



Visions of Community in Nazi Germany: Social Engineering and Private Lives

Martina Steber, Bernhard Gotto

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When the Nazis seized power in Germany in 1933 they promised to create a new, harmonious society under the leadership of the Führer, Adolf Hitler. The concept of Volksgemeinschaft - 'the people's community' - enshrined the Nazis' vision of society'; a society based on racist, social-Darwinist, anti-democratic, and nationalist thought. The regime used Volksgemeinschaft to define who belonged to the National Socialist 'community' and who did not. Being accorded the status of belonging granted citizenship rights, access to the benefits of the welfare state, and opportunities for advancement, while those who were denied the privilege of belonging lost their right to live. They were shamed, excluded, imprisoned, murdered.

Volksgemeinschaft was the Nazis' project of social engineering, realized by state action, by administrative procedure, by party practice, by propaganda, and by individual initiative. Everyone deemed worthy of belonging was called to participate in its realization. Indeed, this collective notion was directed at the individual, and unleashed an enormous dynamism, which gave social change a particular direction. The Volksgemeinschaft concept was not strictly defined, which meant that it was rather marked by a plurality of meaning and emphasis which resulted in a range of readings in the Third Reich, drawing in people from many social and political backgrounds.

Visions of Community in Nazi Germany scrutinizes Volksgemeinschaft as the Nazis' central vision of community. The contributors engage with individual appropriations, examine projects of social engineering, analyze the social dynamism unleashed, and show how deeply private lives were affected by this murderous vision of society.

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