pack. An officer, as high-ranking as possible, a commandant, a general, whatever I can manage. After all, what are my brains for, my little knowledge of the enemy’s language?" This is an example of a woman who was determined to be more than just a spoil of war. She and women like her started to change their mindset from helpless victim to a person who was not going to just let this happen to her. As small benefit from allowing men to sleep with her, the Diarist was able to receive some food and also protection. It was a form of prostitution but not in a way that should be looked down upon, as it was the only way to survive.

Episodes of rape happened as the war came to an end, when no men were left behind to defend them. Women were forced to take matters into their own hands. While women might not able to retaliate with physical force to the force of the Russian men, some of them were able to manipulate the situation to their benefit by trying getting food and goods they needed or wanted from the Russian soldiers they slept with. The men were going to force themselves onto women anyway and if a woman was able to receive some food from the soldiers it made the situation more tolerable.

The battle of Berlin was long-fought and in the end up to half a million people were killed or wounded. But the headquarters of the Nazi regime finally fell the Russians on May 3, 1945. As the Russian troops celebrated their victory and the end of a long war they took to alcohol, which made them more aggressive towards the German people, and especially women. When the fighting stopped German women became the new targets for the Russian soldiers. Lieutenant General V.D. Sokolovskii of the Soviet Army, defended the actions of the soldiers, “Of course… a lot of nasty things have happened. But what do you expect?... In the first flush of

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145 Boehm, ed., *A Woman in Berlin*, 64.
146 Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 78.
victory our fellows no doubt derived a certain satisfaction from making it hot for those Herrenvolk Women. However, that stage is over. Our main worry, is the awful spread of clap among our troops.” The Lieutenant justified the action of his men by saying that the treatment of the women was to be expected because the men had been involved in the war for so long, and that the real victims were his soldiers who were getting venereal diseases. The remark of the Lieutenant just put in perspective how the Russian Army saw women.

“Women of the Rubble”

At the end of April Hitler committed suicide along with his new wife, Eva Braun, in his bunker in Berlin, as did Goebbels, along with his wife and children. Many top Nazi officials took the option of death rather than being taken prisoner by the enemy armies. Many other top Nazis fled. The war ended in early May 1945. Germany had surrendered and the Third Reich had fallen leaving nothing but disaster in its wake. The people who remained in Germany were the ordinary citizens. They had been left without a government or any type of leadership other than the occupying Allied or Russian forces. With the men being beaten up mentally and physically, the only people left to take care of the city and the children were the women who had been left there throughout the war and who now had to face their own type of battle.

“Women of the Rubble” is a phrase used to describe the women in Germany after 1945. They were victims and of rape and bloodshed and in 1945. They were forced to put the past behind them and to continue on with life. When the fighting stopped they could not let the terrible events of starvation, death, and rape push them down, because without them there would be no one to rebuild Germany. Most men were dead, or in POW camps, or wounded. At

\[147\] Ibid., 79.
any rate the men were unable to clean up the cities that had been destroyed by air raids. Women were the ones who had to clean the streets and do the work that needed to be done in order to continue life in Germany. A 1946 pamphlet said:

There is no picture that characterizes the results of a catastrophic politics more impressively and graphically, but at the same time more movingly, than these untiring women working in the rubble in all weather. Of all the boasting promises that were once made to them, nothing remains but rubble and piles of stone, which they must literally clear away with their own hands so life can go on. They do not hide their disappointment over their fate, but whatever may happen, they want to put these hard times behind them.¹⁴⁸

This describes what life was like for women after the war and in it we can see the image of women that had evolved; through the struggles of losing loved ones and falling victim to rape. The last years of World War II placed great stress on the women in Germany and imposed on them a heavy burden. They had to continue living, and while saving themselves, pull along those who depended on them. Men were too mentally and physically damaged from the many years at battle to help with the reconstruction of the cities so women had no choice but to continue living life alone and as strong as they had learned to be through the war.

When the men did come back from war to live in their homes and to return to their wives they found themselves living with a new type person. Women had learned to survive and fight for themselves and their children while their husbands were gone, they had become strong independent citizens. And the traditional image of women, especially in the intensified form imposed by the Nazis, had presented them as the glue of the home. But while many men were used to having their women depend on them for help and support, now women were taking care of the men and their needs. Roles had switched and the upper hand was given to the role of the women. The diary of the woman of Berlin tells about the trouble she faced when her fiancé

¹⁴⁸ Frauen gestern und heute (Berlin, 1946), 34-36, quoted in Heineman, “The Hour of the Woman,” 376.
returned from the war. She had changed so much while he was gone that it was hard for them live as they once had. Now she was vocal about her opinions and was no longer dependent on him. They soon ended their relationship because they both had changed so much over the course of war that they no longer could remain together. This was a common occurrence for many women because of the vast changes they had experienced during the war.

Women were the ones who had to rebuild the cities of Germany when no one else could. They quickly became the backbone of the country more than before. This was a significant shift in the image of women and another example of their ability to meet the demands that society needed them to fill. Postwar Germany was in shambles and when the men were too damaged to rebuild the country, women were the only ones strong enough to do it. They were met with some resistance because men found it unexpected to see women so independent and outspoken, which was a big change compared to the way they left their women before the war. The image of women after the war is what shows the true strength of the German women throughout the entire Third Reich, because it shows the complete change they had experienced during the twelve years of meeting various demands.
Conclusion

The newer social history historians have sought to study groups that were formally ignored in old practical type of history. Women were a part of the group that was often looked over. With new social historians like Claudia Koonz, Jill Stephenenson, and Renate Bridenthal women’s history in Germany is becoming better known. My research looked to explore more of their ideas along with some of my own. In reference to women and their relationships with the Jewish people of Germany and the Holocaust I do not go into this subject because I feel that it is another aspect of women’s social history that was to large to include in my research. I wanted to cover the majority of the women’s history in Germany during the Third Reich, which forced me to limit the inclusion of some particular voices of women who were a part of different social classes as well as those who were against Hitler and the Nazi Party.

Women were asked to be the “mothers of the nation” by sacrificing their independence and to focus their efforts on raising a family. They were pushed out of the public sphere and told that their place was in the home. With limited options of employment women were forced into jobs that were categorized as feminine work or would work along side men in factories and receive a significant less pay. Hitler never concealed his thoughts on what he though of women referred to them as individuals who were not equal to men and who had no place in the public sphere. Many women accepted this misogynistic view and fully embraced their roles in society as the “mothers of the nation.” Nazi propaganda placed enough of an emphasis on how important the role of women as mothers that it made this role become appealing. Also, by embracing the role of the mother women were able to find their place in a male-dominated political party. If they had not accepted this notion of self-sacrifice for the good of the nation and their family, they would have been left on the outside of a very popular political movement.
As the war in 1939, some German women found themselves benefiting from the swift victories of the German army. Receiving packages from soldiers gave them real material advantages and fostered the impression that war was not going to be so bad. Life on the home front did not change dramatically during the beginning years of the war and looked like Germany was as dominate of a country as they had thought. But, by 1943 not only had there been a shift in the war there had been a shift in the role of women as well. After great losses in battle, the German army was struggling on the war front. The military struggle led the government to create a new demand on the women of Germany. Once again, women were called to duty to show their patriotism and love for their country and their loved ones fighting. The image of women had changed to a more active one of someone who was ready to replace men in the war industries and willing to help any way she could with the war effort.

As the intensity of the war increased so did the demands on women. By 1944, Allied air raid bombings had placed women in the line of fire with little to no protection. Women were left in the cities to care for those who were unable to care for themselves. In many situations women became soldiers in war but they were not given guns. The role of women was modified into someone who needed to be strong but once again able to sacrifice themselves for their loved ones and community. The final years of the war took a toll on the women and it shaped the history of women in Germany because it forced the public to recognize the strength they showed in such hard times.

As the war dragged on, it was becoming clear that the defeat of Germany was inevitable. With the invasion of the Red Army a mass amount of rape happened to the women and they were left defenseless against their strength and number. The German men had not yet returned from war and the majority of the Nazi officials had either committed suicide or fled the country. This
was a dark time for women in Germany and it forced them to find a way to survive on their own. Many women resulted to a form of prostitution that was able to provide a source of protection. German women had become the victims of aggressive behavior shown by the Russian army. But they did not give up they still pushed to survive and the behavior of the women created a strong foundation that all of the German people could pull strength form.

Throughout this extensive research on the development of the role of women in Nazi Germany multiple things have become clear, but one that is the most prevalent is the willingness of women to sacrifice themselves for the people surrounding them and their determination to survive. The Nazi Party placed restrictions on their independence and social image but that did not stop them. During the reign of the Third Reich the Nazis placed large expectations of the women in the cities and they were able to follow through with them. It is important to recognize the struggles and the accomplishments that women had during World War II because they are so often left out of history or not recognized in the proper way. Women in Nazi Germany were in the background up to the early 1940’s, but by late 1945 they had become the only things still standing in Germany. While acknowledging the highlights of German women another aspect that is true is they were also collaborators and thus bear responsibility for what the Nazi Party did, including enjoying the plunder at the beginning of the war and being part of the occupation and efforts of ethnic cleansing. Women were not innocent in the crimes that the Nazi Party committed and do bear some of the responsibility.
Figure 1: This is a propaganda poster encouraging women to join the labor services and to be a part of the Third Reich. The source does not provide and exact date but it says in the 1940’s. John Ingram, *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media_ph.php?ModuleId=10005205&MediaId=1073.

Figure 2: German propaganda poster calling for women to become Air-Raid Wardens. This poster shows the military call to duty for women in Germany. The source does not provide a date, but probably 1943 or 1944. The Man Behind Hitler, *PBS.org*, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/goebbels/gallery/g_02.html.

Figure 3: This poster advocates the German people to comply with the blackout rules. Nazi Posters: 1939-1945, *German Propaganda Archive*, http://www.bytwerk.com/gpa/posters3.htm
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