Visual Propaganda and the Aryan Family: The Difficulties of De-Emancipating Women of the Third Reich

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Abstract
In alignment with its racial ambitions, the Third Reich implemented a robustly maternalistic propaganda campaign in attempt to convince “racially superior” women to return to the home and bear many children. Because women could create a “racially pure” state through their reproductive capabilities, they became the main targets of such propaganda. This project analyzes the power of the visual in invading the female private sphere for the public benefit, specifically placing poster propaganda of mothers and families in their social, ideological, and visual contexts. It also identifies how visuals used the female body as an ideological map for Nazi racism and, in turn, fashioned women’s identity as wives and mothers. Many scholars have argued that the myriad propaganda implemented by the Nazis was ineffective in increasing the birth rate. This project explores this finding by searching for a potential semiotic disconnect between the Nazis’ images of the ideal Aryan woman and an audience that had emerged from Weimar female emancipation. Ultimately, this project assesses the effectiveness of Nazi visual propaganda aimed at Aryan girls and women, which ultimately argued that motherhood—above all—glorified the Third Reich.

The Art of Nazi Propaganda, The Propaganda of Nazi Art

In Mein Kampf, Adolf Hitler stressed the importance of propaganda as a political weapon. Poster propaganda was to be clear, present “simple and firm” binaries, remain constant in message, and appeal to the masses. The Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, under the leadership of Dr. Joseph Goebbels, attempted to meld the popular will with the political will in order to ultimately rally the masses in a social revolution. Art and culture that “capture[d] the true expression of the spirit of the Volk” was highly valued for its display of the Aryan people’s shared identity and destiny. Through poster propaganda, Nazi ideology in a clear, emotionally activating visual format could be disseminated in mass quantities on a daily basis. The Nazi emphasis on poster propaganda points to its use as an advertisement for a new society—one with a distinct racial hierarchy and gender role assignment.

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References
- Calvin College Online German Propaganda Archive.