

THE SWASTIKA: A SYMBOL OF GOOD OR EVIL?

A Thesis

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Thesis Statement

This paper is an examination of how the religious symbolism of the swastika has been marginalized by the negative history the symbol has accrued due to its association with Nazism. I propose that it is important for the United States to focus on developing a greater awareness concerning the history of the swastika that precedes the 1920's. Therefore, the Western culture would be able to identify the negatively burdened symbol as a peaceful one as well. I hope that this will encourage the West to become more mindful and accepting to foreign religion and history. By accepting this previous history into the West, it can become a template for other interactions for foreign relations to model after. Although the West is not alone in a negative initial reaction to the swastika, the United States should establish itself as a leader to become more inclusive to lesser well known histories and religions.

A common misconception of the West is the exact origin of the swastika. While many believe its history began with Hitler's anti-Semitic party, the Nazis, its existence spans much further back to antiquity. The United States had not encountered the negative swastika before its prevalence within Hitler's party and therefore had only associated the symbol as a peaceful one. In the first chapter of my paper, I will be introducing the swastika's history from its birth until its recognition as a negative symbol with its relation to Hitler. Directly following in the second section I will conclude this chapter with the continuation of its history within the context of Hitler, the National Socialist Party, and the Nazi's.

I have decided to separate the discussion of the symbol into two distinct sections,

because its recognition negatively before Hitler is not as well known, being widely recognized in the West and East predominately as a peaceful symbol. Although it is still interpreted in the East as a religious symbol, after the 1920's, in the West, the swastika transformed into a symbol of national prosperity during the time of Hitler. After the fall of the Fuhrer, the West identified the symbol as evil by linking the swastika to the Holocaust; this negativity attached to the swastika escalated and overwhelmed its two previous meanings of religion and national prosperity. The purpose of this section is to show the three different kinds of identification the symbol has been recognized as; religious context in the East, 'luck' and architectural in the West, and finally negative concerning the Holocaust.

After identifying the three major identifications the swastika has in chapter one, I will then move onto chapter two, which will be focused on the details of Joseph Goebbels, who was the most influential propagandist in the Nazi Party. In the first section, I will bring up three major characteristics of his childhood and education that influenced the decisions of Joseph Goebbels, the lead propagandist. In the second section, I will discuss the methods that Goebbels followed that made his propaganda so powerful, and effective. In the third section, I will talk about how the symbol became integrated with this Hitler 'religion. Finally, I will end this chapter with examples of some of the material that manifested the widespread acceptance for an Aryan race and set the Holocaust in motion. The intent of this chapter is to understand that the symbol was a sign of hope, and the condition of Germany was desperate for unity of any kind. Goebbels saw these needs, and gave the German people cohesiveness by insistence for racial purity. Today, after the fact, this idea of racial purity is remembered by the

annihilation of the Jews. It is important to remember that during this time in Germany, the symbol did not represent genocide, but a brighter future.

In chapter 3 of my paper, I will be discussing how the United States has transformed the symbol to evil since the fall of Hitler. In the first section, I will be discussing the United States' lack of action when the destruction of the Jews was systematically in full force in Germany. This section is particularly important, because I believe the strong association of the swastika to evil is bound tightly with elements of guilt and sympathy, due to the fact that the United States ignored reports of the genocide. The second section will discuss how the United States has chosen to remember and memorialize the Holocaust. This will entail the few survivors our world has left, the memorials, and also organizations whose goal is to preserve this symbol in its evil context. The purpose of this chapter is to see how the United States has paralyzed the symbol from being reinvented by the fear of 'forgetting,' and permitting another genocide. This is translated into clutching to the swastika as a symbol of what should never happen again. I believe this is very poignant, because the strength in remembrance is fueled by unquenchable guilt that it was allowed in the first place.

CHAPTER 1

History of the Swastika

1.1 Origination

Pinpointing the exact birth of the symbol within the prehistoric times for scholars

was surprisingly ambiguous. As John Prince Lowenstein states, "It was known to older research that already in prehistoric times the swastika was present in wide areas of the old world and of the new, but there were no indications which could lead to the determining of any particular place of origin."¹ The Asian continents had passed the symbol along to the American continents, because the swastika surfaced first in Eurasia. According to Lowenstein, he observed that the "chief distribution of the swastika lied along the areas where the more favorable climate and earliest agricultural civilizations evolved."² Very early artwork from the beginning of human activity is strikingly similar to the swastika pattern; some dating back 3,000 b.c., while others to be more recent in Greece and South-east European countries. Lowenstein also shared, "the oldest swastika like patterns known, are from objects made of mammoth ivory which were found in the village of Mezine in Southern Russia."³ Lowenstein dates them around 20,000 years old, putting them right in the middle of the Ice Age.

Artworks studied by Lowenstein that have been dated to the first known products of human activity bare striking similarity to the swastika, designed with very similar patterns. Lowenstein dates the first time the swastika appears in the cultures of the Near East in Samarra and Susa in 4000 b.c. In these art pieces, the swastika was carved into figures that were representative to the female gender. Lowenstein goes more into detail.

This association with the 'woman-swastika', which had already been

¹ John Prince Lowenstein, "The Swastika: Its History and Meaning" In *Man* Vol. 41, (1941), 49.

² Lowenstein, "The Swastika: Its History and Meaning". *Man* (1941), 49.

³ Lowenstein, "The Swastika: Its History and Meaning". *Man* (1941), 50.

present in the Ice Age culture of Mezine, is still common among certain Negro tribes in Central Africa, where women use this obviously magic sign as a tattoo pattern. It is noteworthy, too, that even objects in any way connected with woman, the bracelet from Mezine, or spinning whorls and loom weights from Troy are often decorated with the swastika.⁴

There is no need to assert the synonymous meaning from woman to the symbol; the female form itself has been one of the oldest practiced themes for artistic depiction. The swastika, since the earliest time, had been closely associated with females, and in turn became a symbol of fertility. As Lowenstein notes,

the female face-urns from Troy, which bear the sign on the vulva, support this view. On sepulchral pottery the swastika is often associated with certain animals, for instance the fish, which owing to its great power of reproduction is already known to have a fecundity symbol for primitive man. It is to be found, on phallus representations dating from the Older Stone Age, or associated with animals.⁵

In early Chinese pottery, the swastika had been specifically reserved for funeral urns, therefore became synonymous with death. This is something that Lowenstein gave several examples of, elaborating the role the swastika played in the death cults, noting that it had appeared often on tomb-stones and weapons.

Lowenstein continues and discusses the meaning of the swastika to late Mesopotamian ideology, where the fertility cult makes one of its earliest appearances. "Mesopotamia was only the centre of a far larger cultural circle which could be termed the Southern or Matriarchal Cultural Circle, and which covered a vast area. It extended

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Lowenstein, *The Swastika: Its History and Meaning*. *Man* (1941), 51.

from the Near East in a north-western direction as far east as China.”⁶

The important thing that Lowenstein asserts about this migration is, “to establish that the swastika occurs in all the groups of this southern circle whilst it was originally quite unknown outside the boundaries of the geographical area indicated above.”⁷

The main common feature as Lowenstein accurately points out, is that within this southern circle, the female idols just like the swastika, are nowhere to be found outside of this area.⁸ He continues,

In Northern Europe sculpture is entirely lacking in the Younger Stone Age, thus placing it in striking contrast to the agricultural civilization stretching south and south-east of it, where sculpture was widely disseminated. The idol-region extends as far as Moravia, Bohemia, and Central Germany, but in these latter countries the idols are very scarce.⁹

Just like the female idols, the swastika does not go back beyond the third millennium. But the swastika had been identified as a lunar symbol as well. It seems according to Lowenstein that the swastika, “within this culture had first made its appearance in Europe proper, about the middle of the Third Millennium.”¹⁰

In Hinduism, the swastika assumes even more peaceful symbology than female fertility. Dharam Vir Singh writes, “The word ‘Swasti’ means auspicious, benevolent, a

⁶ Lowenstein, *The Swastika: Its History and Meaning*. *Man* (1941), 52.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

good deed or good wishes.”¹¹ Singh even defines the swastika himself in the back of his glossary to be a tantric symbol. The swastika is considered to be a symbol for luck, and brings good favors onto the household when painted onto the doors in India; it is also believed to ward off evil spirits when painted on the thresholds. While Singh dates the origin of the swastika much further back than Lowenstein can, Singh writes, “its origin goes back to the Vedic times (4500-2500 B.C.), maybe even earlier. Seals with the swastika symbol have been found at excavation sites in Harappa which date back to about 2000 years.”¹² Although between Lowenstein and Singh there is a discrepancy between the dating of about 500 years, it is without a doubt to be considered one of the oldest recognized symbols in our Western culture today.

The swastika is in fact, in a form of a Greek cross with the arms bent at right angles. Where the right handed cross moves in the clockwise direction is this pure and holy symbol, the left handed or the counter clockwise swastika is considered evil, and as Singh describes “an evil omen and generally never used”¹³ The right turning swastika in Hinduism represents the Sun or Lord Vishnu. Singh continues, that it can also describe, “the ‘Sudarshana Chakra’ or the wheel of the Vishnu and also symbolizes the constant changes in the universe.”¹⁴

The center of the swastika has also been identified as the navel, or belly button of the Lord Vishnu, and the four lines that project outwards are the faces and the arms of

¹¹ Dharam Vir Singh. *Hinduism* (Patna: Pawan Prakashan Press, 2002), 140.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Singh, *Hinduism*, 141.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Brahma. Interestingly enough, the swastika is also well known to represent a tantric symbol in Hinduism and is also drawn in various italic styles. Lord Vishnu is described by Singh,

Vishnu is blue coloured and has four or more hands. He is shown holding two of his most characteristic symbols: the wheel and the conch-shell. He is always clothed in yellow. The wheel represents the Universal Mind and the powers of creation and destruction that form the revolving universe. The conch-shell is associated with the original of existence through its spiral form and its connection with water.¹⁵

Singh continues to describe the characteristics Vishnu embodies,

Vishnu is a striking example of the way in which the changing demands of religious life in India brought about changes in the status of deities, or the qualities they represented. Although Vishnu is mentioned in the Rig-Veda, he became loosely associated with the sun and eventually, in the Mahabharata and the Puranas, he acquired a prestige that he never lost. Ultimately he was invested with the qualities of permanence, continuity and preservation.¹⁶

In correlation by the Hindu belief of reincarnation, Krishna or the eighth incarnation of Vishnu is also represented by the swastika. Krishna is regarded in Hinduism as the most important out of the ten reincarnations of Lord Vishnu. Singh describes him,

[Krishna] is usually shown as blue or black-skinned having two hands and playing the flute. In paintings he is shown standing on one leg with the other crossed in front, resting on his toes. He usually wears colourful garments and is richly ornamented. He may hold a conch-shell or a curved stick in his hand...Vishnu manifested himself as Krishna so as to kill the evil king Kansa.¹⁷

Now, while in the traditional Indian religion of Hinduism the swastika is present and

¹⁵ Singh, *Hinduism*, 13.

¹⁶ Singh, *Hinduism*, 14.

¹⁷ Sign, *Hinduism*, 49.

representative of Lord Vishnu who is reincarnated into 10 different gods, the ninth reincarnation of the Lord is a god that is also found in Buddhism, the Buddha. The swastika is often found on the footprints of the Buddha, being the first depicted on the toes of Buddha out of many symbols that are on his feet.

Closer to home in the United States the Navajo tribe has the symbol to be representative of their mythical number four. There are numerous examples of the swastika being used in Western History. Navajo Indians also believed the symbol to be mystical, and frequently wove them into their blankets and baskets. Although they had deeply rooted beliefs in the representation of the symbol, after World War II the tribes signed a decree announcing the end of representing the swastika in their artwork.

The United States 45th Infantry had a yellow swastika on a red diamond before they replaced it with the thunderbird they are known for now. In Washington D.C. on the Marriner S. Eccles Federal Reserve Board Building on Constitution Ave has exterior Swastika window iconography, which was built in 1937. Even more representative, the U.S. Naval base in Coronado, California is shaped like the swastika. In Canon City, Colorado in 1912, a minor league baseball team, were the Canon City Swastikas in a Class D Rocky Mountain League. The last example of the swastika present in the West is the Swastika Canoe Club of Pawtuxet Village.

1.2 1920's to the Fall of Hitler

As quoted from Quinn, "The swastika...could not be confused with any other symbol."¹⁸

¹⁸ Malcom Quinn, *The Swastika: Constructing the Symbol* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 10

The swastika, since the reign of Hitler, has been paralyzed not only within its historical context but also in its identification to the 'superior' Aryan race. Since the late nineteenth century onwards there has been a developed set of practices that set out to maintain the integrity of the swastika as a symbol of race; anti-Nazis and anti-fascists have succeeded with their strategies in reinforcing the status of the swastika, and more recently the notorious murderer Charles Manson had carved it onto his forehead, playing into the surrealism of the connotation of demonic and sinister notes.

At the same time, it is interesting to note that there have also been attempts to separate the Nazi swastika from its negativity. One of the very first pieces of 'de-nazification' legislation passed in the closing months of World War II. Quinn continues that the purpose of these regulations was to eliminate from German law and administration the policies and doctrines of the National Socialist Party. The first Nazi policy to be repealed was the 'Law for Protection of National Symbols' of May 19, 1933. This set of regulations, issued on the authority of Josef Goebbels' Propaganda Ministry, had been concerned with safeguarding the 'dignity' of the swastika and preventing its unauthorized commercial use¹⁹.

This first 'de-Nazification' of regulations to be introduced revoked specific laws that protected the swastika, showing that the Nazi party and its symbol was seen as indivisible. This was something that nobody, since World War II, has made any attempts to diminish. Quinn asserts that "the image of the swastika, and the word Nazi have become both interchangeable and, in a sense 'onomatopoeic': they are linked to their

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¹⁹ Ibid.

referents in a way in which the words National Socialism are not.”²⁰

The swastika and all of the memorials set up at Dachau, Auschwitz and elsewhere around the world are now the most familiar to the Nazi terror. Both the swastika and these death camps cannot be rehabilitated for other use and both define space that is untouchable. Quinn writes, “in Germany in 1945, the government could de-Nazify its image just by the removal of the swastika, but the swastika itself could not.”²¹ Quinn continues that the laws which once policed the public display of the swastika were abrogated, but the same abrogation recognized the indivisible links between the swastika and Nazism.²²

One of the main struggles people have with this symbol is that it gives rise to a wide variety of interpretations, depending on your genealogical background. For some, the Swastika is a religious symbol representing a pious god; others see it as a sign of racial purity. And for some, it represents the genocide and horrific deaths of many different racial groups. In history, it is important that the Holocaust can also be recognized as a contributor to sustaining a momentum of escalating radicalization for the negativity of the symbol. The question of Nazi self representation must be examined. What links the image of the swastika directly to the camps is the ‘mission’ and the goals which Adolf Hitler had outlined in *Mein Kampf*. As Hitler describes,

In the swastika we see the mission of the struggle for the victory of the Aryan man, and, by the same token...the idea of creative work,

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Quinn, *The Swastika: Constructing the Symbol*, 4.

which as such always has been and always will be anti-Semitic.²³

Hitler's definition of the party symbol shows that it is worth asking how Nazis might explain their chosen representation in the symbol and image of the swastika. As we see in the passage, it is interesting to note that Hitler named the swastika as the symbol of the *victory* of the Aryan man. He is announcing an "absent referent", or a sign for an event which had not yet taken place. So in a sense, the symbol of the swastika stood for what the Nazi Party wished to be understood as. In turn, the Nazi party also united the swastika with their ideas of racism. Auschwitz is a word that at once evokes the stark brutality of recorded facts and lets those facts stand as an inexplicable symbol, a non-negotiable boundary. The swastika is now the visual equivalent of the word Auschwitz²⁴.

What is particularly noticeable about the swastika is the interrelationship of interpretation and responses of the search for a symbolic cause which then becomes part of the swastika's symbolic effect. Quinn asserts, "over the past 120 years, this has resulted in a redoubling and accumulation of 'effects' and the corresponding institution of the swastika as an apotropaic object rather than a readable sign. The swastika is not so much read as reacted to, and has assume causality in its own right rather than being seen as an image whose presence can be accounted for with a viable explanation."²⁵

This statement trumps the tendency to interpret the swastika as a symbol, or to be reduced into a study of symbols. "The interpretation of symbols has a tendency to see symbols as a product by cultural context...it is also the case that symbols can themselves

²³ Hitler, Adolph. *Mein Kampf*, (London: 1992), 452.

²⁴ Quinn, *The Swastika: Constructing the Symbol*, 5.

²⁵ Ibid.

be seen to have 'produced' the contexts in which they are encountered, as well as catalyzing the interpretive project itself. The passive representative role which is given to the symbol in decoding should be seen as an active function in which it displays, defines, and also objectifies what it is that it represents. This is particularly noticeable in the cases where symbolic images are used to construct identities such as race, nation and speech."²⁶

For instance, Quinn writes,

In 1891, when Michael Zmigrodski defined the swastika as the armorial shield of the Aryan race, his heraldic metaphor was apposite in several senses: the Aryan swastika was both the precursor heralding an absent or delayed referent meaning, and also its defensive shield. It was also heraldic in so far as the tradition of the symbol and the repetition of the sign was a mimesis of racial lineage and pedigree. In this 'heraldic' form, the swastika does not 'mean', it merely produces the meaning by announcing it on the one hand and obscuring it on the other.²⁷

We see here, presented by Michael Zmigrodski, that Quinn emphasizes there is simultaneously both a preventative and a defensive role for the symbol. Instead of seeing the swastika as something that can be translated into something textual, it is important that defining the swastika as an object for, rather than the subject of, is a step into a more focused direction.

In the case of the Aryan swastika, which eventually became the Nazi emblem, the response to the loss of a stable tradition and a secure reference was to develop a strategy of self reference. In this way a sign for doubt, of nostalgia and loss was instituted as the certainty of a reference from image to image. When tradition is lost as a community of practice, of custom and culture, it is replaced by the repetition of the sign and the repeated acknowledgment of this

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Quinn, *The Swastika*, 6.

sign. Both racism and the racist image or gesture signals the loss of a power to reenact or recreate a community. Instead, they institute the passivity of a visual acknowledgement, the recognition of a form (whether that form is a shared skin colour or a swastika) which substitutes for the absence of a more tangible connection or mutuality.²⁸

However, on the other hand, the swastika had invited a passive acceptance of racial identity as a form which had existed over time, and which needed to be re-awakened, or re-constructed. For instance, in the *Mein Kampf* the swastika is identified as an image of creative work, which by in Hitler's definition is the labor directed towards the general maintenance of a racial representation.

1.3 Fall of Hitler to Present

Directly after World War II, it is easy to say that the swastika represented the Holocaust and the tyranny of Hitler. The United States and Europe had full detailed knowledge of how camps such as Auschwitz worked even before the camp opened. The United States newspapers reported every day about the gruesome raids through towns and the Germans expanded for their beloved Lebensraum. Quinn writes, "the Swastika, which had been a symbol of well-being and enlightenment, became a symbol of chaos, sadism, oppression and tyranny. Infection of its original meaning condemned this symbol to fall victim to a chronic infection which will take centuries to heal."²⁹

The United States cannot refute that the government officials at the time had not

²⁸ Quinn, *The Swastika*, 8.

²⁹ Dr. Felix Marti-Ibanez, 'Symbolology and Medicine' in Elwood Whitney (ed.), *Symbolology: The Use of Symbols in Visual Communication*, (New York: 1960), 161.

only known, but had access to great detail about the steps taken by the Nazis. Pairing this past knowledge of Hitler's intentions of completely wiping out several racial identities with the prominence of the swastika, there is no question a direct connection was made for the West between the two. It would be hard not to make a correlation between evil and the swastika when the imagery of Hitler involved the prevalence of this symbol throughout the party, and the knowledge of Hitler meaning what we historically know about his premeditated mass killing. Hitler and the symbol became two identifications that would relate back to each other, one referring to the other.

It is not often for events like this stain our history with innocent blood, so the responsibility to remember also plays an important factor. In the Western culture remembering what the swastika stands for is remembering the Holocaust. The Swastika became a symbol that was trapped and frozen to its negativity because of how prominent the symbol was with what it signified to. Hitler and everything he enveloped and represented became synonymous. This can be compared to as Quinn describes, "a to a fly trapped in amber, its unchanging form representing the preservation of a racial essence over time."³⁰

Now, the presence of the swastika through Hitler's entire political party is very obvious. It played an important role in the identification of your allegiances and party line. People of all levels of authority proudly wore the swastika as a sign of their devotion. S.S. officers, Sturmabteilung or the S.A., the Einsatzgruppen, GESTAPO, RSHA, KRIPO, children, and adults alike of the Aryan race all had them sewn onto armbands, clothing, and hats. Even during political conventions, multitudes of flags and

³⁰ Quinn, *The Swastika: Constructing the Symbol*, 24.

banners were displayed; it is without a question that no one would mistake Hitler was there in their hearts and imagery. "Recognizing and naming the image of the swastika became a way of claiming kinship and assuming race identity and the visual discrimination of a 'sign object' was made equivalent to discrimination on the grounds of race,"³¹ as Quinn states.

As the Reich grew in population, the identification became larger with the swastika. Also, the presence of it within the smaller the communities became more prevalent. Quinn continues, "when the Reich became widespread in popularity, even the smallest towns of Germany became introduced to the party and could identify themselves with the superior race Hitler preached about. The identification of what the swastika stood for was unmistakable, the material symbol of an unwritten law of race identity."³² Hitler and his intent for the newly united Germany was intended for pure Aryan race. This was not a misconception in Germany. Germans and Jews alike knew to a certain degree what that meant for them. For the Germans, it meant a promising future, working hard and rebuilding their nation. For the Jews, they had at least a general idea of how they would not be included in this future of Germany; understanding the growth of popularity concerning racial cleansing was directed towards them.

The transition of the symbol from an image to an identity is an important aspect of the swastika to consider. While it did represent the parties' actions as a symbol, it slowly shifted from being a sign to conjuring action from what it signifies. Quinn continues this idea, "the swastika, as an Aryan symbol shifted from the symbol of set

³¹ Quinn, *The Swastika: Constructing the Symbol*, 23.

³² Quinn, *The Swastika: Constructing the Symbol*, 38.

(productive) practices, to the institution of a set of practices which will 'produce the corporate mission or goal embodied in the symbol.'³³ The symbol no longer is a representative symbol of what the Reich is, but now it became identified as to what the Reich does. As Quinn asserts, "the visual image has in fact taken on the ontological qualities which were once seen as proper to identity."³⁴

This transition of the symbol did not happen over night, but rather in small steps in a gradual process, transforming the symbol progressively. As the German front expanded further and further with each passing day, knowledge of the symbol diffused faster and further. "The trademark which was once a postscript, signature or makes mark applied 'after the fact' to the object has grown in stature to become an image which *precedes* both the manufactured object and the group itself,"³⁵ quoted from Quinn.

The Nazis did not seek out and shoot every Jew anonymously. They systematically raided each town, which was followed by the Einsatzgruppen, whose sole task was to seek out the Jews and kill them. The Nazis did not approach each town without announcing their allegiances by the flags and the symbol. Who and what each individual represented from every town was very important. The flags of the Swastikas could be seen from afar, and the town knew very well who was coming and what the intentions of the Nazis were when they arrived to the cities and towns. The Nazi methods of surprise attack, sweep, and kill was for quite some time a very effective means of

³³ Rose de Nev, *Whatever Happened to Corporate Identity?*, print 43, (May/June 1989) 92.

³⁴ Quinn, *The Swastika: Constructing the Symbol*, 112.

³⁵ Quinn, *The Swastika: Constructing the Symbol*, 113.

capturing and killing the Jews. The one downfall to their identity, and a small win for the targeted was with the symbol and this type of attack is that the news spread. Once the people knew of the attacks, and were aware of when the front of the Lebensraum expansion was close, some of the Jews were able to hide away, or make their escape.

The complete conversion of the swastika into a sign of racial superiority was achieved the symbol became a referent to not only the present but the future as well. Race superiority in Hitler and the Reich was not a only task of the present, as we see with the missions of the Lebensraum. The Reich was about cultivating the future for the Aryan race, Quinn writes, “the image of the swastika would be completed by a race identity...only in the name of swastika, the sign of race, could Nazism identify and distinguish itself.”³⁶

Here is where the swastika had finally completely identified with the sign of the purity of the Aryan race. To be placed in the different categories of race other than the Aryan one was not only was a guarantee to be ostracized, it was also common to be treated unjustly, and inhumanly. For some, like the Jews, it was much worse. The symbol for the Jews represented their lack of cohesiveness with the other races. It meant death camps, slave labor, and mutilation. If a person did not match those of the pure race, there was no way to make any identification or relation to the swastika at all.

This is where the symbol as a referent to the future is now perceived as a goal. The Nazis saw this pure, Aryan race as an obtainable, rational, and perfected future of Germany and their Lebensraum. The symbol never demanded the complete extinction of the Jews, POWS, Serbians, Gypsies, and many more racial groups targeted by the Nazis,

³⁶ Ibid.

but it represented the need of the Aryan race to be dominant. We would hope that the Nazis mission of complete Aryan race dominance would be unobtainable. With the late and stagnant reaction to the Holocaust from the West and the rest of Europe, it is not that hard to postulate that the Reich would indeed finish the mission it started. Despite the tardy intervention done by the West and Europe, it is clear that the Reich was attempting to reach their goal of total annihilation, regardless of how realistic or obtainable that goal may be.

The swastika today still represents the actions taken for the sake of race superiority, for it has survived for that reason only. Now, these articles of clothing that was once worn proudly with the symbol of race superiority on it are behind glass cases in museums, tucked away in personal homes, or were shamefully discarded. They are reminders of the history we wish to never repeat, each and every artifact is still burdened with history.

CHAPTER 2

The Facilitator: Joseph Goebbels

Joseph Goebbels Gaullier of Berlin was the Head of the Propaganda Department, and the most successful propagandists of the twentieth century. He was regarded as “the most brilliant and malignant this century has known so far.”³⁷ According to Ernest Bramsted, he had two important qualities to his personality that enabled him to become such a

³⁷ Ernest K. Bramsted, *Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda* (Michigan State University Press: 1965), 457.

successful influential propagandist. First, he had an “intuitive grasp of the feelings and thoughts of the masses ... [and secondly, this helped him] to convey messages to them which [held] their attention and combine simplicity with attractiveness.”³⁸ Goebbels was a man that thought in terms of the larger picture, and always considered the impact on the collective public, rather than the much smaller scale of an individual.

2.1 Childhood and Education

In his life, there were three distinct features of his upbringing that were important to his success as a great propagandist. The first was his educational background and upbringing. Born on October 29th, 1897 into the lower class of Germany. Goebbel's father had to support a family of seven that included two brothers, two sisters, and Goebbels himself, who was born with a slight physical deformity. For some years, his father barely scraped by making ends meat. Later on in Goebbel's career, he tended to over exaggerate the frugality of his parent's home apparently in order to exemplify his own success. According to Bramsted, “He told his assistants that as children they had to help their parents make lamp wicks to earn a few extra pennies”³⁹. In the Goebbel's household, it was pressed upon Joseph and his brothers and sisters early on that their father's late economic success was in direct correlation to his dedication and hard work. Once his father had advanced through the strict economy by his strength and fortitude, he sent Joseph to get an education so that he might have a more promising future.

³⁸ Bramsted, *Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda*, xiii.

³⁹ Bramsted, *Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda*, 4.

The second significant aspect of Joseph's life was a physical deformity. In early childhood, Goebbels had suffered infantile paralysis that left his left leg four inches shorter than his right. As a grown man, Goebbels liked to give the impression his physical handicap was due to wounds he received in the First World War, rather than to own up to a crippling deformity. His limp fueled his restlessness, malice and wit, and he often cruelly quipped back to critics and rivals who enjoyed making him the topic of their jokes. Despite all of this, "all of his energies had to be concentrated on one focal point; to show others, who were healthy, cheerful and straight, that he too could achieve something."⁴⁰

In 1917, Joseph matriculated and earned excellent marks, although he was reportedly "arrogant, quarrelsome and difficult."⁴¹ Despite the personal failings, Joseph realizing that socializing was not one of his personal strengths and threw himself into the academics throughout his undergraduate studies. When he decided after Grammar school to continue his education, for once in his life his physical disability became an advantage as it made him unfit for military service, and he was rejected by the military. Because of this, he went on to study at eight different universities. According to Bramsted, "It was a time honored habit of German students to study at a number of universities,"⁴² but Goebbels did this to excess, apparently unable to avoid his restlessness and his desire for constant change. While these several different universities satisfied his thirst for knowledge, they did not really foster a challenging environment for Goebbels, and the

⁴⁰ Bramsted, *Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda*, 5.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

colleges lacked the resources to provide a solid foundation for his specific talents and ambitions. "His main talent" says Bramsted, "was not scholarship but off politics, of political action and oratory."⁴³

The third and final aspect of his upbringing was religious. Both his mother and his father were devout Catholics. Early in his life, Goebbels showed aptitude in religion, for some time having as Bramsted would describe it as, "ambiguous streak of religious idealism."⁴⁴ His parents thought that he would have a respectable career as a priest. It was a position that was regarded as honorable by many German Catholics of their class, but later on in life Goebbels would disregard all belief in the Catholic creed and in Christ, to be replacing these by the Fuhrer himself. Then the "National Socialism gradually became his creed."⁴⁵ After a visit to Obersalzberg in July of 1926 this religious transformation was solidified into a new belief where the prophet was Adolf Hitler. Goebbels praised him in his personal diary. "These days have shown the direction and the way! In the midst of deep despair a star is shining! I feel drawn to it for ever. Now my last doubts have been shed. Germany will live! Heil Hitler!"⁴⁶

Hitler recognized Goebbel's talents, and used Goebbel's desire and drive, appealing to his thirst for prestige. He showered him with luxuries such as drivers, posh hotels, and money, so that Goebbels was impressed. "I love him..." Goebbel's wrote of Hitler, "He is a man, in every way, in every respect. Such a firebrand can be my Fuhrer. I

⁴³ Bramsted, *Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda*, 6.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Diary entry of July 25, 1926. *Tagebuch*, 94.

bow before the greater man, the political genius!”⁴⁷ According to Bramsted,

Goebbels had found a protective hold in a man who was equally fanatical, was fundamentally more sure of himself and was filled with a sense of mission to an extent which Goebbels had never felt. The leader personified a political mystique for which the disciple was to become the chief propagandist, a mystique which combined hatred of all opponents with faith in the dynamics of their Movement, a radical negation of the existing political system with emphatic but equivocal promises of a new authoritarian structure of state and society. In addition there was the hope of office and power should the Movement one day succeed.⁴⁸

Goebbels would systematically attack each of Hitler’s opponents, rivals and enemies.

Because of Hitler fostering an environment to Goebbels natural talents in political

rhetoric, the stream of insults to opponents was unrivaled malicious attacks. On

November 1st, 1926 Joseph was appointed by Hitler the Head of Berlin, and since then

put the Nazi Party on the map, and continued to create new and striking techniques of propaganda.

2.2 Goebbels’ Principles of Propaganda

According to Doob, “Goebbels wished to demonstrate an unswerving loyalty to Hitler; to expose the ineptitudes of the German military staffs; to boast about his own accomplishments, his respectability, and his devotion to the Nazi cause; and to place on the record a criticism of rival Nazis like Goering and Rosenberg.”⁴⁹ Doob categorizes the principles that Goebbels strategically followed with great effort approaching propaganda

⁴⁷ Diary entry of April 19, 1926. Tagebuch, 72.

⁴⁸ Bramsted, *Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda*, 14.

⁴⁹ Leonard W. Doob, *Goebbels’ Principles of Propaganda*. The Public Opinion Quarterly, (1950), 419-442.

methodologically.

Goebbels had maintained throughout his production of propaganda that he could plan and execute propaganda effectively because he constantly referred to previously existing intelligence. Otherwise, as Doob asserts, “the communication would not be adapted either to the event or the audience. As Germany’s situation worsened, he permitted fewer and fewer officials to have access to all relevant intelligence.”⁵⁰

Goebbels pushed so hard for limiting information by May of 1943; he was one of a handful of people whom read unexpurgated reports. Goebbels had constant access to intelligence concerning events and public opinion night and day.

Although strict when referring to the steps Goebbels would take approaching the deliverance and content of propaganda, Goebbels preferred his intuition over the formal reports he received daily. Moreover, Goebbels tended to trust his own common sense, or experience more than formal reports. He listened to his mother because, he said, ““She knows the sentiments of the people better than most experts who judge from the ivory tower of scientific inquiry, as in her case the voice of people itself speaks.””⁵¹ Doob continues, “Goebbels often relied upon his own intuitive judgment, and he seldom hesitated to make far-reaching deductions from a thread of evidence.”⁵² With any reaction from enemies or competitors Goebbels surmounted their counter attacks to a form of flattery, and interpreted it as a sign of his success and effectiveness.

⁵⁰ Doob, *Goebbels’ Principles of Propaganda*, 442.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

Goebbels also was known to support that propaganda should not only be planned, but also executed by only one authority. Nazi theory also asserted this practice of centralizing authority; however, for Goebbels, it was satisfying his own personal quest for power. As Doob further discusses, Goebbels felt that a single authority-himself- must perform three functions:

- a. *It must issue all the propaganda directives.* Every bit of propaganda had to implement policy, and policy was made clear in directives...that referred to all phases of the war and to all events occurring inside and outside Germany. They indicated when specific propaganda campaigns should be begun, augmented, diminished, and terminated. They suggested how an item should be interpreted and featured, or whether it should be ignored completely.⁵³

Goebbels only stepped down from his authoritative position when issuing these directives to Hitler only, whose approval he relentlessly sought.

- b. *It must explain propaganda directives to important officials and maintain their morale.* Unless these officials who either formally or informally implemented directives were provided with an explanation of propaganda policy, they could not be expected to function effectively and willingly.⁵⁴

Goebbels did not care the size or the type of venue, or even the amount of people he spoke to, what mattered to him the most was that they understood the propaganda correctly, and able to act upon their beliefs. The last function that Doob saw Goebbels followed was that,

- c. *It must oversee other agencies' activities which have propaganda consequences.* Goebbels had told Hitler that 'when a propaganda ministry is created, all matters affecting

⁵³ Doob, *Goebbels' Principles of Propaganda*, 423.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

propaganda, news, and culture within the Reich and within the occupied areas must be subordinated to it'. Although Hitler allegedly agreed unreservedly, this high degree of unification was not achieved. Goebbels considered himself and his ministry troubleshooters: whenever and wherever German morale seemed poor-whether among submarine crews or the armies in the East- he attempted to provide the necessary propaganda boost.⁵⁵

While implementing all propaganda, Goebbels also considered the consequences of each action, and with these actions, the message should always affect the enemy's policy and action. Doob continues on this idea of damaging the enemy morale, that Goebbels also believed that the propaganda could affect the policies and actions of enemy leaders. First, it would negatively affect them by, "suppressing propagandistically desirable material which can provide the enemy with useful intelligence."⁵⁶ Goebbels had been known to refuse to deny or refute any enemy claims concerning air damage, insisting that it was better for the enemies to *believe* they have had successful air war fare then for them to actually have these victories.

Then, Doob's continues, by openly disseminating propaganda whose content or tone causes the enemy to draw the desired conclusions, Goebbels would egg on the enemy into revealing vital information about them.⁵⁷ Goebbels also would make no references at all to a desired enemy activity when one would arise, to not discredit their actions. He would not let in to the enemies that their reactions were exactly what he desired.

Goebbels also declassified operational information to become available to

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Doob, *Goebbels' Principles of Propaganda*, 425.

implement any propaganda campaign. No matter how unimportant any propaganda goal may be, it required some kind of operational material that did not conflict with security regulations. The material Goebbels based his propaganda from had to have some kind of factual basis no matter how small. Goebbels was also very talented at manifesting 'news' through implemented action. Doob entails an excellent example, "a group of ailing Finnish children was invited to Germany on a 'health restoring vacation'. The funerals of prominent Nazis were made into news-worthy pageants...German and Nazi anniversaries were celebrated so routinely that the anniversary of the founding of the Three Power Pact was observed even after the downfall of the Italian member."⁵⁸

Relentless time and energy was devoted to how the propaganda was perceived. Goebbels insisted that it must evoke the interest of an audience and must be transmitted through an attention-getting communications medium.⁵⁹ The movies, daily newspapers, pamphlets, radio programs, which were all valid forms of media that were not obviously loaded with propaganda. The best propaganda was slanted news that appeared to be unbiased, or straight. Goebbels himself seemed to considerably favor the movies and did not limit himself to solely Nazi thought but enjoyed numerous times a week, leisurely cinema.

Another aspect that Goebbels followed was his belief in credibility when it concerned whether or not the propaganda should be true or false, Goebbels asserted time after time that he told the truth, and it was his enemies who told them lies. Goebbels, to

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Doob, *Goebbels' Principles of Propaganda*, 426.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

his own reputation, did tell the truth as often as he could. He did, however, find equal value in lying. Doob also adds, "Lies, consequently, were useful when they could not be disproved"⁶⁰, and comparatively the truth could damage credibility.

Goebbels also was particularly careful in deciding when he would refute or ignore enemy propaganda. Doob suggests that "most of the time Goebbels seemed mortally afraid of enemy propaganda"⁶¹, although his first impulse would be to react immediately to enemy propaganda as if allowing the propaganda stand unanswered would tarnish his own reputation. Goebbels actually spent a good deal of time analyzing enemy propaganda, and also his own before he refuted a reply. He restrained his ego when he felt his argument was not supported enough or appear too weak. The extent of analyzing his propaganda went much further, as Doob entailed, "estimating in advance the effectiveness of a rebuttal. If his own case as well as the enemy's appeared strong but the enemy's might look stronger because of his attempt to refute it, he withheld his fire. It always seemed better to concentrate on the dissemination of a Hitler speech rather than to reply to foreign critics."⁶² Finally, Goebbels had to survey the current propaganda he had circulating before he even attempted to confront the enemy propaganda. Goebbels had enough restraint to ignore and not fire back when he felt that it might divert attention away from more important propaganda themes that he had circulating at the time.

Goebbels was so systematic for what, when, how, and why the propaganda was to be delivered that he even considered the timing. That the deliverance of the propaganda

⁶⁰ Doob, *Goebbels' Principles of Propaganda*, 428.

⁶¹ Doob, *Goebbels' Principles of Propaganda*, 429.

⁶² Doob, *Goebbels' Principles of Propaganda*, 430.

had to reach the audience before competing propaganda could surface. The kick off of the message had to begin early in order for the propaganda to reach its height at the right time. Reiteration of the message was also important in order for the message to be instilled and repeated correctly.

Nicknaming specific events and people with very distinctive slogans or catch phrases was also very characteristic of Goebbels. This had been one of the most difficult aspects of propaganda for Goebbels, because the slogans had to evoke a very specific response which the audience it was being delivered to already possessed. They also, for the survival and transference of the propaganda, had to be capable of being easily remembered and learned.

The last aspect of propaganda that Goebbels followed religiously according to Doob is that "propaganda to the home front must create an optimum anxiety level...anxiety was a double edged sword: too much anxiety could produce panic and demoralization, too little could lead to complacency and inactivity. An attempt was constantly made, therefore, to achieve a balance between the two extremes."⁶³ The propaganda that Goebbels produced had to scare the public of the possibilities of defeat. This mild anxiety of the consequences of losing the war inspired Germany just enough and was a perfect balance to Goebbels. In comparison, Goebbels also relied on propaganda to diminish anxiety when it could not have been reduced by any other means.

⁶³ Doob, *Goebbels' Principles of Propaganda*, 438.

2.3 Symbol and Religion in the National Socialist Party

The integration of the symbol to be synonymous with Nazism, Hitler and consequentially the Holocaust was no mistake; it is undeniable that the presence of the symbol was intentional for the representation of Hitler and the Nazis. By this constant presence of the swastika, of repetition and reinforcement, it had become the identified symbol for Nazism. As Simon Taylor insists, “for Nazism, symbol and ritual were essential forms of ideological presentation and reinforcement.”⁶⁴ The symbol according to Taylor was the foundation to the success of maintaining the Nazi party, the “symbol and political ritual performed the function of mystifying the real social, economic, and political contradictions between the social strata which constituted German fascism’s mass basis.”⁶⁵

The Nazi party continually sought identity within the symbol and relied on it to represent the ideology the party, through its political rituals. Taylor cites a significant example of this quoting *Völkischer Beobachter*,

Remembrance Day on the 16th of March, for instance, traditionally a day of mourning for the dead of the First World War, was transformed under Hitler’s personal orders into an opportunity to reflect upon the heroic nature of the German soldiers’ sacrifice. Henceforth the swastika flag was no longer to be lowered to half mast, but flown proudly ‘at the top of the standard’ as a symbol of Germany’s ‘reawakened faith and pride’.⁶⁶

We see here in Taylor’s example is the transformation of Remembrance Day to become a

⁶⁴ Simon Taylor, “Symbol and Ritual under National Socialism,” *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 32, No.4, (1981), 506.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Taylor, Simon. “Symbol and Ritual under National Socialism.” *The*

day of national pride. Instead of mourning the loss of the men lost in the First World War, the dead is celebrated for giving their lives for a better, more unified Germany. It was no longer recognized as a day for mournful reflection, but a day to reflect this upon ultimate act for Germany, and be inspired to push for and preserve this new Germany that many were willing to die for. The swastika flag, notably flown at the top of the mast, represented the pride and strength of Germany taking over the representation of Remembrance Day to become an affiliated Nazi Socialist holiday. This example is one of countless instances the National Socialist party would insert the swastika, which would be reinforced repetitively.

Mystification of the symbol and symbolic figure heads like Hitler created a pseudo religion, where Hitler and the swastika were analogous to Jesus and the cross. This progression of creating Hitler and the symbol into holy entities was a very calculated gradual process. Taylor describes a ceremony on November 9, 1935 that illustrates the saturation of the mystical symbolism and ritualistic ideological style of the National Socialist Party. At the head of the procession bloodflags which were stained with 'the blood' of the sixteen martyrs, that bore the name of one of the fallen heroes.⁶⁷

Taylor quotes *Volkischer Beobachter* again,

We believe that these dead have found new life in us, and that they will live forever. The belief that our flag is holy: the belief that the Creator has given us and them the strength for work and for victory, and the belief in our sacred mission to which these everlasting hours are dedicated, shows Germany her way forward. We know that out of the inner experiences of our movement...we have gained eternal life because of the struggle and the sacrifices

British Journal of Sociology (1981), 506.

⁶⁷ Taylor, "Symbol and Ritual under National Socialism.", 507.

of the fallen for Germany... We old and young National Socialists thank Adolf Hitler for this unforgettable day. We praise him and this holy symbol of the resurrection of Germany, for which we have him and the flag of our struggle to thank. We go forward with open eyes and believing hearts under his direction.⁶⁸

As each coffin was taken out of the hearse, Hitler called out their names to be owned by the Nazi party, and the Hitler youth by responses of "here!" the significance of this was that the youth and the party members were taking responsibility of the deceased. They were collectively showing ownership to the causes to which the 'martyrs' had valiantly died for. Taylor quotes from *Beobachter*, when Hitler spoke of the significance of the assembly to the masses," these sixteen men, who twelve years ago gave their lives as a sacrifice for their people and their Fuhrer, are today raised from the grave. Who does not feel the truth of this resurrection?"⁶⁹

Consequentially, out of this commemorative service to the sixteen who gave their lives to the future leadership of the Fuhrer, and the preservation of a unified Germany came a religiously loaded service. Foremost, the swastika and the flag were exemplified symbolically. The Bloodflag, which was spattered with the sacrificial blood from the sixteen became, as Taylor has termed it, 'witnesses' to their deaths each one carried at the head of the parade along side Hitler.

Taylor emphasizes this underlying religious metaphor to the Christian cross, because it has a fair, "representation of the process of historical salvation for a nation or people through the blood-sacrifice of another. Its power as a 'holy' symbol is emphasized

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Taylor, "Symbol and Ritual under National Socialism.", 508.

by the fact that the bloodflag was only exhibited on the 9 November and at Nuremberg on Reichsparty-day...carried in front of the Fuhrer during the flag-dedication ceremony, in which the banners and flags of the party formations were 'sanctified' by Hitler's touch and that of the original Bloodflags."⁷⁰

Taylor cites Burden,

The flags – how many of them are faded and tattered, soaked with the blood of fallen fighters and riddled with bullet holes. With his hand he presses the cloth of the Bloodflag against the new standards, and thereby they are consecrated with the blood of the sixteen, who as the first 'martyrs' of the movement, gave their life-blood, and thereafter became immortal.⁷¹

What is emphasized here is that the Bloodflags of the fallen sixteen have become essentially 'relics' of the National Socialist movement. By exemplifying what the flags represent the party now has significance and power through the sacrificial blood that has been 'spilled' upon them. This is in the same way, as Taylor writes, "as the Christian crucifix derives its thaumaturgical significance from the original Cross of Golgotha."⁷²

Joseph Goebbels at the same time made sure that the propaganda from this event would project that the sixteen individual 'martyrs' had as Taylor states, "absolute loyalty, unquestioning obedience and his readiness to sacrifice his life for the Fuhrer was equally imprinted in the flags symbology...It is not surprising therefore, to discover that the flag or the swastika emblem was rapidly embellished with other 'significant' associations

⁷⁰ Taylor, "Symbol and Ritual under National Socialism.", 509.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

with one another; caught up in the mysticism and power of being in the presence of Hitler and the swastika. These spaces served as a separation from the 'outside', creating an isolated environment where the growing masses of people could be all lost in the moment. Hitler himself would be situated alone, high upon a platform looking down and out as Taylor describes, "like a high priest on a temple wall...thus the masses were spatially subjected to Hitler's person, the symbolism of his absolute power, and to its ideological prerequisite, the Fuhrer principle."⁷⁶

Joseph Goebbels had mentioned quite often, "the need to emulate the mysticism of the Roman Catholic church at the party rallies"⁷⁷ Taylor continues,

if we separate the mechanics of the celebrations from the question of ideological presentation we can see that here is a common denominator, namely the plagiarization and exploitation of traditional Christian imagery and its means of ritual consecration. Even a brief look at the methods which the National Socialist Party used to 'consecrate' its symbols shows how the party ransacked the various religious traditions of the German churches, and reproduced their ritual forms in the political celebrations.⁷⁸

Taylor is showing that the Nazi's understood these Christian concepts and the power of the masses and used them to efficiently portray an analogous service for their 'services'. The party constantly referred the flag, the party, and the fallen martyrs in a religiously loaded language. Hitler addressed his followers very similarly to how a priest would preach to the congregation; Hitler was to the Reich, was Christ was to Christians.

Taylor notes upon also a call and response that opened a day that commemorated

⁷⁶ Taylor, "Symbol and Ritual under National Socialism.", 513.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

which related to the wider aspects of the National Socialist doctrine.”⁷³

The National Socialist party after World War One had rejected the older nationalist colors in favor for the swastika. The reasoning behind this new symbol was to prove by the party that this post war movement to be a radical new social and political party. “The swastika was therefore presented as the deepest historical expression...as a symbol of profound religious significance.” Taylor insisted. Now, what the Christian cross represented as a religion, the flag and Hitler could readily draw from, and Hitler was identified as cultural political savior of the Germans. Hitler is quoted to a call and response from the ranks at the Nuremberg commemorative service. The Reich party called as Taylor cites Brandt, “‘The Fuhrer is Germany and Germany the Fuhrer’, was answered by Hitler, ‘I am never without you, and you are never without me.’”⁷⁴

The Nuremberg service was a transformation from the Old Germany to the new, of the Third Reich. Where the flag became a symbol of the promises and future Hitler as their savior could fulfill for them. He also, created and facilitated monumental places where people could celebrate National Socialism. Taylor quotes Hitler, “The ‘community’ of the mass rally strengthens not only the individual, but binds together all, and helps create a party spirit...The man who had entered such a gathering doubtful and hesitant, leaves it strengthened inside himself.”⁷⁵

These monumental places that Hitler created for celebrating the National Socialist Party created this ‘community’ of where people could gather and feel in that space unity

⁷³ Taylor, “Symbol and Ritual under National Socialism.”, 510.

⁷⁴ Taylor, “Symbol and Ritual under National Socialism.”, 511.

⁷⁵ Taylor, “Symbol and Ritual under National Socialism.”, 512.

National Work. The caller shouted for who was responsible for the salvation of the people, for returning honor to their ranks, and the sole person who could claim ownership of these good deeds. All of these calls were responded with 'Adolph Hitler the Fuhrer!'. Taylor showed how these successful transference of religious and sacred symbols onto the party, the swastika, and Hitler. All of which Doob has pointed out, as Goebbels had insisted, to be drawn upon previous accepted intelligence and rituals. Hitler essentially has been successfully represented as the 'second coming of Christ' for all of Germany.

The Jew was then targeted as an enemy of 'Christ', by being presented negatively in propaganda film, and within other mediums. Goebbels and Hitler consistently denounced the Jews as enemies and conspirators against Hitler and that there needed to be radical action against them, only then, would salvation come to the people of Germany. However, Taylor elaborates, that this salvation would be "vague and undefined...it was not to be achieved in the next world, as Christian myth promised, nor was the promise of this-worldly salvation over-elaborated by the Nazi regime once it had consolidated its political position."⁷⁹ By exploiting this pre-existing Christian myth and symbolism, they were able to demand salvation by the extermination of Jews without really elaborating upon any authentic way to how or what the salvation would be.

One very important aspect about this 'religion of Hitler' is that once the language and symbolism of the National Socialism is taken out of context from Hitler's monumental places the mysticism fails. Taylor discusses, "increasing flight into symbolic reductionism forced an increasing reliance upon forms of ideological presentation which

⁷⁹ Taylor, "Symbol and Ritual under National Socialism.", 516.

persuaded by means of 'association rather than 'explanation'." ⁸⁰ Removed from the rituals and sense of 'community' within these rallies the ideological theology of the Nazi's no longer conjure up the mysticism, or have a powerful association to the Christian myth as they would have within the isolated places of rallies.

2.4 The Success of Propaganda

Goebbels is credited to say, "We believe that fate has chosen him to show the way to the German people. Therefore we greet him in devotion and reverence, and can only wish that he may be preserved for us until his work is completed". Hitler's spectacular rise to prominence and the 'Führer idea' went hand in hand with the nations need and desire for a unified country led by a leader they have been 'waiting for'. This idea of all hope and reliance on one leader was not a new, or even progressive idea for Germany. "Promotion by threatened elites and acceptance by anxious masses of strong authoritarian leadership, often personalized in one 'charismatic' figure, has been (and still is) experienced by many societies in which a weak pluralist system is incapable of resolving deep political and ideological rifts and is perceived to be in terminal crisis." ⁸¹ This emergence of a leadership cult in Germany is characteristic of specifically German political culture, and this was long before Hitler, although Hitler was the one to have enough conviction in promising to restore Germany's greatness.

Goebbels was constantly behind Hitler, exemplifying Hitler to the fullest extent, which complimented Hitler's own very obsessive self-governing habits. Hitler was well

⁸⁰ Taylor, "Symbol and Ritual under National Socialism.", 518.

⁸¹ Ibid.

known to take great pains and attentions to his public image and posture when speaking and other engagements. He had practiced for hours in front of the mirror to get his facial expressions and gestures to portray exactly what he intended. Hitler went as far as to avoid any kind of hint of human failings, refusing to wear glasses in public, and avoided any kind of sport or activity that would make him the idea of a spectacle rather than admiration. Goebbels even projected Hitler's decision of celibacy to the masses as a selfless act, "portrayed as the sacrifice of personal happiness for the welfare of the nation."⁸² Throughout the Hitler Movement, Goebbels was indispensable to the integrative function, first as "a counter to the strong centrifugal forces within the Nazi movement itself"⁸³ and secondly "in establishing a massive basis of consensus among the German people for those aims and policies identifiable with the Fuhrer."⁸⁴ Goebbels also was not shy to admit the Movement's dependence on the value of his talents claiming "the creation of the Fuhrer myth as his greatest propaganda achievement...of image building."⁸⁵

Goebbels propaganda was effective. Not because of the force of imposition upon the masses, but because the masses helped Goebbels create the image, and it was building upon and not countering the already existing values and mentalities. "The ready made terrain of pre-existing beliefs, prejudices, and phobias forming an important stratum of

⁸² Ian Kershaw, *The Hitler Myth: Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 3.

⁸³ Kershaw, *The Hitler Myth*, 4.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

the German political culture on to which the Hitler myth could easily be imprinted, provides, therefore an equally essential element in explaining how the propaganda image of Hitler was upholding the true sense of propriety of the Germany people could take hold and flourish.”⁸⁶

Since his induction to be the Party propaganda leader, he associated Hitler directly with his vision of Germany’s awaited leader. The true leader, he declared, was not elected, was not subject to the whims of the masses, and was not a parliamentarian but a liberator of the masses. Hitler and the other party leaders delivered the religious language and connotations Goebbels would formulate and whole heartedly believe. He was credited to say that Hitler was the ‘fulfillment of a mysterious longing’ and spoke of him as the man who showed Germany in its deepest darkness the way to a faith and could “work miracles of enlightenment and belief in a world of skepticism and despair.”⁸⁷

CHAPTER 3

Reinventing the Swastika: Symbol of Evil

United States Lack of Action

Peter J. Haas has stated quite clearly the deafening silence from the west, “the absence of sustained moral challenge on the parts of Britain and ht United States and the Vatican and

⁸⁶ Kershaw, *The Hitler Myth*, 5.

⁸⁷ Bramsted, *Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda*, 155.

other religious institutions is one of the most striking features of the Nazi period.”⁸⁸

There was during the span of the Holocaust and undeniable surplus of awareness within the public. The lack of information could never be a valid excuse for daily reports came out to the public about the mass graves, the gas chambers, inhumane experiments, and death marches. The grand scale of how the Holocaust was planned and systematically carried out, could not be ignored or go unnoticed.

No one, as Haas recapitulates, had ever opposed. “When the Jews could have deported, no one wished to protest; when Auschwitz was in full operation, no one felt compelled to bomb it; when Jewish refugees managed to escape from Germany, they were imprisoned by the Allies and on occasion even returned to Germany.”⁸⁹ By the time the West responded, it was successful on a smaller level, but ineffectual on the much larger scale of the holocaust.

In the Holocaust’s earliest stages, the West knew, in great detail, the annihilation of the Jews that prompted a speech by Himmler that advised the crowd to take their answer to the Jewish Question to the grave. What is even more surprising is that the communities around the camps could ignore the chimney tops and the gunshots. The Nazi genocide was undeniably present in Germany’s economy making it impossible for the citizens to turn a blind eye.

Stories from witnesses about the death camps had actually been discussed with a Swedish diplomat before the camps were even fully functional. Haas goes on to detail,

“Kurt Gerstein, chief disinfection officer in the office of the

⁸⁸ Haas, Peter J. *Morality After Auschwitz: The Radical Challenge of the Nazi Ethic* (Philadelphia: 1988), 192.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

hygienic chief of the Waffen- S.S. Gerstein had been sent with a load of Zyklon gas to Belzec to evaluate its use as a possible mass killing agent. On the way back to Berlin, he happened to sit next to a Swedish diplomat, Baron Goran von Otto. Gerstein used the occasion to relate to von Otto everything he had seen at the camp, and upon returning to Berlin, the diplomat immediately wired the results of the conversation to Stockholm. Thus, the mission of Auschwitz and the details of its operation became available to Allied intelligence.”⁹⁰

Sweden alone had fifty-three offices of intelligence that was in charge of gathering military, economic, and industrial information from listening posts. To claim naivety at this point was, as Haas puts it, absurd. The Resistance underground offices also kept a well informed stream to the West concerning the camps. They were not only reliable, but also proved to be very accurate concerning timing, and extremely detailed. Army intelligence from both America and Britain had cracked the S.S. military code in 1941, so they too had very easy access to up to date material.

Haas has noted upon five important factors that are accountable for the West’s inexplicable lack of action. The first he noted upon briefly was caution. Haas elaborated, “There had been a number of atrocity reports coming out of World War 1. As it turned out, most were false, crude attempts to sway public opinion...When atrocity reports from Germany were released, they were as often as not shrugged of as anti-German propaganda.”⁹¹

The second factor that Haas brings up concerned Britain’s shaky position with the Palestine’s and the Arabs. Great Britain had promised to allow Jewish migration into the area of Palestine. However, with the rise of Arab nationalism, the leaders began to protest

⁹⁰ Haas, *Morality After Auschwitz*, 194.

⁹¹ Haas, *Morality After Auschwitz*, 196.

this 'invasion' of Jews. As the Arab anger progressively grew, Britain tightened their policy of immigration upon the Jews. The Jews now had nowhere to go, for their only hope to escape was Palestine, which was now cut off to them, and Britain found themselves in a compromising position. Haas continues, "On the one hand, they had publicly capitulated to Arab demands to restrict Jewish migration into Palestine. They had established a strict quota system and were determined to stick to it. On the other, the atrocities of the Nazis were creating immense pressure on refugees to find a haven, and British Palestine seemed the logical choice."⁹² The British smoothed over the information of the Nazi's as much as they could so that they would not feel, and prevent pressure in their own country but also across seas.

The third factor that Haas discusses to be an influence behind the lack of response from the West was that the United States was struggling itself with Anti-Jewish, and Jewish hatred. President Roosevelt himself clearly saw that the Jewish demands were a political liability if he had to bend or supply to their demands. As Haas writes, "He realized that placing Jewish concerns too far toward the forefront would jeopardize his efforts to have the United States join the war. So the United States, like Britain, had deep political reasons for wanting to suppress the news of Hitler's anti-Jewish atrocities.

The fourth problem was the undecided attitude some of the Allies like Poland and Russia had towards the Jews. Haas makes the point that, "The Poles had suffered tremendously at the hands of the Nazis and were proving to be loyal and useful allies. Why upset the Poles by pointing a finger specifically at atrocities perpetrated against

⁹² Haas, *Morality After Auschwitz*, 197.

Jews?"⁹³ The Poles and the Russians were both traditionally anti-Semitic, and allies, when the Jews began to progressively grow weaker and weaker both countries did not seem to have any concern for them at all.

The last factor concerns the psychological barrier.

The Allies seemed unable to take a stand against the basic assumptions that underlay the Nazi ethic... They, were caught in the web of their own moral preconceptions about race, state sovereignty, and the demands of war, and so could not form an adequately forceful response to Auschwitz. In war, human life is cheap, and death of a few Jewish victims was deemed inconsequential that prevented the West from providing the Archimedean fulcrum needed to dislodge the Nazi Ethic.⁹⁴

Haas elaborates that the reluctance of the West gave the victims of the Nazi ethic no choice but to continue to remain within their control, and the effect of that escalated drastically. The Nazis also responded to the West's lack of any response by legitimizing their actions and by offering up no protest to destructing of the Jews. He continues, "In the end, Britain, France and a few other countries reluctantly accepted most of the refugees, with the clear understanding that under no circumstances would more be accepted. The result of all this was a brilliant propaganda victory for the Nazis. It was now clear to the world that no country, not even the United States wanted Jews."⁹⁵

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Haas, *Morality After Auschwitz*, p.198.

⁹⁵ Haas, *Morality After Auschwitz*, p.199.

Conclusion

The swastika has been reinvented several times over the duration of history, and over the course of this paper I have discussed the different identifications the swastika has assumed. If the United States allowed the history of the swastika to include its origin before Nazism, the symbolism of the swastika would become more peaceful. Although it is difficult to ignore the first reaction to the symbol with negativity, we must keep in mind that other cultures accept this symbol in a different way than our own.

By overcoming this fear of the symbol, we are allowing ourselves to be more open minded. In order to identify the swastika with an identity that is more peaceful, we have to be receptive to the other identities that we have not acknowledged until now. The benefits of this inclusiveness are priceless, the willingness to bend and compromise on such an unforgiving topic will pave the way for easier cultural differences to be solved.

I must, in order to not self deprecate myself into a position of ignorance say a few things about the Holocaust. I do not wish to, by proposing that we reinvent the symbol, to 'forget' the Holocaust. I intended to have a study on the symbol and how it became such an important aspect in the Holocaust. While this symbol is the focus of very strong emotions, be it good or evil I did not wish in any means offend anyone who has clung to the symbol in their own personal lives. I don't mean to undermine any of the efforts done by the survivors, and the people who have memorialized the Holocaust.

I also do not intend by reinventing the symbol by being more inclusive, for us to forget about, or lessen the important lessons of morals and ethics that have been tied to. The symbol, and what it has been identified with has been drawn out for over 50 years. It

is important for us to remember, learn and grow from our mistakes; my intention was to point out a possibility of another. The symbol that was rooted to evil, then has a possibility of finding another identity it has been known for over the past thousands of years.

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