

# 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 identities as wives and mothers. Many scholars have argued that the myriad propaganda implemented by the Nazis was ineffective in increasing the birthrate. 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.

## Nazi Ideology on Women

The ideal Nazi woman:

- Is a pure, “racially superior” Aryan
- Maintains her health through “feminine” physical activity
- Has a strong, classical body that reflects the race’s durability
- Accepts her “natural” role as a housewife and mother
- Sacrifices her life and body to bear, raise, and educate numerous Aryan children for the state’s future health
- If she cannot bear children, implements her “spiritual maternity” by working for the state
- Prioritizes the *Volksgemeinschaft* (people’s community) above all else

## Children for the Reich



“To the Leader – the children,”  
1939 postcard

## 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.

## “Mother of the Volk”



“Support the assistance program for mother and child,” mid-1930s poster promoting a Nazi charity organization

## The Separation of Spheres

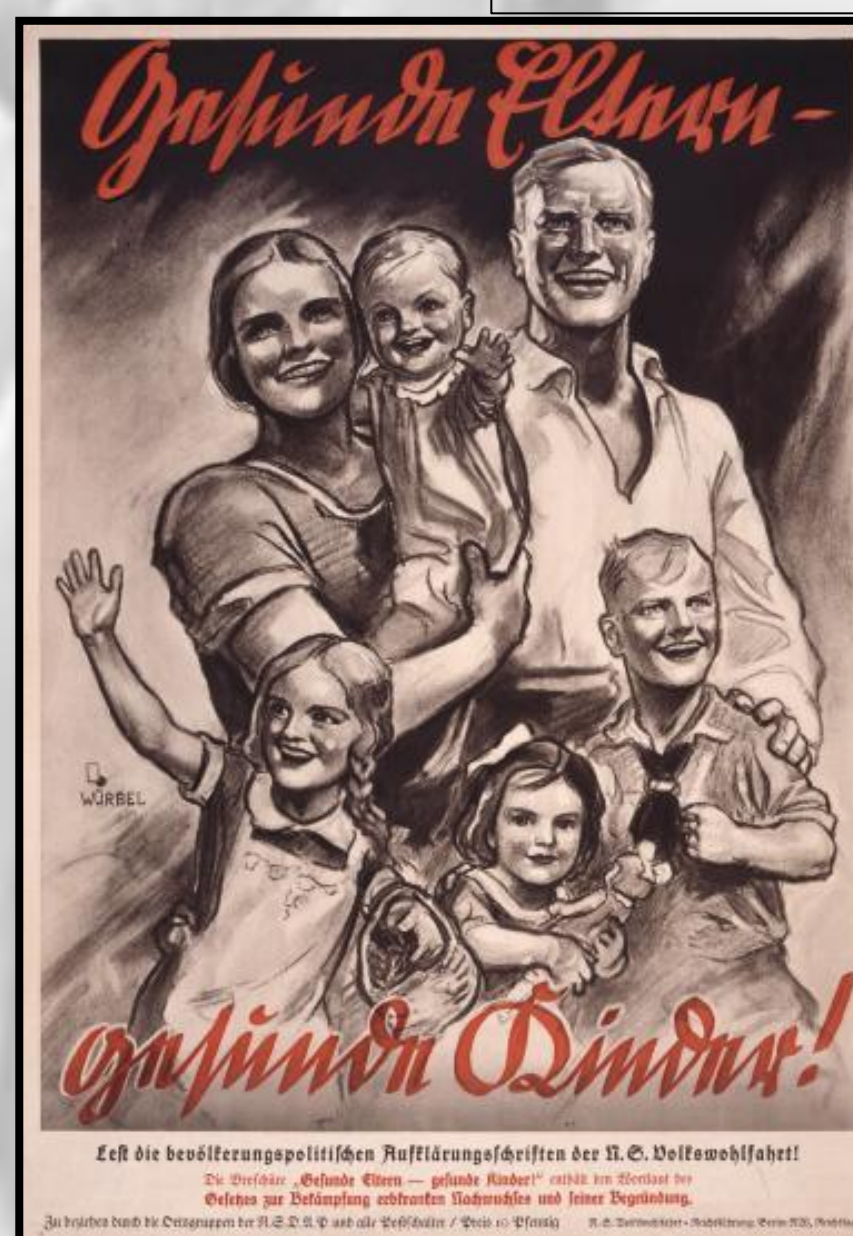


*Frauen Warte* (“Women Wait”) magazine, issue #20, 1937/1938

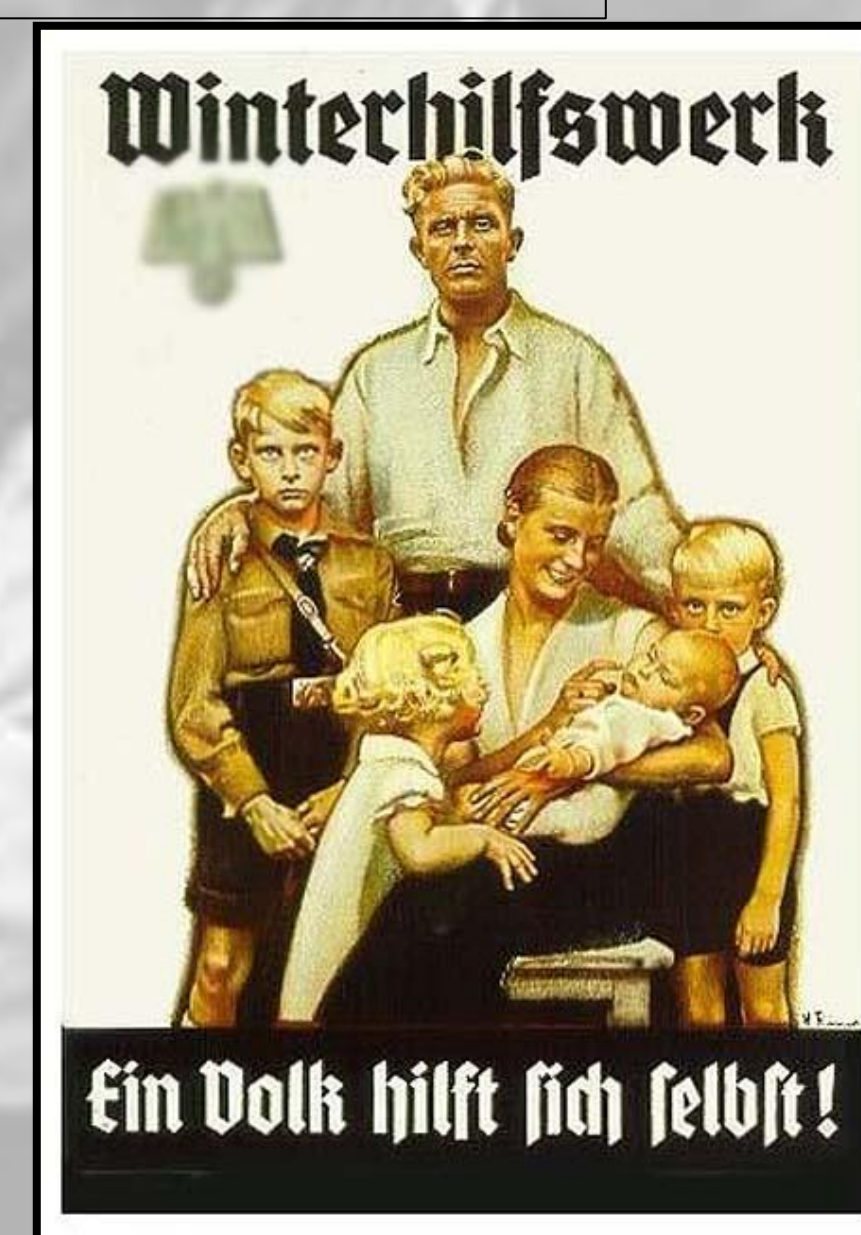
## Conclusions

- The Weimar “emancipation of women” was less dramatic than the prevalence of the “new woman’s” image would lead one to believe.
- Nazi propaganda of and for women attempted to fashion women’s identities for the state’s racial, social, and economic needs.
- Posters clearly and powerfully articulated Nazi ideology by enabling women to imagine themselves within the Nazis’ ideal society and then practically and ideologically align their lives with its realization.
- In the late 1930s, representations of women shifted from a racial and maternal visual rhetoric to the economic and wartime need for women to enter the workforce.
- The poster could present a perfect separation of spheres, but war strained the rigid duties of the spheres. Posters then recast women’s “natural” feminine strengths as useful for wartime productivity.
- Although not the focus of this study, one must also account for the visual rhetoric which called men to be fathers, but to also serve the Reich’s masculine war endeavors and thus pull them away from the family.

## The Family is the “Cell of the State”



“Healthy parents – healthy children,” 1936 poster promoting writings about genetic hygiene



“A People helps itself!”  
1938 poster promoting the Winter Relief Organization

## Women’s Work at Wartime



1941 poster advertisement for a county Party rally



“Mothers, fight for your children!” poster from late in the war

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