

“We are your Bad Conscience”

The Influences of the White Rose and their Peaceful Resistance for Intellectual Freedom

Amidst the climate of intellectual oppression experienced within Germany, the White Rose movement organized non-violent resistance within the Nazi stronghold of Munich. The White Rose represents the collective efforts of Hans and Sophie Scholl (siblings), Alexander Schmorell, Willi Graf, Christoph Probst, and Professor Kurt Huber. Together these German students and professor peacefully challenged Hitler and Nazism by composing, printing, and distributing anonymous leaflets which rejected Nazi tyranny and genocide. On June 27, 1942, the first leaflet was distributed. The paper was titled “Leaflet of the White Rose” and marked with a number one, signifying the first of a series. The opening lines of the first leaflet decried the Nazi regime and incited each German to critically investigate the actions of their government. The halls of Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich were scattered with these mysterious papers. Around one hundred copies of the leaflet had been mailed to a diversified grouping of recipients, including those who shared similar beliefs or were known to harbor resentment toward Nazism. Over the next year, a total of six leaflets circulated Munich, each advocating for active opposition to the Nazi regime.

While the White Rose movement did not overthrow the Nazi regime, they defied the totalitarian state by voicing their beliefs and encouraging passive resistance. Their motivations stemmed from moral convictions and ideological differences between Nazism, namely the fundamental pursuit of freedom. Intellectual and religious similarities within familial relationships and friendships, restriction of freedom under the Third Reich, crimes of the German state during World War II, and the shared duty to encourage resistance influenced the members of the White Rose to defy the Nazi regime. For the members of the White Rose movement, the act of writing, printing, and distributing the pamphlets was an act of resistance. While their resistance resulted in their violent deaths, the efforts of the Scholl siblings, Schmorell, Probst, Huber, and Graf offered information and inspiration to the German people. Their words and sacrifice continue to serve as the conscience of Germany as they commemorate the struggle for freedom within an oppressed state.