

Hitler's rise to power in 1933 and the subsequent formation of the Nazi Party brought with it the limiting of opinion and expression and infused within the German culture the fear of imprisonment at the hands of the Gestapo in response to any form of political or social resistance.<sup>1</sup> As a result, according to Mark Starr, "what genuine resistance existed was most often modest or secret."<sup>2</sup> There was one group of students, however, who under the name "The White Rose" came together to warn Germans of the evils of the regime. The movement only lasted for one year until the members were arrested and either executed or imprisoned; however, their sacrifice gradually became an act which has been immortalized by Germans and has slowly, though in small amounts, gathered the attention of American writers and historians as well.

Given the fact that the White Rose is not an American group but a German one, there is unfortunately a very limited amount of literature about the subject in English. There are multiple sources in German, however given the language barrier, there is a limit to the amount of sources which I can use for this purpose. Just the same, there is very little information prior to the mid-1980s, although this could be attributed to the limited knowledge of or interest in the subject. One of the earliest accounts referring to the White Rose is a news article published in *Time* magazine in 1950 regarding Inge Scholl, the sister of Hans and Sophie Scholl.<sup>3</sup> Inge Scholl found a way to continue the

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about life in Nazi Germany and the effects of the Gestapo and the SS on the public, see Detlev J. K. Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*, trans. Richard Deveson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> Mark Starr, Bruce Shentz, and Debbie Seward, "Resisting Hitler," *Newsweek*, May 13, 1985. [http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy.umw.edu/hottopics/lnacademic/?verb=sr&csi=5774&sr=HLEAD\(Resisting+Hitler.\)+and+date+is+May+13%2C+1985](http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy.umw.edu/hottopics/lnacademic/?verb=sr&csi=5774&sr=HLEAD(Resisting+Hitler.)+and+date+is+May+13%2C+1985) (accessed October 7, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> "The Good," *Time* 55, no. 9 (1950): 32, <http://web.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.umw.edu/ehost/detail?sid=45e4b13b-11e9-48cf-9940-fa15e611f87a%40sessionmgr-104&vid=7&hid=108&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2-ZQ%3d%3-d#db=a9h&AN=54156941> (accessed October 7, 2012).

work of her siblings not by handing out pamphlets, but by starting a school to “teach [the populace] a new political creed.”<sup>4</sup> This article was not written until 1950, which very well could be attributed to the lack of American knowledge of the group.

As popular as the White Rose became in Germany, despite the numerous awards and statues commemorated to the students, English and American accounts of the group are virtually non-existent in the period between 1950 to about 1985. Given the importance of the White Rose in attempting to resist Hitler and his regime, it is hard to believe there was no apparent American interest in the subject. One of the probable reason for this is that the SS and Gestapo, for a time, succeeded in repressing the knowledge of such actions. It is equally possible that prior to the ‘80s there simply was no American interest in stories of Germans revolting against Hitler. Beginning in the mid-1980s, however, interest in the White Rose gradually began to increase. Mark Starr’s article in *Newsweek*, published in 1985, assessed not only the White Rose, but all resistance movements against Hitler. In his article, Starr quotes Franz Muller, a surviving member of the White Rose, who, in discussing the creation of the group, said “we started to discuss things and discovered an important thing—that Nazis were liars.”<sup>5</sup> Chances are that it is the testimony of Muller that is the reason that the interest in the White Rose was re-sparked. The resurgence in interest may also be attributed to the fact that the 1980s marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary to the start of the war.

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<sup>4</sup> “The Good”.

<sup>5</sup> Starr, “Resisting Hitler”.

Just one year later, Annette Dumbach and Jud Newborn first made famous the story of Hans and Sophie Scholl with their book *Sophie Scholl & The White Rose*.<sup>6</sup> The book took the story of the White Rose and turned it into a narrative which all but glorified the actions of the students. That is not to say that their sacrifices were not inspiring and that they deserved to be cemented into history, it is simply to say that the book does more than simply state the facts of their actions; it takes those actions and romanticizes them. Considering the majority of writings about the White Rose were written after the 1980s, it is possible that this book gave rise to the increase in interest and knowledge in this and other resistance groups.

In 1993, the White Rose was formally recognized at the University of California, Santa Barbara in their White Rose conference. Professor Harold Marcuse gave a speech entitled “Remembering the White Rose: German Assessments, 1943-1993.”<sup>7</sup> This conference was held on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of the members of the White Rose. In his speech, which was later turned into a written version, Marcuse analyzed the group and how they were remembered in Germany. According to Marcuse, it was not until six months after the fall of the Nazi regime that any form of commemoration was made for the group. Even then, Romano Guardini, the Italian-German theologian who was invited to speak at the ceremony, did not mention the actions of the White Rose and placed the cause of their actions on God rather than the conditions of the country and the social morality of the times.<sup>8</sup> Marcuse’s speech shows

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<sup>6</sup> Annette Dumbach and Jud Newborn, *Sophie Scholl & The White Rose* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Prof. Harold Marcuse, “Remembering the White Rose: German Assessments, 1943-1993,” University of California Santa Barbara, <http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/publications/articles/whiteros947.htm> (accessed October 8, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

the difference in German and American perceptions of the White Rose and the change in German perceptions throughout the decades following the war.<sup>9</sup>

Within the sphere of American works regarding the White Rose, it is an almost constant opinion that the actions of the White Rose were heroic and a brilliant show of resistance against a tyrant. Simon Henderson challenges this idea, however, in his article “The White Rose and the Definition of ‘Resistance’.”<sup>10</sup> Henderson bases his argument around the idea that the White Rose did not, in his opinion, meet the definition of *Widerstand*, the German word for resistance.<sup>11</sup> While he admits that the acts of the group were brave, he says that due to the fact that their plans could not overthrow the regime, then the White Rose could not have reached an effective level of *Widerstand*.<sup>12</sup> Henderson’s opinion is far removed from that of other English writers; as he did not show the students as being revolutionaries and heroes for opposing Hitler. Rather, he argues that their actions did not actually constitute resistance. This difference in opinion practically sets Henderson’s work in its own category when placed against other works on the topic. At the same time, it shows how opinions have grown and changed throughout the years since the death of the group members.

While it is generally important to view the opinions of the White Rose through academic journals or newspaper articles or the like, it is impossible to overlook the importance of one who was directly affected by Nazi Germany. John M. Lewis, in his

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<sup>9</sup> Marcuse, “Remembering the White Rose.”

<sup>10</sup> Simon Henderson, “The White Rose and the Definition of ‘Resistance’,” *History Review* no. 53 (2005): 42-47, <http://web.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.umw.edu/ehost/detail?sid=0bc0624b-5ee0-4da5-aa40-ee339dc-5568e%40sessionmgr114&vid=7&hid=108&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=a9h&AN=18974274> (accessed October 8, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

article published in the *New Hampshire Bar Journal* in August of 2012, recounted a trip which he took to Germany, the homeland of his Jewish family.<sup>13</sup> He claims that his purpose in writing the article is to bring knowledge of the White Rose to Americans.<sup>14</sup> Although his argument is filled with personal emotion due to the connection of his Jewish family to the horrors of Nazi Germany, Lewis clearly has a goal of strengthening and broadening knowledge of the White Rose and their role in history.

American accounts and articles on the White Rose are, for the most part, still very limited. Throughout the years, however, there can be seen a change in the perceptions and arguments on the subject. Within the first couple of years after the war, as with the news article “The Good,” not much was known or discussed regarding the White Rose. Although this article discussed Inge Scholl and her actions to continue with her siblings’ efforts, it still shows the beginnings of interest in the topic. There is a large span of time in which there is virtually no literature on the White Rose at all. This time lapse could be the result of many things, however it is most likely that it was a cross between an absence of interest and a lack of previous knowledge about German resistance groups in general. Either way, the majority of interest in the White Rose began in the mid-1980s. Mark Starr brought forth interest in resistance groups against the Nazis. The growing interest in the resistance movements of the war was most likely a result of the fact that survivors like Franz Muller were telling their stories and revealing the truth of Nazi Germany. As a result, it became a slightly more popular topic, although it still is not a popular enough issue to attract a great number of writers.

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<sup>13</sup> Hon. John M. Lewis, “Germany and the White Rose,” *New Hampshire Bar Journal* 53, no. 2 (2012): 56-57, <http://web.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.umw.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=3&hid=108&sid=0bc0624b-5ee0-4da5-aa40-ee339dc5568e%40sessionmgr114> (accessed October 8, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

It was arguably Annette Dumbach and Jud Newborn's work *Sophie Scholl & The White Rose* which sparked the most attention of the American people. Their work shows a drastic switch from the scarce amount of knowledge about the White Rose to the now-growing amounts of work on the subject. This change is most likely the result of the need for Americans to hear the testimonies of those who encountered hardships or danger in the war. Although they were not alive to give their testimony of their experiences, Hans and Sophie Scholl and all of the members of the White Rose will now be remembered for their bravery. Within the last 10 years, the works studying the White Rose have also changed from simply telling the story of the students to looking at the events and analyzing their true place among resistance movements in history; these works have also begun to increase the knowledge of the White Rose in America. Simon Henderson questioned the validity of the idea that the group was actually a resistance group. This close examination of events which are generally just accepted shows the level of interest to which this topic has risen; rather than simply stating the facts and analyzing their causes, Henderson instead challenges the popular idea. Just the same, the desire of John Lewis to promote the knowledge of the White Rose is significant in its justification of this group as an important mark in history.

Although there is little work regarding the White Rose, the transformation of the topic from simply factual to analytical is proof that throughout time, the White Rose has risen not only in its popularity as a subject, but in its importance as a historical event.