

Dehumanization, Criminalization, Persecution, and Extermination

An Examination of the Legal Oppression and Horrific Violence Against Queer People in Nazi Germany

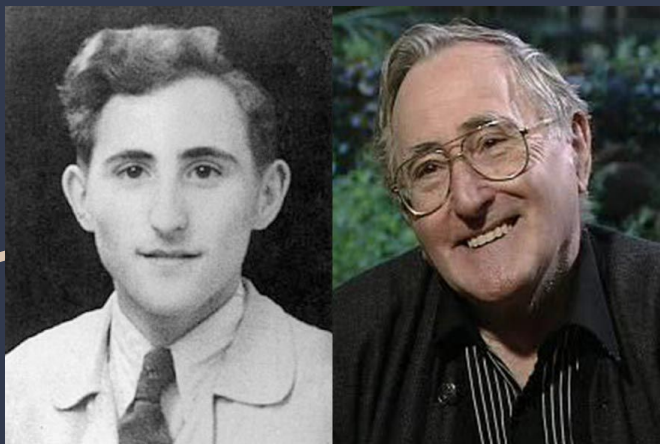
Mx. Christian B. Weisse (They/Them)
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Alex Kyrrou

Link to the Capstone Thesis

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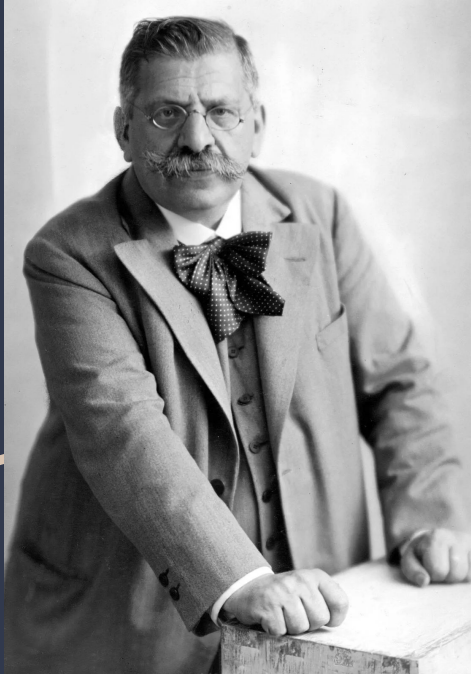


Gay Life in the Weimar Republic: Germany 1918–1933



- During the era of the Weimar Republic, Berlin became known as “a homosexual mecca, where gay men and lesbians could live relatively open lives” (Kaczorowski).
- Gay clubs, bars, restaurants, and dance clubs became the epicenter of socialization for queer people during the Weimar Republic.
- “Coming out” occurred in different aspects than the present-day
 - Gad Beck, a survivor of the Nazi Genocide
 - Support system with his family
 - Felt free to be himself growing up
 - One of Beck’s drawings depicts a man hanging on a tree symbolizing the oppression and trauma of queer people - a dark foreshadowing of the persecution and extermination of queer people.

Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld



- Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, a queer German physician and sexologist, created the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee on May 15, 1897.
 - The committee advocate for the social acceptance and inclusion of queer people into societal mores.
 - Goal was to eradicate Paragraph 175 of the Criminal Code, a law punishing “homosexual behavior.”
 - Gathered more than 5,000 signatures for a petition to overturn Paragraph 175
 - People like Albert Einstein, Hermann Hesse, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Martin Buber signed the petition.
- In 1918, Hirschfeld co-wrote the first international gay-themed film, *Anders als die Andern* (Different from the Others).
 - Promoted and educated the public on homosexuality and advocated for the acceptance and inclusion of queer people.
- Early in his career, Dr. Hirschfeld had a young military officer as a patient. The patient killed themselves on the eve of his wedding as he did not want to marry a woman. Rather, this officer wanted to be in a relationship with his male friend. This suicide deeply affected Hirschfeld and the work he continued to do.
- In 1919, Hirschfeld created the Institute for Sexual Research.

Paragraph 175

- After the rise of the Nazi regime, Paragraph 175 was used as a legal form of oppression against queer men.
- In February 1933, queer rights organizations were banned and queer publications were prohibited.
 - This shut down the socialization of queer people in Nazi Germany.
- In 1934, the enforcement of Paragraph 175 was led by a special Gestapo division. If anyone was caught and found guilty of disobeying the law, they could be sentenced to a decade in prison.
 - Their obligation was to find, criminalize, and sentence those who did not follow the law.
 - They used violence and beat many queer men.
- A total of 100,000 men were arrested for violating Nazi Germany's law against homosexuality.
- According to official records, between 50,000 and 63,000 men, including 4,000 juveniles, were accused of violating Paragraph 175 and convicted of homosexuality in Germany between 1933 and 1945.

Artikel 6

Unzucht zwischen Männern

1. § 175 des Strafgesetzbuchs erhält folgende Fassung:

§ 175

Ein Mann, der mit einem anderen Mann Unzucht treibt oder sich von ihm zur Unzucht mißbrauchen läßt, wird mit Gefängnis bestraft.

1933 - 853	1934 - 948	1935 - 2,106	1936 - 5,320	1937 - 8,271
1938 - 8,562	1939 - 7,614	1940 - 3,773	1941 - 3,735	1942 - 3,963

The number of men convicted of charges relating to homosexuality dramatically increased after 1934, after the creation of a unit in the Gestapo specifically arresting people for homosexuality.

Paragraph 175 for Women



- Paragraph 175 did not include any language or enforcement toward lesbians
- However, lesbians felt just as unsafe as gay men when it came to societal pressures and mores.
 - The married to avoid societal pressures
- The Nazis launched a massive propaganda campaign in support of marriage and procreation
 - Lesbians were aware of the backlash if they remained single in Nazi Germany
 - The propaganda became a fear tactic for lesbians and they felt pressured to conform to societal norms

Ernst Röhm



- A German military officer and Nazi Party official, Ernst Röhm was a close ally and friend of Adolf Hitler. Röhm was a queer man.
- Reports claim Hitler knew about Röhm being gay.
- On June 29th, 1934, Hitler had Röhm arrested.
- On July 1st, 1934, guards went into Röhm's prison cell and handed him a revolver, persuading him to commit suicide.
 - Röhm responded with, "Let Adolf do it himself."
 - He was executed by two SS hitmen later the same day and hauled away in a butcher's tin-lined truck.
- Hitler would later call this the "Night of the Long Knives" when 61 SA members had been executed, 13 SA members were shot while resisting arrest, and 3 committed suicide.
- Hitler said, "If anyone reproached me and asks me why I did not resort to regular courts of justice, then all I can say is this: In this hour I was responsible for the fate of the German people. I became the supreme judge of the German nation."
 - Holding himself above the law, Hitler referred to Röhm's sexuality as one of the reasons he was executed.

Medical Experiments and Abuse



- In addition to the legal persecution of queer people in Nazi Germany, medical experiments and forms of torture were conducted.
- Pierre Seel, another survivor of the Nazi Genocide, witnessed medical experiments happening in the concentration camps.
 - “In a white room, he and others were pinned up against a wall and had needles injected into their nipples - an experiment that killed at least one inmate when the needle struck his heart.”
 - “These experiments caused illness, mutilation, and even death, and yielded no scientific knowledge.”
- Some queer people survived was by opting to do castration in exchange for lower sentences. However, judges and SS camp officials, later on, ordered castration without any content.
 - Queer prisoners “were castrated. Some were used as guinea pigs in various medical experiments to find a cure for typhus fever and a cure for homosexuality, the latter of which led the SS to inject them with testosterone to see if it would make them straight” (Waxman).

175ers and the Pink Triangle



- The last form of dehumanization and degradation against queer people before extermination was the labeling of queer people in concentration camps with the pink triangle.
- Debates continue today as to why the color pink was used.
 - Author and historian Ken Settrington claims, "It could be that pink was considered a feminine color, much as it is today, and would be humiliating for a man to wear...No documentation is available to confirm the reason that pink triangles were used to identify homosexuals."
 - German sexologist Erwin J. Hawberle argues, "In the case of the homosexuals, the color pink was, of course, meant to signal weakness and effeminacy in accordance with the earlier mentioned Nazi perception of their character."
- No matter the reasoning for the pink triangle, the degradation and dehumanization of queer people shows hatred and disdain by the Nazi regime towards queer people.
- Today, the pink triangle is used as a symbol of gay rights and the memorialization of queer people killed in the Nazi Genocide.

Murder and Extermination



- Pierre Seel endured his traumatic experiences in the medical chamber. In addition to this, he also saw his former love murdered right in front of him in the concentration camp.
 - “Of all the terrors and horrors in the camp, none could compare to the day on which Pierre saw Jo, his love from only a few months past. He had never seen him before in the camp, but now, at the roll-call site, he knew his best friend was about to die. The SS officers stripped him naked and shoved a tin pail over his head. They let their well-trained German Shepherd dogs loose. All the prisoners were forced to watch as the dogs attacked and killed Jo” (Settingington).
- This trauma was something queer people were subjected to in addition to their torture and abuse.
- Other forms of extermination included shooting squads, gas chambers, executions, starvation, illness, and more.

Memorials Dedicated to Queer People

- Pink plaques dedicated to the queer victims from the concentration camps and death camps were placed at Dachau, Mauthausen, and Buchenwald.
- The Gay and Lesbian Holocaust Memorial Park in Sydney, Australia
- Other Places with memorials dedicated to the queer victims of the Nazi persecution
 - Tel Aviv
 - Amsterdam
 - San Francisco
 - Sydney

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