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## The evolution of the swastika : from symbol of peace to tool of hate

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# THE EVOLUTION OF THE SWASTIKA: FROM SYMBOL OF PEACE TO TOOL OF HATE

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in History  
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## ABSTRACT

Although the swastika is most commonly associated with Nazi Germany, the symbol has a long history. Believed to have originated in India, the swastika had a multiplicity of meanings and was used as a symbol across the globe. Only with the concentrated efforts of nineteenth century racial scientists did the swastika come to represent that mythical Aryan race. By linking the swastika to the alleged Aryan race, racial thinkers created a bond between the ancient conquerors and modern Europeans. With the link formed, the swastika became a part of the propaganda of the Third Reich. In association with this propaganda, the swastika took on a narrower meaning- the purified German community. The swastika, imbued with the sentiments of the Third Reich, is used today as a metonym for hatred, both by neo-Nazi and neo-fascist groups as well as by vandals to introduce fear in their communities. By examining the works of racist scientists, German historians and modern neo-Nazis, the swastika's transformation becomes evident.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I express the deepest thanks and gratitude to my committee members Dr. Vladimir Solonari and Dr. Libby Cowgill for their guidance and careful readings of my thesis. I would like to thank my adviser, Dr. Amelia Lyons, for her dedication, praise, knowledge and wisdom. This project certainly could not have happened without your guidance.

I would also like to thank Daniel Gonzalez and Sean McDonnell for their unending support and aid in this project, as well as my family for their unconditional support.

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## Introduction

In the eyes of the western world, the swastika represents the Nazi party; however, accepting the swastika as a piece of Nazi memorabilia denies the symbol's complex and varied history and the processes of transformation the symbol undertook. In its earliest forms, the swastika existed in various cultures and had a multiplicity of meanings. By balancing primary sources from nineteenth century racial scholars as well as twenty-first century scholars, this thesis creates a rough sketch of the swastika's history prior to its introduction to western culture. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the swastika was a part of a larger process to understand and classify other non-western cultures in relation to the West. Part of this process included the association of the swastika with the mythical 'Aryan race,' which was crucial to the development of racial hierarchies. One aspect of this thesis includes an examination of the works of intellectual history of nineteenth century racial scientists and their roles in creating racial categories and hierarchies. This thesis also builds on the works of George L. Mosse and other studies of the Third Reich by examining cultural ideals in National Socialist Germany and how the swastika was used to communicate those goals to the masses. Because the swastika became an icon of the National Socialist Party, the symbol absorbed the ideology of the Party through continual and strategic association. In the twenty-first century, Neo-Nazis still use the swastika to represent National Socialist ideology. Through the symbol's association with National Socialism, the swastika has become a metonym for hate in the West in that a lone swastika creates feelings of fear, pride, or belonging. This thesis creates an intellectual history of the swastika. I will demonstrate



how, through concentrated efforts and careful association of the swastika with the 'Aryan race' and National Socialist ideology, the swastika became an icon for these beliefs.

In order to do so, I will trace the swastika's history through four chapters. Chapter one will examine the swastika's varied history. The swastika, used by many cultures, held various, unique meanings to each group who used it. Each society used the swastika in a distinct fashion, be it as a religious symbol, fertility icon or an image of man. This chapter examines nineteenth century racial scientists and anthropologists as well as twentieth century, Western scholarship to sketch the swastika's possible origins, meanings and method of travel. Next, chapter two will examine the swastika's associations with the mythicized 'Aryan' race. To develop the connection, I will use primary sources written by nineteenth century racial scientists such as Emile Burnouf, Arthur Gobineau, Herbert Spencer and Francis Galton. These sources not only provide a history of racial scholarship, but also outline attempts to link the swastika with the 'Aryan' race.<sup>1</sup> Works such as Stephen J. Gould's *The Mismeasure of Man* and Gretchen Schafft's *From Racism to Genocide*, Andrew Porter's *European Imperialism 1816-1940* and Scott B. Cook's *Colonial Encounters in the Age of High Imperialism* placed these attempts in the greater historical context of imperialism. Adolf Hitler's selection of the swastika as the symbol of the National Socialist Party linked the swastika, National Socialism and the 'Aryan race.' Chapter three then examines National Socialists ideology and the role the swastika played in propaganda. The swastika, portrayed with idealized images National Socialist rhetoric, absorbed the meanings it was associated

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<sup>1</sup> Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Biology*, Volume 2 (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1904), 55, 505-521.

Francis Galton, "Hereditary Improvement," *Every Saturday: A Journal of Choice Reading* (1873): 207-214.  
Emile Burnouf "The Action of Races," *The Science of Religion* (Marisonneuve, 1876) 186-200  
Paul A. Fortier, "Gobineau and German Racism" *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 19. (1967)

with, such as a glorification of peasant life and the family unit. Finally, chapter four presents the swastika's legacy today. By examining neo-Nazi websites and reputable twenty-first century newspapers, such as the *Glasgow Herald* and *New York Times*, I demonstrate how these hate groups continue to perpetuate Nazi beliefs about racial purity, gender roles and the family. In studying these groups, it is evident that a lone swastika still stands in for National Socialism, racism, anti-Semitism and eugenics decades later. The swastika, harnessed to create feelings ranging from fear to belonging, continues to be an effective tool in communicating a particular set of ideals.

## Chapter 1: The Swastika and Its Origins

### Introduction

The swastika has a long, rich history that includes many of the world's civilizations. The word itself comes from Sanskrit, and literally means "object of good fortune." While the name we use is related to the West's introduction to the symbol in the nineteenth century, the symbol was in use long before it had a singular name in a number of non-western cultures, notably India, Japan and Tibet. Thomas L. Wilson, nineteenth century scholar and former curator of the Department of Prehistoric Anthropology at the U.S. National Museum, argued that the name swastika is merely an accepted common name in the West for a cultural symbol that was probably in use at least two thousand years before it had a name because it predates the Sanskrit language.<sup>2</sup> Thought to have originated in India, the swastika was used "all over the habitable world" by the end of the Bronze Age<sup>3</sup> and went by a multiplicity of names, including gammadion, hakenkreuz, fowerfot, wan, manji, tau cross, Thor's hammer and flyfot.<sup>4</sup>

Through examining archaeological records, it is possible to reconstruct a rough history of the symbol that includes its usage and travels. Much of what we know about the swastika's origins comes from nineteenth century "racial scholars," including anthropologists. Current scholars, however, continue to use these nineteenth century sources, which suggest that in some ways these sources are reputable or that there has been little interest in doing this work since then. This chapter attempts to strike a balance

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas L. Wilson. *The Swastika: The Earliest Known Symbol, and its Migrations*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1896. 769.

<sup>3</sup> The term "Bronze Age" refers to a period when a culture performed advanced metalwork with bronze, not a specific date. The Bronze Age followed the Neolithic Age and preceded the Iron Age.

<sup>4</sup> Stanley Freed and Ruth S. Freed. "Origin of the Swastika," *The Natural History*. (1980) 68-74.

between older and recent, western scholarship in order to present the origins and history of the swastika, while being conscious of and working to avoid reinscribing the racially motivated assumptions and agenda of the nineteenth century scholars. In order to do so, the chapter traces the swastika's origins, locations, travels, potential meanings and various forms. Although no one has pinpointed exactly where the swastika originated, or how it traveled, the swastika was not associated exclusively with the "Aryan race," primarily because race is an evolving social construct, not a biological fact.

### **Swastika's Origins**

Drawn in 1896, Thomas Wilson's map illustrated the range of the swastika in prehistory. This map shows the complete range of the swastika, five of the seven continents, which Wilson dubbed "the habitable world."<sup>5</sup> The map shows that the swastika was not restricted to any particular culture, group or region.

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<sup>5</sup> Wilson *The Swastika* 769

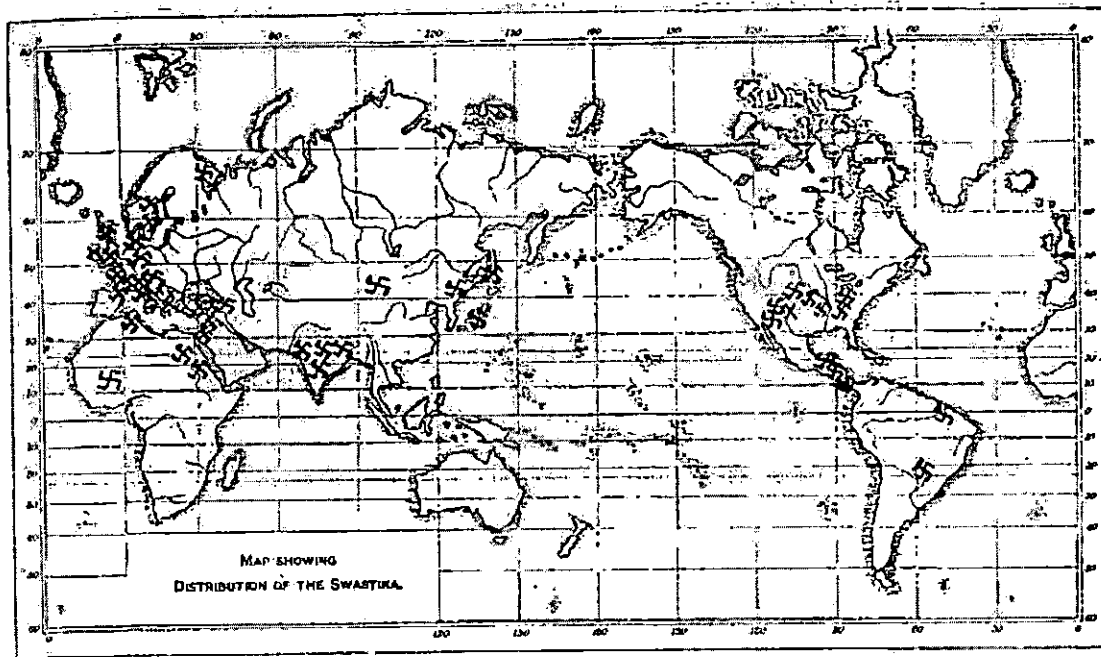


Figure 1: The Distribution of the Swastika. From Thomas L. Wilson. *The Swastika: The Earliest Known Symbol, and its Migrations*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1896.

The wide range of the swastika correlates with findings from W.G.V. Balchin, a British geographer who wrote in 1944. Balchin wrote that the swastika, found in most cultures, dated to the Bronze Age.<sup>6</sup>

Because the swastika had a wide range, no one has been able to pinpoint its exact origins with any certainty. Balchin noted that swastika-like designs were found as far east as present-day Ukraine.<sup>7</sup> These patterns were carved into “mammoth-ivory” tusks and uncovered in Mezine Village, Southern Russia (present-day Mezin, Ukraine). These carvings date back to the Ice Age, roughly twenty thousand years before present.<sup>8</sup> Although the carvings are not technically swastikas, geometrical patterns found in the

<sup>6</sup> W.G.V. Balchin. “The Swastika.” *Folklore* 55 (1944): 167-168.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> John Prince Loewenstein. “The Swastika; Its History and Meaning” *Man* 41 (1941): 49-55. 49-51.

carvings (illustrated below) resemble swastikas.

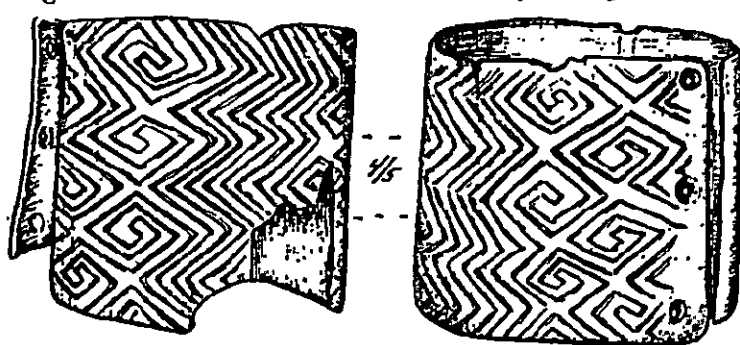


Figure 2: Swastika-like carvings on mammoth tusk bracelet. From John Prince Loewenstein.

The Ukrainian ivory carvings supported W. Norman Brown's belief. Calling these carvings swastika-like illustrates that a range of images may have qualified as what we call a swastika today. Brown, an American Sanskrit and Asian Studies professor, theorized that "primitive" swastikas existed west of their agreed upon home. India is believed to be the home of the "perfect" swastika that we recognize today.<sup>9</sup>

While the swastika lacks a distinct creation date, swastikas were found in Mohenjo Daro and Harappa, India that dated to 5000 B.P.<sup>10</sup> The Dravidians, a group who lived all over India until they were forced to the southern peninsula by the alleged Aryans, may have used the swastika. According to Brown, the Dravidians used swastikas in their cities centuries before the Aryans arrived in 3500 B.P.<sup>11</sup> While the earliest swastikas were found in India, ancient swastikas were found in Asia, the Indus Valley, China, Japan and southern-Central Europe.<sup>12</sup> North and South American cultures may have also invented similar symbols. The symbol was used by American Indian groups

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<sup>9</sup> Brown, Norman W. *The Swastika: A Study of the Nazi Claims of its Aryan Origin*. New York: Emerson Books, 1933. 22

<sup>10</sup> Wilson *The Swastika* 771

<sup>11</sup> Brown *The Swastika: A Study of the Nazi Claims* 13-14

<sup>12</sup> Loewenstein "The Swastika: Its History and Meaning" 52

and was found in Fains Island, Tennessee, Entowah Mound Georgia and Hopewell Mound, Ohio. The Pueblo, Pima and Navajo also used swastikas in their art. Stone tablets featuring swastika art were found all over the Yucatan Peninsula. Furthermore, swastikas appeared in ancient Costa Rican and Brazilian art, often covering human genitals.<sup>13</sup> Thomas Wilson believed the swastika migrated to the Americas before the sixth century B.C., before the advent of Buddhism.<sup>14</sup> However, Brown theorized that the symbol was most likely an independent creation of the American cultures in which it appeared.<sup>15</sup> Anthropologist Stanley Freed argued that American swastikas were not related to the “hooked cross” of the Old World.<sup>16</sup> Only two notable groups did not use the swastika- the Semites and early Christians. Brown pointed out that only after Christianity was established in Europe was the swastika used.<sup>17</sup> Since the swastika was used all across the globe, debate continues as to how it traveled.

### **Swastika's Travels**

Because the swastika was so widely used, its method of travel has not been agreed upon. The swastika may have traveled along trade routes, by conquering tribes, or alongside particular religions. The Dravidians, a millennia-old Indian cultural group, probably facilitated the dispersal of the swastika as they were forced south by the advancing Aryan culture.<sup>18</sup> British anthropologist John Prince Loewenstein suggested

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<sup>13</sup> Balchin “The Swastika” 168

<sup>14</sup> Wilson *The Swastika* 957

<sup>15</sup> Brown *The Swastika: A Study of the Nazi Claims* 27-28

<sup>16</sup> Freed “The Origin of the Swastika” 74

<sup>17</sup> Brown *The Swastika: A Study of the Nazi Claims* 26. While the lack of Semetic swastikas is not particularly notable, it may have furthered racial science against the Semites in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

<sup>18</sup> Brown *The Swastika: A Study of the Nazi Claims* 13-14

the swastika travelled across Southeastern Asia across trade routes.<sup>19</sup> Balchin believed the swastika, as a symbol of Buddhism, spread naturally as the religion became more widely practiced.<sup>20</sup>

Heinreich Schliemann, a German archaeologist, unearthed the first swastikas in Hissarlik, better known as Troy.<sup>21</sup> Troy is regarded as the swastika's entry point into Europe. Brown theorized that the swastika traveled from Troy, across the Aegean Sea to Greece, where it spread through southern Europe on objects like vases and pots that were traded across the continent. The Celts, Romans and Germans then picked up the symbol. To Brown, the Hittites were another possible vehicle for the swastika, they spread the swastika as they conquered nearby cultures.<sup>22</sup> As noted in the previous section, the swastika was probably also created independently in the Americas, as it arrived without Buddhist sentiments attached.<sup>23</sup> Although one singular method of travel has not been agreed upon, each of the methods seems equally plausible and each probably contributed to the swastika's travels.

### **Swastika's Meanings**

Because the swastika existed in so many cultures, throughout long periods of time, one concrete meaning for the swastika has not been determined. The swastika's meaning probably varied from group to group. In Sanskrit, "swastika" literally translates to "object of good fortune."<sup>24</sup> That, combined with the usage of swastikas, cross-

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<sup>19</sup> Loewenstein "The Swastika; Its History and Meaning" 38

<sup>20</sup> Balchin "The Swastika" 168

<sup>21</sup> Heinrich Schliemann. *Troy and Its Remains*. 101 For Schliemann's racial beliefs, please see chapter two.

<sup>22</sup> Brown *The Swastika: A Study of the Nazi Claims* 24-25

<sup>23</sup> Wilson *The Swastika* 957

<sup>24</sup> Brown *The Swastika: A Study of the Nazi Claims* 17-18



culturally, all over commoner goods (as opposed to monuments) led Wilson to believe that the swastika was a “religious, group or sect symbol, or a good luck charm, blessing, or decoration.”<sup>25</sup> However, swastikas were also imbued with religious symbolism. Contemporary anthropologist Stanley Freed argued for a correlation between the swastika and the *graha*, a Hindu ceremony dating back to the ancient Indus valley Harappa civilization. In this ceremony, the swastika represents Hinduism’s nine planetary gods. In Freed’s argument, the Greeks, Romans and Germans who used the swastika substituted their own planetary gods.<sup>26</sup> Contemporary American writer Steven Heller compiled a list of many of the gods with which the swastika was associated. In Hinduism, swastikas were found alongside Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. The swastika appeared as a Buddhist symbol as “Buddha’s footprints.” The symbol was also in association with Jupiter, Thor, Artemis, Hera, Demeter and the Egyptian lotus.<sup>27</sup> Brown further theorized, perhaps summing up the work of his predecessors, that the swastika may have represented the path of the sun cross the sky or an image of man.<sup>28</sup> Swastikas were frequently found with woman-figures or art. Sometimes swastika were also found in association with animals such as fish. Loewenstein believed the swastika’s association with these symbols pointed towards fertility. In addition, swastikas, as mentioned previously, were sometimes found covering women’s genitals, notably in Costa Rica, Brazil and Troy. Fertility symbols, as Loewenstein noted, were used in many cultures, meaning the swastika could have been a fertility symbol for some groups.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Wilson *The Swastika* 952

<sup>26</sup> Freed “The Origin of the Swastika” 74

<sup>27</sup> Stephen Heller, *The Swastika: Symbol Beyond Redemption?* New York: Allworth Press, 2000. 6

<sup>28</sup> Brown *The Swastika: A Study of the Nazi Claims* 17

<sup>29</sup> Loewenstein “The Swastika” 50

## **Conclusion**

Through careful examination western scholarship from the nineteenth century to the present, this chapter presents a rough sketch of the swastika's origins, travels and meanings. Swastikas, found all over the ancient world, most likely originated in India. The symbol had a multiplicity of meanings. The swastika traveled along trade routes, with new religions and alongside expanding civilizations. Although no one knows for sure what meaning the swastika had for those who originally used it, it is clear that the swastika had multiple, positive meanings, including fertility and religion. The symbol was not exclusive to one group, nor did it have one fixed meaning. As we will see in chapter two, racial scientists attempt to narrow the symbol's meanings by creating a link between 'Aryans' and the swastika.

## Chapter 2: Racial Science and the Swastika

### Introduction

In Sanskrit, the word swastika means “object of good fortune.” We think of it as the symbol of German national socialism, but, the symbol was in use long before it had a name, predating the both the Sanskrit language and Buddhism, a religion that held the swastika as a holy symbol.<sup>30</sup> Swastikas appeared on every continent and in a majority of the world’s cultures. Certain groups may have used the swastika, but it did not have the racial connotations we associate with the symbol today. Racial scholars who linked Europeans with the mythical Aryan race intentionally created the association of the swastika and race.

In order to understand how the symbol came to be associated with Nazi ideology this essay traces the development of racial science in conjunction with imperialism as well as the reinvention of the swastika as a symbol of the Aryan race in the modern era. In the early nineteenth century, with the rise of imperialism, European and American scholars sought to justify colonization. Theories of Social Darwinism, eugenics and racial hygiene developed in order to not only justify, but also encourage imperialism. The swastika served as a symbol for this project because racial intellectuals developed and argued the idea that it was the symbol of the Aryans; the alleged race believed to have given rise to “superior” European cultures. As racial scientists constructed a history of Europeans, from the “Aryan race” to contemporary peoples, they introduced the swastika as a symbol to represent the race. While the swastika played

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<sup>30</sup> Wilson *The Swastika* 769

only a small role in the overall development of racial sciences in the nineteenth century, race scientists commonly associated it with good luck and with the so-called 'Aryans' of South Asia. The fusing of the "Aryan race," Germany and the swastika was marginally successful until Adolf Hitler adopted the symbol as the symbol of the nascent Nazi party because of its racial connotations.

### **What Are The Theories of Social Darwinism, Eugenics and Racial Hygiene?**

Charles Darwin's 1859 theory of natural selection, which others applied to human social populations, offered a superficial rationalization for imperialism.<sup>31</sup> Eugenics, a branch of Social Darwinism popularized in the twentieth century, promoted the idea that selective breeding could improve human populations and spread alongside Social Darwinism as accepted, practical science. Racial hygiene, a derivative of eugenics first promoted by Francis Galton in 1869, promoted the idea that races could be purified.<sup>32</sup>

The study of racial science rested assumptions of two theories taken from Gregor Mendel and Charles Darwin. Although racial scientists borrowed from Mendel's and Darwin's theories, neither man promoted racial hierarchies. Mendel, a nineteenth century Czech monk, researched trait inheritance in common garden peas and determined that an "organism's characteristics were inherited as discrete units and not through a blending of parental traits."<sup>33</sup> Mendel's findings could not account for inheritance of complex human traits such as intelligence or artistic ability. Charles Darwin wrote the *Origin of*

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<sup>31</sup> It is important to point out that legitimate science has never found data to support the archaic notion that there are concrete differences between people that would result in a hierarchy of any kind.

<sup>32</sup> Diane B. Paul. *Controlling Human Heredity: 1865 to the Present*. (Atlantic Highlands: Humanity Books, 2005) 4.

<sup>33</sup> Stephen Molnar, *Human Variation: Races, Types and Ethnic Group*, 6<sup>th</sup> Ed. (Saddle River: Pearson Education, 2006) 34.

*Species* in 1859. After research in the Galapagos Islands, Darwin documented the processes of natural selection.<sup>34</sup> Much like Gregor Mendel's findings, Darwin's theory applied to biology, not social groups. While Mendel and Darwin researched plant and animal biology, racial scientists applied their theories to human societies.

French novelist and diplomat Arthur de Gobineau was one of the first racial scientists to apply Darwinian ideas to social situations. Gobineau thought that in order for a particular race to survive and flourish, it needed maintenance. Gobineau was among the first to introduce the idea of a white "Aryan race." In his mind, the Aryan race could not breed with any other race because all other races were inferior.<sup>35</sup> Miscegenation would harm the Aryan race, leaving them unable to hold onto their empires. Gobineau cited France as an example of the harm racial mixing caused; because France was comprised of a multitude of ethnicities, the nation's stock was quickly diluting.<sup>36</sup> While Gobineau was one of the first to apply Darwinism to human societies, he was not alone in doing so.

British philosopher and sociological theorist Herbert Spencer contributed to misconceived notions of Darwin's theory when he coined the term "survival of the fittest." To Spencer, survival of the fittest implied that people of "superior races" would greatly out produce those of "inferior races." Spencer argued "civilized" men had more complex nervous systems and bigger bodies, which allowed these races to gain access to more food. Access to a better diet made these races more successful from an

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<sup>34</sup> Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*. (London: John Murray, 1859)

<sup>35</sup> Alfred Rosenberg, *Race and Race History (and Other Essays by Alfred Rosenberg)*, trans. By Robert Pois (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1938) 22.

While this book contains essays from Rosenberg, the translator/editor made this statement.

<sup>36</sup> Stephen Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1981) 389-390.

evolutionary standpoint.<sup>37</sup> Although clearly untrue, Spencer's argument made use of Darwinist language, giving it the veneer of legitimate science.<sup>38</sup>

Francis Galton, Charles Darwin's cousin, applied Mendel and Darwin's theories to human "races." Assuming Mendel's experiments were applicable in human groups, Galton firmly believed one's racial inheritance determined one's behavior.<sup>39</sup> Applying convoluted Darwinism to human social populations, Galton believed races could improve through "positive eugenics," which increased valuable traits in a society. Correct application of a positive eugenic policy would reduce harmful diseases and increase the number of worthy traits in a race. "Negative eugenics" weakened a race by not regulating breeding and allowing unfavorable traits to spread. In order to prevent unwanted traits from reoccurring in a population, eugenic policy dictated that anyone possessing said unwanted traits be forbidden to reproduce. If implemented properly, eugenics eliminated unfavorable traits from the population, contemporary knowledge suggested.<sup>40</sup>

In reality, complex traits, such as intelligence, are not inherited in a Mendelian fashion and therefore cannot simply be bred out of a group.<sup>41</sup> Francis Galton pontificated that even with extensive nurturing, any "inferior breed" could only aspire to "make the best of its kind," but could not advance past the limits determined by the race.<sup>42</sup> These early beliefs laid the foundation for eugenic programs, such as the creation of centers for eugenic study and awards for "well-bred families" given at Fitter Families Contests.

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<sup>37</sup> Spencer *The Principles of Biology* 55, 505-521

<sup>38</sup> Eric Ehrenreich. *The Nazi Ancestral Proof: Genealogy, Racial Science and the Final Solution*. (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007) 15.

<sup>39</sup> Galton *Hereditary Improvement* 207-208

<sup>40</sup> Galton *Hereditary Improvement* 220

<sup>41</sup> Garland E. Allen, "Flaws in Eugenic Research," *Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Archives*, 2008, <http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/eugenics/list2.pl> (Accessed April 8, 2010).

<sup>42</sup> Ehrenreich *The Nazi Ancestral Proof* 15

These beliefs also led to the creation of sterilization programs, which used coercive policies to stop “defectives” from reproducing. Mental patients, the impoverished and the handicapped were frequent targets of aggressive sterilization policies. Sterilization occurred in Europe and America in the early twentieth century.<sup>43</sup> Many eugenics programs focused on prohibiting birth by those deemed unworthy, although some programs also existed to encourage reproduction between healthy individuals, such as the Fitter Families Contests.<sup>44</sup>

Westerners wanted to ensure their superiority by promoting both positive and negative eugenics programs like those Francis Galton inspired. Fearful of miscegenation, German anthropologist Alfred Ploetz also sought to counter racial degeneration with “racial hygiene.” The call for racial hygiene policies allowed the government to execute eugenic procedures to ensure the hygiene of the so-called Aryan race. Ploetz, expanding on the work of Francis Galton, suggested government control of mating in humans, much as a farmer does with livestock. Ploetz believed it imperative that “weaker” members of society not reproduce because their offspring would “degenerate” the race, essentially “undoing” evolution. Ploetz’s theory echoed the sentiment found in Arthur de Gobineau’s political writings.<sup>45</sup> Ploetz became very influential. In 1905, Ploetz founded the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene* (German Society for Racial Hygiene) with the support of the government. Ploetz’s Society gained popularity, and soon similar societies appeared throughout Germany and in Sweden, England, Holland and America.<sup>46</sup> The development and propagation of racial

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<sup>43</sup> Paul *Controlling Human Heredity* 4, 6

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Fortier *Gobineau and German Racism* 343

<sup>46</sup> Gretchen Schafft, *From Racism to Genocide*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004) 43.

sciences coincided with major European expansion and colonization.

By legitimatizing racism through science, blatantly discriminatory policies and practices appeared just. In using Darwin's work as a basis for their theories, racial scientists gained credibility. Their pseudo-scientific theories explained, to imperialists, why human cultures and races differed and how those differences resulted in innate hierarchies. Because the best, most developed races were the fittest, they would eventually out-produce, out-compete and dominate those less fit and stagnant. In turn, the "best" races were differentiated by their ability to colonize and expand. Aptly named, Social Darwinists supported "imperialism of inevitability."<sup>47</sup> This circular line of reasoning supported both imperialism and Social Darwinism. The imperialists believed that because western culture was superior, it was their moral duty to spread western civilization across the globe. Colonies, in return illustrated a nation's fitness.

### **The Role of Imperialism**

French Prime Minister Jules Ferry stated in a speech to the Chamber of Deputies in 1884: "We must say openly that indeed the higher races have a right over the lower races...I repeat, that the superior races have a right because they have a duty. They have the duty to civilize the inferior races."<sup>48</sup> Ferry's attitude displays notions of imperialism and racial hierarchies in the period known as the "age of high imperialism, the period between 1870 through 1914. Although colonizing land and exploiting resources had occurred since the Age of Exploration in the fifteenth century, the age of high

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<sup>47</sup> Andrew Porter, *European Imperialism 1816-1940* (London: Macmillan Press 1996). 24

<sup>48</sup> Jules Francois Camille Ferry. "Speech Before the French Chamber of Deputies, March 28, 1884," Trans. by Ruth Kleinman. *World History Sourcebook*. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1884ferry.html> (Accessed April 10, 2010)



imperialism was unique because it occurred at a rapid-fire pace and within the context of an expanding, industrialized global economy.<sup>49</sup> Imperialism safeguarded a nation's access to raw materials and provided a market for surplus goods. It also offered an outlet for nationalistic fervor, allowing world powers to gain territory without impeding on other great powers.<sup>50</sup> Establishing claims over certain key lands served to keep the balance of power intact among European nations, particularly after the defeat of France and the unification of Germany in 1870-1871.<sup>51</sup> Sometimes colonies also served as strategic military or shipping bases.<sup>52</sup> Beneficial for the nations who practiced it, imperialism expanded the range of western cultures and economies at the expense of native peoples.

With the "high imperial" age in full swing, countries scrambled to possess new lands. Britain held claims to most of India, West Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, parts of the Caribbean, and large portions of China. Tiny Portugal held scattered land in Asia and West Africa. Russia continually expanded south and east.<sup>53</sup> The French, in an attempt to regain respectability and territory after their defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, established claims in North and South Africa, and spheres of influence in China.<sup>54</sup> Colonial claims exploded so rapidly that the Berlin Conference on African Affairs became necessary to manage these claims.<sup>55</sup> Although German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck originally opposed colonialism, Germany founded colonies in parts of Africa and the South Pacific in 1887. Bismarck did so partially out of sheer insecurity

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<sup>49</sup> Scott B. Cook, *Colonial Encounters in the Age of High Imperialism*, ed. Michael Adas (New York: Longman, 1996). 2-3

<sup>50</sup> Cook *Colonial Encounters* 22-23

<sup>51</sup> Porter *European Imperialism* 14

<sup>52</sup> Cook *Colonial Encounters* 3

<sup>53</sup> Porter *European Imperialism* 4-5, 18

<sup>54</sup> Porter *European Imperialism* 33

<sup>55</sup> Norman Rich, *Great Power Diplomacy: 1814-1914*. (Boston: McGraw Hill Publishing, 1992) 239-241.

and paranoia of being encircled within Europe by other nations, such as France.<sup>56</sup> Within Germany, the thought of colonies gained popular and diplomatic support. Any colonies near French holdings would reroute French attention away from Alsace, a province France lost during the Franco-Prussian war and was determined to retrieve. Colonies also provided more constant trading partners and united Germans towards a common goal, offsetting rising tensions caused by economic depression and boosting nationalistic fervor.<sup>57</sup>

For all nations, colonies provided an opportunity to put the racial sciences into practice. Keeping the race pure was the key for holding onto colonies. British colonial administrator F.D. Lugard believed that “The prestige of the white man---depends on his influence...If he shows by his surroundings, by his assumption of superiority, that he is far above the native, he will be respected, and his influence will be proportionate to the superiority he assumes.”<sup>58</sup> According to the existing racial science, effectively colonizing a new land proved a nation’s innate superiority, as well as the superiority of the white man. This is also demonstrated in British imperialist poet Rudyard Kipling’s poem “The White Man’s Burden,” where Kipling encouraged the United States to “send forth the best ye breed” in order to “reap his own reward.”<sup>59</sup> Kipling advocated eugenics and colonization in order to solidify a nation’s position in the hierarchy. Colonies reinforced fitness, which in turn codified the existing racial hierarchies supported by the writings of Herbert Spencer, Francis Galton and Alfred Ploetz.

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<sup>56</sup> Porter *European Imperialism* 33

<sup>57</sup> Cook *Colonial Encounters* 24

<sup>58</sup> F. D. Lugard, “The Rise of Our East African Empire,” (Edinburgh, 1893) *World History Sourcebook*. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1893lugard.html> (accessed April 10, 2010).

<sup>59</sup> Rudyard Kipling, “The White Man’s Burden. 1889. *World History Sourcebook*. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/Kipling.html> (accessed April 10, 2010).

## Connecting the “Aryan” Race to the Germans

By establishing and maintaining colonies, white Europeans had asserted themselves as the dominant force in the world. As Arthur Gobineau noted, the Aryans were the most superior race. Seeing their mighty empires spread before them, Europeans assumed they were a part of this superior Aryan race. According to early German anthropologists, and racial scientists, the “Aryan race” contained the predecessors of several European ethnicities, including the Nordic, German, Czech, Celtic and Persian populations. Allegedly using the swastika as their symbol, the Aryans supposedly moved from India, through the Middle East and into Troy. The Aryans borrowed the “best parts” of every culture, creating a new, advanced culture, which spread as the Aryans diffused across the continent.<sup>60</sup> The German belief that they were descended from superior Aryan stock became crucial in the development of German racial attitudes. In the early nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a slew of lesser-known intellectuals attempted to prove, using anthropology, pseudo-science and ethnography, that contemporary Germans descended directly from the noble “Aryan race.”

In 1871, German nationalist and archaeologist Henry Schliemann unearthed a plethora of swastikas in the ancient city of Hissarlik.<sup>61</sup> After consulting with French orientalist and racialist Émile Burnouf in 1872, the word “swastika,” (“sign of good wishes” literally translated) could officially be assigned to the symbol.<sup>62</sup> In 1875, Schliemann wrote that these swastikas were older than Christ and held great importance

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<sup>60</sup> Brown *The Swastika: A Study of the Nazi Claims* 16

<sup>61</sup> Hissarlik, more commonly known as Troy, refers to the archaeological site located in present day Truva, Turkey.

<sup>62</sup> Heinrich Schliemann, *Troy and Its Remains*. (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1875) 101.

“among the progenitors of the ‘Aryan race’...at a time when German, Indian, Pelasgians, Celts, Persians, Slavonians and Iranians still formed one nation and spoke one language.”<sup>63</sup> Referring to a group of conquerors, the name “Aryan” grew from the word “Aryas,” mentioned in the *Rigvedas*, a sacred Hindu text.<sup>64</sup> The idea of an Aryan race was not original; it was first suggested in Arthur Gobineau’s writings. However, Schliemann used the swastika to validate German claims of Aryan ascendancy,<sup>65</sup> therefore setting the precedent for considering the swastika a material trace of the “Aryan race.”

Nineteenth century French racist and educator Emile Burnouf expanded and built on Schliemann’s discoveries. Burnouf, in an attempt to legitimize his pseudo-scientific racial theories, felt the swastika would make an appropriate symbol for the “Aryan race.” The word “Aryan” appeared multiple times in the *Vedas*, a sacred Hindu text, most likely referred to a band of conquerors.<sup>66</sup> Burnouf understood this to mean that all modern Indo-Europeans, descendants of “Aryans,” had roots in the Asian sub-continent. The Bible, according to Burnouf, was linguistically related to the holy *Vedas*. This relationship meant “Aryan” religion was similar to that of the Persian and Indian religions which, in turn, was superior to the Semitic and Islamic religions. When writing on religion, Burnouf proclaimed each race of men chose a religion best suited to its abilities- the Aryans decided on a religion based on sophisticated metaphysics, rites and symbols, while the “lesser races”<sup>67</sup> chose religions based on anthropomorphism and

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<sup>63</sup> Schliemann *Troy* 102

<sup>64</sup> Malcolm Quinn, *The Swastika: Constructing the Symbol* (London/New York: Routledge, 1994), 42.

<sup>65</sup> Quinn *The Swastika: Constructing the Symbol* 43

<sup>66</sup> Burnouf *The Action of Races* 186-200

<sup>67</sup> Burnouf’s racial hierarchy was ordered as such: whites, Semites, “yellow races” and “black races.”

superstition.<sup>68</sup> Through pseudo-science, Burnouf linked the swastika to Christianity and Aryanism. Burnouf supported a linguistic, and therefore cultural, connection between the “Aryans” and Indo-Europeans because similarities existed between the Persian, Sanskrit, Latin, Greek and German languages. By pointing out the similarities between modern and ancient languages, Burnouf “proved” the swastika belonged to the Aryans.<sup>69</sup> Burnouf’s position as an educator gave him credibility and the opportunity to link the swastika and Aryans in the minds of a wider audience. Although Burnouf was not German, his contemporaries would use his theories as a springboard to prove German superiority.

Houston Chamberlain, an English transplant to Germany, strongly identified with the developing racial science theories in nineteenth century. Contributing to the existing racial theories of Francis Galton, Arthur Gobineau and Alfred Ploetz, Chamberlain suggested human intellect correlated with race. Chamberlain theorized the great Renaissance thinkers were actually Germanic, reinforcing Schliemann’s ideas of alleged German ascendancy. Jesus, according to Chamberlain, was the illegitimate child of a Germanic warrior and not a Jew.<sup>70</sup> Like Burnouf, Chamberlain connected an Indo-European race to Christianity. Chamberlain contributed to the idea that the Germans were a part of a superior race.

A key figure in the development of German thought, Alfred Rosenberg built on the ideas Gobineau, Schliemann, Burnouf and Chamberlain presented in the period

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<sup>68</sup> Burnouf *The Action of Races* 194

<sup>69</sup> Quinn *The Swastika: Constructing the Symbol* 26, 45

<sup>70</sup> Schafft *From Racism to Genocide* 41

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between 1893 and 1946. Rosenberg believed a prehistoric, heroic, Aryan<sup>71</sup> culture settled the Indian sub-continent. The Aryans spread across the continent due to an overwhelming urge to conquer distant lands. Rosenberg attributed the need for some contemporary European nations to spread and conquer land to this ancient urge.<sup>72</sup> This attitude reflected common ideas of the time, promoting Aryan superiority and imperialism. Rosenberg believed Aryans were born masters and leaders, and in accordance with Galton's and Gobineau's theories, Rosenberg credited the decline of the Persian Empire to a "weakening of Aryan blood."<sup>73</sup> In agreement with Houston Chamberlain, Rosenberg credited the development of Renaissance thought to "a thunderous reaffirmation of Nordic, this time German, blood." Rosenberg blamed intellectual stagnation in Southern Europe, particularly Italy, on racial miscegenation. Only with the spread of fascism -a German idea- was Italy rejuvenated.<sup>74</sup>

Nineteenth century racial intellectuals invested much of their lives linking contemporary peoples with a mythical band of warriors known as the "Aryans" in an attempt to prove European superiority. The idea that Germans descended from such a noble group of warriors instilled a sense of unity and pride in those who followed racial science. While success did not occur overnight, the belief that Germanic peoples were descendants of these warriors created sense of shared history among a newly unified nation.

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<sup>71</sup> Alfred Rosenbeg felt there were subsets of the Aryan race, such as the Nordic, Indo-Iranian and Slavic groups. For the purpose of this thesis, the term "Aryan," when applied to Rosenberg's theories, refers to the Nordic subset of the Aryans.

<sup>72</sup> Alfred Rosenberg. *Race and Race History, and Other Essays*. Ed. by Robert Pois. (New York: Harper and Row, 1971) 39

<sup>73</sup> Rosenberg *Race and Race History* 46

<sup>74</sup> Rosenberg *Race and Race History* 75

## Reinventing the Swastika to Represent Aryans in Modernity

Academics and scientists linked the Aryans and Germans using racist pseudoscience. These men chose the swastika as a symbol to represent the modern Aryan race. Having an unclear, but mainly positive history, the swastika could be reconstructed to serve the needs of those promoting the Aryan race myth. This process consisted of removing the swastika's history and context and Germanizing it.<sup>75</sup> The swastika, as British historian W.G.V. Balchin suggested in 1944, could be adapted as both a national flag and a symbol separate from the flag. The symbol's adaptability most likely contributed to its popularity.<sup>76</sup> The swastika did not become a symbol of the Aryan race immediately. As late as 1907, the swastika was still seen as an oriental and mystical symbol, sometimes related to the ancient Aryans, but certainly not linked the way it became in the 1920s. Even though the transformation was not instant, the swastika's association with the Aryan race myth had begun.

Even if the swastika was not seen as an "Aryan" symbol, it was seen as a symbol of good fortune. As late as 1907, the swastika's meaning was still fluid and not associated with the Aryan race. In publications as large and well circulated as *The New York Times*, decorative swastikas were available for purchase, the most inexpensive, plain pin costing twenty-nine cents (\$6.62 today), while the most expensive, decorative pin costing a dollar and ninety eight cents (\$45.19 today). Price in mind, these pins may have represented socioeconomic status as well as good luck. The full text of the advertisement read:

"The Lucky Swastika, in any way you like.  
Good luck and happiness from the four

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<sup>75</sup> Quinn *The Swastika: Constructing the Symbol* 32

<sup>76</sup> Balchin "The Swastika" 167

winds of Heaven for the wearer of a  
Swastika- so says ancient superstition.  
From an especially propitious quarter came  
the wind that blew in all these pretty  
ornaments, all useable for the summertime  
and all carrying the fortunate swastika.<sup>77</sup>”

The wording of this article, as noted by calling ancient beliefs “superstition” rather than “beliefs” or “religion,” suggests that consumers felt their own religions more valid than mere ancient superstition. Secondly, calling the swastika a “pretty ornament,” rather than a good luck charm or religious symbol, suggests that the swastika held a sort of novelty value for the purchasers. In this advertisement, the swastika appeared as a mystical and oriental symbol, but certainly not a symbol denoting belonging to a particular race.

After World War I, Germany’s government shifted from a monarchy to a parliamentary republic; commonly called the Weimar Republic. Displaced by the war, a number of former Finnish soldiers remained in Germany. These soldiers joined nationalist, authoritarian paramilitary groups that opposed the antebellum republican government. In part because they wore the swastika on their helmets when they crushed republican uprisings, the swastika began to be associated with violent, right-wing nationalism.<sup>78</sup> This wave of violence towards Weimar Germany resulted in the swastika’s association with right-wing sentiment in the 1920s. These events linked the swastika and violent, anti-republican sentiment; however, the symbol still lacked a commonly accepted association with the Aryan race. The final step linking the swastika and the Aryans occurred in the 1920s, when, in *Mein Kampf*, Hitler connected the

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<sup>77</sup> Display Ad 7, *New York Times*. (New York, 1907) 4.

<sup>78</sup> Balchin “The Swastika” 167.



swastika, Germans and the Aryans.<sup>79</sup>

Swastikas in Germany between unification and Nazism represented, according to symbolist Malcolm Quinn, a return to Germany's "Aryan past." The symbol represented "hope and salvation."<sup>80</sup> The hope, for Germans, included racial purity and extreme nationalism. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler remarked that the swastika was the only appropriate symbol for the nascent Nazi party because it represented "the struggle for the victory of Aryan mankind," both noble and anti-Semitic.<sup>81</sup> Hitler connected the swastika to a "noble and glorious" Aryan past.<sup>82</sup> The ascendancy of Germans from the "Aryans" was recognized. By linking modern Germans to the ancient Aryan race, Hitler fused the ideas of his predecessors. Adolf Hitler combined the ideas of Herbert Spencer, Francis Galton, Arthur Gobineau, Heinrich Schliemann, Emile Burnouf, Alfred Rosenberg, Houston Chamberlain and others to reinforce the ideas of German superiority and the Aryan race.

## Conclusion

The marriage of Germans, Aryans and the swastika occurred nearly fifty years after Heinrich Schliemann first linked the swastika with the so-called Aryan race. Beginning with the cultivation of the theories of Social Darwinism, eugenics and racial used to support "imperialism of inevitability," ideas of inherent Western superiority developed. Extensive work by numerous racial scientists connected the supposedly

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<sup>79</sup> T.C. Scott Garrett, "Iron Cross and Swastika, A Historical Interpretation of Military Symbolism in the Third Reich" (Ph.D. diss., Southern Illinois University, 1990), 40.

<sup>80</sup> Quinn *The Swastika: Constructing the Symbol* 74.

<sup>81</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*: [http://www.hitler.org/writings/Mein\\_Kampf/mkv2ch07.html](http://www.hitler.org/writings/Mein_Kampf/mkv2ch07.html) (Accessed 6 Nov 2009)

<sup>82</sup> Hitler *Mein Kampf*

superior Europeans to the mythical Aryan race, assumed heroic and noble conquerors. In linking these two groups, the swastika emerged as the symbolic representation of the Aryan's journey from Indian warriors to the "enlightened, noble and civilized" Germans. This representation did not occur overnight, rather it was a gradual process, as evidenced by *The New York Times* advertisement. As late as 1907, the swastika was still a mystical, oriental, and good luck symbol. While others had tried previously, the marriage of the swastika and twentieth century Germans, conducted by Adolf Hitler, was the last stage in creating a link between a specific racial group to the swastika. In the twentieth century, the swastika had been successfully severed from its past, Germanized and reinvented as a symbol of German purity and supremacy.

## Chapter 3: The Swastika and the Nazis

### Introduction

Through the concentrated efforts of racial scientists, the swastika came to represent the 'Aryan race.' The swastika became the featured symbol of the Third Reich under Adolf Hitler through consistent association of the swastika with the ideals of the *volksgemeinschaft*, or racial state. In an effort to create simple, understandable, memorable propaganda, the swastika was featured alongside positive German images, such as its renewal. By associating the swastika, which already had positive associations, with these images, the symbol became a metonym for the National Socialist regime, standing in for the entirety of the ideology.

This chapter will first examine the *volksgemeinschaft*, which constituted the basis of the National Socialist ideology in order to understand what values were being represented in propaganda. The chapter will also examine specific instances of the swastika's usage in propaganda. This analysis of propaganda will demonstrate how the swastika, through positive association, came to represent National Socialism. The swastika, as a common thread in all propaganda, became a simple icon that gave viewers good feelings.

### The Ideology of the *Volksgemeinschaft*

In order to comprehend the swastika's role in propaganda, one must understand

what the symbol represented as well as the goals of the Nazi Party. In the early and mid nineteenth century, nationalism swept through the German elites, uniting them in hopes of a unified nation.<sup>83</sup> Chancellor Otto von Bismarck drew from this nationalism and united Germany amid sectional tensions. Under these class tensions, exacerbated by the Depression, the strains brought by modernization, and the development of racial sciences, German thinkers conceptualized *volkish* thought.<sup>84</sup> In *The Longing for Myth in Germany*, George S. Williamson defined the *volkish* movement as “a collection of groups led by racial and mystical notions of a people” that peaked between 1890-1920.<sup>85</sup> It grew out of racial and mystical German enthusiasm from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when Germans interpreted Tacitus’ *Germania* literally in an attempt to invent ancient roots of the modern nation. The emerging “Teutomania” assumed from the literal reading of *Germania*, that all Germans were brave, simple, disciplined and tall, with blonde hair and blue eyes.<sup>86</sup> German philosopher Houston Stewart Chamberlain exemplified a *volkish* thinker, his work *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, dubbed the “bible of *volkish* thought,” borrowed from Teutomania and laid the foundations for twentieth century racial anti-Semitism. Along with Teutomania, thinkers also turned to occultism as another way to link the past with the present. Viennese poet and occultist Guido von List, author of *Secrets of the Runes*, believed participation in occult nature rituals unleashed creative forces within Germans. Sun worship became a part of *volk* culture, including formal theatrical confessions of faith and choral chants.

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<sup>83</sup> Rich *European Great Powers* 184

<sup>84</sup> Fritz Stern. *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of Germanic Ideology*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963) xxviii.

<sup>85</sup> George S. Williamson. *The Longing for Myth in Germany*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) 286.

<sup>86</sup> Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Ippermann. *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 25.

Allegedly, German life forces could be revitalized by participating in heathen rituals.<sup>87</sup> *Volkish* ideology championed links between ‘Germanic blood’ and culture rather than class. This exclusive group, bonded by blood rather than material goods, ideally refused any selfish, individualistic tendencies to be a part of the greater nation.<sup>88</sup> These links between blood and land provided a foundation for *volkish* ideology.

In an attempt to create a national community, ideology emphasized the concept of “rootedness.” Rootedness was an expression of “man’s correspondence with nature,” which in turn, linked one with the cosmos and the entire *volk* community. Progress and modernity were opposed in favor of nature and peasantry. Within the community, one with roots sought a peasant or artisan lifestyle in order to recapture creativity and emotion while being connected to the cosmos. This idea was a convenient way to exclude “rootless” foreigners including industrial workers and Jews. Those with “roots” saw industrial workers as bourgeoisie, internationalist, and dangerous.<sup>89</sup> The romantic *volk* art provided a clear visual image of the ideology. The most common forms of art were paintings of trees, where the trunk represented the peasant’s strength, the roots were firmly anchored and the limbs reached towards the cosmos.<sup>90</sup>

National Socialist writer Alfred Rosenberg believed the three pillars would uphold the *volk*; social justice and a pure race, preserved by a national defense system. Above all, Rosenberg said, the state must be kept free from Asiatic-Jewish blood.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> George L. Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution: Towards a General Theory of Fascism*, (New York: Howard Fertig, 2000) 72-73.

<sup>88</sup> Stackelberg *The Politics of Cultural Despair* xi

<sup>89</sup> Mosse, *Fascist Revolution* 21

<sup>90</sup> Mosse, *Fascist Revolution* 26-28

<sup>91</sup> Alfred Rosenberg. “The Folkish Ideology of the State” in *Nazi Ideology Before 1933*. Ed. and trans. By Barbara Lane and Leila Rupp. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978). 63-66

According to popular ideology, the Aryan soul would dominate the enemy and remold reality. The body represented the soul, and the 'Aryan' was the ideal body type.<sup>92</sup> The racial beliefs of *volkish* thinkers banned non-white Germans from entry to the society for fears of contamination. In order to promote these ideas of race, racial hygiene and the *volk*, the German Weimar government adopted Mother's Day in 1927. Within the *volk*, mothers gained recognition as protectors of the home and breeding and were rewarded for having four or more children.<sup>93</sup> Race, therefore, became the crucial factor in membership of the community.

When the National Socialists came to power in 1933, they drew upon, expanded and co-opted the already popular *volkish* ideology. While *volk* ideology did not cause National Socialism, these ideas and attitudes became policy under the Nazi regime.<sup>94</sup> The National Socialists promoted the *volksgemeinschaft*, or people's community, a socially egalitarian, homogenous, nationalist, racially exclusive community. The *volksgemeinschaft* attempted to bridge class gaps without actually changing the social structure, as Communism promoted.<sup>95</sup> As Mosse concluded, the idea of the *volksgemeinschaft* was a "purified national community that would overcome all present difficulty."<sup>96</sup> This idea allowed individual Germans to interpret how their difficulties would be solved, making National Socialism appealing to many.

In order to connect the noble *volksgemeinschaft* with the ancient heroic past, German thinkers returned to Tacitus' *Germania*. Tacitus believed Germans, who

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<sup>92</sup> For more on the 'Aryan race,' please see chapter 2.

<sup>93</sup> Karin Hausen, "Mother's Day in the Weimar Republic," in *When Biology Became Destiny*. Ed. by Renate Bridenthal and Atina Grossmann. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984) 131-150.

<sup>94</sup> Stackelberg *The Politics of Cultural Despair* xi

<sup>95</sup> Stackelberg *The Politics of Cultural Despair* 4

<sup>96</sup> Mosse *Fascist Revolution* 9

supposedly had not been contaminated by miscegenation, held the special distinction of being a *volk*. Within this group, Jews were seen as impure, and not belonging to the *volksgemeinschaft*. Tacitus theorized that Rome fell to the Germans, but the Germans failed to “impose their superior culture” on neighboring populations. To German thinkers, the modern *volksgemeinschaft* was “like a tree growing from particularly profound roots,” that could not inherit new characteristics; it was the beginning of all creativity and genius.”<sup>97</sup> The idea of rootedness clearly harkens back to the nineteenth century *volkish* ideology. While National Socialists borrowed heavily from the *volkish* thinkers, the people’s community celebrated families.

The *volksgemeinschaft* stressed racial purity as a key component for membership. In order to keep the community pure, National Socialists continued and expanded eugenic programs. As part of the eugenic movement, doctors sterilized “unfit” women—racial others, asocials, lesbians and the feebleminded, sometimes by force. The goal of sterilizing “unfit” women was to prevent *lebensunwürdiges leben* or life unworthy of life. “Aryan” women considered fit were encouraged to bear children, prohibited from getting an abortion and were required to notify the health board in the event of a miscarriage.<sup>98</sup> Because reproduction was crucial to the *volksgemeinschaft* and the “Aryan race,” the family, especially the childbearing women, was the focus of the community.

The family represented not only the continuing of the Aryan race, but also the central unit of the *volksgemeinschaft*. The Nazi Party Office of Racial Policy leader, Dr. Walter Groß, expressed this sentiment in his 1933 speech at a women’s rally. He stated

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<sup>97</sup> Mosse, *Facist Revolution* 68-69, 87

<sup>98</sup> Gisela Bock, *Racism and Sexism in Nazi Germany: Motherhood, Compulsory Sterilization and State* in *When Biology Became Destiny*. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984) 275.

“that the state and nation cannot do without the family,”<sup>99</sup> meaning the family was crucial to the health of the German state. A German family would not be complete without a woman to bear and raise children. As Otto Tolischus, a *New York Times* journalist, wrote in 1933, “woman becomes synonymous with mother.” A woman’s duties were the three K’s, *Küche, Kinder, Kirche*- church, children, kitchen- and she was to accept these duties with pride.<sup>100</sup> With German women’s great responsibility, it was in the National Socialists’ interest to keep women and mothers happy and healthy, as Joseph Goebbels stated in a 1933 speech, “if the woman is healthy, the people will be healthy.”<sup>101</sup> With the *volksgemeinschaft* in mind, the National Socialists created propaganda to reflect these goals.

## Examining Propaganda

The dissemination of ideology rested on visual propaganda. Visual propaganda often contained swastikas as a part of representations of the *volksgemeinschaft*. Adolf Hitler believed propaganda must always address the masses, particularly the masses with limited intellect. Effective propaganda not only grabbed the masses’ attention, it also convinced the masses that the ‘facts’ presented were correct. Hitler felt that the public were prone to forgetfulness, therefore, propaganda should be limited to a few eye-catching, memorable points. Persistence and repetition were key in successful

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<sup>99</sup> Dr. Groß, “*Nationalsozialistische Rassenpolitik. Eine Rede an die deutschen Frauen* (Dessau, C. Dünhaupt, 1934). From <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/gross.htm>. Accessed 16 Feb 2010.

<sup>100</sup> Otto Tolischus, Woman’s Place in the ‘Manly’ Nazi State in *The New York Times*. 1933. SM4.

<sup>101</sup> Joseph Goebbels, “Deutsches Frauentum,” *Signale der neuen Zeit. 25 ausgewählte Reden von Dr. Joseph Goebbels* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP., 1934), pp. 118-126. From <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/goeb55.htm>. Accessed 11 Feb 2010.



propaganda.<sup>102</sup> With that in mind, the swastika served as the simple, boiled down symbol that was repeated throughout Nazi propaganda. Swastikas, as the common thread between propaganda, eventually came to stand in for the ideology as a whole. Swastikas became the common thread that linked all of the propaganda. In turn, the swastika became a piece of propaganda by itself. Because the swastika had absorbed the *volkish* ideology through its association, the viewer could interpret a lone swastika in a way that best served him/her.



Fig 3: “Health, child protection, fighting poverty, aiding travelers, community, helping mothers: These are the tasks of the National Socialist People's Charity. Become a member!” From Calvin German Propaganda Archive

The National Socialist People's Welfare (NSV) acted as the social wing of the Nazi Party. Originating in 1931, the NSV served as a safety net for Party members,

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<sup>102</sup> Adolf Hitler. “Chapter Six: War Propaganda,” *Mein Kampf*. [http://www.hitler.org/writings/Mein\\_Kampf](http://www.hitler.org/writings/Mein_Kampf) (Accessed April 10, 2010).

especially during the Great Depression. The NSV had several branches, including branches for mothers, dental work and winter relief. Donating to the NSV was originally voluntary, but after 1933, the Nazi Party automatically deducted funds from one's paycheck.<sup>103</sup> Although the NSV seemed philanthropic, the group also propagated *volkish* values such as maintaining the health of the community, particularly mothers. Unhealthy or non-community members were not allowed access to NSV funds because they were believed to be detrimental to the Party. Healthy Aryan women would produce healthy Aryan babies, who would in turn be loyal to the cause. By donating to the NSV, one would "'strengthen' and 'purify' the national community," in accordance with a healthy *volksgemeinschaft*.<sup>104</sup>

Figure 3, which dates to the early 1930's, after the Nazi takeover, depicts a traditionally dressed peasant and a soldier working together to literally build Germany, with a swastika in the foreground. The peasant represents an idealized German heritage. The soldier, dressed in modern uniform, juxtaposes the peasant, and represents continuity between the modern party and the idyllic German past. Men from two different sectors of society worked together to create a new Germany; building the country was not limited to one group of men. This suggested that membership in the NSV, which supported women, children and healthy Germans, was just as valuable as the peasant and soldier. Every German, regardless of class, wealth or status, worked towards the preservation of the nation. By donating to the NSV (National Socialist People's Welfare), one would fund the future of the Aryan race, people's community and the German nation. The NSV

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<sup>103</sup> Burleigh and Wipperman *The Racial State* 68-71

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

boasted considerable popularity among Germans.<sup>105</sup> The swastika's association with the NSV would have served as a reminder that the Nazi Party supported needy Germans.



Fig 4: Hitler is building. Help him. Buy German goods. From Calvin German Propaganda Archive

Several themes are repeated in the poster, such as the reference to the idyllic pastoral past represented by the covered wagon in the background. The juxtaposition of the working peasant and working man highlight the idea that every German citizen should contribute to Hitler's efforts; whether one grows crops to feed the nation or one is literally engaged in building. The man featured portrays the Nazi masculine ideal. He is blonde, young, fit and muscular; and the sharpness of the building blocks is reflected in the man's sharp features. His ideal Greek body type mirrored the *volk* idea that the body reflected character.<sup>106</sup> The Nazi construction of masculinity included the belief that a man needed to serve the fatherland in order to fulfill his duties; the ideal Aryan man

<sup>105</sup> Burleigh and Wipperman *The Racial State* 68

<sup>106</sup> George L. Mosse *Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 170

would sacrifice his life at a moment's notice. In the same vein, a man's individuality was shunned in favor of his contribution to the greater nation.<sup>107</sup> This image clearly demonstrates a man literally rebuilding Germany, giving his talents to better the nation.



Fig 5: Four Boy Race From Calvin German Propaganda Archive

The 1934 poster (fig 5) depicts the "Four Boy Race." Taking the boys' uniforms into consideration, this race probably took place with the context of the Hitler Youth. The Nazis believed the future was dependant upon the success of children, and as such, many believed the Hitler Youth was the only place fit for a child. The Hitler Youth included two main sex-segregated branches, the Hitler Youth for boys and the *Bund Deutscher Madel* for girls. Boy's youth groups dedicated themselves to war and the army; this commitment left no room for imaginative play.<sup>108</sup> Part of the militarization of

<sup>107</sup> Mosse, *Image of Man*. 164

<sup>108</sup> Erika Mann. *School for Barbarian: Education Under the Nazis*. (Modern Age Books, 1938) 32

boys related to the loss in World War I. In the aftermath of the war, young men represented the future of a devastated nation.<sup>109</sup>

A child's education also consisted of lessons on race, party loyalty and math, allegedly the "representation of the Nordic spirit." Boys also learned basic military training while girls learned about motherhood, one-pot cooking and nursing.<sup>110</sup> In order to build camaraderie among boys, they joined fraternities and gymnastic societies. The societies encouraged unity between boys as well as athletic endeavors, which in turn shaped their bodies to the German aesthetic.<sup>111</sup> Young people joined the Hitler Youth in part because they supported Hitler. The parents of Hitler Youth also experienced job security, giving parents reason to sign their children up for the program. The Hitler Youth reflected the values of the *volksgemeinschaft*, as boys enjoyed hikes in the woods and fires, bridging any class gap that may have existed outside of the Hitler Youth and allowed the children access to nature, crucial to the fulfillment of the people's community.<sup>112</sup> In joining the Hitler Youth, boys ascended to the highest idea of masculinity because they sacrificed their childhoods for the betterment of the nation. Associating the swastika with the Hitler Youth presented a positive connection between the future and restoration of Germany, the *volksgemeinschaft* and masculinity.

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<sup>109</sup> Sabine Kienitz "Body Damage: Gender and constructions of Masculinity in Weimar Germany" in *Home/Front* ed. by Karen Hagemann and Stefanie Schtüler-Springorum. (Frankfurt: Campus Publishers, 2002) 181-205.

<sup>110</sup> Mann *School for Barbarians* 66, 112-116

<sup>111</sup> Mosse *Fascist Revolution* 30

<sup>112</sup> Burleigh and Wiperman *The Racial State* 202-203



Fig 6: Scene from *Triumph of the Will* From Calvin German Propaganda Archive

*Triumph of the Will*, released in 1935, chronicled the September 1934 Nazi Rally at Nuremburg and contained speech excerpts from Nazi leaders as well as footage from party events. *Triumph of the Will* fully presented the connection between the swastika and party ideology. Swastikas, featured throughout the opening scenes, then served two purposes- the symbol inspired warm feelings towards the party or feelings of alienation to enemies.

The film opened with a plane flying over Germany, glorifying the beauty of the country as well as demonstrating the mass of Nazi party followers. Impressive images such as these served to make one feel a sense of oneness within the party, or to make a non-supporter feel isolated.<sup>113</sup> The plane, emblazoned with a swastika, appealed to the youth and showed the party's ability to harness technology. Although the party shunned technology for not being peasant based, an airplane was acceptable if it served the party

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<sup>113</sup> Bergen War and Genocide 64

ideology.<sup>114</sup> This film promoted ideas of German pride, strength, loyalty and self-sacrifice, as outlined in the *volksgemeinschaft*, all in association with the swastika. These scenes promoted a sense of belonging among Germans.

The swastika also appeared in conjunction with young, working men. The men, from different regions of Germany, promoted unity among the country as well as service to the nation through the Reich Labor Service. The Labor Service provided unemployed men with jobs during the Depression, allowing traditional, masculine breadwinners to fulfill their role in society.<sup>115</sup> The men, “soldiers with hammers,” proclaimed their loyalty to Germany and Hitler. After Germany’s defeat in World War I and the following hardship caused by the Depression, work would have appealed to German men. Work, according to *Triumph*, not longer divided the nation into classes, but united everyone and was mandatory for entrance into the community.<sup>116</sup> Seeing a swastika linked with working men reminded the nation that the National Socialists brought this new prosperity.

The men in the film represented the ideal body type- fit, blonde and tall and participated in games, gymnastics and wrestling, proudly promoting the “Aryan” body type. After the devastation of World War I, the image of thousands of healthy, strong young men would have been instilled a sense of pride in the viewer.<sup>117</sup> Not only did the young men adhere to the values of masculinity, work corps also provided training for future soldiers. The values of the *volksgemeinschaft* are represented throughout this

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<sup>114</sup> Mosse *Fascist Revolution* 27-28

<sup>115</sup> Adolf Hitler. "Arbeitsdienst für Deutschland," *Der Parteitag der Ehre vom 8. bis 14. September 1936. Offizieller Bericht über den Verlauf des Reichsparteitages mit sämtlichen Kongreßreden*. From <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/pt36lab.htm>

<sup>116</sup> Reifenstahl *Triumph of the Will*

<sup>117</sup> Kienitz "Body Damage" 182

section of the film.

Throughout the film, peasants worked the field, swastika flags visible in the background, and only stopped to salute to Hitler. By showing different classes and statuses of Germans, *Triumph* portrayed the *volksgemeinschaft* ideal of a socially egalitarian society. Administrator Josef Wagner, quoting Hitler's speech, stated "the tallest tree has the strongest growth behind it;" clearly a reference to the *volkish* ideas of rootedness, cultural development and longevity. Furthermore, Julius Streicher, editor of Nazi publication *Der Stürmer*, stated "a people that does not protect its racial heritage will perish," again harkening back to the *volksgemeinschaft*. The party hoped that "children would group up without caste or class," clearly reflecting the idea of the people's community. *Volk* ideals were mentioned throughout the film while swastika adorned flags were shown in the background, which reinforced the connection between the swastika and ideology.<sup>118</sup> The film creates a sense of belonging and loyalty among viewers by showcasing what the Nazi Party had to offer- young, dedicated servicemen, jobs, and solidarity, all punctuated by the swastika.

Like all Nazi propaganda, *Triumph of the Will*, linked all of the party rhetoric- the swastika, glorified peasants, young male soldiers, and the strength of the German people. The swastika not only represented good fortune, it also demonstrated what Germans wanted after the losses of World War I and the Depression. With a powerful connection made between the swastika and empowering German rhetoric, a simple swastika allowed the audience to construct Nazi culture in a way that made sense to them.

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<sup>118</sup> Leni Reifenstahl, dir., *Triumph des Willens*, with Adolf Hitler and Hermann Goring (Berlin, Ger: Reichsparteitag-Film, 1935), film.





Fig 7: 1938 *Frauen warte* Cover. From Calvin German Propaganda Archive

The August 1938 figure appeared on the cover of *Frauen Warte*, a Nazi women's magazine that contained articles about marriage, fashion and cooking, an adult version of the lessons taught to the *Bund* girls.<sup>119</sup> The couple is dressed simple clothing and holding, presumably, their only son. Although the swastika does not figure prominently into the image, the symbol remains visible, reminding the viewer that the National Socialists created this prosperous, happy family. This rhetoric ties back to Rosenberg's ideas regarding racial preservation and earlier ideas of racial hygiene. A featured poem in this issue discussed how the woman lived through her son, because she could not take up arms. The son's duty was to protect the nation's "bloodline" and honor his fathers.<sup>120</sup> The swastika, associated with this magazine issue, not only emphasized the National Socialist's creation of this "Aryan" family, but also the roles of each member of the family to the greater Germany.

<sup>119</sup> Randall Bytwerk, <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/images/fw/fw7-04.jpg>

<sup>120</sup> Werner vom Hofe, "Mein Junge," *NS Frauen Warte*, (7), 4 1938, trans. Randall Bytwerk. p. 97.



Fig 8: Mother's Day 1939 *Frauen Woche* From Calvin German Propaganda Archive

The picture graced the cover of the Mother's Day 1939 issue of *Frauen Woche*. As with the 1938 cover, the woman clearly represents the ideal Aryan woman- a mother of three healthy children. A woman had no purpose outside of reproduction- the private sphere became public. It was a woman's duty to the Party and state to have as many healthy children as possible, this is exemplified in groups such as the League of Large Families, which required four or more children to join. In order to ensure the health of future German mothers and soldiers, the National Socialists' Reich Mothers' Service offered classes regarding pregnancy, infant care, food preservation and quitting smoking and drinking.<sup>121</sup> These eugenically based classes existed solely to promote the development of 'Aryan' children. These duties made a German mother one of the most

<sup>121</sup> Hausen "Mother's Day in the Weimar Republic" 240

important members of society, according to the party rhetoric.<sup>122</sup> A swastika's association with these ideals would appeal to women, perhaps allowing them to feel a sense of pride and connection in their contributions to the nation.

## Conclusion

By the mid-1930s, the swastika had become synonymous with the Third Reich and became a key piece of propaganda on its own. In order to do so, the swastika, already known as a good luck symbol, was shown in positive images of a new, stronger, united Germany. These images reflected the values of the *volksgemeinschaft*- a united, socially egalitarian, peasant and racially purified community. In the attempt to create this community, the idea of "rootedness" was emphasized. Rootedness linked a person with the community and nature. The attitudes represented in the *volksgemeinschaft* became National Socialist policy.

Within propaganda images, the swastika was shown alongside images of happy, healthy Aryan families. These families represented the new prosperity the National Socialists promised. Images also featured young, fit men partaking in the literal rebuilding and celebration of Germany, images designed to boost morale after the devastation of World War I. Propaganda, featuring swastikas, reinforced ideas of the traditional *volksgemeinschaft* and provided reassuring scenes for the German masses. Through this continual association, the symbol came to stand in for the whole of National socialist ideology.

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<sup>122</sup> Dr. Groß, "Nationalsozialistische Rassenpolitik. Eine Rede an die deutschen Frauen.

## Chapter 4: The Swastika Today

### Introduction

In 2009, fourteen giant swastikas appeared around a predominately-Jewish city near Montreal, Canada that is home to six thousand Holocaust survivors. Although some of the graffiti appeared in public areas, like the bus station, other targets included a Jewish-owned bakery.<sup>123</sup> In this incident, clearly the only motive was to incite fear in the hearts of Montreal's Jewish population. The intent appeared to be an attack on the mental health of the city's Jewish population- especially the Holocaust survivors. This event showed that the swastika, imbued with racist, anti-Semitic sentiments, does not need accompany goose-stepping neo-Nazis to convey a particular message. Throughout the Americas and Germany, groups and individuals continue to use the swastika's power to conjure a range of meanings. Those who oppose Nazi ideology may become fearful, and those who do ascribe to the beliefs may feel a sense of belonging. This chapter will begin to examine several types of neo-Nazi organizations. The first groups I examine attempt to cultivate the ideals of the regime by building on Nazi texts. These groups are aware of the history of the Nazi Party and lament its passing. Next, I will examine hate groups that are not interested in Nazi history or building a movement, but use the swastika as a metonym, for hate to those opposed, or belonging, to those who embrace the ideology the swastika has come to represent. Finally, the chapter will examine isolated instances where the swastika was used anonymously, without the context of any

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<sup>123</sup> Andrew Halfnight, "Police investigate anti-Semitic graffiti; Swastikas in Côte St. Luc Highly visible locations targeted one year after similar spree" in *The Montreal Gazette*. August 9, 2009. A2.

hate group. The association of the *volksgemeinschaft* and the swastika has made the symbol and icon of white power, which is how the symbol is used today.

### **The History of Neo-Nazism in America and Germany**

Original skinhead culture grew out of Britain's white and black Jamaican working class youth in the 1960's. Opposed to Britain's "shaggier" youth culture, skinheads borrowed from immigrant and "mod" fashion, and fashioned themselves as clean-cut soccer hooligans. The original skinhead movement was "working class" and multiracial, not racist. By the late 1970's, however, a racist, nationalist skinhead faction developed as a response to South Asian immigration, which coincided with the rise of the fascist National Front and British Movement.<sup>124</sup> By the early 1980s, racist skinhead culture reached America and mixed with existing hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and the American Nazi Party.<sup>125</sup>

In post-World War II America, hate groups attempted to crush the Civil Rights movement due to racial prejudice and fear of upsetting the antebellum status quo. Their collective failure led 1970s white supremacists to restructure the movement around the notion of "white dispossession." These white supremacists perceived affirmative action as evidence that white people were losing rights in white nation.<sup>126</sup> The oil crisis of the early 1970s brought with it a recession and record unemployment. Layoffs in the

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<sup>124</sup> Mark Potok ed., "Skinhead Report," *Southern Poverty Law Center*, [http://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/downloads/publication/Skinhead\\_Report.pdf](http://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/downloads/publication/Skinhead_Report.pdf) (accessed 24 Mar 2010).

<sup>125</sup> Howard L. Bushart, John R. Craig and Dr. Myra Barnes, *Soldiers of God: White Supremacists and Their Holy War for America* (New York: Kensington Books, 1998) 206.

<sup>126</sup> Leonard Zeskind, *Blood and Politics: The History of the White Nationalist Movement from the Margins to the Mainstream* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2009) xvii

automotive and steel industries, combined with a jingoistic media campaign blaming Middle Eastern oil-producing nations led to racism directed at “the Arabs.” Racism and hate groups provided an outlet for those caught up in “anti-Arab hysteria.”<sup>127</sup> Hate group membership further expanded in the late 1970s and 1980s, explained by a decline in agriculture and manufacturing in America. Those affected most by the decline turned to white supremacy groups for support.<sup>128</sup> Declines in logging, ranching and mining, perceived as attacks on traditional values, led some to turn to hate groups. An influx of nonwhite immigrants in the 1980s and 1990s led some to construct “fears of a white minority” as well as xenophobia in some, who too joined growing white supremacy movements. The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, and therefore the elimination of America’s external rival, may have led some to seek a new enemy, this time, within the nation.<sup>129</sup> The widespread use of the internet has given hate groups the tools to organize, recruit, distribute and mobilize like-minded individuals.<sup>130</sup> Racial prejudice, combined with xenophobia and the internet contributed to the expansion and growth of hate groups in America. By the time Neo-Nazism arrived in America in the late 1980s, a volatile breadth of hate groups and white supremacist organizations already existed. In America, Neo-Nazism blended with a number of existing hate groups and white supremacist organizations.

German neo-Nazism emerged out of the ashes of the Nazi Party and grew because of mounting social tensions. In 1964, German World War II veterans founded the

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<sup>127</sup> Max Elbaum, “What Legacy from the Radical Internationalism of 1968?” *Radical History Review* 82 (2002): 37-64. 53-54

<sup>128</sup> Rory McVeigh, “Structured Ignorance and Organized Racism,” *Social Forces* 82 (2004): 895-936. 897

<sup>129</sup> Jerome Walters, *One Aryan Nation Under God* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2000) 9-10

<sup>130</sup> Carol Swain and Russ Nieli, ed., *Contemporary Voices of White Nationalism in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 5

National Democratic Party in West Germany, which promoted the ideas of the *volksgemeinschaft*. Twelve of the founding NPD members were active Nazis in 1945.<sup>131</sup> The Party was supposed to be a “magnet for all other nationalistic forces.” By 1968, the NDP boasted twenty-eight thousand members and gained two percent of the votes in the German federal election.<sup>132</sup> In a trend similar to America, German neo-Nazism experienced resurgence during the 1980s and 1990s, during a period of rising immigration, in which a large number of “unwanted” poor immigrants seeking work or political asylum entered the country. Despite a lack of need for foreign workers, immigration remained high. Those who felt marginalized by immigration, young men in particular, developed xenophobic feelings.<sup>133</sup> Youth unemployment, combined with xenophobia caused some Germans to turn to neo-Nazism for a solution.<sup>134</sup> German reunification in 1990 led to the National Democratic Party’s resurgence in Eastern Germany because of a lack of “democratic options” such as churches and non-governmental organizations. Some militant wings of the NPD, such as the *Kameradschaften*, supported violent racism.<sup>135</sup> By 1992, sixty-seven percent of the 3,800 far-right activists were under the age of twenty, another twenty-nine percent were between the ages of twenty-one and thirty.<sup>136</sup> Although from different origins than American Neo-Nazism, German neo-Nazism is also driven by xenophobia and fear.

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<sup>131</sup> Rosie Goldsmith, “Far right gains ground in Germany’s east,” *BBC News*, 21 November 2007, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/crossing\\_continents/7105445.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/crossing_continents/7105445.stm) (Accessed 24 March 2010).

<sup>132</sup> David Childs, “The Far Right in Germany since 1945,” in *The Far Right in Eastern and Western Europe, Vol.2*, eds., Luciano Cheles, Ronnie Ferguson and Michalina Vaughan, 290-308(London: Longman Group, 1995), 292-295.

<sup>133</sup> Jaroslav Krejčí, “Neo-Fascism- West and East,” in *The Far Right in Eastern and Western Europe, Vol.2*, eds., Luciano Cheles, Ronnie Ferguson and Michalina Vaughan, 1-12(London: Longman Group, 1995), 8.

<sup>134</sup> Childs “The Far Right in Germany Since 1945” 297

<sup>135</sup> Goldsmith “Far right gains ground in Germany’s east”

<sup>136</sup> Childs “The Far Right in Germany Since 1945” 305

Skinhead culture evolved from working class soccer hooliganism to full fledged, racist, neo-Nazism. In America, neo-Nazi ideology mixed with long-standing racist groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan. By contrast, German neo-Nazism was born from the ashes of the Third Reich. In both nations, hate groups expand in times of mounting social tensions, such as during high periods of immigration. In combining swastikas, violence and the National Socialist party rhetoric, a blueprint for modern neo-Nazi parties emerged. Today, America has two main neo-Nazi parties that use the swastika.

### **Organized Groups**

The National Socialist Movement (also called NSM88 or NSM), originated in 1974 out of the ashes of the American Nazi Party. Today, the NSM claims to “borrow the best of capitalism and socialism” to create a prosperous future for Americans. In order to do so, the party promotes defending the rights of whites everywhere by “protecting [their] European heritage,” strengthening family values, enhancing economic self-sufficiency, reforming immigration and promoting white separatism. The NSM clearly modeled the Nazi Party- both contain a women’s club and a youth movement. Women interested in the NSM may join the NSM Women’s Group, while children aged fourteen to eighteen are eligible for membership in the Viking Youth Corp. Membership in both groups is contingent upon on heterosexuality, remaining free from drugs and loyalty to the race.<sup>137</sup>

The party outlined The Twenty-Five Points of National Socialism, self-

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<sup>137</sup> American National Socialist Party: About Us, ed. Mann Wilson (Detroit: National Socialist Movement 2010), <http://nsm88.org/aboutus.html> (accessed 9 March 2010)



consciously lifted from the Twenty Five Points, which Hitler declared on February 24, 1920 as the platform of the Nazi Party.<sup>138</sup> Where the original Twenty Five Points demanded the abrogation of the Treaty of Versailles, the Movement demanded the revocation of the North Atlantic Trade Organization, World Trade Organization and the North American Free Trade Agreement. Furthermore, the Movement seeks colonies to feed and house whites, clearly remnant of Hitler's ideology of *lebensraum*. The Party further pledged that only heterosexual, non-Semitic whites can be citizens and all non-Whites (presumed to be immigrants) must "return to their point of origin, peacefully or by force." Anyone who meets the citizen requirements is believed to have equal rights, regardless of class, and all actions of the citizen must be in accordance with the community. Again, the NSM party rhetoric echoed that of the Third Reich, where the egalitarian community had priority over the individual. Both the Nazi Party and the NSM condemned abortion, for "Aryan" women and offered pay raises to those who gave birth to healthy children and desired to recreate the traditional family, where the father provide and the mother stays home. The traditional family model drew upon the Nazi idea that a mother is responsible for the mental and spiritual growth of her children. The Nazi Party and the NSM promoted a traditional vision of masculinity; not only was a man a provider, his body was sculpted through sports and he marched in the national army.<sup>139</sup> Replicating the Nazi Party, the Movement organized marches to garner support.<sup>140</sup> Just as Nazi marches sought to impress party members and alienate enemies, the NSM

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<sup>138</sup> Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression Volume IV, Office of the United States Chief Counsel for Prosecution of Axis Criminality. Washington, DC : United States Government Printing Office, 1946  
<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/25points.html> (Accessed 9 March 2010)

<sup>139</sup> 25 Points of American National Socialism. ed. Mann Wilson (Detroit: National Socialist Movement 2010) <http://nsm88.org/25points/25pointsengl.html> (Accessed 9 March 2010).

<sup>140</sup> "65 Are Jailed In Violence at Neo-Nazi Rally in Ohio," *The New York Times*, October 16, 2005. 7.

marches attempted to do the same. Clearly, the National Socialist Movement modeled itself a modern Nazi Party, as it lifts its' creed directly from the 1920 Nazi platform. It seems fitting that this group, who replicated the Nazi Party ideology would also use the swastika as its symbol. In doing so, those who agreed with the NSM's ideology would feel allegiance towards the group.

Holocaust denial remained an important element in the National Socialist Movement. In the NSM's frequently asked questions, someone asked "what about the Holocaust?" The group responded by insisting the Holocaust never happened, and counter that if in fact, the Holocaust did occur, that no one should follow National Socialist ideology. The Movement cited that thirteen countries have made it illegal to question the Holocaust; if the Holocaust happened, the NSM suggested, there would be no reason for such laws. The NSM offered that Jewish doctors, upset at replacement by Germans, fabricated the Holocaust. Furthermore, according to the NSM, the Torah stated that all Gentiles must be eternal servants of Jews. Because Hitler and the Nazis did not bow down to "Jewish pressure," they were seen as enemies of the Jews. In fact, the NSM implied, based on Isaiah 60:12 ("For the nation and kingdom that will not serve [Israel] shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted"), that Germany lost World War II because of their enemy status.<sup>141</sup> Holocaust denial seems not a far step from Nazi ideology, and a logical consequence of an attempt to keep the ideology alive. Heinrich Himmler called the "extermination of the Jews" a "page of glory never mentioned, never

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<sup>141</sup> FAQ About National Socialism, ed. Mann Wilson (Detroit: National Socialist Movement 2010) <http://wd.nsm88.org/faqs/frequently%20asked%20questions%20about%20national%20socialism.pdf> (accessed 10 March 2010).

to be mentioned.”<sup>142</sup> Himmler felt the extermination must not be talked about outside of top SS circles, knowing that the Final Solution would not be acceptable to most. Even German authorities felt the brutality was extreme.<sup>143</sup> Modern groups realized this and too deny the Holocaust, because these groups cannot embrace the Holocaust and garner support. While the Nazis hid the Final Solution under the cover of war, the NSM denied the Holocaust. When one considers that the Nazi Party downplayed the Holocaust, the NSM’s denial does not seem far-fetched.

The NSM boasted the swastika represents the ‘white race.’ In contrast, the Star of David is the Jewish emblem. The swastika, they believed, was an Aryan symbol, which represented Aryan progress and wellbeing. As a group that promotes white pride, it makes sense the Movement would identify with the swastika and its constructed association with the ‘Aryan race.’ Because the NSM considered the swastika a ‘white’ symbol, they neglect to mention how many cultures used it.<sup>144</sup> The NSM continued to explain that “hate” is merely the other side of love- one must hate someone who will destroy the race one loves- they consider it the law of nature.<sup>145</sup> While violence is not explicit, the call to hate those who will “destroy” the race suggests that violence would not be a far call for the Movement, just as the Nazis sought to eliminate the threat of miscegenation. While the NSM is the largest neo-Nazi party in America, it is not alone.

Alongside the National Socialist Movement, Aryan Nations (AN) formed as the political wing of the Christian Identity Movement in 1974. The Christian Identity Movement, also founded in 1974, preached that white Europeans can trace their heritage

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<sup>142</sup> Heinrich Himmler’s Poznan speech of October 4, 1943. <http://www.holocaust-history.org/himmler-poznan/speech-text.shtml> (Accessed 9 March 2010)

<sup>143</sup> Bergen *War and Genocide* 170

<sup>144</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>145</sup> FAQ About National Socialism, ed. Mann Wilson

to the “Lost Tribes of Israel” and therefore are God’s chosen ones. The Christian Identity Movements considered Jews the descendents of the ‘unholy union’ of Eve and Satan and all non-whites “mud people.” The fiercely anti-government Movement led Pastor Richard Butler to form Aryan Nations, “the political, spiritual and social core” of the Christian Identity Movement.<sup>146</sup>

Like NSM, Aryan Nations borrowed rhetoric from the original Nazi Party. Aryan Nations sought to establish an Aryan homeland for the ‘Aryan folk,’ where they may practice self-determination, write their own laws, and practice their own culture.<sup>147</sup> Pastor Butler stated that in order for a nation to be successful, it must be of one race.<sup>148</sup> Aryan Nations cited the Third Reich’s ‘Blood and Soil’ ideology as inspiration. AN’s goal may only be realized when they end “the Aryan-oppressing, Judaic-based system.” This call to arms echoed Hitler’s condemnation of Communism as an international Jewish plot to destroy Aryans.<sup>149</sup> AN called for “pan-Aryan War” in order to free the race from the oppressive Jews. While AN does not have a strict hierarchy, it calls every member to be an agent of the movement, which will inevitably turn violent until a “White Racial Homeland is secured.”<sup>150</sup>

Above all, Aryan Nations pledged to uphold the “14 Words” coined by David Lane, late leader of The Order, a now-defunct white separatist group. The words read, “We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children.” The fourteen words are reminiscent of Nazi goals- to redeem the Aryan race through purity

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<sup>146</sup> Bushart, Craig and Barnes *Soldiers of God* 31

<sup>147</sup> Kingdom Identity Movement Doctrinal Statement, ed. Dr. Wesley A. Swift (Arkansas, 2010), <http://www.kingidentity.com/doctrine.htm> (accessed 10 March 2010).

<sup>148</sup> Bushart, Craig and Barnes 194

<sup>149</sup> Bergen *War and Genocide* 37.

<sup>150</sup> Aryan Nations About Us, ed. by A.B. Kreis III, (Lexington, 2010) <http://aryan-nations.org/about.htm> (Accessed 11 March 2010).

and conquering living space for expansion.<sup>151</sup> AN added that the “beauty of the white Aryan woman must not perish from the Earth.” Much like Hitler saw women as crucial to the future of the race, AN placed women on a pedestal as a marketing tool. Although AN strives to protect the beauty of white women, it is also implied that white women are the vehicle for the race.<sup>152</sup> In order to preserve the purity of the white woman, AN called for a “racial holy war” as suggested in white supremacist novel *The Turner Diaries*.<sup>153</sup>

While Aryan Nations used multiple symbols as well as the swastika, their main webpage<sup>154</sup> featured the German war eagle and the swastika. However, AN claimed that the symbol Hitler used was not a swastika, but in fact a *hakenkruetz*, a version of the swastika.<sup>155</sup> AN denied that the “hooked cross” and swastika are related, as the swastika is a non-white symbol. AN blamed a mistranslation in *Mein Kampf*, where *hakenkruetz* ‘wrongly’ translated to swastika. AN offered that Hitler’s swastika was actually a take on the *sieg* rune, made familiar on the coats of the SS. At the end of the paragraph, AN noted that “we are NOT using a symbol from India...get it through your thick non-white skulls...the symbol belongs to us, National Socialist Aryans.”<sup>156</sup> The statement reflected a shifting idea of race; in the nineteenth century, the Indian ‘Aryan’ was a great culture while in the twentieth and twenty first century, United States racists see it as problematic because they see South Asians as racial inferiors. AN denied that the swastika has any connection to India, or the process by which the symbol became racialized; instead AN

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<sup>151</sup> Bergen *War and Genocide* 38

<sup>152</sup> Earth’s Most Endangered Species. ed. by A.B. Kreis III, (Lexington, 2010) <http://aryan-nations.org/leaflets/earthsmost.html> (Accessed 11 March 2010).

<sup>153</sup> Carol M. Swain, *The New White Nationalism in America: Its Challenge to Integration*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 45.

<sup>154</sup> The main webpage can be found at <http://aryan-nations.org>.

<sup>155</sup> See chapter 1.

<sup>156</sup> Hitler’s Hakenkruetz Was Not A Swastika, ed. by A.B. Kreis III, (Lexington, 2010). <http://aryan-nations.org/index-2.htm> (accessed 11 March 2010).

created a new meaning for the symbol, which ignored its actual diverse, complex history and the shifting meanings of race, even among those who espoused racial hierarchies.<sup>157</sup> Aryan Nations, along with NSM, used the rhetoric and symbolism of the Nazi Third Reich.

### **Loose Followers: Prison Gangs and Music**

Deep inside the California prison system, the Aryan Brotherhood (AB) avowed themselves followers of Adolf Hitler, tattooing themselves with swastikas and thumbing *Mein Kampf*. The AB formed in the 1980's, and cohorts with other active Nazi prison gangs, including Nazi Low Riders and Public Enemy Number 1 (PEN1), both inside and outside prison.<sup>158</sup> The group formed along racial lines as a means of self-preservation within the prison system.<sup>159</sup> Aryan Brotherhood members are notorious for their incredibly violent, bloody murders of non-white inmates, especially those from rival gangs. AB members profited from the sale of illicit drugs, including heroin. Despite other neo-Nazi groups' condemnation of drug usage, the gang sells drugs to whites and non-whites alike. Prison gang expert Tony Delgado argued that the Aryan Brotherhood is more concerned with profit than a "white revolution." The white power rhetoric, according to Delgado, is a simple recruitment tool to gang members who may be otherwise alienated in the prison system.<sup>160</sup> The ideal Aryan Brotherhood candidate was physically small, white and young. These men, victimized by other inmates, turned to the

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<sup>157</sup> A.B. Kreis III.

<sup>158</sup> David Holthouse. "Smashing the Shamrock," *Southern Poverty Law Center*.  
<http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2005/fall/smashing-the-shamrock?page=0,0> (Accessed 9 March 2010).

<sup>159</sup> Thornton W. Price, *Murder Unpunished: How the Aryan Brotherhood Murdered Waymond Small and Got Away With It*, (Tuscon, University of Arizona Press, 2005) 47

<sup>160</sup> Holthouse "Smashing the Shamrock"

Brotherhood for support.<sup>161</sup>

While the Aryan Brotherhood certainly espoused white power values, they did not model themselves after the Nazi party or any contemporary neo-Nazi groups. However, the group does use the swastika, however, often tattooed inside a shamrock, alongside the number '666' or the letters 'AB' as well as the Nazi SS symbol. The symbol represents the Irish heritage of the Brotherhoods founders and allegiance to the gang.<sup>162</sup> New members have to 'earn' their tattoos by reading *Mein Kampf* and attacking or killing a nonwhite inmate.



Fig 9: Aryan Brotherhood Tattoo from the *ADL*.

AB held strong to the requirement, prison lore reported that in 1974, notorious killer Charles Manson was denied entry into the gang for refusing to attack a non-white inmate.<sup>163</sup> Although the Brotherhood promoted Nazi racial values and uses the swastika, the group does not follow the structure of the Third Reich. The Aryan Brotherhood is not the only group that borrows Nazi ideology without fashioning themselves after the Third Reich.

In the early 1990s, the National Democratic Party had gained popularity in East

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<sup>161</sup> Roger H. Boner. "Brotherwoods: The Rise and Fall of a White-Supremacist Gang Inside a Kansas Prison" in *The Journal of Gang Research*. 6 (1999): 61.

<sup>162</sup> Price 47

<sup>163</sup> Holthouse.

Germany. In 1994, three teen boys formed the German black metal band, Absurd. Drawing influence from Nazism, Leni Riefenstahl, and Rock Against Communism, the teens produced “Aryan metal.” An interview with the band read like a Nazi pamphlet—they admitted to being “rooted in a blood and soil cosmology.” The phrase could have directly out of the *volksgemeinschaft*, which encompassed rootedness and race. Fittingly, Absurd used a swastika in their logo.



Fig 10: Absurd's logo featuring a swastika and Thor's hammer.

In a 1998 interview with Absurd, the band touted their pride in not only being members of the Aryan race, but Germans, above all. The band added, “If Aryan stands for the noble...then Jewish means the opposite.”<sup>164</sup> This statement borrowed from Hitler's declarations of Aryanism; that every worthy quality belongs to the Aryan, and every unworthy quality, the Jew.<sup>165</sup> The Absurd teens dedicated themselves to the *volksgemeinschaft* and the ideas of the Racial Holy War.<sup>166</sup> Under the guise of the preserving the people's community, the three teens spontaneously murdered a classmate. The classmate, Sandro Beyer, had been spreading rumors about the band members. When questioned about the murders and prison sentences, the boys wished the murder

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<sup>164</sup> Michael Moynihan and ed. Didrik Soderlind. *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*. (Los Angeles: Feral House, 1998) 242-259. 255

<sup>165</sup> Bergen War and Genocide 37

<sup>166</sup> Moynihan and Soderlind *Lords of Chaos* 256



been committed under the National Socialist, because they would have been praised for eliminating a *volksschädling*, a pest to the *volksgemeinschaft*. The teens cited the SS motto, “to give death,” as their model for dealing with their opponents.<sup>167</sup> Clearly, the members of Absurd felt ties to Nazism and the *volksgemeinschaft*, as evidenced by their ideology and usage of the swastika.

At the time of the interview in 1998, the Absurd teens claimed to be following a three part political plan. The band wished to awaken the Aryan aesthetics, such as Greek art and beauty ideals, the same aesthetic the Nazis promoted. They also hoped to enlighten Aryan awareness and create a new Aryan avant-garde elite. Absurd considered themselves a political band, with hopes to create a new heroic, strong and proud German Reich.<sup>168</sup> These ideals do not seem out of place, especially when compared to their contemporaries, such as more rigid groups like the NSM or Aryan Nations.

### **Swastika: Metonym in Action**

In order to be used effectively, that is, to bring about an emotional responses from the viewer, a list of Nazi ideology need not accompany the swastika. A simple spray paint swastika can be sufficient to incite fear in those who have stood in opposition to the Third Reich swastika. These types of vandalism are not confined to just America and Germany, rather the incidents occur globally. In these cases, those who use the swastika are not organized hate groups; however, those who use the swastika do so because it is effective in getting the point across.

In Berlin, three neo-Nazis carved a swastika into a 17-year-old wheelchair bound

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<sup>167</sup> Moynihan and Soderlind *Lords of Chaos* 258

<sup>168</sup> Moynihan and Soderlind *Lords of Chaos* 254-259

girl's face. The neo-Nazis ordered the girl to shout fascist slogans and upon her refusal, the neo-Nazis turned violent. Although the attack did not leave a physical scar, the girl was mentally distraught and speechless. This was not the first neo-Nazi attack on handicapped individuals.<sup>169</sup> This attack echoed the Nazi beliefs about the handicapped- that they would denigrate the 'Aryan race' and did not deserve to bear children. This incident showed that neo-Nazis disseminate Third Reich rhetoric, whether it is conscious or not. Regardless of intent, this attack brought back memories of the Nazi's attacks on handicapped individuals.

In 2004, New York suffered a barrage of swastikas spray-painted on synagogues, Jewish Centers and police radio cars. The swastikas appeared courtesy of a woman expressing anger at her Jewish ex-husband and his new Jewish wife. Several of the swastikas accompanied personal attacks on the new couple.<sup>170</sup> The vandal, a Russian woman, demonstrated how embedded the swastika's anti-Semitism had become. With a distinct target in mind, the attacks were personal and cruel. These events show that the swastika is still potent as a metonym for anti-Semitic thought.

## **Conclusion**

Nazi propaganda effectively left the swastika synonymous with Third Reich ideology, including hypernationalism, hypermasculinity and of course, racism and anti-Semitism. The swastika gave neo-Nazi groups something to rally around because the symbol represented a sense of belonging to a larger nation. The two major United States movements, the National Socialist Movement and Aryan Nations self-consciously borrow

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<sup>169</sup> "Swastika cut on face of girl in wheelchair" in *The Glasgow Herald*. Jan. 12, 1994, 6.

<sup>170</sup> Michael Wilson, "Woman Charged with Painting Swastikas Aim at Ex-Husband" in *The New York Times*. October 19, 2004. 7.

from Nazi rhetoric. NSM follows the Nazi party in that it contains women and youth groups and assigns them roles similar to those the Nazis proscribed. NSM strives to create a separate country for whites only. The NSM rallies around the swastika because they feel it is a 'white emblem.' National Socialist Movement contemporaries Aryan Nations also seek to create a homeland for whites, however they deny that Hitler used a swastika at all. AN claims Hitler used a *hakenkruez*, a white symbol, instead of the Indian swastika. Their argument is moot, however, because the two symbols are the same.

Other groups that use swastika are less organized and do not pattern themselves after the Nazi party. Prison gang Aryan Brotherhood tattoos all members with a swastika and shamrock, which a member earns by killing a non-white inmate. While the AB espouses racist ideology, the Brotherhood sells drugs for a profit, often to whites; something neo-Nazi movements condemn. German band Absurd uses a swastika in their logo because they feel they follow a "blood and soil cosmology."<sup>171</sup> The self-proclaimed political band hopes to usher in a new German era, full of strong, proud and heroic Germans.

Swastika-based vandalism occurs globally. The vandals, often unorganized, use the swastika because it has become a metonym for hate. The symbol alone, without any other accompanying words or symbols, can cause feelings of fear. With the Nazi's successful propaganda campaign, the swastika took on new meaning. This symbol, used today, can give a viewer a sense of belonging, or a deep-seated fear.

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<sup>171</sup> Moynihan and Soderlind *Lords of Chaos* 254

## Conclusion

Although today the swastika is a metonym for National Socialism, the symbol has a much longer and more diverse history. Occurring across cultures, the swastika meant different things to each culture that used it, including fertility and the cosmos. The swastika traveled across continents alongside religions and expanding civilizations. Today, we can demonstrate that the swastika was not exclusive property of one group. With the development of racial science, however, western racial scientists attempted to construct a link between the swastika and the 'Aryan race,' the alleged European race that sat atop the imagined racial hierarchy. Although the racial scientists enjoyed varying degrees of success, Hitler made the final link between 'Aryans' and the swastika when he chose the symbol to represent the German people. Under National Socialism, the swastika was burdened further with meaning. National Socialism adopted popular *volkish* ideology that promoted a racially pure *volksgemeinschaft*. In order to create effective propaganda, the swastika appeared in images representing the ideals of the popular *volksgemeinschaft*. This technique was highly effective and the swastika absorbed the meanings with which it was associated and in turn served as a symbol of propaganda on its own. The effectiveness of the swastika as a piece of propaganda holds today, as neo-Nazi groups, some consciously drawing from the original Party, still use the swastika to represent their beliefs.

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