

# Finding the 'other Germany': Analysing the contested legacy of resistance to Nazism from within the Third Reich

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## Abstract

Hailing from long before the rise of the Third Reich, the concept of a so-called 'other Germany' is increasingly used to describe acts of resistance against Nazism undertaken by German individuals. Yet among the tussle of political agendas, a pendulum-swinging change in resistance historiography, and the rise of postwar mythology, the memory and legacy of such resistance has remained contested and incomplete. This paper distinguishes the common threads which link the fractured resistance landscape into one cohesive 'other Germany', demonstrating how acts of German resistance—irrespective of their limited effectiveness—maintained a moral and sociocultural legacy which prevailed well after the Second World War and the fall of the Third Reich.

By evaluating the various categorisations by which 'resistance' has been understood, the paper first utilises historiographical discourse to devise a multifaceted classification framework. When applied to historical examples, the framework assists in constructing a cohesive picture of German resistance. The second section pinpoints the true legacy of German resistance, accounting for the limited effectiveness of such efforts in light of the obstacles faced by resisters. Incorporating historiographical analysis, it pinpoints how the 'other Germany' was a tangible reality which remained faithful to the nation's prewar moral tradition, and served a valuable role in preserving Germany's non-Nazi national identity during the postwar era.

## Introduction

The concept of *Das andere Deutschland*—the 'other Germany'—spans far back to the time and works of German philosophical greats such as Goethe, Kant, Schiller, and Heine. Its origins are rooted in a time where intellectual debate distinguished German idealism as belonging to an 'other' Germany, where national identity was not hallmarked by Prussian militarism and barbarity.<sup>1</sup> Acquiring a new meaning in the twentieth century, the concept was widely popularised by West German Chancellor and Nobel Laureate Willy Brandt. A resolute opponent of Nazism since adolescence, Brandt had been pursued by the Gestapo, deprived of his citizenship, and denounced by communists.<sup>2</sup> Yet even from exile, he still proclaimed: 'I never renounced what I regarded as my duty towards the other Germany, the real Germany. Hitler had to be defeated so that Germany might live'.<sup>3</sup> In a life encompassing the defeat of his German Fatherland in two world wars, Brandt never lost sight of this 'other Germany', untainted by Nazi rhetoric and characterised by peace and tolerance. This concept has become increasingly synonymous with all acts of resistance against Nazism within Germany under the Third Reich; however, such an idealistic conceptualisation is ripe for contention. Historiographical debates have contested how to define and categorise various forms of resistance, intensely debating their nature,

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew D'Auria, *Visions and ideas of Europe during the First World War* (London: Routledge, 2019), 82.

<sup>2</sup> Willy Brandt, *In exile: Essays, reflections, and letters, 1933–1947* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 264.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

extent, and effectiveness.<sup>4</sup> Here, a myriad of questions arise. Was the concept of an ‘other Germany’ the mere product of postwar mythology, perpetuated to address guilt in the tussle of East and West German agendas? Moreover, was this preserved national identity a tangible reality; if so, considering its effectiveness, what legacy does it retain?

Ultimately, this paper will distinguish the common threads which link the fractured resistance landscape into one cohesive ‘other Germany’, demonstrating how acts of German resistance under the Third Reich retain a key moral and sociocultural legacy, irrespective of their limited effectiveness. As the unique context of Nazi Germany ensured there was no coherent resistance movement, this article applies a multifaceted classification framework to historical examples, inspired by the various categorisations and typologies through which ‘resistance’ has been understood. Through this method, a cohesive picture can be formed, encapsulating dissent and civil resistance, more violent acts of sabotage, and efforts to liberate the persecuted. Moreover, this paper will highlight how the legacy of German resistance is far greater than strictly ‘physical outcomes’ such as the elimination of tactical targets, evacuation of oppressed individuals, or destruction of an entire regime. It will explore how the resistance retains an important moral and sociocultural legacy, overcoming the clamour of postwar mythology and political agendas. Overall, this paper will demonstrate how the ‘other Germany’ was a reality which lived on in the sacrifice of the few, preserving the values, morals, and national identity of Germany threatened by the Third Reich.

## Constructing a cohesive picture of German resistance

As resistance undertaken by German nationals is often overlooked, it is imperative to firstly acknowledge that the unique context surrounding such acts of resistance differed significantly to similar efforts observed in other, forcibly Nazi-occupied nations. Any efforts undertaken by German citizens repudiated the state doctrine by which their country functioned; as a result, resistors essentially operated against fellow citizens, committing high treason to act in accordance with personal beliefs.<sup>5</sup> So central to Nazism was *Gleichschaltung*, or ‘social coordination’, that even the most private forms of noncompliance carried the potential for grave consequences.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the phrase ‘German resistance’ cannot be applied in a manner analogous to the coordinated movements witnessed in other occupied nations, as there was no united resistance movement within the Third Reich. As such, categorical frameworks are key to understanding how isolated efforts can be linked through their methods and motivations, assisting in the search for a tangible ‘other Germany’.

### Categorisations and typologies

Definitions of resistance largely reflect an organised movement, prompting imagery of a mass conspiracy or coup d’état. The absence of a singular, cohesive movement has prompted scholars to debate what methods, goals, or efforts constituted ‘resistance’.<sup>7</sup> Labels and typologies have played a critical part in the debate, with the German term *Widerstand*—simply, ‘resistance’—emerging in the late 1960s as the key label for all forms of resistance against Nazism from within the Third Reich.<sup>8</sup> Historians soon became preoccupied with *Alltagsgeschichte*, or the history of everyday life. Consequently, the ‘Bavaria Project’ by the Institute of Contemporary History instigated research into

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<sup>4</sup> Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi dictatorship: Problems and perspectives of interpretation* (London: Arnold Press, 2000), 183–184.

<sup>5</sup> Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand, ‘German Resistance Memorial Centre: 1933–1945’, 2016, [www.gdw-berlin.de/en/site\\_of\\_remembrance/1933\\_to\\_1945/](http://www.gdw-berlin.de/en/site_of_remembrance/1933_to_1945/).

<sup>6</sup> Yale Law School Lillian Goldman Library, ‘Nazi conspiracy and aggression: Means used by the Nazi conspirators in gaining control of the German state’, 2020, [avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/chap\\_07.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/chap_07.asp).

<sup>7</sup> Leonidas Hill, ‘Towards a new history of German resistance to Hitler’, *Central European History* 14, no. 4 (1981): 369–399, [www.jstor.org/stable/4545942](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4545942).

<sup>8</sup> Danny Orbach, ‘Criticism reconsidered: German resistance to Hitler in critical German scholarship’, *Journal of Military History* 75, no. 2 (2011): 565–590, [scholar.harvard.edu/dannyorbach/criticism-reconsidered-german-resistance-hitler-critical-german-scholarship](http://scholar.harvard.edu/dannyorbach/criticism-reconsidered-german-resistance-hitler-critical-german-scholarship).

how individuals resisted through everyday actions; for instance, refusing to give the Nazi salute. The project's first director, Peter Hüttenberger, defined *Widerstand* as encompassing 'every effort to resist the claim of total domination, no matter how minor'.<sup>9</sup> The second director, Martin Broszat, opposed such an extreme typology, acknowledging that not every action rejecting the Nazi regime's total claims should be considered a form of *Widerstand*. Instead, he devised the concept of *Resistenz*, meaning 'immunity', whereby certain sections of German society maintained their pre-1933 values without fundamentally confronting Nazism.<sup>10</sup> The concept was criticised by many, including the German historian Klaus-Jürgen Müller, who argued that the term *Widerstand* should apply only to those with a 'will to wholly overcome the system'.<sup>11</sup> However, as noted by Hans Mommsen, through this concept 'even those who fought only for the rights of workers ... or as a powerless protest daubed slogans on walls at night-time ... all belonged to the resistance'.<sup>12</sup> Mommsen cautioned against unduly rigid terminology, promoting the utility of a *Widerstandspraxis*, or 'resistance practice', which acknowledges the vast spectrum of types and forms of resistance and places actions within a 'process' which increasingly rejected the Nazi system in its entirety.<sup>13</sup> Such an approach sought to remedy the rift in historiographical discourse, embracing the fragmented nature of the resistance landscape and acknowledging how the Nazi political system resulted in an extensive array of forms of opposition.<sup>14</sup>

Consequently, an array of multifaceted frameworks emerged. German historian Detlev Peukert created a typology designed to categorise various forms of resistance. Spanning from the private to the violent, his typology utilised a range of terms: 'nonconformity', referring to actions mostly done in private and not including total rejection of the Nazi system; *Verweigerung*, or 'refusal of cooperation'; acts of public protest; and finally, 'resistance' by those committed to the total overthrow of the regime. Most prominently, historian Sir Ian Kershaw promoted the use of a tri-faceted analytical framework, proposing the use of three bands ranging from dissent to opposition and resistance.<sup>15</sup> Any analysis of the effectiveness and value of resistance undertaken by German nationals would be incomplete without the consideration of historical examples. In building a picture of how the proposed 'other Germany' did indeed materialise, multifaceted frameworks provide the most ideal basis through which the wide-ranging forms of resistive action can be suitably assembled into a cohesive picture. Thus, this paper will adopt a tri-faceted framework, drawing from many of the common categories highlighted within such historiographical debate to cover acts of civil dissent, more violent acts of opposition or sabotage, and resistance through assisting those oppressed by the Nazi regime.

### a) *Dissent and civil resistance*

Dissent and civil resistance in Germany commonly sought to oppose the indoctrination and militarisation of individuals under the Nazi model, ranging from private nonconformist behaviour to public displays of ideological opposition.<sup>16</sup> Civil resistance directly violated the Reichstag Fire Decree, which allowed the Nazi state to restrict all rights of expression; however, religious convictions led individuals to offer some of the most trenchant public criticisms regarding the moral erosion occurring under the Third Reich.<sup>17</sup> Lutheran preacher Dietrich Bonhoeffer was notably influential within the clandestine resistance movement, while Catholic Bishop Clemens August Graf von Galen publicly

<sup>9</sup> Kershaw, *The Nazi dictatorship*, 193.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Broszat, *Bavaria in the National Socialist era: Vol. I–VI* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1983).

<sup>11</sup> Kershaw, *The Nazi dictatorship*, 195.

<sup>12</sup> Hans Mommsen, *German society and resistance against Hitler* (Blackwell: London, 1999), 267.

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

<sup>14</sup> Hans Mommsen, 'The German resistance against Hitler and the restoration of politics', *The Journal of Modern History* 64, no.1 (1992): 112–127, [www.jstor.org/stable/2124972](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2124972).

<sup>15</sup> Kershaw, *The Nazi dictatorship*.

<sup>16</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 'Resistance inside Germany', 2020, [www.ushmm.org/outreach/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007751](http://www.ushmm.org/outreach/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007751).

<sup>17</sup> Kairos Centre, 'The Widerstand: Religion and German resistance to Hitler', 2019, [kairoscenter.org/religion-and-the-german-resistance-to-hitler/](http://kairoscenter.org/religion-and-the-german-resistance-to-hitler/).

denounced the euthanasia program.<sup>18</sup> Pastor Julius van Jan was arrested following his sermon denouncing *Kristallnacht*, or ‘Night of the Broken Glass’, a pogrom against Jewish individuals carried out by both the *Sturmabteilung* (Nazi paramilitary force) and civilians. As he stated, ‘Where is the man who, in the name of God and justice, will cry: “Maintain righteousness, rescue those deprived of their rights from the hands of the transgressor?”’<sup>19</sup> Groups such as the ‘Edelweiss Pirates’ were also formed, comprised of anti-establishment youths motivated by a shared antipathy towards the grim uniformity of the Hitler Youth.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the ‘White Rose’ group—founded in 1942 and led by University of Munich students Sophie and Hans Scholl—distributed six mimeographed leaflets explicitly denouncing public indifference to the oppressive acts of the Nazi regime.<sup>21</sup> Although the Gestapo eventually tried and executed the core members, Sophie reiterated: ‘What does my death matter, if through us, thousands are stirred to action?’<sup>22</sup> Such cases exemplify how civil resistance sought to oppose the indoctrination and militarisation of individuals under the Nazi model, as resisters hoped to wake their fellow countrymen from their passive slumber.

### b) Violent opposition and sabotage

By contrast, more violent aspects of the resistance movement in Germany centred around sabotage and assassination attempts, with resisters desperately seeking to hinder the regime from within. Over time, the essentially non-political activities of the ‘Edelweiss Pirates’ grew to some 30 gangs in the Rhine-Ruhr area, often acquiring firearms and explosives to fight the Hitler Youth and attack police stations.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the infamous failed ‘Operation Valkyrie’ plot of 20 July, 1944—in which Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg planted a bomb in Hitler’s *Wolfsschanze* military headquarters on the Eastern Front—was the culminative work of the Kreisau Circle, a group of military officers who planned to initiate a coup following the assassination of Hitler.<sup>24</sup> In the aftermath, nearly 200 individuals were executed and 5,000 were arrested.<sup>25</sup> Many of the conspirators have been dismissed as aristocratic, opportunistic officers who assisted only when catastrophic defeat loomed in the Russian campaign; however, many acted through an unwavering moral conviction, including Major-General Henning von Tresckow, who declared: ‘When I go before God, I will be able to justify what I did. A man’s moral worth is established only at the point where he is ready to die in defence of his convictions.’<sup>26</sup> Yet such radical attempts were not undertaken only by those in positions of relative power. The story of carpenter Georg Elser represents one such account of extraordinary action. Executed just four weeks shy of the end of the war, Elser had been arrested for the attempted assassination of Hitler at the *Bürgerbräukeller* Beer Hall in 1939. Motivated only by a profound sense of moral accountability, he acted alone, informing his arresting officers: ‘I wanted to prevent by my act even greater bloodshed.’<sup>27</sup> During the four days of his interrogation in Berlin, Elser further articulated his motive to his interrogators: ‘I considered how to improve the conditions of the workers and avoid war ... for this, I was not encouraged by anyone.’<sup>28</sup> Moreover, five years later in Dachau concentration camp, Elser reiterated to SS officer Lechner: ‘I had to do it because, for his whole life, Hitler has meant the downfall of Germany.’<sup>29</sup> Although Hitler ended his address early, avoiding the explosion which killed eight individuals, Elser’s cause retains an

<sup>18</sup> Claudia Koonz, ‘Ethical dilemmas and Nazi eugenics: Single-issue dissent in religious contexts’, *Journal of Modern History* 64, no.1 (1992): 8–31, [repository.library.georgetown.edu/handle/10822/544863](https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/handle/10822/544863).

<sup>19</sup> Steven Candido, *Widerstand: Resistance to Nazism* (Boston: Boston College, 2011), 45, [www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research\\_sites/cjl/pdf/StevenCandido\\_Thesis.pdf](http://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/pdf/StevenCandido_Thesis.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> Toby Axelrod, *Rescuers defying the Nazis: Non-Jewish teens who rescued Jews* (New York: Rosen Publishing Group, 1999).

<sup>21</sup> White Rose Studies, ‘The leaflets of the White Rose’, 2020, [www.white-rose-studies.org/The\\_Leaflets.html](http://www.white-rose-studies.org/The_Leaflets.html).

<sup>22</sup> Weiße Rose Stiftung, *The White Rose: Student resistance against Hitler* (Munich: Ludwig-Maximilians University, 2006), 34–35.

<sup>23</sup> Axelrod, *Rescuers defying the Nazis*.

<sup>24</sup> Ger Van Roon, *German resistance to Hitler: Count von Moltke & the Kreisau Circle* (London: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1971), 517.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, martyr, prophet, spy* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Press, 2010), 521.

<sup>27</sup> Bundesarchiv Koblenz, *Gestapo interrogation report*, November 19–22, 1939, signature R 22/3100.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Hellmut Haasis, *Bombing Hitler: The story of the man who almost assassinated the Fuhrer* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing Company, 2013), 196.

unwavering validity.<sup>30</sup> Arthur Nebe, who led the investigation, even privately disclosed to Hans Bernd Gisevius in late 1939: 'This man of the people loved ordinary people; he laid out for me passionately and in simple sentences how ... Hitler is war—and if he goes, there will be peace.'<sup>31</sup> These select examples display how resistance also occurred through more violent means, as German citizens desperately sought to deliver a devastating blow to the regime from within.

### c) Resistance through assistance: Liberating the oppressed

German resisters also undertook efforts to liberate those persecuted by ethnocentric fascism, upholding the fundamental values of the 'other Germany' from the confines of their domestic circumstances. As Nuremberg Race Laws of 1935 institutionalised ethnocentric fascism, resistance to state-sanctioned oppression of minorities was limited in capacity and carried overwhelming risk.<sup>32</sup> Yet as early as 1933, a Quaker group in Berlin worked to shelter persecuted individuals, declaring: 'We must carry the little child on our shoulders through the floods of our time to the shore. We have to work, to bring a new spirit into the world.'<sup>33</sup> The aforementioned 'Edelweiss Pirates' also operated through the sphere of assistive resistance, aiding German deserters, Jews, and escaped Russian slave labourers.<sup>34</sup> Instigated by the non-Jewish wives and relatives of over 1,800 Jewish men awaiting deportation, the *Rosenstrasse* protest of 1943 saw nearly 6,000 individuals successfully protest for their release.<sup>35</sup> Through Yad Vashem, over 587 German individuals are commemorated amongst the 'Righteous Among the Nations', with many having provided shelter and falsified travel documents.<sup>36</sup> Prominent Minister Heinrich Grüber negotiated with British and Dutch authorities to secure visas, and Admiral Wilhelm Canaris brazenly utilised his position as head of the *Abwehr*—the German military intelligence service—to facilitate evacuations.<sup>37</sup> The remarkable legacy of Oskar and Emilie Schindler—popularised through the 1993 film *Schindler's List*—serves as a pivotal account of altruistic action, in which the couple facilitated the survival of 1,100 Jewish individuals interned in Kraków-Płaszów concentration camp.<sup>38</sup> Overall, resistance also notably manifested through efforts to liberate those persecuted by ethnocentric fascism, prompted by an altruistic will to preserve universal freedoms.

## Solving the contested historical legacy of the resistance

### Effectiveness: 'A few flashes of humanity'

Although discourse has often centred upon the 'immeasurability' of resistance, any consideration of effectiveness can at least appreciate limiting factors such as age, physical capacity, occupation, and access to centres of power.<sup>39</sup> There can be little doubt that between 1933 and 1945 in Germany, accommodation, collaboration, and passivity were the normal patterns of public behaviour. Active opposition struggled to succeed in the political vacuum, as popular dissent was transformed into

<sup>30</sup> Smithsonian Institute, 'One man against tyranny', 2011, [www.smithsonianmag.com/history/one-man-against-tyranny-53850110/](http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/one-man-against-tyranny-53850110/).

<sup>31</sup> Haasis, *Bombing Hitler*, 153.

<sup>32</sup> Peter Hoffmann, 'The good Germans: Inside the resistance to the Nazis', *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 4 (2014): 190–196, [www.jstor.org/stable/24483571](http://www.jstor.org/stable/24483571).

<sup>33</sup> Candido, *Widerstand*, 55.

<sup>34</sup> Axelrod, *Rescuers defying the Nazis*.

<sup>35</sup> Mark Wolfram, 'Rediscovering narratives of German resistance: Opposing the Nazi 'terror-state'', *Rethinking History* 10, no. 2 (2006): 201–219. [www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13642520600649382](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13642520600649382).

<sup>36</sup> Yad Vashem, 'Righteous among the nations', 2020, [www.yadvashem.org/righteous/statistics](http://www.yadvashem.org/righteous/statistics).

<sup>37</sup> Wolfgang Bialas, 'Nazi ethics: Perpetrators with a clear conscience', *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust* 27, no. 1 (2013): 3–25, [www.tandfonline.com/doi/citedby/10.1080/23256249.2013.812821?scroll=top&needAccess=true](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/citedby/10.1080/23256249.2013.812821?scroll=top&needAccess=true).

<sup>38</sup> Detlef Garbe, *Between resistance & martyrdom* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 743.

<sup>39</sup> Frank McDonough, *Opposition and resistance in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

resignation, despair, apathy, and self-preservation.<sup>40</sup> The ruthless and systematic nature of Nazi surveillance and repression ensured that by June 1933, political opposition was driven underground and paralysed by mass arrests.<sup>41</sup> As Kershaw observed, ‘popular opposition broke down ... where conservative and Nazi values converged’, meaning dissent did not allow a permanent or overwhelming disintegration of consensus.<sup>42</sup> Ultimately, popular opposition among citizens remained scattered, isolated, and easily suppressed, while military resisters lacked unity, favourable access, and diplomatic support abroad.

It is important to note that although the extent of internal opposition was concealed, Gestapo records reveal nearly 800,000 Germans were imprisoned for active resistance during the 12-year reign of the Third Reich.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, the first concentration camps—notably Dachau, built in 1933—were intended for left-wing dissidents, and as far back as 1936 a recorded 11,687 Germans were arrested for illegal ‘socialist’ activities.<sup>44</sup> As historian Martin Gilbert noted: ‘We will never know how many Berliners had the decency and courage to save their Jewish co-citizens: 20,000, 30,000? We don’t need the number to recognise this admirable minority.’<sup>45</sup> While impressive considering the contextual limitations, the reality remains: German resistance was unable to overthrow the regime. Although determined, efforts were largely ineffective and incapable of overwhelming the masses, and are despairingly characterised by Kershaw as ‘a few flashes of humanity by individuals, lightening the general darkness’.<sup>46</sup> Any outcomes reflected the extent to which resisters were realistically able to overcome the comfortable coexistence of ‘complaint and compliance’.<sup>47</sup> Ultimately, physical outcomes were all greatly limited by contextual factors, explaining how general currents of discontent failed to translate into widespread resistance.<sup>48</sup>

## A pendulum-swinging change in resistance historiography

Delicate political sensibilities have contributed to the portrait of German resistance remaining somewhat incomplete. Following the war, the nation was burdened by the psychology of defeat, economic distress, occupation, and de-Nazification.<sup>49</sup> Within both the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic, the memory of German resistance was appropriated to provide legitimacy to the two rival German states. Historical memory was rewritten with Orwellian vigour. In East Germany, the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) was portrayed as the only anti-fascist force in the Third Reich, while non-communist resistance remained largely ignored or obscured.<sup>50</sup> In West Germany, discourse sought to rebut national ‘collective guilt’ accusations, hailing the heroism and martyrdom of resistance while denouncing all socialist resisters as traitors.<sup>51</sup> Here, the emergence of postwar mythology shrouded the memory and commemoration of resistance, causing much of its true value to be lost amidst the clamour of clashing ideologies.

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<sup>40</sup> Jo Fox, ‘Resistance and the Third Reich’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no. 2 (2004): 271–283, [www.jstor.org/stable/3180725](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3180725).

<sup>41</sup> Michael Balfour, *Withstanding Hitler in Germany: 1933–45* (New York: Routledge Press, 1988).

<sup>42</sup> Fox, ‘Resistance and the Third Reich’.

<sup>43</sup> Shareen Brysac, ‘At last, recognition and praise for the resistance in Nazi Germany’, *New York Times*, October 7, 2000, [www.nytimes.com/2000/10/07/arts/at-last-recognition-and-praise-for-the-resistance-in-nazi-germany.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2000/10/07/arts/at-last-recognition-and-praise-for-the-resistance-in-nazi-germany.html).

<sup>44</sup> Peter Hoffman, *History of the German resistance: 1933–1945* (Canada: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), 121–127.

<sup>45</sup> Martin Gilbert, *The righteous: The unsung heroes of the Holocaust* (New York: Holt Publishing, 2004), 188.

<sup>46</sup> Fox, ‘Resistance and the Third Reich’, 283.

<sup>47</sup> Hoffman, *History of the German resistance*, 278.

<sup>48</sup> Fox, ‘Resistance and the Third Reich’.

<sup>49</sup> Hajo Holborn, *A history of modern Germany* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982).

<sup>50</sup> Suzanne Swartz, *Obstacles and stepping stones to the hero’s pedestal: Reunified Germany’s selective commemoration of resisters to National Socialism* (2007), 277, [digitalcommons.colby.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1276&context=honorstheses](http://digitalcommons.colby.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1276&context=honorstheses).

<sup>51</sup> Alan Merson, *Communist resistance in Nazi Germany* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985), 91.

## An intrinsic moral legacy

Effectiveness is not the sole nor primary standard by which German resistance has been debated and evaluated. As reiterated by rabbi Harold Schulweis: 'In unearthing the crimes of villainy, the virtues of humanity must not be buried.'<sup>52</sup> Despite the reality of limited outcomes, isolated resisters who had no hope of succeeding did not make success the sole basis for their commitment. As German Chancellor Helmut Kohl noted, to entirely understand the legacy of the resistance, 'we have to ask what those who took part were for ... the true inheritance lies in the what for'.<sup>53</sup> Consequently, although it failed to dismantle the regime, German resistance is by no means historically irrelevant; rather, as Willy Brandt reminds us, the 'other Germany' was a reality which 'retains its validity, irrespective of its limited effectiveness'.<sup>54</sup>

Through the stories and voices of those involved, it is clear that resisters counted much more than just the prospect of success in their considerations; instead, they were motivated by a shared sense of ethical conviction. As noted by historian Peter Hoffman, 'to declare these individual or collective acts of heroism to have been ineffective is not a judgement on their moral value'.<sup>55</sup> Finding no excuse in youth, ignorance, or passivity, these individuals took upon themselves a responsibility for atonement on behalf of the German moral consciousness.<sup>56</sup> It is this exact pursuit of humanity which unites the fractured resistance landscape; moreover, it is the pursuit of these qualities of freedom, peace, and tolerance which aligns German resistance with the philosophical tradition of the 'other Germany'. Even during his trial, Professor Kurt Huber of the 'White Rose' remained loyal to the teachings of eighteenth-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant, concluding his defence with the words of Kant's disciple, Johann Fichte:

And thou shalt act as if  
On thee and on thy deed  
Depended the fate of all Germany  
And thou alone must answer for it.<sup>57</sup>

Two centuries later, his words were fulfilled. Determined not to let the fate of Germany be moral annihilation, resisters undertook the obligation 'to save Germany from self-inflicted spiritual collapse'.<sup>58</sup> They worked to demonstrate that the humane values of the 'other Germany' lived on; that ultimately, some portion of Germany remained morally untouched. Overall, the philosophical tradition of the 'other Germany' stands as a fitting label by which the fractured resistance landscape can be united, highlighting the shared defence of the very qualities tragically erased from the German identity during the catastrophic rule of the Nazi Party.

## Sociocultural legacy: A lesson from refugee scholars

Furthermore, the deeds of resisters laid a foundation stone for the rekindling of German identity in the post-Nazi sphere. This sociocultural value is most clearly observable through the experiences and works of German literary and intellectual figures who fled their homeland as Nazism took hold. Many wrote and campaigned from abroad, seeing themselves as custodians of the 'other Germany'; of Heine and

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<sup>52</sup> Eva Fogelman, *Conscience and courage: Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust* (New York: Anchor, 1994), 12.

<sup>53</sup> Marjorie Miller, 'Germans mark glimmer of Nazi resistance', *Los Angeles Times*, July 21, 1994, [www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1994-07-21-mn-18316-story.html](http://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1994-07-21-mn-18316-story.html).

<sup>54</sup> David Large, *Contending with Hitler: Varieties of German resistance in the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 7–9.

<sup>55</sup> Frances Nicosia, *Germans against Nazism: Nonconformity, opposition and resistance in the Third Reich* (New York: Berghan Books, 1991), 60.

<sup>56</sup> Annedore Leber, *The conscience in revolt: Portraits of the German resistance: 1933–1945*, trans. Thomas McClymont (Mainz/Munich: Hase & Köhler, 1994).

<sup>57</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 'White Rose', 2019, [www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007188](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007188).

<sup>58</sup> Nicosia, *Germans against Nazism*, 4.

Goethe, rather than brownshirts and barbarism.<sup>59</sup> In the postwar sphere, this catastrophe of identity came to the forefront, requiring what émigré historian Hans Rothfels referred to as a task of ‘identity rehabilitation’.<sup>60</sup> Citizens strived for a clear national identity amongst the physical and moral rubble, struggling to reconnect with the pre-Nazi sociocultural tradition of Germany.<sup>61</sup> Many even spoke of the most basic need to distinguish between ‘German’ and ‘Nazi’, a definition which had become despairingly blurred during wartime.

One such émigré historian, Fritz Stern, stressed that while he did not wish to deny the responsibility of the German people for the horrors unleashed in their name by the Nazi regime, he could not hold them collectively guilty, or wholly reject his native land.<sup>62</sup> He reiterated the tragic truth: ‘their purposes had not been ours’.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, scholar Victor Klemperer did not dissociate with Germany after fleeing to serve in the United States forces, articulating his distinction between the Nazi enemy and the ‘other Germany’ of decency and urbanity: ‘The more the German nation became an accomplice of atrocious crimes, the more I held that among the wicked citizens of Sodom, there were righteous ones. Some, after all, were my friends.’<sup>64</sup> The discourse and writings of wartime émigrés offer insight into the value German resistance had for the sociocultural identity of post-Nazi Germany. For the many who held an exceptional yearning to return, knowing that individuals had conscientiously opposed the Nazi regime at the price of their lives had a positive influence on the complex attitudes they held toward their native country. In the post-1945 sphere, a new relationship with the German present was now possible. In 1946, recently returned leftist writer Alexander Abusch heralded the German resistance as ‘a beacon in the German darkness, whose light must be kept burning’ to guide the way to a democratic future for postwar Germany.<sup>65</sup> As noted by Chancellor Helmut Kohl, amid the tumultuous atmosphere marred by political agendas and postwar mythology, ‘the resistance helped Germans find a way back into the community of free peoples’.<sup>66</sup> Overall, as observable through the experiences of refugee historians, scholars, and other literary figures, the German resistance preserved an important sociocultural identity.

## A legacy for today

Even today, a national understanding of the cost of war continues to deeply affect contemporary German political culture. Since 1945, Germany has strived to remain steadfastly pacifistic. No country has placed more emphasis on stability and tolerance or been more welcoming to immigrants, from the Italian, Greek, Turkish, and Spanish *Gastarbeiter* (‘guest workers’) attracted during the economic boom of the 1960s, to the Middle Eastern refugees seeking safety in more recent years.<sup>67</sup> However, the rise of right-wing populism—particularly in former East German states—has seen the emergence of a multitude of far-right organisations, including the political party ‘Alternative for Germany’ (AfD), which received the third most votes in the 2017 national election.<sup>68</sup> Yet such a phenomenon has not managed to disturb the steadfast German culture of wartime memory. Although a radical minority seek to erase any sense of responsibility for the nation’s dark past, the stories of the resistance remind us there is no alternative for Germany regarding historical memory. Today, the values of the ‘other

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<sup>59</sup> Anna Carey, ‘When the other Germany was driven into exile’, *The Irish Times*, September 24, 2011, [www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/when-the-other-germany-was-driven-into-exile-1.608738](http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/when-the-other-germany-was-driven-into-exile-1.608738).

<sup>60</sup> Marjorie Lamberti, ‘The search for the “other Germany”’: Refugee historians from Nazi Germany and the contested historical legacy of the resistance to Hitler’, *Central European History* 47, no. 2 (2014): 408, [www.jstor.org/stable/43280442](http://www.jstor.org/stable/43280442).

<sup>61</sup> Carey, ‘When the other Germany was driven into exile’.

<sup>62</sup> Lamberti, ‘The search for the “other Germany”’.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 402.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 415.

<sup>65</sup> Alexander Abusch, *The wrong path of a nation* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1946), 260.

<sup>66</sup> Miller, ‘Germans mark glimmer of Nazi resistance’.

<sup>67</sup> Richard Evans, ‘From Nazism to never again: How Germany came to terms with its past’, *Foreign Affairs*, December 12, 2018, [www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/western-europe/2017-12-12/nazism-never-again](http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/western-europe/2017-12-12/nazism-never-again).

<sup>68</sup> Manès Weiskircher, ‘The strength of far-right AfD in Eastern Germany: The East-West divide and causes behind populism’, *The Political Quarterly* 91, no. 3 (2020): 614–622, [onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1467-923X.12859](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1467-923X.12859).



Germany' endure, demonstrating that there is no excuse found in passivity; that choices are always possible, whether in wartime or in peace.

## Conclusion

Although the Third Reich was not dismantled from within, the conceptualisation of the 'other Germany' stands to accurately embody the important moral and sociocultural legacy that German resistance retains. In the absence of a coherent resistance movement, a multifaceted classification framework allows for the construction of a more cohesive picture of German resistance, encapsulating acts of dissent and civil resistance, more violent attempts of assassination and sabotage, and efforts to liberate persecuted individuals. While unique circumstantial factors limited the effectiveness of resistance efforts, the legacy of German resistance is far greater than strictly physical outcomes; in particular, the intrinsic moral legitimacy of the resistance retains a fundamental validity. Furthermore, a clear sociocultural value prevails, as the resistance preserved and rekindled the non-Nazi values, moral traditions, and national identity of Germany. Ultimately, irrespective of its limited effectiveness, the 'other Germany' was indeed a tangible reality which lived on in the sacrifice of the few, maintaining a moral and sociocultural legacy well after the Second World War and the fall of the Third Reich.

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