

The Women of Rosenstrasse: Analyzing Resistance in Nazi Germany

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Abstract

In the midst of World War 2 studies, the horrors of the Holocaust dominate international thought and academia. With this at the forefront, less emphasis has been placed on the resistance to the Nazi regime including this specific instance of mass civil courage. Resistance to Hitler's Germany took many forms and was led by varying motivations for the groups leading resistance. In some instances, resistance took the form of a political agenda from left-leaning political groups diametrically opposed to the fascist rule of the Nazi's. In comparison to other forms of resistance, the Rosenstrasse protest demonstrates the greatest form of courage to its predecessors. Not only was the protest the only public protest in Nazi Germany, the actions of the protesters reunited families and inspired courage amidst the darkest of times.

Background

Hitler's rise to power was never unopposed, with many left-wing groups diametrically opposed to the dictator's fascist policy and regime. By 1933, there was a formal ban on leftist organizations forcing these groups to move silently underground to continue their resistance. Operating from underground, resistance groups relied on publications to deliver their message, with opposition taking the frequent form of educational materials relating to socialist and communist policy. The goal was to inform the public of information they were unable to receive in the wake of the Nazi regime.

Second to political movements against Hitler, were movements from Jewish youth groups and Zionist groups that opposed the antisemitic regime. The Zionist groups encouraged immigration to the Jewish homeland as an escape from the regime, but their efforts became increasingly more difficult after 1938 when an emigration ban was imposed. One Zionist leader in particular, Edith Wolff, was the child of a Jewish father and an Aryan mother, became greatly involved in preparing young Jews to leave the country to travel to Palestine and opposed the Nazi regime by putting "poison" stickers on copies of *Mein Kampf*.

With the previous resistance to the Nazi regime in mind, the Rosenstrasse protest, in comparison, is the greatest public display of protest to Hitler and the Gestapo. On February 27, 1943, the regime initiated its final roundup of Jewish people in Germany. Previously exempt Jewish men who were married to Aryan wives were arrested and detained by the Gestapo. Furious and upset by the arrests of their husbands, Aryan wives took to the street in protest in the heart of Berlin in front of the building their husbands were being kept in for deportation. The women shouted "Give us our husbands back!" at the gate, and for a week straight stood in protest for the release of their family members. This protest resulted in the release of nearly 2,000 Jewish men, all of whom were to be deported. Due to the solidarity and strength of the women, the men were free from deportation and able to return back to their families.



Figure 1 The Jewish Federation of Rosenstrasse
Served as the holding facility for all Jews arrested before the Rosenstrasse protest.

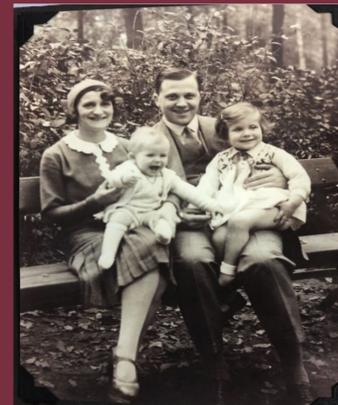


Figure 2
The Kuhn Family circa 1932
All but the mother were imprisoned at Rosenstrasse.

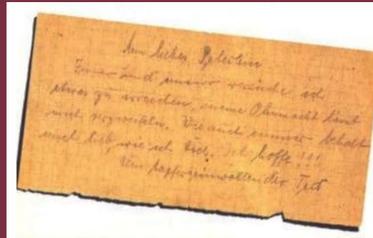


Figure 3
A love letter Elsa Holzer smuggled to her husband inside of a sandwich while he was imprisoned.

Methods

Research was done utilizing diverse literature hosted on the Rosenstrasse Foundation website regarding the Rosenstrasse protest. Through the use of historical databases, further research was done specifically focused around the words "dissent," "resistance," and "protest" in Nazi Germany. Sources include peer reviewed journals, articles, and books written on the topics. Once the research was completed, I analyzed all materials on resistance in comparison to the oral accounts of the Rosenstrasse protest to find discrepancies in the different forms of resistance.

Discussion

The implications of the Rosenstrasse protest extend far beyond the release of Jewish men from Nazi custody. The protest as a whole represents a mass act of civil courage and the importance of standing in opposition to injustice. The key differentiation of this protest from the resistance that took place before it, is the timing and publicity of the event. Their actions were unprecedented in the larger picture of World War 2 and the Holocaust, as the women of Rosenstrasse took completely unprecedented action and risked their lives to save their husbands. In a tumultuous world, the goals of the Rosenstrasse Foundation to educate on civil courage remain of the utmost importance. Through the comparison of the events of Rosenstrasse to other resistance, it shines light on what separates this act of opposition to others and demonstrates the level of strength it took for these women to commit to an act of protest.

Future Work

This project, along with further research, can be utilized to further develop curriculum on civil courage for the Rosenstrasse Foundation. In combination with the personal testimonies of those present for the events at Rosenstrasse, this research can be used in an attempt to demonstrate to students the significance of the events of Rosenstrasse and create a larger discussion on the implications of civil courage.

References

