

# **The Holocaust in Gay German and American Life**

by

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*For mom and dad with thanks  
for all your love, support, wisdom, and guidance  
for as long as I can remember.*

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## **Abstract**

Beginning in the 1970s, German and American homosexuals began scrutinizing the past to learn more about gay history. Many found that Adolf Hitler's Germany provided the worst example of anti-homosexual policies run amok. American homosexuals in particular were prone to view this history through the eyes of Nazism's Jewish victims. By the mid-1980s, German homosexuals and historians also began employing and discussing this particular approach as an appropriate means to understand the past. This Master's thesis examines the employment of the Holocaust by some German and American homosexuals as a means to construct a shared historical memory and asks why, despite new historical evidence disputing many central arguments of "gay Holocaust" history, does a comparative framework remain the popular method of viewing the past?

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Within three months of the February 1933 seizure of power, the Nazis shut down gay pubs and clubs and the comparatively open Weimar homosexual subculture disappeared. The new regime's homophobic rhetoric and policies increased following the murder of Ernst Röhm and other *Sturmabteilung* (Storm troop, or SA) leaders in June 1934. Charges of homosexuality against Röhm acted as an *ex post facto* rationale for a purge based largely upon political motives.<sup>1</sup> Although the 1871 German Penal Code's Paragraph 175 (§175) outlawed male homosexuality long before Adolf Hitler's rise to power, its provisions were dramatically overhauled in 1935 to allow the Nazi judicial system greater flexibility in prosecuting homosexuals.<sup>2</sup> German criminal courts tried 50,000 gay men between 1933 and 1945. Of these, 5,000 to 15,000 were sent to concentration camps and branded with the pink triangle—a symbol of their “crime.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Peter Bleuel, *Sex and Society in Nazi Germany*, trans. J.M. Brownjohn (New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1973), 219; and Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889-1936: Hubris* (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), 520.

<sup>2</sup> “The National Socialist Revision of Section 175 of the Penal Code,” in *Hidden Holocaust? Gay and Lesbian Persecution in Germany, 1933-45*, ed. G. Grau (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1995), 64-66.

<sup>3</sup> Rüdiger Lautmann, Winfried Grikschat, and Egbert Schmidt, “Der rosa Winkel in den nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern,” in *Seminar: Gesellschaft und Homosexualität*, ed. R. Lautmann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977), 333; also Günter Grau, “Final Solution of the Homosexual Question? The Antihomosexual Policies of the Nazis and the Social Consequences for Homosexual Men,” in *The Holocaust and History: The Known, the Unknown, the Disputed, and the Reexamined*, eds. M. Berenbaum and A.J. Peck (Indianapolis: Indiana U. Press, 1998), 340; and Richard Plant, *The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War against Homosexuals* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1986), 154.

Concentration camp prisoners were marked by coloured triangles which denoted their reason for detention. Pink was issued to homosexuals; green marked criminals; purple for Jehovah's Witnesses; red was given to political inmates; and black for so-called “anti-socials.” Jewish prisoners were marked by the Star of David and, in some cases, one or

## “Gay Holocaust” History’s Late Emergence

Discussing the Nazi persecution of homosexuals only began decades after the defeat of the Third Reich for a number of reasons. First, both East and West Germany continued to criminalize male homosexuality. Legal restrictions against gay men paralleled *religious* morality as represented by the West German Christian Democratic Union, which politically dominated the 1950s and ’60s, and *socialist* morality as epitomized by the East German Socialist Unity Party. Furthermore, for both German nations, the lingering concern that young men were vulnerable to homosexual seduction warranted the continued negation of homosexuality.<sup>4</sup> Police regularly harassed and arrested gay men throughout the 1950s and ’60s. Hans Zauner, the mayor of Dachau, illustrated the hostile climate gays lived in when he told an interviewer in 1960: “You must remember that many criminals and homosexuals were in Dachau. Do you want a memorial for such people?”<sup>5</sup>

Second, little personal testimony existed from the victims themselves. Richard Plant observed in 1977 that

some 40 years later, we possess countless eye-witness testimonies to the Jewish holocaust; we can study detailed chronicles dealing with different countries; we can even watch films by the Nazis themselves. The Eichmann trial, thoroughly explored by Hannah Arendt, alerted even larger segments of the American public to the fate of the European Jews. But the gay minority has no Hannah Arendt. The books, the

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more triangles depending upon their alleged crime. Hans-Georg Stümke and Rudi Finkler, *Rosa Winkel, Rosa Listen: Homosexuelle und ‘Gesundes Volksempfinden’ von Auschwitz bis heute* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1981), 268.

<sup>4</sup> Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 2005), 94-95.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Erik N. Jensen, “The Pink Triangle and Political Consciousness: Gays, Lesbians, and the Memory of Nazi Persecution,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11 (2002), 321.

documents we have, most of them written in German, are sparse, and no film exists of the sufferings inflicted upon those men with the pink triangle.<sup>6</sup>

While 1,000 gay concentration camp survivors were assumed to still be alive in 1981, only 15 personal accounts had been gathered just over a decade later.<sup>7</sup>

Third, no unrestricted gay press existed to memorialize their persecution.

Homosexual organizations, as they are understood today, did not exist: the small support groups that did were hidden from the public. It was only after the 1971 West German film release of *Nicht der Homosexuelle ist pervers, sondern die Situation in der er lebt* (*It's not the Homosexual who is perverse, but rather the Situation in which he lives*), with its slogan: "Out of the toilets and into the streets!," that a gay press began to emerge.

Fourth, homosexuals may have wished to forget the Nazi period altogether. Erik N. Jensen plausibly argued that "after struggling through the lean years of the 1940s, most gay men and women sought sanctuary in the economic boom of the 1950s[.] Along with other West Germans, they avoided reminders of a painful past during which some had sympathized with the regime, even as others had faced persecution."<sup>8</sup>

Fifth, gay males faced the myth that National Socialism was synonymous, both ideologically and through its membership, with homosexuality. As early as the 1930s, Socialists and Communists had linked homosexuality with Nazism for political gain.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Plant, "The Men with the Pink Triangle," *Christopher Street* 1 (1977), 5.

<sup>7</sup> Stümke and Finkler, *Rosa Winkel, Rosa Listen*, 301; and Kai Hammermeister, "Inventing History: Toward a Gay Holocaust Literature," *The German Quarterly* 70 (1997), 20.

<sup>8</sup> Jensen, "The Pink Triangle," 322.

<sup>9</sup> This will be discussed further in chapter two. For a contemporary's criticism of this tendency see Kurt Tucholsky, "Röhm," in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, eds. A. Kaes, M. Jay and E. Dimenberg (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1994), 714. Originally published in *Die Weltbühne* 17 (26 April 1932), 641. For recent discussions see W.U.

This argument was rooted in the fact that Ernst Röhm, SA Chief-of-Staff and a close associate of Hitler, was openly gay. In 1941, H.R. Knickerbocker, an American journalist living in pre- and Nazi Germany, wrote of the “strange paradox of German history and culture” whereby Germans were “the most brutally masculine” but also “the most homosexual.”<sup>10</sup> Immediately following the war, Samuel Igra, a Jewish émigré in England, explicitly blamed the murder of six million Jews upon the homosexuality of Nazi leaders.<sup>11</sup> A year later, Wilhelm Reich’s *Mass Psychology of Fascism* broadly linked the “fascist mentality” with sexual deviancy, specifically homosexuality. “For the fascists,” he wrote, “natural sexuality was viewed as a sign of decadence, lasciviousness, lechery, and sexual filth. [They] recognized the state solely as a male state organized on a homosexual basis.”<sup>12</sup> Although academic scholarship has long since dismissed this myth as an explanatory tool in dissecting the actions of the Nazis, it persists in the popular imagination to this day.<sup>13</sup>

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Eissler, *Arbeiterparteien und Homosexuellenfrage: Zur Sexualpolitik von SPD und KPD in der Weimarer Republik* (Hamburg: Rosa Winkel, 1980); Walter Fähnders, “Anarchism and Homosexuality in Wilhelmine Germany: Senna Hoy, Erich Mühsam, John Henry Mackay,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 29 (1995), 117-53; Manfred Herzer, “Communists, Social Democrats, and the Homosexual Movement in the Weimar Republic,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 29 (1995), 197-226; and Harry Oosterhuis, “The ‘Jews’ of the Antifascist Left: Homosexuality and the Socialist Resistance to Nazism,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 29 (1995), 227-57.

<sup>10</sup> H.R. Knickerbocker, *Is Tomorrow Hitler’s? 200 Questions on the Battle of Mankind* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1941), 35.

<sup>11</sup> Samuel Igra, *Germany’s National Vice* (London: Quality Press, 1945), 28, 71.

<sup>12</sup> Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, 3rd ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970), 92-93.

<sup>13</sup> On 24 November 1987, *Die Tageszeitung* in Berlin published an article that attributed much of the Nazi movement’s early formation to the “dynamic of male-bonding homosexuality.” Cited in Jensen, “The Pink Triangle,” 323. Scott Lively and Kevin Abrams’s *The Pink Swastika* attempted to resurrect the myth of a Nazi Party dominated by homosexuals. The authors hoped to counter “gay Holocaust revisionism” by arguing

This does not mean that the Nazi persecution of homosexuals was completely overlooked after the war. In 1946, East German Rudolf Klimmer petitioned the *Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes* (Organization of Those Persecuted by the Nazi Regime) to recognize homosexual victims and compensate them.<sup>14</sup> Former Buchenwald inmate Eugen Kogon wrote about the camp's pink triangle prisoners as did Auschwitz Commandant Rudolf Höss.<sup>15</sup> Wolfgang Harthausen recounted over the radio in the late 1960s what it was like to be gay in Hitler's Germany.<sup>16</sup> In May 1969, West Germany's *Der Spiegel* magazine called wide attention to the Nazi persecution of gay men as background to its cover story about decriminalizing homosexuality between men

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that gays administered far more "brutality, rape, torture, and murder" than they received. For Lively and Abrams, "gay Holocaust" history was part of contemporary America's conspiratorial gay agenda, a "gay victim strategy" in which perpetrators pose as victims. Scott Lively and Kevin Abrams, *The Pink Swastika: Homosexuality in the Nazi Party* (Oregon: Founders Publishing Corporation, 1995), ii, 229. In 2001, Lothar Machtan declared that his *Hidden Hitler* was the first serious attempt to marshal convincing historical evidence of Hitler's homosexuality. He argued that Hitler's political actions were motivated by a desire to cover up and destroy evidence of his gay past. Lothar Machtan, *Hitlers Geheimnis: Das Doppelleben eines Diktators* (Berlin: Alexander Fest, 2001). Published in English as *The Hidden Hitler*, trans. J.M. Brownjohn (New York: Basic Books, 2001). For a recent analysis of this phenomenon see Axel von Krämer, "Nazi=Homo," *Die Tageszeitung* (23 February 2002), 7.

<sup>14</sup> Jensen, "The Pink Triangle," 323.

<sup>15</sup> Eugen Kogon, *Der SS Staat: Das System der deutschen Konzentrationslager* (Berlin: Druckhauses Tempelhof, 1947), published in English as *The Theory and Practice of Hell: The German Concentration Camps and the System Behind Them*, trans. H. Norden (New York: Octagon Books, 1973); Rudolf Höss, *Commandant of Auschwitz*, trans. C. Fitzgibbon (London: Pan Books, 1959).

<sup>16</sup> Published as Wolfgang Harthausen, "Der Massenmord an Homosexuellen im Dritten Reich," in *Das grosse Tabu: Zeugnisse und Dokumente zum Problem der Homosexualität*, ed. W.S. Schlegel (München: Rütten & Loening, 1967), 7-37.

over 21.<sup>17</sup> Despite these examples, the subject was not actively researched or written about until the 1970s.

### **Searching for a Shared Historical Identity**

Beginning in the mid-1970s, German social historians broke new ground in investigating sexuality and sexual behaviour that went beyond the established paradigms of family history, demographics, and sex roles.<sup>18</sup> The field grew with advancements in both women's and gender history over the next two decades and continues today with Dagmar Herzog's important revisionist work in the field of National Socialist and post-National Socialist sexuality.<sup>19</sup> Paralleling these developments, a history of homosexuality emerged in the politicized context of gay liberation. German and American homosexuals, searching for a shared historical identity and scrutinizing how past and present societies treated them, found that no event other than the Holocaust had so clearly exposed and defined their vulnerability.

Heinz Heger's *Die Männer mit dem rosa Winkel* (1972), the first and one of the only memoirs by a former gay camp prisoner, and in North America James Steakley's article "Homosexuals and the Third Reich" (1974), provided a framework from which the German and American homosexual rights movements could develop a larger collective memory.<sup>20</sup> Heger's experience was quickly politicized as the worst example of a

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<sup>17</sup> "Paragraph 175: Das Gesetz fällt—Bleibt die Ächtung?" *Der Spiegel* (12 May 1969), 55-76.

<sup>18</sup> Edward R. Dickinson and Richard F. Wetzell, "The Historiography of Sexuality in Modern Germany," *German History* 23 (2005), 291.

<sup>19</sup> Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*.

<sup>20</sup> Heinz Heger, *Die Männer mit dem rosa Winkel: Der Bericht eines Homosexuellen über seine KZ-Haft von 1939-1945* (Hamburg: Merlin-Verlag, 1972), published in English as *The Men with the Pink Triangle*, trans. D. Fernbach (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1980)

continuing oppression of gays, while Steakley's insistence that homosexuals write their own history prompted other gay men to take up the cause. For example, Richard Plant, a Jewish homosexual in the United States, used a comparative framework to tell the story of gay men under the swastika. Born in Frankfurt am Main in 1910, Plant, knowing that he was twice marked as an outcast, left Germany when Hitler became chancellor.<sup>21</sup> His argument that Jewish and homosexual persecution paralleled one another led to further comparative questions such as: were gay men, like Jews, persecuted for what they were? Did homosexuals suffer the same fate as Jews in Nazi concentration camps? And did the Nazis institute a "gay Holocaust?"

"Gay Holocaust" theory—that is, the notion that homosexual persecution in the Third Reich was similar both in kind and severity to that inflicted upon the Jews—was popularized to meet the needs of the American gay rights movement in the 1970s. In Germany, however, the duality of being both *Täter* (perpetrator) and *Opfer* (victim) discouraged homosexuals from taking a comparative framework as their starting point for investigating the Nazi persecution of homosexuals.<sup>22</sup> It was, therefore, the situation of being separated in the US both geographically and emotionally from the country of the criminals and their descendants that allowed American gays to focus solely upon victimization. By directly paralleling gay and Jewish experiences, American homosexuals were able to identify with and draw from a widely written history. The tendency for

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and republished in 1994 with an introduction by Klaus Müller; James D. Steakley, "Homosexuals and the Third Reich," *The Body Politic* 11 (1974), republished in *Flaunting It! A Decade of Gay Journalism from The Body Politic*, eds. E. Jackson and S. Persky (Toronto: Pink Triangle Press, 1982), 84-91.

<sup>21</sup> Plant, "The Men with the Pink Triangle," 5.

<sup>22</sup> Jensen, "The Pink Triangle," 342-43.

American gays to view their past through a Jewish lens increased, especially after the debut of Martin Sherman's *Bent* on Broadway in 1979. As a popularized "gay Holocaust" history evolved—often independent of and eventually informing historical research—gay Germans employed and debated the utility such a comparison offered for understanding their past. Indeed, in their introduction to a collection of German essays on the subject, researchers Burkhard Jellonnek in Saarbrücken and Rüdiger Lautmann in Bremen disappointingly observed that this debate "stretches like a red thread" through each study.<sup>23</sup> "Gay Holocaust" historiography includes everything from academic research by professional sociologists and historians to amateur articles and books as well as activist writing, newspaper columns, films, plays, and fiction.

Equating the victimization of homosexuals with that of Jews, however, has marred attempts to examine historically the gay experience in the Third Reich. This was especially the case for German researchers who did not initially employ the Jewish/homosexual paradigm. Furthermore, the comparison incorrectly implies that the Nazis had a similar rationale behind their respective persecutions and threatens to produce a final narrative that is wholly imagined—one that is couched in the words, phrases, and experiences of another history. This thesis will critically analyze this comparative approach as it developed from the 1970s to the present in Germany and the US in order to demonstrate that homosexual victimization was unlike Jewish victimization; to help end the futile and crude "who had it worst" debate between Nazi victims which this comparison perpetuates; to give autonomy to the written history of homosexuals in Nazi

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<sup>23</sup> Burkhard Jellonnek and Rüdiger Lautmann, "Einleitung," in *Nationalsozialistischer Terror gegen Homosexuelle: Verdrängt und ungesühnt*, eds. Jellonnek and Lautmann (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2002), 12-13.



Germany; and ultimately to contribute toward a more balanced and objective history. To accomplish this requires both a reassessment of accessible primary sources and a return to the roots of the written history—that is, treating the histories and memoirs of the late 1970s and the 1980s as primary material and presenting their authors as historical and historiographical voices of experience.

It will become evident that “gay Holocaust” histories have presented many inaccurate versions of the past. To understand fully these misconceptions and where they differ from actual historical events requires some background. Chapter two provides a brief survey of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals with relevant information on homophobic attitudes and stereotypes during the Wilhelmine and Weimar eras. This thesis also aims to comprehend the nature of the specific framework that “gay Holocaust” writers have adopted for their understanding of historical events. Chapter three will therefore trace the evolution over the past 30 years of “gay Holocaust” histories as characterized by their reliance upon the Jewish/homosexual comparison. And finally, in chapter four, this thesis seeks to uncover the purpose “gay Holocaust” history has served in contemporary German and American contexts. For example, how has “gay Holocaust” theory ultimately hindered or helped historians attempting to write autonomous histories of Hitler’s gay victims?

Both “homosexual” and “gay” refers to men unless otherwise stated. Only male homosexuality was specifically outlawed; the pink triangle, a symbol for homosexual “criminals” in Nazi concentration camps, was worn only by men, and this is consistent with how these terms appear throughout the historiography. I also speak broadly of a singular gay community. However, I acknowledge the problems associated with this from the outset. First, this may imply that a single gay memory of Nazi persecution exists

which is not the case. Many gay men and women do not view their past persecution through the eyes of other minority victims. Second, generalizations of this nature may tend to simplify the complex historical contexts in which “gay Holocaust” histories were written. The German and American sources that I draw upon reflect the different political, social, and national experiences of their authors. Additionally, “gay Holocaust” will always appear in quotation marks as a highly charged and problematic phrase. The apostrophes are appropriate given the critical treatment of the term in this thesis.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE PINK TRIANGLE AND THE SWASTIKA

The homophobic stereotypes trumpeted by Nazi propaganda originated in the late nineteenth-century when homosexuality was generally viewed as aberrant.<sup>1</sup> The “sickly, effeminate, perverse, and out of control” gay man was contrasted with the “physically strong and active” heterosexual who was “head of the family, dominant in the public world of politics, and in complete control of his sexuality and his emotions.”<sup>2</sup>

Homosexuality was criminalized under §175 of the German Penal Code in 1871, which forbade indecency between men and punished the guilty with a prison term.<sup>3</sup>

### Discussing Homosexuality in fin-de-siècle Germany

The first major theory regarding homosexuality emerged in Germany in 1867. Social reformer Karl Heinrich Ulrichs suggested that homosexuals neither chose their orientation nor fell into it as a consequence of seduction. In *Memnon, The Sexual Nature of the Man-Loving Uranian: Somatic-Psychic Hermaphroditism*, Ulrichs “viewed homosexuality as a congenital anomaly, comparable to left-handedness—a minority trait to be sure, but neither contagious nor evil.”<sup>4</sup> Ulrichs received little support for his views

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<sup>1</sup> James W. Jones, *‘We of the Third Sex’: Literary Representations of Homosexuality in Wilhelmine Germany* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 43.

<sup>2</sup> John C. Fout, “Sexual Politics in Wilhelmine Germany: The Male Gender Crisis, Moral Purity, and Homophobia,” in *Forbidden History: The State, Society, and the Regulation of Sexuality in Modern Europe*, ed. J.C. Fout (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1992), 284.

<sup>3</sup> Original wording—“Ein Mann, der mit einem anderen Mann Unzucht treibt oder sich von ihm zur Unzucht mißbrauchen läßt, wird mit Gefängnis bestraft” in Christian Schulz, *Paragraph 175 (abgewickelt): Homosexualität und Strafrecht im Nachkriegs-deutschland—Rechtsprechung, juristische Diskussionen und Reformen seit 1945* (Hamburg: MännerschwarmSkript, 1994), 7.

<sup>4</sup> James D. Steakley, *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement in Germany* (New York: Arno Press, 1975), 8.

from either contemporary homosexuals or the medical community. His work was not widely circulated in his lifetime.<sup>5</sup> However, his writings re-surfaced toward the end of the century, greatly influencing the sex researcher Magnus Hirschfeld among others.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast, Richard von Krafft-Ebing concluded in his 1894 book, *The Deviant Sexual Male Before the Court of Justice*, that homosexuality was a deviant behaviour and that “such degenerates” had no right to a normal social life. Yet, Krafft-Ebing objected to the *criminalization* of homosexuality. Rather than go to jail, he wished to see homosexuals incarcerated in hospitals where they would receive medical treatment. While homosexuals “should be put away for life, they should not be branded as criminals—they are unfortunates, deserving pity.”<sup>7</sup> Krafft-Ebing’s argument that homosexuality be treated as disease rather than vice offered a new way of analyzing this “problem.”<sup>8</sup>

Discussions about homosexuality increased in frequency in *fin-de-siècle* Germany as a consequence of emerging gay organizations and of government repression catalyzed by several international scandals and trials. On 15 May 1897, Berlin physician Magnus Hirschfeld joined Leipzig publisher Max Spohr, lawyer and ministerial official Eduard Oberg, and former officer Franz Josef von Bülow to establish the *Wissenschaftlich-*

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<sup>5</sup> Hans-Georg Stümke, *Homosexuelle in Deutschland: Eine politische Geschichte* (München: C.H. Beck, 1989), 18.

<sup>6</sup> For more on Karl Heinrich Ulrichs see John Lauritsen and David Thorstad, *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement 1864-1935* (New York: Times Change Press, 1974), 82-83.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 32.

<sup>8</sup> For more on Krafft-Ebing see Harry Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature: Krafft-Ebing, Psychiatry, and the Making of Sexual Identity* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 2000).

*humanitäre Komitee* (Scientific-Humanitarian Committee, or WhK).<sup>9</sup> Together they produced new scientific studies about homosexuality, in all twenty-three publications by 1899, and founded Hirschfeld's *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen* (*Yearbook for Sexually Intermediate Types*).

In 1898, Hirschfeld circulated a petition to abolish §175 from Germany's law books. Despite obtaining the signatures of prominent writers, lawyers, doctors, professors, and politicians, the Reichstag rejected the petition.<sup>10</sup> Richard Plant summarized the course of this campaign:

All the old arguments of the past were marshaled: homosexuality corrupts a nation; it breaks the moral fiber of the citizens; it is un-Germanic; it is connected with dangerously corrosive left-wing and Jewish elements (this from the right), or it is typical of the dissolute aristocracy and high bourgeoisie (this from the left). Above all, the spread of homosexual behaviour would lead to Germany's decline, just as it had always spearheaded the ruin of great empires. Such arguments, recycled and sometimes imbued with Himmler's special brand of crackpot fanaticism, would later reappear in numerous Nazi directives.<sup>11</sup>

The *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (Social Democratic Party of Germany, or SPD), under the leadership of August Bebel, was the only party to vote for the repeal of §175. While the SPD's attitude generally and Bebel's position specifically towards homosexuality is a study all on its own, it is important to point out that the SPD had declared itself, in principle, opposed to the criminalization of homosexuality at the close of the nineteenth century. Although, the party failed to develop a program for §175's repeal, Bebel was among the first to sign Hirschfeld's petition and it was he who argued

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<sup>9</sup> Stümke, *Homosexuelle in Deutschland*, 34.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 38. The entire text of the petition including the names of all who signed it is reproduced as appendix number one in Stümke and Finkler, *Rosa Winkel, Rosa Listen*, 420-24.

<sup>11</sup> Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 33.

the SPD's position at the 1898 Reichstag debate on the issue. Still, attitudes remained contradictory and subject to dispute among SPD members and despite adopting a pro-homosexual rights position, the SPD was not above tarring their enemies with charges of homosexual debauchery from time to time.

Five years later, the WhK took an unprecedented step in distributing some 6,611 questionnaires regarding sexual attitudes and behaviour to Berlin factory workers and university students. Hirschfeld published the results in the 1904 *Jahrbuch*, and came to the conclusion that 2.2 percent of German males, about 1.2 million, were homosexual.<sup>12</sup> He believed homosexuality was hereditarily determined and not a choice. He argued that homosexuals comprised a "third sex" whereby they outwardly resembled the traits of one gender but possessed the soul of the other. For Hirschfeld, the "effeminate" male homosexual proved this. Paradoxically, Hirschfeld portrayed the homosexual as an innocent victim of legal and social discrimination as a basis to reform §175, but simultaneously recognized homosexuals as something "other" than normal by locking their behaviour into a rigid, biologically determined definition. By addressing homosexuality "from such a limited perspective"—presenting homosexuals as "basically different"—Hirschfeld and other WhK members "only exposed themselves to greater persecution and homophobia."<sup>13</sup> Regardless, Hirschfeld remained the most prominent homosexual reformer of this period as other theoreticians often began their studies by agreeing with or opposing him.

The WhK itself was the most significant reformist organization although two other groups deserve mention. The first is the *Bund für Menschenrecht* (League for Human

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 40; also Stümke, *Homosexuelle in Deutschland*, 48.

<sup>13</sup> Fout, "Sexual Politics in Wilhelmine Germany," 274; also Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 34.

Rights) founded in 1903 by Senna Hoy, the pseudonym of Johannes Holzmann. Ernst Röhm would later join its ranks in the 1920s as an “outed” homosexual.<sup>14</sup> The second, the *Gemeinschaft der Eigenen* (Community of the Special) founded by Adolf Brand, Wilhelm Jansen, and Benedict Friedländer on 1 May 1902, initially drew its members from the readership of *Der Eigene*, the first homophile periodical to appear in Berlin in 1896.<sup>15</sup> The journal, under Brand’s editorship, bore the subtitle *A Periodical for Masculine Culture, Art, and Literature*. Its emphasis upon masculinity, especially aesthetics and the homosocial or homoerotic rather than the homosexual, broadly appealed to gay men who were uncomfortable with Hirschfeld’s fixation on femininity. The purity of male-male friendship was held as being superior to the purely procreative relationship between man and woman. Consequently, historians Lawrence Baron and John C. Fout dismissed this group as a misogynist organization, whose program harboured several “proto-fascist” tendencies. The Community’s “solipsism easily lapsed into elitism; its aestheticism led to irrationalism; and its Hellenic hyper-masculinity degenerated into misogyny.”<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, while the Community held beliefs wholly compatible with those of Germany’s conservative elements its members distinguished themselves by pushing for §175’s abolition, subsequently influencing the post-World War One homosexual reform movement.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> For more information on the League and its founder see Fähnders, “Anarchism and Homosexuality,” 125-30.

<sup>15</sup> Till Bastian, *Homosexuelle im Dritten Reich* (München: C.H. Beck, 2000), 14.

<sup>16</sup> Lawrence Baron, “Review of *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement* by James D. Steakley,” *New German Critique* 12 (1977), 195; also Fout, “Sexual Politics in Wilhelmine Germany,” 289.

<sup>17</sup> Jones, *We of the Third Sex*, 101.

Two scandals stunted the growth of Germany's homosexual reform movement prior to 1914. The first surrounded the apparent suicide of Germany's steel baron Alfred Krupp in 1903. On 15 November 1902, the Social Democratic newspaper, *Vorwärts*, reported that Krupp had recently been expelled from Capri by the Italian authorities because of homosexual activities with young boys.<sup>18</sup> Right-wingers criticized that these revelations were a "contemptible maneuver to discredit both Krupp and the Kaiser," who were close friends.<sup>19</sup> The WhK made no public statement on the allegations, a silence that undermined their petition for legal reform.

Still, the real knock-out blow to the movement was delivered on 17 November 1906 by the socialist weekly *Die Zukunft*. For a week the paper ran a series of articles alleging that Prince Philipp of Eulenburg and Count Kuno Graf von Moltke, adjutant to the Kaiser and mayor of Berlin respectively, were homosexuals. The charge produced a media frenzy, with German newspapers suddenly full of the story. It also produced an anti-homosexual witch-hunt from which no government or military official was immune. Encouraged by this revelation, Brand denounced the Chancellor, Bernhard von Bülow, as a homosexual too and thereby set the stage for a series of sensational trials that dragged on until June 1909. Hirschfeld allowed himself to be called into court to testify as to Moltke's homosexuality. The WhK's financial sponsors promptly withdrew their funding.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, both Hirschfeld's tactical blunder and the denunciation of men

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<sup>18</sup> Stümke, *Homosexuelle in Deutschland*, 40-41; also Eissler, *Arbeiterparteien und Homosexuellenfrage*, 44. For Eissler, this move revealed the Janus-faced nature of SPD support for homosexual rights. *Ibid*, 46.

<sup>19</sup> Steakley, *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement*, 33.

<sup>20</sup> For more on this scandal see Stümke, *Homosexuelle in Deutschland*, 42-47; also Isabel V. Hull, *The Entourage of Kaiser Wilhelm II, 1888-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1982), 109-45.



within the Kaiser's entourage undid years of struggle. Hirschfeld's financial and political backers distanced themselves from him, while a new law drafted in 1909 symbolized how completely the gay rights movement had been discredited prior to the war. The draft recommended not only five years of hard labour for convicted felons under §175 but also the criminalization of female homosexuality.<sup>21</sup> However, Wilhelmine Germany collapsed before this draft could be submitted for parliamentary approval.<sup>22</sup>

One other individual contributed to the homosexual reform movement prior to the Weimar period. Hans Blüher's concept of a homosocial world founded upon and strengthened by the homoerotic bonds between men was more compatible with Brand's Community. Despite this, Blüher never joined Brand's group and his anti-Semitism put him at odds with Hirschfeld. His 1912 publication entitled *Die deutsche Wandervogelbewegung als erotisches Phänomen* (*The German Youth Movement as an Erotic Phenomenon*) created a sensation with its allegation that the youth movement was a product of homoerotic attraction between men and boys. According to Blüher's follow-up publication in 1917, *Die Rolle der Erotik in der männlichen Gesellschaft* (*The Role of the Erotic in Masculine Society*), homosexuals specifically created communities while state institutions were founded upon homoeroticism generally.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> For more information see Tracie Matysik, "In the Name of the Law: The 'Female Homosexual' and the Criminal Code in Fin de Siècle Germany," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 13 (2004), 26-48.

<sup>22</sup> Hans-Georg Stümke, "From the 'People's Consciousness of Right and Wrong' to 'The Healthy Instincts of the Nation': The Persecution of Homosexuals in Nazi Germany," in *Confronting the Nazi Past: New Debates on Modern German History*, ed. M. Burleigh (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 155.

<sup>23</sup> George L. Mosse, "Nationalism and Respectability: Normal and Abnormal Sexuality in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Contemporary History* 17 (1982), 237. For further background on Blüher see Eissler, *Arbeiterparteien und Homosexuellenfrage*, 24.

## Homosexuality and the Weimar Years

When German military leaders requested armistice negotiations on 29 September 1918, chaos ensued. Just over a month later, Berlin was abuzz with revolutionary activity and the German Republic was declared by SPD leader Philip Scheidemann. Following the Kaiser's abdication and flight to the Netherlands, Hirschfeld addressed a rally hastily organized in support of the Republic that was held in front of the Reichstag on 10 November. He declared:

In the future, the will of the king can never again be supreme law. Instead, everything will be by the people for the people! Together with a true people's state with a genuinely democratic structure, we want a social republic. Socialism means solidarity, community, reciprocity, the further development of society into a unified body of people . . . let each person help to maintain calm and order. Then we will soon be able to lead again lives of human dignity in peace . . . Long live the free German Republic!<sup>24</sup>

Looking east, Hirschfeld expressed the hope that a socialist republic in Germany would usher in the same "freedoms" enjoyed by the citizens of the new Soviet Republic. One year earlier, Russia's Tsarist regime had been toppled in a relatively bloodless revolution and within two months the new government had scrapped all anti-homosexual legislation. Only under Joseph Stalin in 1934 were anti-homosexual laws reintroduced.<sup>25</sup> Taking its lead from Moscow, the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (Communist Party of Germany, or KPD) toed the official line throughout the 1920s as summed up by Felix Halle, a prominent KPD lawyer:

The class-conscious proletariat, uninfluenced by the ideology of property and freed from the ideology of the churches, approaches the question of sex life and also the

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<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Steakley, *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement*, 71-72.

<sup>25</sup> Lauritsen and Thorstad, *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement*, 71-80; also Laura Engelstein, "Soviet Policy toward Male Homosexuality: Its Origins and Historical Roots," *Journal of Homosexuality* 29 (1995), 155-78; and Oosterhuis, "The 'Jews' of the Antifascist Left," 234-37.

problem of homosexuality with a lack of prejudice afforded by an understanding of the overall social structure . . . In accordance with the scientific insights of modern times, the proletariat regards these relations as a special form of sexual gratification and demands the same freedom and restrictions for these forms of sex life as for intercourse between the sexes, i.e., protection of the sexually immature from attacks . . . control over one's body, and finally respect for the rights of noninvolved parties.<sup>26</sup>

As Richard Plant concluded, "the Marxist message rang loud and clear: problems of sex are secondary to the contradictions of class; they have no enduring relevance for society's workers; they will disappear come the revolution."<sup>27</sup>

From 5 to 11 January 1919, the KPD under the leadership of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg moved to topple the regime only to be bloodily crushed by right-wing paramilitary *Freikorps* units. The socialist revolution had been aborted and Germany became a parliamentary democracy. When a draft penal code was brought before the Reichstag later that year, the maximum penalty set for male homosexual acts was five years incarceration. The homosexual reform movement was to spend another decade petitioning for penal reform and protesting social discrimination.

Relative to what would follow, however, homosexuals were better off during the Weimar period.<sup>28</sup> A number of homosexual meeting places sprang up, notably the "queers' way" in Berlin's Tiergarten Park and the "Tabakgärtchen" in Hamburg. Post-war Berlin had about forty homosexual bars and pubs. Books, films, and magazines dealing with homosexuality in a fairly open way increased. This is not to say that Weimar Germany, at least outside Berlin, was a homosexual mecca. Richard Plant, who lived in Frankfurt am Main at this time, wrote that generally "the average gay man could live

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<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Steakley, *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement*, 83.

<sup>27</sup> Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 39.

<sup>28</sup> Stümke, *Homosexuelle in Deutschland*, 53.

unnoticed and undisturbed unless he fell victim to police entrapment or blackmail.”<sup>29</sup>

Convictions under §175 remained few since it was difficult to prove what had taken place in private between two males.<sup>30</sup>

Hirschfeld’s major achievement in this period was establishing the *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft* (Institute for Sexual Science) in Berlin on 1 July 1919. It was here that:

[Hirschfeld] amassed a unique library of twenty thousand volumes—an incomparable collection of rare anthropological, medical, legal, and social documents. He also gathered some 35,000 photographs. He employed four physicians and several assistants, and provided various research facilities. He welcomed scientists from all over the world. In addition, the attending physicians offered various kinds of sexual counseling—a practice that was considered radically reformist. His doctors also tested and treated people for venereal diseases, charging minimal fees and giving advice on abortion procedures.<sup>31</sup>

While the Institute was devoted to all aspects of sexuality, uppermost on the agenda was the campaign against §175. Two years later, Hirschfeld organized the First Congress for Sexual Reform. The socialist and pacifist Kurt Hiller gave a speech in which he described homosexuality as a standard deviation, a “Spiel der Natur” (“play of nature”), and presented legal arguments to back his pro-homosexual rights stance.<sup>32</sup> Encouraged by the Congress’s success, Hirschfeld created the World League for Sexual Reform on a Scientific Basis, which held five international congresses between 1921 and 1932 and claimed a membership of 190,000 at its height in 1930.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 27.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wipperman, *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1991), 184, 186.

<sup>31</sup> Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 43.

<sup>32</sup> Bastian, *Homosexuelle im Dritten Reich*, 20.

<sup>33</sup> Ralf Dose, “The World League for Sexual Reform: Some Possible Approaches,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 12 (2003), 3.

Despite all of this under Weimar, “the pressure to conceal and deny homosexuality was virtually overwhelming, and apart from a lucky few in minor niches of tolerance, revealing one’s homosexuality entailed severe disadvantages and could easily destroy one’s livelihood.”<sup>34</sup> In 1925 there was an attempt, similar to that of 1909, to bolster the severity of §175. Unlike the 1909 recommendation, this draft no longer sought the criminalization of female homosexuality but did attempt to punish those convicted with five years of hard labour. According to the draft, dubbed E 1925, the “German view” held that homosexuality was “an aberration” which would lead to “the degeneration of the nation and the collapse of its power.”<sup>35</sup> When E 1925 was introduced in the Reichstag on 22 June 1927, a coalition of the moderate Catholic Centre Party, the *Deutsche Volkspartei* (German People’s Party), and the right-wing *Deutschnationale Volkspartei* (German National People’s Party) received vocal support from the fourteen Nazi deputies.<sup>36</sup> Despite Communist and Social Democratic opposition, the draft proceeded to the committee stage.

The following year, Adolf Hitler’s *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (National Socialist German Workers’ Party, or NSDAP) issued its first public statement condemning homosexuality. When Adolf Brand circulated a questionnaire to each of Germany’s political parties asking their opinion on penal reform generally and reform of §175 specifically, the Nazis made their view painfully clear:

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<sup>34</sup> Herzer, “Communists, Social Democrats,” 209.

<sup>35</sup> Schulz, *Paragraph 175*, 16.

<sup>36</sup> Stümke, *Homosexuelle in Deutschland*, 74.

Suprema lex salus populi!

Community before self-interest!

Munich, 14 May 1928

It is not necessary that you and I live, but it is necessary that the German people live. And they can only live if they can fight, for life means fighting. And they can only fight if they maintain their masculinity. They can only maintain their masculinity if they exercise discipline, especially in matters of love. Free love and deviance are undisciplined. Therefore we reject you, as we reject anything which hurts our people.

Anyone who even thinks of homosexual love is our enemy. We reject anything which emasculates our people and makes it a plaything for our enemies, for we know that life is a fight and it's madness to think that men will ever embrace fraternally. Natural history teaches us the opposite. Might makes right. And the stronger will always win over the weak. Let's see to it that we once again become the strong! But this we can only do in one way—the German people must once again learn how to exercise discipline. We therefore reject any form of lewdness, especially homosexuality, because it robs us of our last chance to free our people from the bondage which now enslaves it.<sup>37</sup>

In contrast, the KPD responded with this affirmation of its position:

The [KPD] has taken a stand for the repeal of Paragraph 175 at every available opportunity. We need simply remind you of the recent [Reichstag] debate on the law for fighting venereal disease as well as the debate of the [Reichstag] Committee for Penal Code Reform. There is no need to emphasize that we will continue to wage the most resolute struggle for the repeal of these laws in the future.<sup>38</sup>

Rapid changes of government during Germany's Weimar years also brought rapid shifts in the political fortunes of controversial legislation. An *ad hoc* committee eventually met on 16 October 1929 to review the E 1925 legislation following a leftward shift in the Reichstag's political make-up. By a slim majority, conservative committee members were outvoted by representatives of the SPD, the KPD, and the *Deutsche Demokratische Partei* (German Democratic Party) who, in turn, recommended decriminalizing homosexual acts between consenting adults. However, the advent of

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<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Rudolf Klare, *Homosexualität und Strafrecht* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt Aktiengesellschaft, 1937), 149.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Bob McCubbin, *The Gay Question, A Marxist Appraisal* (New York: World View Publishers, 1976), 54.

Hitler's Third Reich soon nullified this considerable achievement—a move foreshadowed in a 2 August 1930 article in the Nazi *Völkischer Beobachter* that read:

We congratulate you on this success, Herr Kahl and Herr Hirschfeld!  
But do not believe that we Germans will let such a law be valid for one day when we come to power.<sup>39</sup>

The recommendations of the committee were never put to a vote in the Reichstag and the 1871 version of §175 continued in force until the Nazis modified it in 1935.

In the early 1930s, the SPD's willingness to abandon its earlier pro-homosexual stance increased when faced with the Nazi Party's growing popularity. In the spring of 1931, the *Münchener Post*, a Social Democrat daily, published a series of articles based upon SA Chief-of-Staff Ernst Röhm's private letters, alleging that he had been blackmailed by a male prostitute and prosecuted with violating §175.<sup>40</sup> Under the theme "Nationalsozialismus und Homosexualität" ("National Socialism and Homosexuality"), the articles headlined "Stammtisch 175," "Warme Brüderschaft im Braunen Haus," and "das Braune Haus der Homosexuellen" attempted to smear the Nazis as a gay, and therefore criminal, organization.<sup>41</sup> The SPD further warned in its *Rheinische Zeitung*: "Parents, protect your sons from 'physical preparation' in the Hitler Youth."<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, Hitler dismissed these charges outright, stating that Röhm's private life did

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<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Stümke, *Homosexuelle in Deutschland*, 84.

<sup>40</sup> Röhm had resigned from his post in May 1925 following a falling out with Hitler but was recalled in 1930.

<sup>41</sup> Stümke, *Homosexuelle in Deutschland*, 86-87. The article "Stammtisch 175," originally appearing in the *Münchener Post* on 14 April 1931, is reprinted in Stümke and Finkler, *Rosa Winkel, Rosa Listen*, 119-20.

<sup>42</sup> Burleigh and Wiperman, *The Racial State*, 188.

not concern him so long as he remained discreet—“Sein Privatleben interessiert mich nicht, wenn die nötige Diskretion gewahrt bleibt.”<sup>43</sup>

These left- and right-wing stances on homosexuality are intended to demonstrate the general political and legal atmosphere in which homosexuality was discussed and homosexuals lived. They do not offer any practical insight into the actual, everyday experience of gay men. In no way do these categories imply that homosexuals were more oriented toward the political left for its relatively open support of homosexual reform than they may have been to right-wing parties. For instance, gay men may have drawn parallels between the homoerotic *Männerbund* praised by Blüher and Brand and certain masculine aesthetics appearing in National Socialist propaganda. Certainly, Röhm's presence so high in the Nazi hierarchy would not have been discouraging despite some of the party's public statements hostile to homosexuality. The difference between Germany's homophobia as a whole and that specifically of the Nazi Party was rather small. The Nazis were not saying anything that had not been heard countless times before.

In his essay, *Der Homosexuelle und die Reichstagswahl* (*The Homosexual and the Reichstag Election*), Hirschfeld reacted to the illogicality of gay support for anti-homosexual parties:

All the more difficult is the conflict of conscience that the Reichstag election causes for homosexual women and men who, by virtue of descent, upbringing, and worldview, find themselves in the camp of conservative or clerical parties that reject out of hand any reform in the prosecution of homosexuals . . . Every homosexual voter who leans toward the right, perhaps because he is a staunch monarchist or a militarist, must therefore grapple with his conscience and consider which issue appears most important to him; he must weigh the different interests that come into play for himself and others . . . We fully recognize the difficult conflict that arises

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<sup>43</sup> Burkhard Jellonnek, *Homosexuelle unter dem Hakenkreuz: Die Verfolgung von Homosexuellen im Dritten Reich* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1990), 58; also Bastian, *Homosexuelle im Dritten Reich*, 30.



for a homosexual voter rooted in old, comfortable ideas and ideals; he will have to make a sacrifice on the one side or the other; there is no way around it.<sup>44</sup>

But as the contemporary Berlin researcher Manfred Herzer correctly observed, sexuality seldom influences political and ideological outlooks.<sup>45</sup>

### **Being Gay in Hitler's Germany**

The ratification of the Enabling Law less than two months after Hitler's appointment as Chancellor marked the passing of Weimar and the birth of Nazi Germany. This law gave the Nazi administration sweeping dictatorial powers and allowed Hitler to pass laws, including constitutional amendments, without the approval of the Reichstag or Reich President. By July, all political parties other than the NSDAP had effectively and formally been banned.

On 6 May 1933, students of the Berlin School for Physical Education ransacked Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Science. Its extensive library of irreplaceable books was ceremoniously burned on the Opernplatz to the singing of the *Deutschlandlied* four days later.<sup>46</sup> An eyewitness to the raid reported:

At 9:30 a.m. some lorries drew up in front of the Institute, and then marched into the building with their band playing. As the office was not yet open, there was no responsible person there; there were only a few women and one man. The students demanded admittance to every room, and broke in the doors of those which were closed, including the office of the World League for Sexual Reform. When they found that there was not much to be had in the lower rooms, they made their way up to the first floor, where they emptied the ink bottles over manuscripts and carpets and then made for the book-cases. They took whatever they thought not completely unobjectionable, working for the most part on the basis of the so-called 'black list'. . . They removed from the walls other drawings and photographs of special types and kicked them round the room, leaving it strewn with torn drawings and broken glass. When one of the students pointed out that this was medical material, another

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<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Herzer, "Communists, Social Democrats," 208.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 207-08.

<sup>46</sup> Stümke, *Homosexuelle in Deutschland*, 102.

replied that this was of no importance, that they were not concerned with the confiscation of a few books and pictures, but that they were there to destroy the Institute. A long speech was then made, and a life sized model showing the internal secretion process was thrown out of the window and smashed to pieces. In one of the consulting rooms they used a mop to smash a pantostat used in the treatment of patients. They also took away a bronze bust of Dr. Hirschfeld, and a number of other statues.<sup>47</sup>

The staff, who had been kept under constant supervision during the initial raid, assumed the worst was over when the students departed at noon. However, at 3:00 p.m. a number of trucks pulled up to the front of the Institute and a few dozen SA men appeared:

[The SA] explained that they would have to continue the work of confiscation, as the men who had been there in the morning had not had time to make a proper clearance . . . They repeatedly enquired when Dr. Hirschfeld would be returning; they wanted, as they expressed it, to be given the tip as to when he would be there. Even before this raid on the Institute storm troopers had visited it on several occasions and asked for Dr. Hirschfeld. When they were told that he was abroad, owing to an attack of malaria, they replied: 'Then let's hope he'll die without our aid: then we shan't have to hang him or beat him to death.' . . . More than ten thousand volumes from the special library of the Institute were destroyed. The students carried Dr. Hirschfeld's bust in their torchlight procession and threw it on the fire.<sup>48</sup>

*Der Angriff*, the propaganda paper edited by Joseph Goebbels, reported on this "deed of culture" the next day in the following terms:

Energetic Action Against a Poison Shop  
German Students Fumigate the "Sexual Science Institute"

Detachment X of the German student organization yesterday occupied the 'Sexual Science Institute,' which was controlled by the Jew Magnus Hirschfeld. This institute, which tried to shelter behind the scientific cloak and was always protected during his fourteen years of Marxist rule by the authorities of that period, was an unparalleled breeding-ground of dirt and filth, as the results of the search have proved beyond question. A whole lorry-load of pornographic pictures and writings as well as documents and registers have been confiscated . . . The criminal police

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<sup>47</sup> World Committee for the Victims of Fascism, "The Destruction of the Hirschfeld Sexual Science Institute," in *The Brown Book of the Hitler Terror and the Burning of the Reichstag* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1933), 166-67.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 167-68.

will have to deal with a part of the material found; another part of it will be publicly burnt.<sup>49</sup>

In the US, the *New York Times* noted that according to the perpetrators the Institute had represented an “Un-German Spirit.”<sup>50</sup> Wisely, Hirschfeld did not return to Germany after viewing the destruction of his Institute in a Parisian movie-house. He died of heart failure at sixty-seven on 14 May 1935, a month before the Nazis revised §175.<sup>51</sup>

It is plausible that some homosexuals reassured themselves that the ransacking of Hirschfeld’s Institute was an anti-Semitic rather than a homophobic act. James Steakley suggested that “some could conceivably have approved of the measure, particularly if they were Nazi sympathizers or male supremacists.” After all, “Hirschfeld’s reform efforts had long been disparaged in some homosexual circles.”<sup>52</sup>

The Hirschfeld Institute, however, was not the only homosexual entity shut down in 1933. In Prussia, for example, the *Freundschaftsblätter* (friendship bulletins) were banned.<sup>53</sup> These had been published in Berlin for both homosexual men and women.

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 169. These three accounts appear in *The Brown Book of the Hitler Terror and the Burning of the Reichstag*, written by a collective of leading German communists in exile and published in 1933 by the Communist International’s (Comintern) propaganda section in Paris. Translated into twenty languages and widely distributed, the *Brown Book* specifically aimed to refute Nazi accusations that the Reichstag had been torched by an international communist ring and therefore is first and foremost a work of propaganda.

<sup>50</sup> “Nazi Students Raid Institute on Sex,” *New York Times* (7 May 1933), 12.

<sup>51</sup> For more on Magnus Hirschfeld see Lauritsen and Thorstad, *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement*, 84-86; the brief biographical sketch in Eissler, *Arbeiterparteien und Homosexuellenfrage*, 19-20; and Charlotte Wolff, *Magnus Hirschfeld: A Portrait of a Pioneer in Sexology* (London: Quartet Books, 1986).

<sup>52</sup> Steakley, *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement*, 105.

<sup>53</sup> “[Banning of Indecent Publications] Third Directive of the Prussian Minister of the Interior, 24 February 1933,” in *Hidden Holocaust?*, 29-31.

Similarly, in many urban areas, gay and lesbian pubs were shut down overnight.<sup>54</sup> If some gays believed that the oppression was temporary and that things would soon “quiet down,” Röhm’s murder and the anti-homosexual political rhetoric that followed shattered any lingering illusions about the new regime’s opinion of gay men.<sup>55</sup>

On 30 June 1934, elite *Schutzstaffel* (SS) units arrested many SA leaders. Two days later, Röhm had been murdered, paving the way for the SS state under Heinrich Himmler. Nazi “spin doctors” spread the notion that Röhm’s homosexuality had motivated his removal. Deputy Führer Rudolf Hess announced that “the Führer had in a few hours freed the nation from the thrall of a few abnormal, perverse beings.”<sup>56</sup> Hermann Göring told the press that “certain SA leaders had placed their own interests, their own ambition and, among a certain portion of them, even their unfortunate disposition in the foreground.”<sup>57</sup> Röhm, that “broad-shouldered fellow of 46, notoriously homosexual,” had apparently plotted to overthrow the government.<sup>58</sup> NSDAP press statements were largely successful in deflecting attention away from the political motivations behind the purge.

Following the seizure of power in 1933, Röhm and the SA clashed with the army leadership. General Walther von Brauchitsch had earlier remarked that German re-

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<sup>54</sup> Stefan Micheler, “Homophobic Propaganda and the Denunciation of Same-Sex-Desiring Men under National Socialism,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11 (2002), 95-96; also Lautmann, Grikschat, and Schmidt, “Der rosa Winkel,” 328.

<sup>55</sup> Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 52; and “Erich,” “You won’t hear heroic tales about our kind,” in *Gay Voices from East Germany*, ed. J. Lemke (Bloomington: Indiana U. Press, 1991), 18.

<sup>56</sup> “Herr Hess’s Speech,” *The Times* [London] (9 July 1934), 13.

<sup>57</sup> Harry Oosterhuis, “Medicine, Male Bonding and Homosexuality in Nazi Germany,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 32 (1997), 195.

<sup>58</sup> “Germany: Nazi Against Nazi, Hitler ‘Liquidates’ Some of His Former Comrades in a Desperate Gamble with the Future,” *Newsweek* 4 (7 July 1934), 3.

armament would be “too serious and militarily essential” for “that gang of homosexuals, thugs and drunks” who should “be allowed no part in it.”<sup>59</sup> As the SA grew however, Brauchitsch and other high-ranking officers began to fear the replacement of the army with Röhm’s Brown shirts.<sup>60</sup> Hitler’s subsequent curbing of the SA appeased the army commanders whose support he needed to militarily prepare Germany for war.

Röhm’s removal also resolved the old conflict between political and paramilitary leadership within the Nazi movement. In the early 1930s, the NSDAP developed into a “double party” made up of two blocs whose belligerence toward one another rapidly escalated.<sup>61</sup> This was partially related to the SA’s increase in membership from 300,000 members in January 1933 to approximately four million a year and a half later as well as Röhm’s growing impatience toward the Nazi Party’s legalism following the failed 1923 Beer Hall Putsch.<sup>62</sup> After 1933, Röhm’s rowdy Brown shirts exhibited a revolutionary zeal no longer needed. Their arbitrary violence and intimidation of opponents was a constant embarrassment to Hitler’s new government.<sup>63</sup>

In the wake of Röhm’s murder and the curbing of the SA, Hitler exhorted all SA commanders to take the “utmost pains to ensure that offences under §175 are met by immediate expulsion of the culprit” so that

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<sup>59</sup> Max Gallo, *The Night of the Long Knives*, trans. L. Emmet (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 77.

<sup>60</sup> Stümke and Finkler, *Rosa Winkel, Rosa Listen*, 183-84; also Bastian, *Homosexuelle im Dritten Reich*, 34-35.

<sup>61</sup> Joachim C. Fest, *The Face of the Third Reich* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970), 140-41.

<sup>62</sup> Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich in Power, 1933-1939* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 22; also Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 54.

<sup>63</sup> Bastian, *Homosexuelle im Dritten Reich*, 33; also Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889-1936*, 519.

every mother may send her son into the SA, the Party, or the Hitler Youth without misgivings lest he be morally ruined. I want to see men as SA commanders, not ludicrous monkeys.<sup>64</sup>

At a meeting of the Reich Cabinet on 3 July, the purge was retroactively legalized by passing a law the sole paragraph of which read: "The measures taken on 30 June and 1 and 2 July to suppress the acts of high treason are legal, being necessary for the self-defense of the State."<sup>65</sup>

In the Reichstag on 13 July 1934, Hitler justified his actions during the purge. His speech laid out an elaborate, yet fictitious, plot by highly placed individuals in the Nazi state to seize power and usher in a so-called second revolution. This group included members of the SA and Hitler's conservative coalition partners. The question of Röhm's homosexuality, and that of other SA leaders, also emerged. Hitler told the Reichstag:

After the month of May [1934] there could be no further doubt that the Chief of Staff, Röhm, was busied with ambitious schemes which, if they were realized, could lead only to the most violent disturbances . . .

The Chief of Staff now began to alienate himself from the Party not only in spirit but also in his whole external manner of life. All the principles through which we had grown to greatness lost their validity. The life which the Chief of Staff and with him a certain circle began to lead was from any National Socialist point of view intolerable. It was not only terrible that he himself and the circle of those who were devoted to him should violate all laws of decency and modest behaviour, it was still worse that now this poison began to spread in ever wider circles. The worst of all was that gradually out of a certain common disposition of character there began to be formed within the SA a party which became the kernel of a conspiracy directed not only against the normal views of a healthy people but also against the security of the State. The review which took place in the month of May of promotions in certain SA districts led to the horrible realization that men without regard to services rendered to the National Socialist Party or to the SA had been promoted to positions

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<sup>64</sup> Quoted in "SA Chief's Plot," *The Times* [London] (2 July 1934), 16; also Bleuel, *Sex and Society*, 219.

<sup>65</sup> "The Reich Cabinet approves a law on measures for the self-defense of the State," in *Nazism 1919-1945, Volume 1: The Rise to Power, 1919-1934, A Documentary Reader*, ed. J. Noakes (Exeter: U. of Exeter Press, 1983), 182.

in the SA solely because they belonged to the circle of those possessing this special disposition.<sup>66</sup>

This evidence of immorality, brutality and lavish excesses among the SA had been publicly known for years and condoned because of Röhm's friendship and loyalty to Hitler and the effectiveness of the SA in helping the Nazi movement rise to power.<sup>67</sup> According to Ian Kershaw's research into public opinion, Germans nonetheless readily believed this propaganda and Hitler was accordingly viewed as "the cleanser of the movement."<sup>68</sup> In addition, by highlighting the "immorality" and "corruption" of the SA, party propaganda was able to mask the political reasons behind the purge, maintaining public support.<sup>69</sup> Homosexual corruption was a compelling reason for the purge for most Germans.

Although the Nazis had previously closed homosexual bars and destroyed much of Germany's pre-1933 sexual reform movement, the Röhm purge is singularly important because it provided a pretext both for the police to compile lists of all known

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<sup>66</sup> Adolf Hitler, "Speech delivered by Hitler in the Reichstag on 13 July 1934," in *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler, April 1933-August 1939*, v.1, ed. N.H. Baynes (Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 1942), 309-10.

<sup>67</sup> "Herr Hitler's Coup; A Belated Purge," *The Times* [London] (2 July 1934), 16.

<sup>68</sup> Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889-1936*, 520. *The Times* of London noted the degree to which Germans were satisfied with their Führer's actions: "The reaction in Munich on yesterday's action is one of uniform satisfaction. Particularly Herr Hitler's instruction to the new Chief of Staff of the SA seems to have acted as a lubricant in the cramped relations between one German citizen and another. German people in cafés and tramcars talked more freely than they have done for the last 15 months, and in Munich at least the Chancellor seems to have won more whole-hearted supporters this week-end than he did during the last year." "Reichswehr out in Munich; Reaction to Hitler's Stroke," *The Times* [London] (2 July 1934), 15; also "Herr Hitler Still a Popular Hero; 'Saved the German People,'" *Rand Daily Mail* (3 July 1934), 9.

<sup>69</sup> Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 69; also Geoffrey J. Giles, "The Institutionalization of Homosexual Panic in the Third Reich," in *Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany*, eds. R. Gellately and N. Stoltzfus (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 2001), 237.

homosexuals and for an overhaul of §175. It was not a coincidence that the Penal Code was amended on the first anniversary of the Röhm purge. On 28 June 1935, subclauses (a) and (b) were added to §175. Homosexuals convicted under §175 now faced ten years imprisonment.<sup>70</sup> The new version also allowed the judicial system greater flexibility in prosecuting homosexuals. An article in the journal *Deutsche Justiz* had previously stated that the principal deficiency in §175 was that it only encompassed activities resembling sexual intercourse. Neither prosecutors nor police could intervene in cases of simple public intimacy between men. By the end of the 1930s however, physical evidence was no longer essential in establishing guilt and it became possible to convict men for having homosexual thoughts.<sup>71</sup>

Launched in 1935, the official SS weekly, *Das schwarze Korps*, quickly became one of the most widely read newspapers in the Reich—printed in hundreds of thousands of copies by the end of the 1930s, its circulation was second only to *Das Reich*.<sup>72</sup> Two years after its launch, Himmler's mouthpiece took the lead in condemning homosexuality. On 4 March 1937, *Das schwarze Korps* printed an article entitled "Das sind Staatsfeinde!" ("They are Enemies of the State!") that dealt with the "homosexual vice." Barely two per cent of the men found guilty of homosexual offenses were considered incurable. By the paper's count this was 40,000 men who, naturally, would have to be expelled from German society. The SS weekly waxed nostalgic for the ancient Germanic custom of castrating or drowning homosexuals in swamps. Yet in most cases, *Das schwarze Korps*

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<sup>70</sup> Original wording of 1935 version reprinted in Schulz, *Paragraph 175*, 7-8.

<sup>71</sup> Stümke, *Homosexuelle in Deutschland*, 110.

<sup>72</sup> Micheler, "Homophobic Propaganda," 110; and Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*, 33.



believed that homosexuality was a result of seduction. The state could, therefore, therapeutically help these men become “healthy,” i.e. heterosexual.<sup>73</sup>

How effective this homophobic propaganda was with the general public is an open question. It has plausibly been argued that homophobic tirades were accepted to the degree that they were founded upon and supported existing stereotypes.<sup>74</sup> “Erich,” a homosexual arrested on 5 July 1935, explained:

When it came to “homo hatred” the Nazis could give free rein. Whereas they had to organize hatred against Communists and Jews among their henchmen and followers with a massive propaganda effort, whole centuries of Christianity handed them homo hatred on a platter. Before they beat us up, they would bombard us with the same words that I had already heard so many times in my life.<sup>75</sup>

A 1936 decree established the *Reichszentrale zur Bekämpfung der Homosexualität und Abtreibung* (Reich Office to Combat Homosexuality and Abortion):

The considerable dangers which the relatively high number of abortions still being performed present for population policy and the health of the nation, and which constitute a grave infringement of the ideological fundamentals of National Socialism, as well as the homosexual activities of a not inconsiderable proportion of the population, which constitute a serious threat to young people, demands more effective measures against these national diseases than has hitherto been the case.<sup>76</sup>

This office operated under the umbrella of the *Kriminalpolizei* (criminal police, or Kripo) which also set up four other Reich Offices dealing respectively with the combating of obscene materials, the international white slave trade, drug offences, and vice.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> “Das sind Staatsfeinde!” *Das schwarze Korps* (4 March 1937), 1. Republished in *Facsimile Querschnitt durch das Schwarze Korps*, eds. H. Heiber and H. von Kotze (München: Scherz Verlag, 1968), 96-97.

<sup>74</sup> Micheler, “Homophobic Propaganda,” 98.

<sup>75</sup> “Erich,” “You won’t hear heroic tales about our kind,” 18.

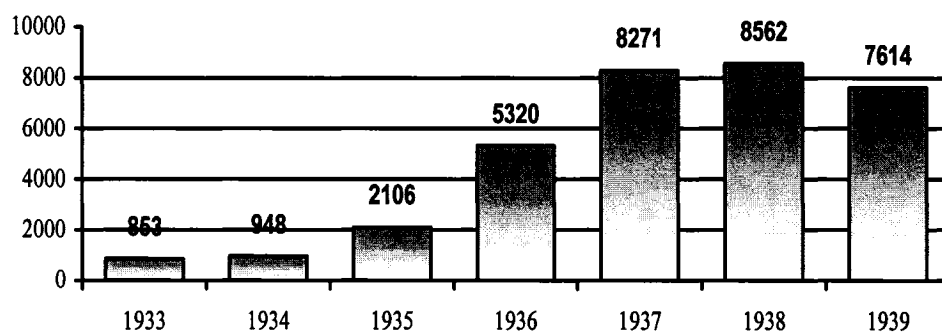
<sup>76</sup> Quoted in Stümke, “From the ‘People’s Consciousness’,” 159.

<sup>77</sup> As detailed in Grau, “The Reich Office for the Combating of Homosexuality and Abortion—an Instrument of Practical Implementation,” in *Hidden Holocaust?*, 103-04.

Günter Grau's research has revealed that the Reich Office to Combat Homosexuality and Abortion acted as a registry whose staff of eighteen performed tasks such as "recording personal data of convicted as well as suspect persons, registering transvestites and abortionists, and controlling the manufacture and sale of abortion and birth control items."<sup>78</sup> However, the Gestapo established close links with this agency, making sure those cases were called to its attention if "the offender's behaviour represented a threat to population policy or public health, . . . or posed a danger to youth."<sup>79</sup> Four years after its establishment, this Reich Office had amassed personal details on 41,000 men convicted or suspected of being homosexuals.<sup>80</sup>

The official Gestapo statistics for the period 1933 to the outbreak of the Second World War are shown in Figure 1:

FIGURE 1: Number of homosexual men sentenced under §175 (in years).<sup>81</sup>



<sup>78</sup> Grau, "Final Solution of the Homosexual Question?," 341-42.

<sup>79</sup> Grau, "The Reich Office," 105; also Reinhard Heydrich, "'I expect the Secret State Police and the Criminal Police to collaborate in the closest way . . . ' Directive dated 4 March 1937," in *Hidden Holocaust?*, 103.

<sup>80</sup> Grau, "The Reich Office," 104.

<sup>81</sup> This graph is based upon statistical information appearing in Stümke and Finkler, *Rosa Winkel, Rosa Listen*, 262; and Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 231.

Quantitatively, the years between 1935 and 1939 were a high point in the incidence of arrest and conviction of homosexuals. The jump in convictions from 1936 to 1937 could plausibly relate to the establishment of the *Reichszentrale* if that was the first year such an increase occurred. However, that 1936 also witnessed a strong upsurge in convictions suggests that the alterations to §175 in June 1935 influenced this trend more than the establishment of the Reich Office the following year. Additionally, the charge of homosexuality had once again become a politically expedient denunciation in dealing with the Third Reich's remaining oppositional institutions. The so-called "cloister trials" involving Catholic clergymen took place between 1936 and 1937. These trials were part of an effort to discredit the Catholic Church.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, Commander-in-Chief of the *Wehrmacht* Werner Freiherr von Fritsch became a victim of homosexual denunciation at the beginning of 1938. Both Himmler and Göring concocted allegations that Fritsch had been paying an ex-convict to cover up homosexual offences.<sup>83</sup> By the end of the year all of these sensational prosecutions had served their purpose.

The quantitative decline between 1938 and 1939 reveals nothing about the brutality faced by homosexuals who wound up in the hands of the Nazi authorities.<sup>84</sup> For example, Geoffrey Giles has explored the Nazi use of castration upon homosexual men. He found that castration was employed for a number of reasons. One theory linked homosexuality

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<sup>82</sup> For more information see Stümke and Finkler, *Rosa Winkel, Rosa Listen*, 201-08.

<sup>83</sup> Fritsch denied these charges when confronted by Hitler in the Chancellery library on 25 January 1938. Hans Schmidt, a homosexual blackmailer, was then brought in by Himmler and Göring who were also present. Schmidt corroborated the allegations. At the beginning of February, Hitler announced von Fritsch's resignation. A military court acquitted him of the charges the following month but, by then, the false allegations had done their job. *Ibid.*, 208-11; also Bastian, *Homosexuelle im Dritten Reich*, 41-50.

<sup>84</sup> For more information on the *Reichszentrale zur Bekämpfung der Homosexualität und Abtreibung* see Jellonnek, *Homosexuelle unter dem Hakenkreuz*, 122-34.

to a testicular malfunction. Castration may have been viewed as the solution in cases where “something, probably gonorrhea, [damaged the] testicles, causing a hormonal change that swung [men] over to a homosexual preference.”<sup>85</sup> In contrast, another theory held that homosexuals were victims of a heightened sex drive. Giles found in one case that an SS doctor attempted to rationalize the homosexual acts of a policeman by explaining that he possessed an “abnormally large” sex drive which most women were unable to fulfill. Castration was thus administered as an attempt to lower and control the sexual impulses of a homosexual.<sup>86</sup> More broadly, castration potentially had a dual purpose. First, it would cure gay men of their homosexuality so that they might be reintegrated into society. Secondly, it ensured that homosexuals did not procreate. If homosexuality was hereditary, as was believed in some circles, castration became a safe way for the regime to guard itself against reproducing homosexuals.

On 5 and 6 April 1937, Josef Meisinger, head of the Reich Office to Combat Homosexuality and Abortion, delivered a series of lectures to a group of medical practitioners which outlined the key problems of homosexuality. All the traditional stereotypes were used to establish the gay man’s criminality and justify his persecution. One concern was the corrupting threat homosexuals posed to German youth. Another was homosexuality’s negative effect on Germany’s procreative potential.<sup>87</sup> The establishment of one office to combat both homosexuality and abortion was not accidental; rather, it

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<sup>85</sup> Geoffrey J. Giles, “‘The Most Unkindest Cut of All’: Castration, Homosexuality and Nazi Justice,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 27 (1992), 52.

<sup>86</sup> Geoffrey J. Giles, “The Denial of Homosexuality: Same-Sex Incidents in Himmler’s SS and Police,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11 (2002), 271.

<sup>87</sup> Josef Meisinger, “Lecture by Josef Meisinger (Extract),” in *Hidden Holocaust?*, 110-15.

reflected Himmler's understanding of homosexuality and abortion as two aspects of the same danger to the German people.<sup>88</sup>

Like no other Nazi, Heinrich Himmler was especially prone to homophobic rants as revealed in the memoirs of Dr. Felix Kersten who served as the *Reichsführer's* personal physician and adviser. On 10 November 1940, Kersten had a conversation with Himmler, who recounted the arrest of a respected but homosexual SS leader. This was the second arrest for the blond, blue-eyed "Aryan" who had already been demoted following the first offence. Himmler was distressed that an otherwise perfect "Aryan" specimen should have such an unfortunate disposition. Himmler feared homosexuals in the SS, Security Service or government inevitably attracted other homosexuals, "abandoning the normal order of things for the perverted world of the homosexuals."<sup>89</sup> When it was implied that the young SS man had modeled himself upon Frederick the Great, Himmler angrily dissented. Anyone who suggested the "great king" had homosexual inclinations obviously had a "sick mind," argued Himmler.<sup>90</sup> He harangued Kersten on the subject of homosexuality and Frederick the Great for some time:

You're not trying to suggest that the great king had abnormal tendencies? I know those dirty Jews who assert things of the kind in order to take our heroes from us and drag them into the mud. Any great man who has done wonders for his people must somehow or other be abnormal, or at best demented. But with the best will in the world it's quite impossible to assert that Frederick the Great should be even suspected of homosexuality. Only mediocrity is normal and conventional because it produces no greatness and is therefore politically and economically 'safe.' To portray Frederick the Great as abnormal is the obvious malice of a sick mind. I

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<sup>88</sup> Dorthe Seifert, "Between Silence and License: The Representation of the National Socialist Persecution of Homosexuality in Anglo-American Fiction and Film," *History and Memory* 15 (2003), 120.

<sup>89</sup> Felix Kersten, *The Kersten Memoirs, 1940-1945*, trans. C. Fitzgibbon and J. Oliver (New York: MacMillan, 1957), 57.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

know that his coldness towards his wife is brought forward as evidence. But just consider that poor-spirited creature; it's no wonder that he viewed her as a holy terror and refused to live with her. Why can't it be looked at in this way: as he could not live with his lawful wife, he gave himself up to an ascetic life as king, which fitted him for his great achievements. Instead of that, mud was slung and homosexual tendencies attributed to him—for which there was, moreover, no foundation in fact. If you looked you could only find indications, no clear indisputable proof . . .

I would only say one thing to them: if a dozen so-called proofs were put before me, I would brush them aside and assert that they had been made up after the event, because my feelings tell me that a man who won for Prussia her place in the sun could not have had any of the tendencies of these homosexual weaklings.<sup>91</sup>

These rants suggest another dimension to Himmler's homophobia and also reveal an interesting contradiction in his rationale. Himmler believed homosexuality disrupted and undermined Germany's political and social institutions. While he clearly thought homosexuals were strong and clever enough to influence and affect a nation's social stability, they were simultaneously too weak and feminine to make good soldiers.

On 18 August 1941, Hitler himself focused on the danger homosexuals posed to state institutions during one of his few comments on the subject. "In the Röhm case and others we saw that a homosexual will fill all positions of authority with other homosexuals" regardless of their ability.<sup>92</sup> He went on to condemn homosexuality in all German institutions, especially those intended for youth in which the state must be especially vigilant in protecting them from the homosexual "plague." Shortly thereafter, Himmler, a hard-liner on this matter, persuaded Hitler to issue a "secret" decree which threatened the death penalty to SS men found guilty of homosexual offenses. To ensure that the SS and Police were kept "clean of vermin with homosexual inclinations," Himmler announced on 15 November 1941 that a member of these organizations who

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Adolf Hitler, "The Führer on the plague of homosexuality in the Wehrmacht and Party," in *Hidden Holocaust?*, 166.

committed “unnatural acts with another man” or allowed himself to “be abused for unnatural acts shall be punished with death.”<sup>93</sup> The only exception was in cases involving youths under 21 years of age where it was assumed that seduction played a role in the offense.

### **Gay Concentration Camp Inmates**

On 11 April 1945, the U.S. Army liberated Buchenwald concentration camp near Weimar in central Germany and found 21,000 starving prisoners. An intelligence team from the U.S. Army’s Psychological Warfare Division collected and prepared prisoner statements in April and May that were to be included in a comprehensive report on the camp. In 1946, Eugen Kogon, a prisoner in Buchenwald since September 1939, published a German volume that utilized much of the report’s testimony. The entire report was not published in English until 1995. However, between Kogon’s work, the original report now available, and other inmate memoirs, it is possible to recreate the life of this camp’s homosexual prisoners. These early postwar accounts reveal the tragic suffering of men who, upon entering the camps, were marked with a pink triangle.<sup>94</sup> Kogon wrote of these men “who deserve special mention:”

This group had a very heterogeneous composition. It included individuals of real value, in addition to large numbers of criminals and especially blackmailers. This made the position of the group as a whole very precarious. Hostility toward them may have been partly rooted in the fact that homosexuality was at one time widespread in Prussian military circles, as well as among the SA and the SS, and was to be mercilessly outlawed and erased. The Gestapo readily had recourse to the charge of homosexuality, if it was unable to find any other pretext for proceeding against Catholic priests or irksome critics. The mere suspicion was sufficient.

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<sup>93</sup> “Death Penalty for members of the SS and Police. Decree of the Führer for the cleansing of the SS and Police, 15 November 1941,” in *Hidden Holocaust?*, 193; also Jellonnek, *Homosexuelle unter dem Hakenkreuz*, 30-31.

<sup>94</sup> See footnote 3 for an explanation of prisoner markings.

Homosexual practices were actually very widespread in the camps. The prisoners, however, ostracized only those whom the SS marked with the pink triangle.<sup>95</sup>

Heinz Heger's memoir similarly revealed how homosexuality automatically made one an outsider, both during and after detention. Upon his arrest, Heger found himself taken to the Rossauerlände street police station and held there. He described his experience as follows:

They [the police] then started to insult me and 'the whole brood of queers,' who ought to be exterminated. It was an unheard-of insult that the authorities should have put a sub-human such as this in the same cell as two relatively decent people. Even if they had come into conflict with the law, they were at least normal men and not moral degenerates. They were on a quite different level from homos, who should be classed as animals. They went on with such insults for quite a while, stressing all the time how they were decent men in comparison with the filthy queers.<sup>96</sup>

The social stigma associated with homosexuality was as strong among prisoners as it was among Germany's wider populace. The incarceration experience of gays can be viewed as a direct reflection of their social status in Germany.<sup>97</sup> "Erich," introduced earlier, spoke during his interview of the gay inmate's isolation. "The Communists had their party, but what did we have?" he asked. "Where the Communists were able to draw their strength, we just reached into a black hole."<sup>98</sup> After his arrest, he was sent to Lichtenburg, an old prison near Prettin that the Nazis had turned into a concentration camp. Since Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald were still being built, his next destination was Esterwegen where he remained from 1936 to 1939. He wound up in Sachsenhausen and

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<sup>95</sup> Kogon, *The Theory and Practice of Hell*, 43.

<sup>96</sup> Heger, *The Men with the Pink Triangle*, 23.

<sup>97</sup> Rüdiger Lautmann, "The Pink Triangle: Homosexuals as 'Enemies of the State,'" in *The Holocaust and History*, 349-51; and Lautmann, "Categorization in Concentration Camps as a Collective Fate: A Comparison of Homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses and Political Prisoners," *Journal of Homosexuality* 19 (1990), 78.

<sup>98</sup> "Erich," "You won't hear heroic tales about our kind," 21.



described it as a “nightmare.” At the end of 1940 he was sent to Flossenbürg where he stayed until the camp’s liberation. Consequently, “Erich” witnessed first-hand the ostracism and treatment of pink triangle prisoners which he viewed as similar in most of the camps where homosexuals were interned. “Always and everywhere, in every camp, the hardest and shittiest work was reserved for us,” he said.<sup>99</sup>

Kogon also spoke of the isolated and brutal life of the homosexual prisoner:

The fate of the homosexuals in the concentration camps can only be described as ghastly. They were often segregated in special barracks and work details. Such segregation offered ample opportunity to unscrupulous elements in positions of power to engage in extortion and maltreatment. Until the fall of 1938, the homosexuals at Buchenwald were divided among the barracks occupied by political prisoners, where they led a rather inconspicuous life. In October 1938, they were transferred to the penal company in a body and had to slave in the quarry. This consigned them to the lowest caste in camp during the most difficult years. In shipments to extermination camps, such as Nordhausen, Natzweiler and Gross-Rosen, they furnished the highest proportionate share, for the camp had an understandable tendency to slough off all elements considered less valuable or worthless. If anything could save them at all, it was to enter into sordid relationships within the camp, but this was as likely to endanger their lives as to save them. There was an insoluble predicament, and virtually all of them perished.<sup>100</sup>

In his study of Buchenwald, Wolfgang Röhl estimated that every second inmate with a pink triangle died.<sup>101</sup> Ferdinand Römhild, a former inmate, recalled that the death rate among new homosexual prisoners was so high that the SS temporarily halted summary executions.<sup>102</sup> Concentration camp survivor L.D. Claassen von Neudegg similarly recounted the life of a gay inmate:

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>100</sup> Kogon, *The Theory and Practice of Hell*, 43-44.

<sup>101</sup> Wolfgang Röhl, “Homosexual Inmates in the Buchenwald Concentration Camp,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 31 (1996), 15.

<sup>102</sup> Ferdinand Römhild, “The Situation of the Homosexuals,” in *The Buchenwald Report*, ed. D. Hackett (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 176.

The homosexuals were grouped into liquidation commandos and placed under triple camp discipline. That meant less food, more work, and stricter supervision. If a prisoner with a pink triangle became sick, it spelled his doom. Admission to the clinic was forbidden . . .

“Homo” was scrawled scornfully across their clothing for their last march through the camp. To increase their thirst, they were forced to eat over-salted food, and then they were placed on the block and whipped. Afterwards, drums were hung around their necks, which they were to beat while shouting, “Hurrah, we’re back!” The three men were hanged.<sup>103</sup>

He went on to observe how death inflicted on homosexual prisoners was far more brutal than the tortures meted out to other groups:

The first evening’s roll call after he [a homosexual prisoner] was added to our penal company was his last. When he arrived, he was seized and ridiculed, then beaten and kicked, and finally spat upon. He suffered alone and in silence. Then they put him under a cold shower. It was a frosty winter evening, and he stood outside the barracks all through that long, bitterly cold night. When morning came, his breathing had become an audible rattle. Bronchial pneumonia was later given as the cause of his death. But before it had come to that, he was again beaten and kicked. Then he was tied to a post and placed under an arc lamp until he began to sweat, again put under a cold shower, and so on. He died toward evening.<sup>104</sup>

Some historians have argued that a homosexual’s prisoner marking—the pink triangle—was about an inch larger than the triangles worn by other inmates.<sup>105</sup> According to at least one report, the “175ers” had a yellow bar affixed to their triangle;<sup>106</sup> another account noted that the pink triangle was also displayed on a prisoner’s right pant leg,<sup>107</sup> allegedly to make gay prisoners “more readily distinguishable,” singling them out for brutal assaults and sexual abuse.<sup>108</sup> Hans-Georg Stümke and Rudi Finkler also discovered

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<sup>103</sup> Quoted in Steakley, *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement*, 114-15.

<sup>104</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>105</sup> Steakley, *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement*, 106.

<sup>106</sup> Max Wittman and Erich Künter, *Weltreise nach Dachau* (Bad Wildbad: Edition Pan, 1947), 162.

<sup>107</sup> McCubbin, *The Gay Question*, 60.

<sup>108</sup> Steakley, *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement*, 113.

that a pink triangle was occasionally substituted for a large letter “A” for “Arschficker” or the number “175.”<sup>109</sup>

Homosexual prisoners were also favoured for medical experiments.<sup>110</sup> *The Buchenwald Report* recounts that Danish SS Major Dr. Vaernet, with Himmler’s approval, began a series of experiments in the fall of 1944 to “cure homosexuality.” According to testimony, he implanted a synthetically produced hormone in the right side of the prisoner’s groin. The treatment was supposed to effect a change in the sexual preference of gay prisoners. Vaernet also experimented with castration on fifteen men, of whom two died. Of those who survived, Vaernet could boast no positive findings.<sup>111</sup> Römhild corroborated the fact that homosexual prisoners were used in medical experiments. He recalled that on 4 January 1942, D., a gay inmate, was ordered to the typhus experimental station. A short time later, the man developed heart trouble and had difficulty completing the heavy work demanded of him.<sup>112</sup>

One of the most revealing accounts of the gay prisoner’s existence comes not from an inmate but from Auschwitz Commandant Rudolf Höss. In his memoir, Höss candidly revealed how he engineered a life of isolation and physical cruelty for homosexual

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<sup>109</sup> Stümke and Finkler, *Rosa Winkel, Rosa Listen*, 268.

<sup>110</sup> In no way should this be taken to imply that homosexuals were the only prisoners used in medical experiments. However, the fate of non-homosexual prisoners falls outside the scope of this thesis.

<sup>111</sup> Psychological Warfare Division, SHAEF, “Report on Buchenwald Concentration Camp at Weimar. [Main Report],” in *The Buchenwald Report*, 79. Buchenwald was not the only camp in which gay inmates were forced to undergo castration. See Joachim Müller, “Homosexuelle in den Konzentrationslagern Lichtenburg und Sachsenhausen—Werkstattberichte,” in *Homosexuelle in Konzentrationslagern*, ed. O. Mußmann (Berlin: Westkreuz, 2000), 82-83.

<sup>112</sup> Römhild, “The Situation of the Homosexuals,” 175. Also see Pierre Seel, *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual*, trans. J. Neugroschel (New York: BasicBooks, 1995), 40.

prisoners in order to make them “normal again.”<sup>113</sup> In June 1934, he became block leader at Dachau where he learned not to mix gay inmates with other prisoners because the “epidemic” of homosexuality quickly spread.<sup>114</sup> He was transferred to Sachsenhausen in 1938 and there kept the homosexual prisoners in a special block while simultaneously isolating them at work. Höss described their regimen as follows:

They were employed in the clay pit of a large brick works. It was hard work, and each of them had to complete a definite amount of work per day. They were exposed to all kinds of weather, since a stipulated number of truck-loads of clay had to be filled daily. The process of baking clay could not be held up through lack of raw material.<sup>115</sup>

Taking a special interest in these inmates, Höss distinguished between “genuine” homosexuals and others who had perhaps worked as male prostitutes or been “inclined” toward homosexuality, “men who through over-indulgence had grown weary of women and sought fresh excitements to enliven their parasitical existence.”<sup>116</sup> Höss offered a laundry list of gay stereotypes regarding the former group who allegedly “indulged in their vice” even under the most dire circumstances.<sup>117</sup> In contrast, he believed that the regimen of hard work “straightened” out the latter who eventually renounced their homosexuality.

As World War Two progressed and Germany’s need for soldiers increased, some homosexuals were released from their detention only to be shipped off to the Eastern Front. Pierre Seel, a homosexual born in France’s Alsace region, was arrested on 2 May

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<sup>113</sup> Höss, *Commandant of Auschwitz*, 103.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 100-01.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

1941 and sent to Schirmeck-Vorbrück, the only German concentration camp on French soil. One year later he was set free only to be rounded up the following day to serve in the German army. Although he was first stationed in Yugoslavia, Seel was soon sent to fight the Soviets in Smolensk in October 1942 only to abandon his unit and surrender to the enemy before war's end.<sup>118</sup>

### **Avoiding Detection**

Taken together, the previous two sections of this chapter paint a rather hopeless picture of what life in Nazi Germany was like for gay men. However, some homosexuals did avoid drawing attention to themselves and certainly not all gay Germans were sent to concentration camps. The story of "J.A.W." is one example.

Led to believe that he would not pass his university admission exam if he did not wear "the brown shirt in some form or other," "J.A.W." transferred himself from the civil defense league into the SA in 1937.<sup>119</sup> That same year, he worked for the Labour Service in eastern Prussia. After finishing his stint with the Service, he studied language and literature at an undisclosed university until the outbreak of war in 1939 when he began his service as a medical corpsman. As the 1930s drew to a close, "J.A.W." ventured to Berlin several times to rendezvous with an actor. "I learned to deceive," he revealed in his interview, explaining how he avoided detection by the authorities.<sup>120</sup> "There were encounters with other people," he added. "The word expresses it fully: we encountered each other and separated again."<sup>121</sup> Despite living in this "terrible, appalling time," there

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<sup>118</sup> Seel, *I, Pierre Seel*, 3, 27-29, 52-88.

<sup>119</sup> "J.A.W.," "The harlequin and the faun," in *Gay Voices from East Germany*, 183.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

existed in the Third Reich what today is called a “scene” with which “J.A.W.” was involved. In the autumn of 1945, he was subjected to “Denazification” by the occupying authorities. Soon released, he resumed studies at an unspecified conservatory of fine arts.<sup>122</sup>

### **“Zero Hour” Did Not Apply to Them**

Life for gay concentration camp inmates was brutal and torturous, and hence a majority of them perished. Many of these men likely hoped that the defeat of Nazi Germany would usher in a return to Weimar’s liberal attitude toward homosexuality. Yet, gays quickly learned that Germany’s “zero hour” did not apply to them. The defeat of the Third Reich commonly represents a new beginning for Germans, but for gay men things remained very similar. Eugen Kogon’s mammoth *Der SS Staat* revealed the existence of pink triangle prisoners in Nazi concentration camps, but this revelation elicited little academic or public interest. While neither post-war German state threatened these men with terms in a concentration camp or subjected them to barbarous acts of torture, both East and West Germany maintained National Socialism’s legal treatment of and social and cultural attitudes towards homosexuality.

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<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 182-89.

### CHAPTER THREE: “GAY HOLOCAUST” HISTORIOGRAPHY

In the 1970s, German and American homosexuals began organizing themselves politically in order to press for gay rights. Gay liberation was well underway by 1980 and in order to establish community ties that would transcend national boundaries, many homosexuals began to research and write about the gay experience during the Third Reich and the Holocaust. American homosexuals were especially prone to compare and contrast the experience of gays with that of Jews in Nazi Germany, essentially arguing that Hitler’s persecution of homosexual men was similar to that inflicted upon Jews. German historians initially did not employ this comparison because they, unlike Americans, had to wrestle with the duality of Germans being both perpetrators and victims. Nevertheless, the idea that a “gay Holocaust” took place whereby gay men were systematically targeted and rounded up for extermination by the Nazis increased in popularity, especially after Martin Sherman’s *Bent* debuted in 1979.

German historians and gay activists subsequently began employing this comparative framework while also debating its usefulness for understanding their own past. German sources, either in that language or by Germans writing in English, often reflect their authors’ mixed feeling about “gay Holocaust” history. Germans were, after all, essentially reacting to American developments as years passed and “gay Holocaust” history continued to increase in popularity. Furthermore, the German references cited throughout this chapter—either to particular sources or to the German gay rights movement broadly—are primarily West German unless otherwise specified. On 10 August 1978, the gay rights periodical *Christopher Street*’s Barry Mehler arrived in Hamburg to interview

Hans, a member of the *Homosexuelle Aktions-Gruppe Hamburg*, who spoke at length on the situation of gay men living in East Germany:

[The situation in East Germany is] not very good. There are no anti-gay laws in East Germany, but public opinion and official policy are anti-gay. The East Germans are doing research in the causes and cures of homosexuality; books on sex education stress that homosexuality is a disease. In 1972 some members of the *Homosexuelle Aktion West-Berlin* went into East Berlin and contacted gays there. They had also seen Rosa von Praunheim's film [*Nicht der Homosexuelle ist pervers, sondern die Situation in der er lebt*]. A small group was started in East Berlin and has grown to about fifty members. They meet privately in one another's homes.<sup>1</sup>

Consequently, it has been historically difficult to research the experience of gay East Germans. There was no active gay press throughout the East German period. The debates stemming from the American use of the Jewish/gay comparison have above all been West German controversies.

### **Setting the Tone for "Gay Holocaust" History—The Histories of the 1970s**

Appallingly little information is available on the situation of homosexuals in Nazi Germany . . .

That homosexuals were major victims of [Nazi] crimes is mentioned in only a few of the standard histories of the period. And those historians who do mention the facts seem reluctant to dwell on the subject and turn quickly to the fate of other minorities in Nazi Germany. Yet tens, perhaps hundreds of thousands of homosexuals were interned in Nazi concentration camps. They were consigned to the lowest position in the camp hierarchy, and subjected to abuse by both guards and fellow prisoners; most of them perished.

Obviously, gay people are going to have to write their own history.<sup>2</sup>

Historian James Steakley was issuing a "call-to-arms," so to speak, when he wrote these words in 1974. Although he exaggerated the number of homosexuals interned in Nazi concentration camps, his words resonated among homosexuals struggling to make sense

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Mehler, "In Neo-Nazi Germany," *Christopher Street* 3 (1979), 62.

<sup>2</sup> Steakley, "Homosexuals and the Third Reich," 84-85.



of their place in history. Before Steakley, only heterosexual camp prisoners and guards had written about the persecution of homosexuals during the Third Reich.<sup>3</sup>

After Steakley, John Lauritsen and David Thorstad devoted ten pages to the topic in their *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement*.<sup>4</sup> Steakley returned to the subject again in his book-length study, *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement in Germany*, published in 1975, the same year that New York City council voted to ban gay discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations.<sup>5</sup> The night before the vote, Ira Glasser, executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union, maintained that the status of contemporary American gays bore no difference to that of Jews in 1920s and '30s Germany.<sup>6</sup> Bob McCubbin picked up this theme, applying a Marxist framework to show that the plight of gays was historically similar to that of the Jews.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the 1976 West German film *Rosa Winkel? Das ist doch schon lange vorbei . . . (Pink Triangle? That was such a long time ago . . .)* drew a direct line from Nazi concentration camps to the situation of gays in the 1970s. *Rosa Winkel?* argued that Nazi homophobia had not died with the regime in 1945, but remained alive and well throughout the Adenauer era and into contemporary West German society.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Kogon, *Der SS Staat*; Höss, *Commandant of Auschwitz*; Harthausen, "Der Massenmord an Homosexuellen im Dritten Reich;" and Heger, *Die Männer mit dem rosa Winkel*.

<sup>4</sup> Lauritsen and Thorstad, *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement*, 42-50, 69-70.

<sup>5</sup> Steakley, *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement in Germany*.

<sup>6</sup> Ira Glasser, "The Yellow Star and the Pink Triangle," *New York Times* (10 September 1975), 45.

<sup>7</sup> McCubbin, *The Gay Question*.

<sup>8</sup> Recounted in Jensen, "The Pink Triangle," 327.

In 1977, Richard Plant, a Jewish homosexual, utilized a comparative framework to tell the story of gay persecution under the swastika.<sup>9</sup> Both Mikhail Itkin and Louis Crompton took the Jewish/homosexual comparative framework even further: Itkin claimed that the “final solution” had been applied equally to gays and Jews; and Crompton traced gay genocide back to Leviticus, arguing that the historical past of Jewish and gay minorities directly paralleled one another.<sup>10</sup>

Together, these authors laid the foundation for “gay Holocaust” history through the presentation and propagation of similar arguments and assumptions that included the inflation of gay fatalities during Hitler’s rule;<sup>11</sup> the depiction of *Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler as the most fanatically homophobic Nazi;<sup>12</sup> the claim that gay concentration camp prisoners found themselves at the bottom of the camp hierarchy alongside Jews;<sup>13</sup> and above all allegations the Third Reich unequivocally intended and instituted an extermination of Germany’s gay minority. By the time Itkin’s work was published, the comparative approach had escalated to one of comparative suffering as well as

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<sup>9</sup> Plant, “The Men with the Pink Triangle,” 1-10.

<sup>10</sup> Mikhail Itkin, “Gays at the Hands of the Nazis,” *Alternate 1* (1977), 53-56; and Louis Crompton, “Gay Genocide from Leviticus to Hitler,” in *The Gay Academic*, ed. L. Crew (Palm Springs: ETC Publications, 1978), 67-91.

<sup>11</sup> See Itkin, “Gays at the Hands of the Nazis,” 53; and Crompton, “Gay Genocide,” 81.

<sup>12</sup> See Steakley, *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement*, 111; and Plant, “The Men with the Pink Triangle,” 7.

<sup>13</sup> At least one report bore this out. In 1937 it had been reported from Dachau that the “175ers” were employed alongside Jews in gravel-digging. Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, *Deutschland-Berichte der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands* (*Sopade*), *Vierter Jahrgang 1937* (Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausendeins, 1980), 685.

comparative history. “Jewish homosexuals would never have had the chance to die as Jews, because they long before would have been put to death as gays,” wrote Itkin.<sup>14</sup>

Two broader arguments were also made. First, Third Reich historians had disregarded the history of gays despite a wealth of information that demonstrated, for Steakley and others, that gay oppression in Nazi Germany had paralleled Jewish oppression both in kind and severity. Second, contemporary American and German governments had directly inherited the Third Reich’s homophobic rhetoric and policies. Crompton, perhaps, best encapsulated all of these points when he wrote:

The Nazi treatment of homosexuals has gone all but unrecorded in standard histories. A number of books in German touch briefly on the subject but until recently the matter had gone unnoticed in English . . .

In 1936 . . . Heinrich Himmler [declared]: “Just as we today have gone back to the ancient Germanic view on the question of marriage mixing different races, so too our judgment of homosexuality—a symptom of degeneracy which could destroy our race—we must return to the guiding Nordic principle: extermination of degenerates.”

How many perished? . . . Reasonable estimates of the number of homosexuals who died from illness, neglect, medical experiments, and the gas chamber have varied from 100,000 to 400,000, but no systematic effort has yet been made to determine the facts . . .

After the war, survivors of Hitler’s concentration camps were in the main treated generously by the West German government in the matter of reparations, which amounted to over fifteen billion dollars. Homosexuals, however, were told they were ineligible for compensation since they were technically “criminals.” Most of those who survived kept their experiences secret for fear of further discrimination.<sup>15</sup>

As a whole, these arguments and assumptions were quickly politicized by the broader gay rights movement. In the United States, the Briggs Initiative sought to bar gays from teaching in public schools. Harvey Milk, an openly gay San Francisco politician, invoked the memory of a “gay Holocaust” during the 1978 protest against the Initiative’s implementation. “We are not going to sit back in silence as 300,000 of our gay

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<sup>14</sup> Itkin, “Gay at the Hands of the Nazis,” 54.

<sup>15</sup> Crompton, “Gay Genocide,” 79, 81-82.

brothers and sisters did in Nazi Germany. We are not going to allow our rights to be taken away and then march with bowed heads into the gas chambers,” he declared.<sup>16</sup> Milk was one of many American gays who increasingly viewed the Nazi persecution of homosexuals through a Jewish lens.

In Germany, however, only some of these arguments were advanced by gay activists. In March 1975, for example, the *Homosexuelle Aktion West-Berlin* (HAW) published a cover article on the Nazi persecution of homosexuals in their gay magazine, *HAW-Info*. The article’s conclusion encouraged homosexuals to make themselves visible: “Show what happened to gays under Fascism! Discrimination is still going on!” Beyond this, gay Germans were not making comparisons between their past suffering and that of Jews. Indeed, HAW explicitly recognized the problems of claiming a one-sided victim identity. *HAW-Info* cautioned that some homosexuals had certainly supported the Nazis, raising the issue of how best to reconcile a conflicting perpetrator-*versus*-victim past.<sup>17</sup>

In 1977, a team of sociologists led by Rüdiger Lautmann of Bremen University published “Der rosa Winkel in den nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern” in *Seminar: Gesellschaft und Homosexualität*, the first investigative report on the subject. This study broke new ground in that it offered semi-reliable statistics on the persecution, arrest, imprisonment, and fate of German and Austrian homosexuals during the Nazi era. Lautmann and his colleagues went to Arolsen, West Germany, where they scoured the documents in the *Archiv des Internationalen Suchdienstes*. On the basis of this research they placed the number of imprisoned homosexuals at between 5,000 and 15,000. Although hundreds of notebooks and thousands of single documents were examined,

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<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Jensen, “The Pink Triangle,” 329-30.

<sup>17</sup> Recounted in *Ibid.*, 326-27, 343.

Lautmann and his team admitted that the data remained rather meager and incomplete which accounted for the large discrepancy in statistics.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, these numbers were considerably smaller than the usual estimates of “hundreds of thousands” and consequently dismissed as “too conservative.”<sup>19</sup> While some German homosexuals found these statistics “sobering,” many individual gay men as well as some groups clung to the belief that the Nazis had victimized far more homosexuals than Lautmann’s findings suggested. And in the United States, Lautmann’s information remained widely unknown, at least up to the publication of Richard Plant’s *The Pink Triangle* in 1986.<sup>20</sup>

Although Lautmann’s study did not take as its starting point a comparison of suffering between Jews and homosexuals under Hitler, some of the views advanced by Steakley and others were shared by Lautmann and his team. For example, a review of Third Reich historiography uncovered little mention of homosexual persecution.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the status of gay inmates inside Nazi concentration camps was a reflection of their general social position outside the camps.<sup>22</sup> More importantly, however, homophobic attitudes generally acted in the same way as anti-Semitism had towards Jews when it came to justifying legal restrictions against and the persecution of gay men.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Lautmann, Grikschat, and Schmidt, “Der rosa Winkel,” 333, 326.

<sup>19</sup> Frank Rector, *The Nazi Extermination of Homosexuals* (New York: Stein and Day, 1981), 113, 116.

<sup>20</sup> James D. Steakley, “Selbstkritische Gedanken zur Mythologisierung der Homosexuellenverfolgung im Dritten Reich,” in *Nationalsozialistischer Terror gegen Homosexuelle*, 55-56.

<sup>21</sup> Lautmann, Grikschat, and Schmidt, “Der rosa Winkel,” 326.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 352.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 365.

Opening on Broadway in December 1979 and premiering in Germany four months later, Martin Sherman's controversial play *Bent* focused upon the experiences of Max and Horst. Arrested through a series of circumstances, Max is sent to Dachau concentration camp. Once there, he exchanges his pink triangle for a yellow star in order to escape the worst treatment. "Pink's the lowest," Horst informs him, a point repeatedly confirmed by the actions of SS guards and Kapos. Act I, Scene 6 thus begins:

*Lights up, on one side of the stage. A large barrel is on the ground. A prisoner-foreman (KAPO) stands behind the barrel, with a huge ladle. He stirs it. The KAPO wears a green triangle on his prison uniform. Prisoners come up, one by one, with bowls in their hand, to be fed. They all wear prison uniforms.*

*[A PRISONER with a yellow star enters. The KAPO stirs the soup. He fills the PRISONER's bowl. The PRISONER leaves. A PRISONER with a red triangle enters. The KAPO stirs the soup. He fills the PRISONER's bowl. The PRISONER leaves. HORST enters. The KAPO does not stir the soup.]*

HORST: Only soup. You skimmed it from the top. There's nothing in it but water. No meat, no vegetables . . . nothing.

KAPO: Take what you get.

HORST: *[Reaches for the ladle.]* Give me some meat.

KAPO: *[Pushes him back.]* Fucking queer! Take what you get!<sup>24</sup>

Max, wearing the yellow star, is subsequently given vegetables in his soup which he then shares with Horst. The play ends as Max, still wearing his yellow star, is forced to watch an SS captain murder Horst. Instead of burying Horst as commanded, Max dons his prisoner jacket, marked with a pink triangle, and runs into an electrical fence.

Both Richard Goldstein and Lev Raphael sharply chastised Sherman for distorting the image of the Holocaust and promoting the "who had it worst" debate among Nazi victims. Raphael wrote:

*Bent* is the story of Max, a shallow, coke-dealing, S&M-loving Berlin homosexual who winds up in Dachau after a 1934 round-up of homosexuals. In the course of two acts, he helps murder his roommate by finishing the beating an SS guard began, commits necrophilia to prove to the SS that he's straight and thus deserves a yellow

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<sup>24</sup> Martin Sherman, *Bent* (New York: Avon Books, 1979), 36-37.

star rather than the pink triangle, has “verbal sex with a fellow prisoner he comes to love,” sees that man killed, and kills himself—after donning the pink triangle. Max is a frivolous charmer, impossible to care about, a man whose deepest insight into himself is that he’s “a rotten person.” If the play is an attempt to show that even men like him can learn to respect themselves and to love, it seems extremely cruel. Does it take Dachau to make someone deepen as a human being? If so much suffering is necessary, he must be hopelessly unfeeling—which Max doesn’t seem to be—so the play fails as the portrayal of a man’s development into a mensch.<sup>25</sup>

And the reviewer goes on to argue:

The play titillates the audience here by offering beefcake and saying “Okay, pretend you’re in a concentration camp and there’s this really hot guy—!” . . . Max says that everyone in the camp talks about sex and misses it: “They go crazy missing it.” This is nonsense. [As many writers point out] about the camps[,] in a brutal and unpredictable atmosphere of terror, torture, starvation, filth, with no medical care, most men’s sexual desires faded away. Prisoners were obsessed with food, not sex. While sex may have occurred, food was far more important, and in memoir after memoir about the camps, you encounter tales of dreaming about food, fantasizing post-liberation feasts, or memories of pre-war meals.<sup>26</sup>

The gay press in Germany and the US, however, praised Sherman, agreeing that pink triangle prisoners were indeed “worth” less than those branded with the yellow star. Other reviews, outside the gay community, also enthusiastically highlighted this message.<sup>27</sup>

### **“Pink Triangle and Yellow Star”—Writing in the 1980s**

The *Journal of Homosexuality*’s first issue of the new decade featured Erwin J. Haeberle’s detailed account of Nazi concentration camp prisoner markings alongside a condensed and translated version of Lautmann’s “Der rosa Winkel in den

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<sup>25</sup> Lev Raphael, “Deciphering the Gay Holocaust,” *The Harvard Gay & Lesbian Review* 2 (1995), 16.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* This is true of Pierre Seel’s experience. Seel, *I, Pierre Seel*, 38.

<sup>27</sup> See Charles Ortleb, “Sharing the Holocaust,” *Christopher Street* 4 (1980), 10-13; also “Bent: Rosa Winkel,” *Homosexuelle Emanzipation* (1980), 34-37; and David Richards, “Sensitive ‘Bent’; Source’s Treatment of Homosexuality,” *The Washington Post* (19 January 1982), D1.

nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern.”<sup>28</sup> While Haeberle utilized the Jewish/homosexual comparison made popular in the 1970s, Lautmann warned against the exaggeration and overstatement that had arisen from it. He wrote:

One possible way to deal with the emotions aroused by the phenomenon of the concentration camps is to exaggerate. In effect one sweeps actual events under the table by evoking a picture of the utmost in horror, a superlative of terror to which (supposedly) no other group was subject. By this method one summons up a picture of hundreds of thousands of homosexual men whose fate was the hardest of all to bear, who had a kind of monopoly on systematic persecution. Such pictures distort what actually happened and what could be repeated.<sup>29</sup>

Just as the 1976 West German film *Rosa Winkel?* had done, Hans-Georg Stümke and Rudi Finkler also paralleled Nazi anti-homosexual policies with contemporary West German attitudes in their 1981 publication *Rosa Winkel, Rosa Listen: Homosexuelle und ‘Gesundes Volksempfinden’ von Auschwitz bis heute*. This study derived a basis from and expanded upon Lautmann’s 1977 findings, corroborating the argument that gay concentration camp inmates occupied a low position in the camp hierarchy.<sup>30</sup> Across the Atlantic this same year, Jack Nusan Porter profiled the Jewish homosexual Magnus Hirschfeld, investigating the history of gays in Weimar and Nazi Germany through his eyes. In contrast to Stümke and Finkler who, after researching the conditions and practices of a number of concentration camps, admitted that no precise figures could be

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<sup>28</sup> Erwin J. Haeberle, “‘Stigmata of Degeneration.’ Prisoner Markings in Nazi Concentration Camps,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 6 (1980/81), 135-39; and Rüdiger Lautmann, “The Pink Triangle: The Persecution of Homosexual Males in Concentration Camps in Nazi Germany,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 6 (1980/81), 141-59.

<sup>29</sup> Lautmann, “The Pink Triangle,” 143.

<sup>30</sup> Stümke and Finkler, *Rosa Winkel, Rosa Listen*, 10, 12, 268-69.



found on the number of homosexual victims, Porter simply labeled the Nazi treatment of gays as “genocide.”<sup>31</sup>

When a Sorbonne-educated, Parisian professor asked author Gore Vidal whether or not his book dealing with homosexuality would receive a fair review, Vidal glibly replied that “scholarly studies having to do with fags do not get reviewed.” In contrast, had he written on the “agony and wonder” of being Jewish, continued Vidal, this would be an entirely different case.<sup>32</sup> The remainder of Vidal’s colourfully worded essay chastised Jews who refused to acknowledge the parallels between their persecution and that of gays; supported the observation that contemporary society for homosexuals was like 1930s Germany had been for Jews; and argued that both Jews and gays were aboard the “same fragile boat.”<sup>33</sup> Vidal implied that gay history would be accepted by a wider audience if it seized upon and expanded this comparison.

Yale historian John Boswell agreed, hoping that through comparative history broader insights into the similarities and differences of intolerance might be revealed.<sup>34</sup>

He wrote:

Most societies, for instance, which freely tolerate religious diversity, also accept sexual variation, and the fate of Jews and gay people has been almost identical throughout European history, from early Christian hostility to extermination camps. The same laws which oppressed Jews tried to wipe out homosexuality; the same periods of European history which could not make room for Jewish distinctiveness

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 61; and Jack Nusan Porter, “The Jewish Homosexual,” in *The Jew as Outsider, Historical and Contemporary Perspectives, Collected Essays, 1974-1980*, ed. J. Porter (Washington: U. Press of America, 1981), 146.

<sup>32</sup> Gore Vidal, “Pink Triangle and Yellow Star,” in *Pink Triangle and Yellow Star, and Other Essays* (London: Heinemann, 1982), 167-68. This essay originally appeared under the title “Some Jews and the Gays” in *The Nation* (14 November 1981).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 167-84.

<sup>34</sup> John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1980), 15.

reacted violently against sexual nonconformity; the same countries which insisted on religious uniformity imposed majority standards of sexual conduct; and even the same methods of propaganda were used against Jews and gay people—picturing them as animals bent on the destruction of the children of the majority.<sup>35</sup>

In 1981, Haeberle again used the Jewish/gay comparison in his article for *The Journal of Sex Research*, arguing that an attack on one group was always accompanied by an attack on the other, while Frank Rector, a Florida journalist, immersed his *Nazi Extermination of Homosexuals* in the “who had it worst” debate.<sup>36</sup> The popularity of Rector’s lively, fast-paced narrative increased awareness of gay persecution in the Third Reich—an achievement offset by the number of historical inaccuracies and casual overstatements. Rector lashed out at academics in general who attempted to suppress Nazi Germany’s treatment of gays, adamantly arguing that Hitler’s “extermination of homosexuals” be treated on an equal footing with the eradication of European Jewry.<sup>37</sup>

In her review of the book for the *New York Times*, Susan Jacoby scolded Rector for denying the uniqueness of Hitler’s war against the Jews. Furthering the notion of a “gay Holocaust,” she maintained, demonstrated Rector’s ignorance of the vital role played by anti-Semitism in Nazi ideology. “Mr. Rector’s case for a ‘gay genocide’ comparable to the extermination of the Jews is at best ridiculous and at worst obscene,” Jacoby concluded.<sup>38</sup> Likewise, Peter Sussman was disgusted at Rector’s “making a contest out of relative suffering.” The analogy between gays and Jews under the Nazi banner was, for Sussman, so “far-fetched as to be obscene.” Referring to the SA, Sussman disqualified

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-16.

<sup>36</sup> Erwin J. Haeberle, “Swastika, Pink Triangle, and Yellow Star—The Destruction of Sexology and the Persecution of Homosexuals in Nazi Germany,” *The Journal of Sex Research* 17 (1981), 270-87; and Rector, *The Nazi Extermination*.

<sup>37</sup> Rector, *The Nazi Extermination*, 113.

<sup>38</sup> Susan Jacoby, “Nonfiction in Brief,” *New York Times* (10 May 1981), 16.

gays from “claiming some sort of group membership among the victims of Nazi Germany” because “unlike the Jews, homosexuals were on both sides of the Nazi fence.”<sup>39</sup>

These views also echoed postwar historians who shared the exclusivist outlook that the Holocaust was a uniquely Jewish experience, who dismissed “prostitutes, homosexuals, perverts, and common criminals” incarcerated by the Nazis as unworthy of historical enquiry.<sup>40</sup> In many histories of the Holocaust, homosexuals were simply not mentioned.<sup>41</sup> Not all Jewish writers, however, maintained an exclusivist view of the Holocaust. Gay Jewish writers, for instance, often emphasized the parallels between Jewish victimization and gay persecution and supported the comparative approach utilized by “gay Holocaust” historians. Common stereotypes, social stigmas, ostracism, and persecution, legal or otherwise, were compared and contrasted with one another to reveal their similarities. Both groups were portrayed as “others,” excluded from the majority who were presented as oppressors. For example, Seymour Kleinberg argued that Jews and gays had suffered through a common history in his article, “The Homosexual as Jew.” He remarked:

No one agrees fully about the meaning of anti-Semitism—neither its etiology nor its character is clear. The term itself, like the term “homosexual,” was made up at the end of the nineteenth century; both suggest an emphasis at once more abstract and more sinister than primitive Jew-hating or horror of sodomy. Before modern times, both the Jew and the homosexual were objects of centuries of outrage, the subjects of myths deeply important to western culture. Both had their most powerful enemy

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<sup>39</sup> Peter Sussman, “Unseemly Addition?,” *New York Times* (5 February 1984), 27.

<sup>40</sup> Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The Holocaust and the Historians* (Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 1981), 8.

<sup>41</sup> For example, Bohdan Wytwycky discounted them as victims in his *The Other Holocaust: Many Circles of Hell—A Brief Account of 9-10 Million Persons who died with the 6 Million Jews under Nazi Racism* (Washington: The Novak Report, 1980).

in the church, and both seemed to suffer more during the same periods. When there was a relative tolerance extended toward one, it was often shared by the other; when periods of persecution were ferocious, they were sometimes identified: the Jew was accused of heresy and sodomy; the homosexual was regarded as heretical and, like the Jew, another spawn of the anti-Christ.

The history of the persecution of Jews is well documented, carefully observed everywhere it occurred, both by Jews and by their oppressors. But the history of the persecution of homosexual men and women is obscure, tenuous, and euphemistic. The Jew was condemned for his belief, the homosexual for what he did. Jews were hated “simply” because of an accident of birth; homosexuals were hated because of their nature. Jews appeared to earn their fate in the eyes of their enemy because they clung so stubbornly to their faith, rejecting the proffered safety of conversion—though that safety hardly meant acceptance. Homosexuals, because they appeared to be heterosexual, were accepted until they revealed themselves as sodomites. They then betrayed the society in which they hid, and the wrath that fell upon them was partly revenge.<sup>42</sup>

Kleinberg emphasized that periods of toleration and persecution of one group invariably meant the same for the other. Through implication it followed that a Jewish Holocaust also necessitated a gay Holocaust. Kleinberg continued his historical parallel, observing that the social status of American homosexuals resembled that of European Jews before fascism’s rise to power. “There are echoes of the parallel histories of Jews and homosexuals, and in the meaning of anti-Semitism lie clues to the psychology of homophobia,” argued Kleinberg, stressing the benefit of such a comparison.<sup>43</sup>

Similarly, in 1985, the Swiss Jewish psychoanalyst and anthropologist Paul Parin published his ethno-psychoanalytic study of Jews and homosexuals in the Stuttgart based journal, *Psyche*. Parin’s task was to understand the effects of oppression on two minority groups that were similarly discriminated in life’s private and public spheres.<sup>44</sup> A

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<sup>42</sup> Seymour Kleinberg, “The Homosexual as Jew,” *Christopher Street* 7 (1983), 35.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>44</sup> Paul Parin, “‘The Mark of Oppression’: Ethnopschoanalytische Studie über Juden und Homosexuelle in einer relative permissiven Kultur,” *Psyche: Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse und ihre Anwendungen* 39 (1985), 196, 198-99.

comparison between the 1895 Dreyfus Affair in France and Oscar Wilde's trial is employed to demonstrate that Jewish and homosexual repression stemmed from traditional stereotypes that had long cast both groups as "others." Parin believed that Jewish annihilation and homosexual repression were subsequently possible during the Third Reich because of this tradition of anti-Semitism and homophobia.<sup>45</sup> Parin also found that Jewish and gay men bore the "mark of oppression" in the sense that they have traditionally been portrayed as *Untermenschen* (sub-humans). Representing Jews and gays as inferior people has, historically, made it easier to segregate and eliminate them from mainstream society.<sup>46</sup>

Martin Sherman also commented on the parallel histories of both Jews and gays in response to *Bent*'s critics. He insisted that people ignored the persecution of gays just as they once overlooked Jewish victimization. According to Sherman, *Bent* reflected the duality of being both Jewish and gay: "I wrote the play every bit as much a Jew as a gay."<sup>47</sup>

Richard Plant's 1986 book was likewise written from the perspective of a Jewish homosexual. As a Jewish homosexual it was perhaps inevitable that Plant explored the analogy between anti-Semitism and homophobia which, according to Rüdiger Lautmann, curiously contradicting his earlier statements, had "received far too little attention so far."<sup>48</sup> Lautmann's review encouraged further exploration of the parallel between anti-

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 198-200.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Jensen, "The Pink Triangle," 340.

<sup>48</sup> Rüdiger Lautmann, "Homosexuals in Nazi Germany [review]," in *Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual*, v.5, eds. H. Friedlander and S. Milton (New York: Kraus International Publications, 1988), 275.

Semitism and homophobia which he said revealed similar patterns of persecution experienced by both Jewish and homosexual men and women.<sup>49</sup> Most reviewers generally agreed and added that Plant's book was singularly important for reminding gays that these events had actually happened and could happen again, something Jews had learned but gays had not.<sup>50</sup>

Plant also commented on the continuing trend among historians to ignore the fate of Germany's homosexuals after 1933. He altogether dismissed the temptation to explain away this trend as a result of sparse documentation. Rather, he observed that for historians able to read German ample evidence existed to prove the Nazi regime had been as eager to exterminate gays as they were to wipe out the Jews. In fact, Plant believed that sufficient statistical material and documentation also existed for non-German readers if they wanted to examine it.<sup>51</sup> His reviewers shared his mystification that the "extermination" of gays during the Third Reich had not become the "single major event preoccupying historians."<sup>52</sup>

Unfortunately, although *The Pink Triangle* was far better written and researched than Rector's study, the popularity of the latter dramatically reduced Plant's influence. Indeed, Plant was criticized for neither citing *The Nazi Extermination of Homosexuals* directly nor including it in his bibliography. Even supporters of his study were forced to admit that Rector "stole much of [Plant's] potential audience."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Michael Denny, "Paragraph 175," *Christopher Street* 9 (1987), 58.

<sup>51</sup> Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 15.

<sup>52</sup> Denny, "Paragraph 175," 54.

<sup>53</sup> See George M. Kren, "Review of Richard Plant's *The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War against Homosexuals*," *The American Historical Review* 93 (1988), 730.

Hans-Georg Stümke's 1989 political history of homosexuality in Germany is an historical survey of gay movements and homosexual persecution from the *Kaiserreich* to the *Bundesrepublik*. Although, he argues the Nazi attempt to eliminate "inferior" gay men from Germany's reproduction pool echoed the measures enacted against Jews and gypsies, he stops short of agreeing with "gay Holocaust" historians that the Nazis intended and instituted a final solution to the homosexual question.<sup>54</sup> So long as the question "what causes homosexuality?" remained unanswered, the Nazis could not develop a systematic effort to eliminate gay men and homosexuality from German society.<sup>55</sup>

### **Continuing the Comparison into the 1990s**

In the early 1990s, Rüdiger Lautmann completely immersed himself in the "gay Holocaust" debate. By comparing and contrasting the fate of non-Jewish victims, Lautmann observed that homosexuals along with political prisoners and Jehovah's Witnesses were sent to camps for "re-education" rather than "extermination"—although he readily admitted this often meant death. Homosexuals were also never completely rounded up, but instead were taken in "random samples," unlike Jews.<sup>56</sup> Since the treatment of camp inmates generally represented an "extension or intensification" of their social status, homosexuals were very low in the camp hierarchy.<sup>57</sup> Likewise, because contact between one another had made them objects of suspicion in society, homosexual prisoners often continued to avoid one another on the inside and found themselves very

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<sup>54</sup> Stümke, *Homosexuelle in Deutschland*, 94.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>56</sup> Lautmann, "Categorization in Concentration Camps," 71.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

isolated.<sup>58</sup> Lautmann concluded that the death rate among gay prisoners was higher than other non-Jewish victims and believed that “the camp destinies of Jews and homosexuals approximate each other.”<sup>59</sup>

Reflecting in 1992 on twenty years of “gay Holocaust” history, Jack Nusan Porter criticized yet sympathized with this history’s use of the Jewish/homosexual comparison. He implied that a “gay Holocaust” was not the overstatement critics had alleged. Porter argued that the murder of homosexuals began with the Röhm purge in June 1934 while, in contrast, the first Jewish pogrom was initiated between 9 and 10 November 1938 with systematic extermination following in 1941, an argument containing glaring historical inaccuracies.<sup>60</sup>

At this time, many critics continued to condemn Third Reich historiography for not acknowledging homosexual persecution alongside Jewish victimization. In 1991, Hans-Georg Stümke criticized one study for downplaying the racial element in the Nazi persecution of homosexuals. He argued that the Nazis viewed homosexuality as a disease, a threat to “racial hygiene” not unlike Jewishness—a threat for which the Nazis too

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 78, 83.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 81-83.

<sup>60</sup> Jack Nusan Porter, *Sexual Politics in the Third Reich: The Persecution of the Homosexuals during the Holocaust, a Bibliography and Introductory Essay* (Newton: Spencer Press, 1992), ix. Other examples of writing in which the Röhm Purge is explicitly identified as catalyzing the Nazi extermination of homosexuals include Steakley, *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement*, 108; and Rector, *The Nazi Extermination*, 25. Hans-Georg Stümke can also be included with the exception that he differentiates the type of persecution that occurred before and after Röhm’s purge. Before 1934 homosexual persecution had a “spontaneous character.” Only in the wake of Röhm’s murder did the “centrally organized and systematic persecution of homosexuals” begin. Stümke, “From the ‘People’s Consciousness of Right and Wrong,’” 157.



sought a “final solution.”<sup>61</sup> Along these lines, London’s *The Independent* headlined an article “No place in history for gay victims of Nazism!”<sup>62</sup> Sara Hart, a senior editor for the gay magazine *10 Percent*, added that, as a result, even gays did not always understand the pink triangle’s historic meaning.<sup>63</sup> The novelist Robert C. Reinhart complained that “while entire libraries are dedicated to chronicles of the Second World War, Nazi Germany, the Holocaust, and the concentration camps, books on what happened to homosexuals caught up in those events would fill only a couple of inches of shelf space.”<sup>64</sup> Consequently, Reinhart, in his novel *Walk the Night*, actively engaged his audience in the “gay Holocaust” debate as exemplified in the following passage:

“He’s so handsome and he plays so wonderfully that I like him already. You like him very much, don’t you?”

“He was my best friend at school. I miss him very much.”

“Don’t you still see him?”

“Not as often as I’d like. We’re a little dangerous for one another.”

“Friends aren’t dangerous. That’s silly.”

“Don’t call things silly you don’t understand,” [Rudy] snapped and [Leda] shot back, “Then tell me what you mean. Don’t just call me silly,” but quickly added, “If you can’t tell me, just say so.”

“It’s not a secret I should have to keep, so why not?” he said and immediately thought of any number of reasons not to tell her: talking so unguardedly to a young girl sponsored at the school by the Nazi party, taking her to a place like this, pointing out people and things the Party had criminalized. But he was tired of cutting his thoughts to fit the national model and whittling his feelings down to such a small, but acceptable, size. He knew it might be dangerously foolish, but he spoke, his tone slipping along the edge of belligerence: “I’m what’s called a *Mischling*, a part Jew. It’s a small part—a great-grandmother—but enough Jew to make me non-

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<sup>61</sup> Hans-Georg Stümke, “‘Endlösung’ oder ‘Umerziehung,’” *Die Zeit* (29 March 1991), 42.

<sup>62</sup> Peter Tatchell, “No Place in History for Gay Victims of Nazism,” *The Independent* [London] (2 July 1995), 25.

<sup>63</sup> Sara Hart, “A Dark Past Brought to Light,” *10 Percent* 1 (1993), 38, 74.

<sup>64</sup> Robert C. Reinhart, *Walk the Night: A Novel of Gays in the Holocaust* (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1994), 6; also Klaus Müller’s introduction to the 2nd edition of Heger’s *The Men with the Pink Triangle*.

Aryan, unfit for this new order. They say that my sort shouldn't even have children. I've been declared unwelcome in my own country."

His voice was now harsh and, like the school director's secretary, he seemed to be accusing her of terrible offenses she couldn't identify, much less defend.

"And Dieter is worse off. I probably shouldn't tell you, but he's a homosexual. He's undermining the will of the people to multiply, to make more pure-blooded Aryans, more good, right-thinking people who are all of one narrow mind. Just think how awful he is. Dieter can't or won't sleep with women and make babies, so what the hell good is the little faggot to the Fatherland? Jews are dangerous. So are faggots. We've become dangerous to one another."<sup>65</sup>

Reinhart's *Walk the Night* discussed whether the Nazis had intended and instituted the murder of homosexuals; whether Hitler personally hated homosexuals; the homophobia, both past and present, that kept this history hidden; Jewish versus gay persecution; and the isolation and death rate among gay camp prisoners. Reinhart's characters make the case that Hitler was personally responsible for the intentional round-up and extermination of Germany's gays; that homophobia was directly responsible for marginalizing this history; that it was worse to be gay than Jewish; and that gay prisoners were horribly mistreated, more so than Jews, often dying torturous deaths.<sup>66</sup> Reinhart was nevertheless criticized for forgetting that although millions of non-Jews were slaughtered by the Nazis, the Final Solution was specifically initiated to rid Europe of Jews. Critics argued that while the use of comparison was permissible, writers should maintain a sense of historical relativity. Put simply, the term "holocaust," with its myriad meanings and implications, would always refer to Jews first and non-Jews second if at all.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Reinhart, *Walk the Night*, 49-50.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-50, 137, 201. Also see Neil Miller, *Out of the Past: Gay and Lesbian History from 1869 to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995). Miller implied similar roads had been traveled by Jews and gays once Hitler came to power. For example, he noted that both Jews and gays misread the writing on the wall—that is, they falsely believed Nazi policies would moderate once they took power.

<sup>67</sup> Victoria A. Brownworth, "Revisiting the Holocaust—*Walk the Night* by Robert C. Reinhart," *Lambda Book Report* 4 (1995), 23.

This point was one among many debated in 1993 at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's inaugural conference: "The Holocaust: The Known, the Unknown, the Disputed, and the Reexamined." Scholars from five continents, whose ages spanned three generations, were invited to participate. Two spoke about homosexual persecution during the Third Reich. Humboldt University professor Günter Grau and Rüdiger Lautmann produced two contrasting papers that highlighted the major debates and issues as they saw them. Grau's "Final Solution of the Homosexual Question?" tackled the issue of intent—that is, whether the Nazis *intended* and *instituted* a "gay Holocaust." Grau carefully debunked the notion of an organized and long-term program of annihilation by the Nazis by outlining three phases of gay persecution that slowly destroyed Weimar's comparatively liberal homosexual emancipation movement.<sup>68</sup> The first phase, from 1933 to 1935, included the closure of gay institutions and the Röhm purge which catalyzed an immense propaganda campaign against homosexuals. The second phase, from 1935 to the outbreak of war, witnessed increased convictions under §175 as well as the denunciation of several Catholic clerics. The final phase, which lasted until the defeat of Nazi Germany, was marked by an extension of physical terror, deportations to concentration camps under the guise of legality, and the institution of capital punishment and forced castration.<sup>69</sup> Grau expressed regret that the "gay Holocaust" debate overshadowed more important work on the gay experience during the Third Reich:

To date, long-term effects, that is entrenched prejudice and its ongoing expressions after 1945, have generally not been explored. Moreover, we do not know how surviving gay men—and the majority did survive—have psychologically overcome that period and what the consequences were for their sexual identity.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Grau, "Final Solution of the Homosexual Question?," 338-44.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 341.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 343.

Alternatively, Lautmann focused upon gays in Nazi concentration camps, arguing that only Jews were systematically murdered. Gays and other minorities were also victims of Nazism's racist ideology and were all similarly caught in the widely cast net to rid Germany of undesirables.<sup>71</sup> Lautmann also recalled how he intended to entitle his piece "Homocaust" as a reasonable middle ground in the "gay Holocaust" conflict.<sup>72</sup>

In 1996, researcher Wolfgang Röhl emphatically argued that the "declared goal of the Nazis" was the eradication of all homosexuals. Like Grau, Röhl identified three stages in the Nazi regime's persecution of homosexuals, each one escalating in intensification to the point of physical extermination.<sup>73</sup> The final stage, in Röhl's view, was the detention of previously convicted homosexuals in Nazi concentration camps and "the application there of a strategy of the 'extermination of homosexuals through work' and 'shooting while trying to escape.'" Homosexuals who wound up in these camps received "the most brutal and inhumane" treatment compared to other inmates.<sup>74</sup> The goal of the Nazi administrators was to isolate, re-educate, and exterminate gays. Homosexuals in concentration camps were given the "toughest work details"; became "the preferred objects of medical experiments;" and were "subject to murderous activities by the SS."<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Lautmann, "The Pink Triangle: Homosexuals as 'Enemies of the State,'" 345-57.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 345.

<sup>73</sup> Röhl, in fact, identified the same three stages as Grau, differing only in emphasis such as the Reich Office for the Combating of Homosexuality and Abortion's central role in co-coordinating "the official persecution of homosexuals and their central registration" during the second stage of Nazism's anti-homosexual campaign. Röhl, "Homosexual Inmates," 9.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 12, 16.

Warren Blumenfeld commented on the ways in which Nazi propaganda paralleled and linked Jewish racial characteristics with the homosexual's behavioural traits. Both Jews and gays were portrayed as feminine, corrupters of youth, money-lenders, and sexual deviants.<sup>76</sup> Blumenfeld concluded that "gay Holocaust" history, in fact, suffered from a lack of comparison between the two minorities. More comparative history was needed to explore the "stunning connections between historical representations and oppressions" of both Jews and gays.<sup>77</sup>

Criticism mounted, however, that there had been far too much comparison already. Scott Lively echoed Holocaust exclusivists of the early 1980s, writing that he was sick of "the self-serving distortion of Nazi history" advanced by "gay Holocaust revisionists." He contrasted the "fraction of one percent of German homosexuals [who] were jailed" with "the majority" of European Jews who were murdered. While he conceded that "some" gay men were interned in "work camps," homosexuals in general "were never rounded up and herded into ghettos, beaten on the streets or targeted for extermination." He stressed that homosexuality was a legitimate sex crime under German law whereas Jews were innocent—they were not guilty of breaking any laws. Lively believed this history exploited the Holocaust and was part of a "gay victim" strategy to manipulate public sympathies.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Warren J. Blumenfeld, "History/Hysteria: Parallel Representations of Jews and Gays, Lesbians, and Bisexuals," in *Queer Studies: A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Anthology*, eds. B. Beemyn and M. Eliason (New York: New York U. Press, 1996), 152, 154-55, 157.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>78</sup> Scott Lively, "Gays weren't Nazi 'victims,'" *Capital Times* (18 April 1996), A15.

Although hostile views such as Lively's remained marginal, some supporters of this interpretation of gay history nevertheless shared his alarm regarding the casual overstatements implicit in this. While Steve Hogan and Lee Hudson believed the persecutions of gays, Jews, and gypsies were similarly motivated, they stopped short of accepting a "gay Holocaust." They recognized that gay males were "herded" into concentration camps, but clearly differentiated their fate from that of Jews and gypsies. Unless gay men were Jewish, Sinti or Roma, they were never sent to purely extermination camps like Auschwitz. Furthermore, Hogan and Hudson asserted that while the Nazi persecution of homosexuals was probably the best known 20<sup>th</sup> century example of gay oppression, it was by no means the most lethal. The authors reserved this distinction for Stalin's forced labour camps.<sup>79</sup>

Despite variations in emphasis, "gay Holocaust" history headed into the new millenium with many of its original arguments and assumptions intact. For example, although Lautmann's 1977 estimate of between 5,000 and 15,000 homosexual victims was accepted as generally accurate, the lack of accurate figures proved difficult to overcome. Richard Plant explained that penal record keeping was concerned with no more than a prisoner's name, age, and reason for detention.<sup>80</sup> Consequently, whenever the "specter of the gay Holocaust is evoked, the numbers are given in the tens of thousands."<sup>81</sup> In the early 1980s, Frank Rector unequivocally put the number of gay

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<sup>79</sup> Steve Hogan and Lee Hudson, *Completely Queer: The Gay and Lesbian Encyclopedia* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998), 412-14.

<sup>80</sup> Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 153.

<sup>81</sup> Stuart Marshall, "The Contemporary Political Use of Gay History: The Third Reich," in *How Do I Look? Queer Film and Video*, ed. Bad Object-Choices (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), 93.

fatalities at no less than 500,000, while Reinhart's *Walk the Night* stated that "tens of thousands of gays" died in concentration camps.<sup>82</sup> Oftentimes, this inflation of numbers served the political interests of the broader gay rights movement. After all, 15,000 did not deliver the same emotional punch of 75,000, 100,000, or 500,000.

### **The History of the Nazi Persecution of Lesbians—"The Queer Melting Pot"**

Historical distortions have also exaggerated the extent to which lesbians were persecuted in Nazi Germany. In the 1970s, the experiences of lesbians under the swastika were included within the history of gay men. Erik Jensen wrote that while this changed somewhat in the 1980s—that is, some lesbians claimed a separate memory of Nazi persecution—the writing of a lesbian "*herstory*" paralleled that of gay men with only subtle variations.<sup>83</sup>

Critics claimed that lesbians lost their autonomy within a so-called "queer melting pot" approach to history and that the pink triangle should be abandoned as a symbol of gay liberation because lesbians were never marked by it. Pink was specifically chosen to emasculate gay men while emphasizing their "femaleness." R. Amy Elman wrote, for example, that the inclusion of lesbian oppression within the pink triangle's symbolism ran "dangerously close to the denial of history."<sup>84</sup> Similarly, lesbian relationships were not outlawed under §175. Nazi theory held that females exhibited more emotional and affectionate friendships, making it difficult to distinguish permissible from forbidden behaviour. Nazi administrators feared that a woman's natural affection might be confused

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<sup>82</sup> Rector, *The Nazi Extermination*, 113, 116; and Reinhart, *Walk the Night*, 6.

<sup>83</sup> Jensen, "The Pink Triangle," 345.

<sup>84</sup> R. Amy Elman, "Triangles and Tribulations: The Politics of Nazi Symbols," *Journal of Homosexuality* 30 (1996), 1-6.

as lesbianism which would result in numerous denunciations, tying up the judicial system. Secondly, it was believed that if a woman succumbed to lesbianism she would not withdraw thereafter from heterosexual liaisons. That is, homosexual women were still capable of performing their reproductive responsibilities. Thirdly, female homosexuality posed no risk to society or to the regime's leadership structure as women were denied access to state institutions and were not allowed to participate in politics.<sup>85</sup>

In the 1990s, Claudia Schoppmann and Christa Schikorra spearheaded the writing of the history of lesbian persecution under Nazism.<sup>86</sup> They jointly agreed that no systematic oppression of lesbians occurred, certainly nothing comparable to that of male homosexuals. Schikorra examined over 2,000 files pertaining to female black triangle prisoners from Ravensbrück and found only four that mentioned lesbianism. Even when the motive for arrest was "lesbianism," women were not issued a pink triangle, which was reserved exclusively for men, but instead a red triangle, the symbol of political prisoners, or a black triangle, given to so-called "anti-socials."<sup>87</sup> Schoppmann's regret that "hardly any relevant files and documents still exist" partially explained why the history of

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<sup>85</sup> See "Discussions Concerning the Persecution of Lesbians," in *Hidden Holocaust?*, 71-84; Claudia Schoppmann, *Days of Masquerade: Life Stories of Lesbians during the Third Reich* (New York: Columbia U. Press, 1996); and Schoppmann, "National Socialist Policies towards Female Homosexuality," in *Gender Relations in German History: Power, Agency and Experience from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. L. Abrams and E. Harvey (Durham: Duke U. Press, 1997), 177-87.

<sup>86</sup> Jensen, "The Pink Triangle," 345.

<sup>87</sup> "Anti-social," or "asocial" was a Nazi designation for people exhibiting traits that conflicted with the "Aryan norm." The *Volks-Brockhaus* encyclopedia of 1939 defined these individuals as "indifferent to the community." Prostitutes, vagrants, the "work-shy", and "habitual" criminals are just a few examples that fell into this category. See Elman, "Triangles and Tribulations," 1-6; and Schoppmann, *Days of Masquerade*, 1.



lesbians in Nazi Germany was even less addressed within an already underwritten history.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Schoppmann, *Days of Masquerade*, 2.

## CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS

Interest in Nazism and its leaders has not waned since that movement rose to political prominence in the 1920s. The amount of material available on Nazism is so immense that experts themselves have difficulty keeping up on every new publication. And as Third Reich and Holocaust university seminars increase in popularity with each passing year, students of modern German history “are frequently unable to assimilate the complex historiography of Nazism and to follow interpretational controversies.”<sup>1</sup> What has occurred since 1945, moreover, is an interesting scenario in which foreign historians participate equally with native Germans in researching and writing Germany’s past.

William L. Shirer, for instance, was an American journalist who became well-known for his broadcasts from Berlin for CBS throughout the 1930s. It was, however, his *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, first published in 1960, that made him the foremost international expert on Hitler’s Germany.<sup>2</sup> Adapted into a miniseries for ABC in 1966, this 1,000-plus page book remains in print today and is still a big seller. Similarly, British historian Alan Bullock’s *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* in 1952 arguably surpassed numerous German-language biographies of the *Führer* until another English contribution, Sir Ian Kershaw’s two-volume *Hitler*, was published in the late 1990s.<sup>3</sup> And Richard J. Evans’s trilogy on the Third Reich will likely become *the* historical survey of Hitler’s Germany

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (London: Arnold, 2000), 3.

<sup>2</sup> William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1960).

<sup>3</sup> Alan Bullock, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* (New York: Harper, 1952); Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889-1936: Hubris*; and Kershaw, *Hitler, 1937-45: Nemesis* (London: W.W. Norton, 2000).

once completed.<sup>4</sup> As Kershaw rightly points out, it is “the very detachment (with correspondingly different perspective) of foreign historians both from the burden of mastering the past and from the intellectual currents of German society which has provided the springboard for fresh impulses and new methods.”<sup>5</sup>

This perspective suggests that the dominance and influence of American writing on the Nazi persecution of homosexuals should not be altogether surprising. It was the broadcast in Germany of NBC’s *Holocaust* miniseries in 1978 that, arguably, “shattered thirty years of German silence on their wartime crimes.” In a similar sense, Martin Sherman’s *Bent*, debuting in Anglo-American theatres in 1979, introduced “gay Holocaust” history to the mainstream.<sup>6</sup>

Specifically in the case of gay rights, German homosexuals often took their lead from the American movement. “Hans,” of the *Homosexuelle Aktions-Gruppe Hamburg*, spoke at length during his interview with *Christopher Street*’s Barry Mehler on the American influence which he observed had started to affect the German movement after the 1969 Stonewall riots.<sup>7</sup> When asked about the situation in Europe generally, Hans replied:

In general one can say that the European gay movement is coming out more and more. What we need are national and international coordinating groups, so that we can exchange information more effectively and work together more closely. I am confident that this will happen. We especially need better contact with the

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<sup>4</sup> The first two volumes are already available. Richard J. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich* (New York: Penguin Press, 2003) and Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*.

<sup>5</sup> Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship*, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), 213.

<sup>7</sup> The Stonewall riots were a series of conflicts between homosexuals and New York police officers that began on 27 June 1969 after police raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in Greenwich Village.

movement in America. We in Europe draw strength from the American gay movement, which is the strongest in the world. The American gay movement is a tremendous inspiration to us. We can learn from your victories and defeats. And I think you can learn from us. It is very important to maintain close ties.<sup>8</sup>

It is telling that Germany's main annual event, equivalent to North America's gay pride parade, is called "Christopher Street Day" after the Greenwich Village street where the Stonewall riots took place. Just as the Jewish/homosexual framework became a popular way for American gays to view past persecution, it was only a matter of time before German homosexuals would begin discussing this method's appropriateness if not actually employing it themselves. However, just as this comparison impeded attempts to examine historically the gay experience in the Third Reich, it also provided a problem for gay Germans confronting a conflicting identity as both perpetrator and victim.<sup>9</sup>

### **"Through the Eyes of our Nazi Persecutors"**

Some German homosexuals had indeed been enthusiastic Nazi supporters, at least before 1933. "Karl," a former pharmacist, admitted to voting for Hitler when interviewed by Jürgen Lemke, a professor of economics at the Berlin Technical University, in East Germany in 1984. "When the whole dilemma became more comprehensible after the war, I tried to face the question of my own complicity," he said. After all, "you're there, on a list of the guilty, even if only at the bottom of it. Why didn't we homophiles put up more of a fight?"<sup>10</sup> Similarly, in 1989, several gay Germans expressed a mixture of remorse and guilt after visiting Auschwitz. One man said:

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<sup>8</sup> Mehler, "In Neo-Nazi Germany," 67.

<sup>9</sup> Jensen, "The Pink Triangle," 342-43.

<sup>10</sup> "Karl," "This is my young friend; we're in love," in *Gay Voices from East Germany*, 31.

I thought I came here as a member of the victimized group from that period. But I am also German. I also belong to those people who were the former perpetrators. How should I handle this schizophrenia?<sup>11</sup>

Another German revealed a different but similar feeling after watching an American play in 1992 about gay concentration camp prisoners. Erik Jensen summarized the experience:

During the post performance discussion, he bristled at American audience members' generalizations about the German national character and what he saw as their arrogant refusal to examine their country's own troubled past. He commented, "I was proud as a German to sit in on this discussion. Would the Americans deal with the problems of the Ku-Klux-Klan in exactly the same way as they command us Germans in our dealings with the Nazis?" In this particular situation, the man clearly, and resentfully, identified first as a German, whose Nazi legacy the Americans apparently painted with a broad brush, rather than as a gay man, with whose victimized legacy the Americans seemed to sympathize.<sup>12</sup>

For Jensen, this "schizophrenia" suggests the need for a bifurcated memory for German gays. The Jewish/homosexual comparison may address the needs of American gays but it does not reconcile two conflicting German identities. Jensen therefore proposes that one strand be "oriented toward the gay community that challenges the tropes and exaggerations that have circulated during the past thirty years, and another strand oriented toward non-gays that reminds the public of the historical consequences of intolerance toward sexual minorities."<sup>13</sup>

Despite the problems for academia and for German identity associated with the continued use of a Jewish/homosexual framework, many homosexuals, both German and American, continue to rely upon it as a useful explanatory tool for understanding their past. For gay men from the 1970s to the present, the mistaken belief that the Nazis had exterminated "hundreds of thousands" of homosexuals filled an enormous gap in their

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<sup>11</sup> Jensen, "The Pink Triangle," 343; also Steakley, "Selbstkritische Gedanken," 60.

<sup>12</sup> Jensen, "The Pink Triangle," 343.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 349.

collective history. Stuart Marshall writes that “this mythical genocide of homosexuals provided us with a group identity similar to that of the Jews. The pink triangle expressed our commonality as victims; we could recognize our community through the eyes of our Nazi persecutors.”<sup>14</sup> Marshall accepts these historical distortions as fulfilling the broader movement’s need for points of identification, be they imaginary or otherwise.<sup>15</sup> Taking issue with this, Kai Hammermeister supports “gay Holocaust” history as a commemoration of gay suffering inflicted by the Nazis. For Hammermeister, a universally accepted “gay Holocaust” history means the victory of gay pride, dignity, self-affirmation, and survival over suffering and self-pity.<sup>16</sup>

Literary critic Gregory Woods’s 1998 essay on the pink triangle criticizes the “casually overstated” notion of a “homosexual Holocaust” advanced by gay liberationists. While Woods concedes that homosexuals were not included in the “final solution,” he neither dismisses the history as trivial nor shies away from broadly including gays within Holocaust studies. For Woods, no event prior to the AIDS epidemic so clearly devastated the gay community as the Holocaust.<sup>17</sup> The complete reversal in social conditions for German homosexuals following 1933 had a lasting, universal impact upon gays that continues to the present. Woods also implies that the inclusion of gays within Holocaust literature contains a deeper, sociological significance. The distortion of historical “truths” in this conflation is acceptable when weighed against the advancement of homosexual rights and the promotion of a shared historical identity—that is, a universal interpretation

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<sup>14</sup> Marshall, “The Contemporary Political Use of Gay History,” 85.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>16</sup> Hammermeister, “Inventing History,” 18-26.

<sup>17</sup> Gregory Woods, *A History of Gay Literature* (New Haven: Yale U. Press, 1998), 247.

of events and experiences. In the United States, the conservative backlash against homosexual rights from the late-1970s onwards pushed gay historians to rely on the Jewish/homosexual paradigm. In Germany, continued legal restrictions and the government's failure to apologize for the treatment of homosexuals under Nazi rule similarly justified the use of comparative suffering. For the homosexual minority, the Nazi period continued to exercise its jurisdiction over them.<sup>18</sup>

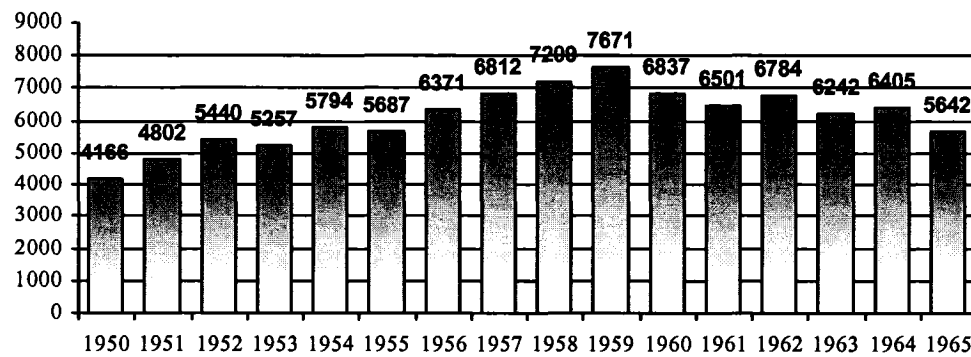
### **Post-war Germany and Homosexuality**

On 10 May 1957, the West German Federal Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe reviewed the constitutionality of the Nazi version of §175 after two men challenged the law, claiming that it was part of the National Socialist system and therefore invalid in the Federal Republic. The presiding judges upheld the law and based their conclusions upon the “healthy instincts” of Germans. Finding that the law contained nothing specifically National Socialist, they observed that German anti-homosexual legislation had a long tradition and it was in the “public’s best interest” to maintain it.<sup>19</sup> In 1960, the validity of §175 was challenged before the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg which confirmed the state’s right to infringe on its citizens’ lives for the protection of health and morality. Between 1950 and 1965, 97,620 men were arrested in West Germany for violating §175. These statistics are broken down in years in Figure 2:

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<sup>18</sup> Stümke, *Homosexuelle in Deutschland*, 132.

<sup>19</sup> Schulz, *Paragraph 175*, 13, 16-17; also Stümke, *Homosexuelle in Deutschland*, 132-35.

FIGURE 2: Number of homosexual men arrested under §175 (in years).<sup>20</sup>

Some of these men had worn the pink triangle in a Nazi concentration camp and were again sentenced to imprisonment following their “liberation.” The Nazi alterations to §175 remained law until 1969 in West Germany when homosexual acts between consenting adults over 21 years of age were legalized. By contrast, East Germany abolished §175 entirely but replaced it with §151 in 1967 to allow homosexual acts between two people over 18.

In 1985, President Richard von Weizsäcker reminded West Germans of gay victimization under the swastika.<sup>21</sup> Germany finally removed §175 from its law books in 1994 following reunification, the same year that an actual pink triangle worn by a camp prisoner was recovered. Josef Kohout, prisoner number 1896 and a gay survivor of the Flossenbürg concentration camp, had kept the scrap of cloth hidden in a box in Vienna after the war. When he died in 1994, his partner took the Nazi symbol to the Dutch

<sup>20</sup> This graph is based upon statistical material compiled from two tables in Stümke, *Homosexuelle in Deutschland*, 147.

<sup>21</sup> Bill Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past: United Germany and the Legacy of the Past* (London: Routledge, 2002), 108.



historian Klaus Müller, a consultant for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington where it is currently displayed.<sup>22</sup>

Gay activists throughout the 1980s and '90s pressed for recognition at Holocaust memorials with mixed success. The first memorial to Hitler's gay victims was a plaque unveiled in Austria's Mauthausen concentration camp museum in 1984. Similar plaques were put up in Neuengamme the following year and at Sachsenhausen in 1991. However, the International Dachau Committee refused to allow a commemorative plaque to be mounted in 1986. It was only finally displayed in 1995. And the efforts of the Gay-Lesbian Archive in Hanover to put up a plaque at Bergen-Belsen have so far been denied on the grounds that the memorial there is reserved for national and ethnic groups.<sup>23</sup>

Gay activists were also petitioning the German government for reparations and an apology well into the late 1990s.<sup>24</sup> In 1996, Germans still tiptoed around the issue of how best to memorialize Nazism's gay victims when discussing the appropriateness of the pink triangle as a symbol of gay liberation.<sup>25</sup> Some, like Burkhard Jellonnek, believed the time ripe for formal apologies to gay men from the Nazi period along with those persecuted during the fledgling years of the West German state. He wished to see

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<sup>22</sup> David W. Dunlap, "Personalizing Nazis' Homosexual Victims," *New York Times* (26 June 1995), A1, B4; also, Dan Levy, "Gay Survivor Speaks Out, An Untold Story of the Holocaust," *San Francisco Chronicle* (30 March 1996), A1.

<sup>23</sup> Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past*, 35-36.

<sup>24</sup> Jason Bennetto, "Holocaust: Gay Activists Press for Germany Apology," *The Independent* [London] (1 November 1997), 12.

<sup>25</sup> Hans Scherer, "Rosa Winkel: Eine Berliner Diskussion über das Homosexuellen-Mahnmal," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (12 December 1996), 39.

reparations given to all men convicted under §175.<sup>26</sup> While the Federal Parliament's bill of 22 May 1998 annulled sentences based on "specifically National Socialist injustice," it did not allow for charges to be dropped completely against all homosexuals sentenced by Nazi courts.<sup>27</sup>

In 2000, the *Associated Press* announced that "Germany might apologize to Homosexuals." On 22 May, the governing Social Democratic and Green parties introduced a bill that acknowledged the Nazi persecution of homosexuals. They also asked the government to consider overturning all convictions that occurred under §175. Still some, like Eberhard Zastrau, a spokesman for the Lesbian and Gay Association of Germany, criticized the bill as not going far enough. Activists demanded to see §175 included in the list of Nazi laws that are "so criminal that convictions are automatically lifted," a gesture already accorded to Nazism's other victims—Jewish and non-Jewish alike.<sup>28</sup> By this time, it seemed to some Germans that the Nazis had been largely successful in their persecution of homosexuals and their destruction of the—comparatively—open homosexual subculture prior to 1933.<sup>29</sup> Germany finally apologized for the Nazi-era persecution of homosexuals in December 2000 and began considering proposals for compensation.

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<sup>26</sup> Burkhard Jellonnek, "Mit dem Naziparagraphen 175 wurden Schwule bis Ende der 60er Jahre verfolgt: Eine Rehabilitation ist überfällig," *Die Tageszeitung* (30 September 1996), 10.

<sup>27</sup> Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past*, xxi.

<sup>28</sup> Associated Press, "Germany Might Apologize to Homosexuals; Legislation would Annul Nazi-era Convictions of 50,000 Men for Being Gay," *The Commercial Appeal* (23 May 2000), A12.

<sup>29</sup> "Homosexuelle als NS-Staatsfeinde," *Die Tageszeitung* (2 September 2000), 7.

On 19 August 2001, *Die Tageszeitung* announced that homosexuals persecuted under National Socialism could finally apply for reparations. Victims who were forced to work in a concentration camp were eligible for up to 15,000 marks while others who were displaced could receive 5,000. Those subjected to forced castration or other medical experiments were likewise able to apply for compensation in the amount of 15,000 marks.<sup>30</sup>

### **Moving Beyond the “Concentration Camp Paradigm”**

After thirty years of “gay Holocaust” history and, finally, official German recognition of gays as Nazi victims, academics now tend to agree that the Nazi persecution of gays was different, both in kind and severity, from that of the Jews. Until very recently, the Jewish/homosexual comparative framework handicapped scholars from moving beyond the “concentration camp paradigm.”<sup>31</sup> After all, for gay rights activists more interested in making a political point than in historical “truth,” tenuous conclusions are easy to reach when Nazi propaganda is taken at face value. There is, for example, Nazi propaganda that *does* link Jewish and homosexual racial characteristics with one another. A 31 October 1928 article of the *Völkischer Beobachter* conflated Marxism and pederasty with Jewish “contamination.”<sup>32</sup> Gay rights activists in Weimar could therefore be demonized as much for religious or leftist political beliefs as for their sexuality. This was especially the case when attacking and denouncing Magnus Hirschfeld’s efforts.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> “Ausgleich für Rosa Winkel; Homosexuelle NS-Opfer können bis zum 31. Dezember Entschädigung bei der IOM beantragen,” *Die Tageszeitung* (19 August 2001), 8.

<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth D. Heineman, “Sexuality and Nazism: The Doubly Unspeakable?” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11 (2002), 36.

<sup>32</sup> Jellonnek, *Homosexuelle unter dem Hakenkreuz*, 55.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

However, by shedding the restrictions imposed by an inappropriate comparison, new studies reveal a greater range of homosexual experience during the Third Reich than previous histories suggested.

Burkhard Jellonnek, for instance, analyzes regional variations in the persecution of homosexuals. At the local level, he finds stark differences between the implementation of anti-Semitic and anti-gay policies. Whereas the Nazi regime had sought Jews everywhere—that is, in major cities, in small towns, in the countryside—homosexuals had been targeted more in urban areas where well-developed gay subcultures existed. Jellonnek focuses on the Palatinate rural region, then on Würzburg, an urban setting, and finally on Düsseldorf to detail the means of persecution rather than the experience of those persecuted. No evidence suggests that the Nazis aimed to round up and murder every homosexual. There was no comparable effort to organize “gay ghettos” or initiate a “gay Holocaust.”<sup>34</sup>

Recent scholarship suggests that key Nazi officials, including Hitler, were “simply less obsessed with homosexuals than with Jews.”<sup>35</sup> Richard Plant found no overt evidence of homophobic tendencies—homophobia as expressed through personal or public pronouncements—among General Wilhelm Keitel of the army, navy Admirals Erich Raeder or Karl Dönitz, or *Reichsmarschall* Hermann Göring.<sup>36</sup> Alfred Rosenberg, author of *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts* and a leading Nazi theorist, spoke of the “reprehensibility” of homosexuality but not of specific countermeasures.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 31-36, 176-326; also Heineman, “Sexuality and Nazism, 36.

<sup>35</sup> Heineman, “Sexuality and Nazism,” 35.

<sup>36</sup> Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 143.

<sup>37</sup> Schoppmann, *Days of Masquerade*, 8.

*Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler remains the exception. Few writers have disagreed with James Steakley's initial argument that no Nazi deserved the reputation as the "most fanatically anti-homosexual" Party leader more than Himmler.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, Himmler's rhetoric figures prominently in "gay Holocaust" historiography as proof that homophobia was central to National Socialism. Statements such as "we must exterminate these people root and branch" and Himmler's nostalgia for the ancient Teutonic practice of drowning homosexuals in bogs appear again and again in this literature. His "speeches and writings dealt more obsessively with homosexuality than did those of any other Nazi leader, and his comments were broadly consistent in their sharp condemnation of homosexuality," finds Geoffrey Giles.<sup>39</sup>

The case that Nazism called for and implemented a program of homosexual annihilation often rests on a tenuous connection between Himmler's homophobic rants and the experience of individually murdered homosexuals. But while homophobic rants were hardly uncommon for Himmler, they never directly implied that he entertained fantasies of and then instituted gay genocide. Peter Padfield's biography of Himmler explored the *Reichsführer-SS*'s homophobia but never suggested that he was the architect of a "gay Holocaust."<sup>40</sup> Along this line, the discovery of homophobia in Himmler's youth would offer a rationale for his later actions. While traces of anti-Semitism emerge in Hitler's youth and are certainly evident in *Mein Kampf*, Himmler appears not to have been overtly homophobic early on. Upon analyzing the diaries of the young Himmler,

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<sup>38</sup> Steakley, *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement*, 111.

<sup>39</sup> Giles, "The Denial of Homosexuality," 257.

<sup>40</sup> Peter Padfield, *Himmler: Reichsführer-SS* (London: MacMillan, 1990).

American historians Werner T. Angress and Bradley F. Smith found that the early Himmler was “to all appearances a normal human being.”<sup>41</sup>

Not only do new studies reveal a greater range of homosexual experience during the Third Reich, but they also demonstrate that no singular motivation existed behind the Nazi persecution of gay men. The Dutch historian Harry Oosterhuis, for example, maintains that anti-homosexual policies justified on the basis of population policies—that is, the Nazis feared the spread of homosexuality because it would remove a large number of German men from the reproductive pool—is neither entirely convincing nor complete. Rather, he offers an alternative rationale for the persecution of homosexuals, arguing that the tension between homoeroticism and homosexuality in the Nazi all-male state catalyzed homosexual persecution.<sup>42</sup> In contrast to Jewish victimization, Oosterhuis finds the persecution of homosexuals neither “wholesale nor systematic.” Anti-homosexual policies varied geographically and also the “intensity of persecution was characterized by local variation.” The Nazis were not aiming at the total extermination of all homosexuals.<sup>43</sup>

The *Journal of the History of Sexuality* published two articles in 2002 whose authors aimed to uncover the social experience of gays in Nazi Germany. By comparing and contrasting these articles, new discrepancies and cleavages within a history finally coming into its own are revealed. Geoffrey Giles’s research into homosexuality within the

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<sup>41</sup> Werner T. Angress and Bradley F. Smith, “Diaries of Heinrich Himmler’s Early Years,” *Journal of Modern History* 31 (1959), 222; and Peter Loewenberg, “The Unsuccessful Adolescence of Heinrich Himmler,” *American Historical Review* 76 (1971), 613.

<sup>42</sup> Oosterhuis, “Medicine, Male Bonding and Homosexuality,” 187-88, 204-05.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

SS paralleled Oosterhuis's conclusions. Giles maintained that the tension between homoeroticism and homosexuality, especially prevalent in the SS, made the issue of same-sex relationships a "high priority for the Nazi leadership" but finds no evidence of a "gay Holocaust."<sup>44</sup> He wrote that:

On the one hand, the [SS] leadership wanted to replicate within its own ranks the close male intimacy of the trenches of the First World War, something that only the shared dangers of front-line warfare could ever bring about. On the other hand, it shunned the soft, emotional, "feminine" underside of such relationships.<sup>45</sup>

In contrast, Stefan Micheler re-enforced the argument that the regime's obsession with boosting population growth necessitated the persecution of homosexuals.<sup>46</sup> Unlike Giles or Oosterhuis, Micheler failed to uncover any homoerotic versus homosexual tension in his examination of Nazi homophobic propaganda. This is not altogether surprising, as the Nazis certainly would have stripped all propaganda of any elements that could be misconstrued as homoerotic or homosexual. What Micheler did find was that anti-homosexual propaganda was based on existing stereotypes and prejudices.<sup>47</sup>

Both Giles and Micheler agree, however, on the notion of regional variation in the implementation and follow-through of the Nazis' anti-homosexual campaign. Giles found that despite Himmler's rhetoric, the actual disciplining of alleged homosexuals in the Nazi movement was far from uniform or consistent. Himmler had allowed the scaling back of police investigations into homosexual cases during the 1936 Berlin Olympics and, according to Giles, the unauthorized arrests of actors and artists was prohibited in 1937. Even after the official edict of 15 November 1941 prescribing the death penalty for

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<sup>44</sup> Giles, "The Denial of Homosexuality," 259-60.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>46</sup> Micheler, "Homophobic Propaganda," 96.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

SS and police members found guilty of homosexuality, as previously explored in chapter two, convicted men were only rarely and inconsistently executed.<sup>48</sup> “Beyond a doubt,” wrote Giles, “Nazi ideology and policies were hostile to homosexuality. Still, the record reveals a much more complex set of responses to homosexuality than the inflammatory rhetoric of Nazi leaders would indicate. Implementation of policies against homosexuals was neither consistent nor unfailingly rigorous.”<sup>49</sup> Micheler reasoned that inconsistencies in implementation likely arose from contradictory attitudes toward homosexuality in the medical profession and from jurisdictional conflicts between the police and legal apparatus when it came to homosexual offences.<sup>50</sup>

In a recent issue of *German History*, Giles explores these legal underpinnings. He argues that while historians have repeatedly written about the “horrific” treatment of gays by the police and SS, the actual legal framework behind it has been scantily addressed.<sup>51</sup> In this sense, the revision of §175 in June 1935 was not a “homophobic reflex” exercised on the first anniversary of the Röhm purge, but rather one part of an extensive overhaul of the entire criminal code.<sup>52</sup> Giles suggests that the campaign against homosexuals as it escalated following the legal changes had more to do with consensus-building among ordinary Germans than it was the realization of a hardcore ideological tenet. Presumably the majority of Germans would approve of “getting tough” with the immoral acts of

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<sup>48</sup> Giles, “The Denial of Homosexuality,” 257, 259, 266.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

<sup>50</sup> Micheler, “Homophobic Propaganda,” 97.

<sup>51</sup> Geoffrey J. Giles, “Legislating Homophobia in the Third Reich: The Radicalization of Prosecution against Homosexuality by the Legal Profession,” *German History* 23 (2005), 339.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 340.



homosexuals which, in turn, would bring support for further legal changes—changes with a much broader scope.<sup>53</sup>

Conflicting victim statements, such as those explored in chapter two, also complicate the notion that Nazi authorities attempted to round up every gay man. Both “Erich” and “Karl” interviewed by Jürgen Lemke in the early 1980s describe a system of brutality and systematic persecution of all gay men during the Third Reich. Yet, “Karl” himself readily admits his complicity in helping the Nazis seize power in 1933.<sup>54</sup> In contrast, “J.A.W.” was able to survive the period without drawing the attention of Nazi authorities. Even more damaging to the claims of “gay Holocaust” historians is his description of an active gay subculture during the 1930s wherein gay men could continue to engage in homosexual liaisons.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 352-53.

<sup>54</sup> “Erich,” “You won’t hear heroic tales about our kind,” 15-26; and “Karl,” “This is my young friend,” 27-36.

<sup>55</sup> “J.A.W.,” “The harlequin and the faun,” 180-92.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Although former concentration camp prisoners and guards early on revealed that gay men had been interned and marked with a pink triangle, research and writing on the Nazi persecution of homosexuals did not begin until almost thirty years after the defeat of Hitler's Germany. First, legal restrictions outlawing male homosexuality continued in force in both East and West Germany. Second, survivors of the concentration camps remained quiet about their experiences. Third, no openly homosexual press as it is understood today existed in either Germany or the United States that could have memorialized their persecution. Fourth, homosexuals may have simply wished to move on and forget about the Nazi period altogether. Fifth, gay men faced the continuing myth that homosexuality was linked with National Socialism—ideologically and through its members.

The situation changed beginning in the mid-1970s. German and American homosexuals began searching for a shared historical identity, one that crossed social and geographic boundaries. Many gays scrutinized the past for examples of persecution and coping strategies that could be applied to contemporary needs. What they found was that the phenomenon of the Holocaust best represented homophobic policies run amok. In the United States, a picture of how Hitlerian Germany had treated its gay minority emerged in which homosexuals understood the experience through the eyes of Jewish victims. Comparative questions were asked, especially in the wake of Richard Plant's 1977 article, and were quickly politicized by the broader gay rights movement, eventually evolving into "gay Holocaust" studies. German historians researching the fate of homosexuals during the Third Reich were eventually forced to engage this popularized "gay

Holocaust” history especially after the premiere of Martin Sherman’s *Bent* in 1979. By the 1980s, “gay Holocaust” historiography included everything from academic to amateur scholarship as well as activist writing, news columns, films, plays, fiction and other forms of reporting.

The notion of a “gay Holocaust” was criticized for trivializing the suffering of Nazi victims and engaging people in the crude “who had it worst” debate. Holocaust exclusivists argued that invoking the Holocaust to describe the experience of homosexuals in the Third Reich was an insult to Jews. Nevertheless, the tendency to view the Nazi persecution of gay men through a Jewish lens increased in the 1980s. The basic arguments supporting the idea of a “gay Holocaust” had been established early with James Steakley’s 1974 article, “Homosexuals and the Third Reich,” and remained intact for the next two decades. These arguments included exaggerated statistics regarding the number of gay fatalities; the determination that the most fanatically homophobic Nazi was *Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler; claims that gay concentration camp prisoners alongside Jews were lowest in the camp hierarchy; and the belief that the Third Reich had intended and instituted the systematic murder of Germany’s homosexual minority in much the same fashion as the “Final Solution” of the Jewish question was undertaken.

While these arguments formed the cornerstone of “gay Holocaust” studies in the United States, German historians initially avoided a comparative framework when researching the Nazi persecution of homosexuals. For example, Rüdiger Lautmann’s, Winfried Grixschat’s, and Egbert Schmidt’s 1977 article “Der rosa Winkel in den nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern” estimated that only 5,000 to 15,000 gay men had lost their lives in concentration camps and did not rely on a Jewish/homosexual

comparison. In 1981, Hans-Georg Stümke and Rudi Finkler, the next two Germans to write on the subject, also avoided a comparative approach.

Throughout the 1980s it was American writers who led the way in “gay Holocaust” studies and many Germans, writing in English, joined in. Both Gore Vidal and John Boswell encouraged the comparative approach because through it one might gain insights into the similarities and differences of intolerance generally. With the success of Frank Rector’s 1981 book, *Nazi Extermination of Homosexuals*, “gay Holocaust” studies broadened its audience while simultaneously raising the ire of Holocaust exclusivists. Five years later, Richard Plant’s *The Pink Triangle* took as its starting point the Jewish/homosexual comparison.

Unlike gay Americans, homosexual Germans wrestled with the duality of being both persecutor and persecuted. Many found it difficult to reconcile the fact that while some gays had languished in Nazi concentration camps, others had supported the regime. However, by 1993 German historians presenting papers at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s inaugural conference were forced to admit that “gay Holocaust” studies had evolved without much reliance upon historical scholarship and indeed had even informed it in some cases. Günter Grau regretted the “gay Holocaust” debate overshadowed more important work on the gay experience during the Third Reich.<sup>1</sup> Equating the victimization of homosexuals with that of Jews incorrectly implied the Nazis had a similar rationale behind their respective persecutions.

At present, new studies continue to emerge, informing academics and laymen that the gay experience during the Third Reich varied according to region and social status,

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<sup>1</sup> Grau, “Final Solution of the Homosexual Question?” 343.

among other factors. Historians such as Geoffrey Giles, Harry Oosterhuis, Stefan Micheler and Burkhard Jellonnek, to name a few, agree that Nazi anti-homosexual initiatives were not of the same sort as those implemented against the Jews. Nevertheless, the tendency to equate gay victimization with Jewish persecution continues.

### **By Contemplating the Holocaust . . .**

Logically, the framework equating Jews with homosexuals should have been abandoned as: more legal rights were afforded to German and American homosexuals; the German government acknowledged the Nazi persecution of gay men; and, ongoing historical research that disputes the main beliefs of “gay Holocaust” studies. Yet, this does not seem to have been the case.<sup>2</sup> In his 1997 article, “Inventing History: Toward a Gay Holocaust Literature,” Kai Hammermeister believed that such a body of writing was about to come into existence. While serious scholarship has tried to steer clear of the Jewish/homosexual paradigm, popular fiction and film dealing with the Nazi persecution of gays continue to portray the subject in relation to the better known Jewish Holocaust.<sup>3</sup> Gay Germans and Americans, likewise, still draw parallels between their contemporary experience and that of homosexuals during the Third Reich. Why, despite historical evidence disputing many central arguments of “gay Holocaust” history, does a comparative framework remain the popular method of viewing the past?

Several reasons explain why the Jewish/homosexual comparison remains a popular method of understanding gay history. First, the destruction of European Jewry during the

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<sup>2</sup> See Lawrence Birken, “Homosexuality and Totalitarianism,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 33 (1997), 1-16; and Leonard Pitts, “Shadow of the Holocaust? Gays Aren’t Sent to Extermination Camps, but Hatred of them has an Echo,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (5 May 2005), B7.

<sup>3</sup> In 1997, Martin Sherman’s *Bent* was adapted into a movie directed by Sean Mathias and starring Clive Owen, Ian McKellan, Mick Jagger, and Jude Law.

Third Reich is better documented. Publications on the extermination of Jews dramatically increased after Adolf Eichmann's 1961 trial in Jerusalem, the furor over Hannah Arendt's 1963 series of *New Yorker* articles on the trial, and NBC's April 1978 airing of the *Holocaust* miniseries. Gay Germans and Americans during this period had little to inform them about the homosexual experience during the Third Reich. If homosexual and Jewish persecution mirrored one another throughout history, as Richard Plant's 1977 article suggested, then it became reasonable to assume that this had also been the case in Hitler's Germany. The historical "gaps" in gay history could be filled by borrowing evidence from the Jewish experience.

Second, this comparison had the potential of bringing gay history to the attention of the heterosexual majority by invoking an experience that is sympathetically acknowledged and widely recognized as a tragedy—a monstrous act never to be repeated. This is a justifiable strategy for many gay activists in view of the anti-homosexual social contexts in both Germany and the US. Dorte Seifert writes that this identification may also help overcome "the shame that still prevails among many homosexual survivors of Nazi persecution, and the embarrassment with which the fate of homosexuals in Nazi Germany is sometimes addressed."<sup>4</sup> Indeed, for Jewish victims of Nazism the term "Holocaust survivor" has become an "honourific." Peter Novick finds in the American context that "survivors are thought of and customarily described as exemplars of courage, fortitude, and wisdom derived from their suffering."<sup>5</sup>

Third, this comparison directly challenges the right of Jews to claim permanent possession of what Novick has crudely termed the "gold medal in the Victimization

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<sup>4</sup> Seifert, "Between Silence and License," 120-21.

<sup>5</sup> Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 68.

Olympics.”<sup>6</sup> It is a reasonable speculation that some gay activists invoked the Holocaust to challenge many Jewish and non-Jewish exclusivists of the Holocaust. The intense reaction of Susan Jacoby described in chapter three to Frank Rector’s *Nazi Extermination of Homosexuals* is a perfect example. I am not suggesting that Rector intentionally sought to provoke Jacoby, but their exchange in the *New York Times* opinion pages no doubt helped bring the issue of gay persecution to a wider audience.

I do not believe, however, that these reasons provide a full explanation. They too easily imply a single gay memory of Nazi persecution and similar motivations for employing this comparison regardless of nationality. How gay Germans and Americans have viewed their past reflects different political, social and national experiences. As I have argued, this is a major reason why “gay Holocaust” studies flourished first in the United States before coming to inform German research. Americans were separated geographically and emotionally from the land of the perpetrators and could comfortably focus upon victimization. An observation borrowed and adapted from Novick’s commentary regarding the Holocaust’s lessons accounts for different national backgrounds and completes the explanation.<sup>7</sup> Gay Germans and Americans searching for a usable past in the 1970s were motivated by different values and concerns. Yet, both communities found that by contemplating the Holocaust contemporary lessons and emancipatory strategies could be learned. By grounding their past in the Holocaust, German and American homosexuals dramatically illustrated the result of homophobic attitudes if taken to their logical conclusion in any society. Since “gay Holocaust” history emerged in the politicized climate of gay liberation it will always remain as the most

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

viable explanatory model as long as the social conditions from which it had originally sprung still exist.

The tendency in the historiography to parallel the Nazi persecution of Jews and homosexuals has been observed by other historians as thoroughly detailed in chapters one through four. Recall the observation by professors Jellonnek and Lautmann that this debate stretches like a “red thread” through every study. While that is true, no full-length study has been devoted to this phenomenon nor to the historiographical threat posed by an overused comparative framework until now. Remember that one goal of this thesis was to offer a more balanced history. One way to accomplish this is to highlight the very “unbalanced” manner in which this history of gay men during the Third Reich has been written by meticulously scrutinizing the Jewish/homosexual methodology and revealing its pitfalls. Obviously, I am not suggesting that all the histories discussed herein are “unbalanced.” Rather, I have argued that the employment of the Holocaust by some German and American gay activists as a means to construct a shared historical memory marred attempts to examine historically the fate of gay men in Hitler’s Germany, creating a distorted narrative whereby gay and Jewish history runs parallel to one another.



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