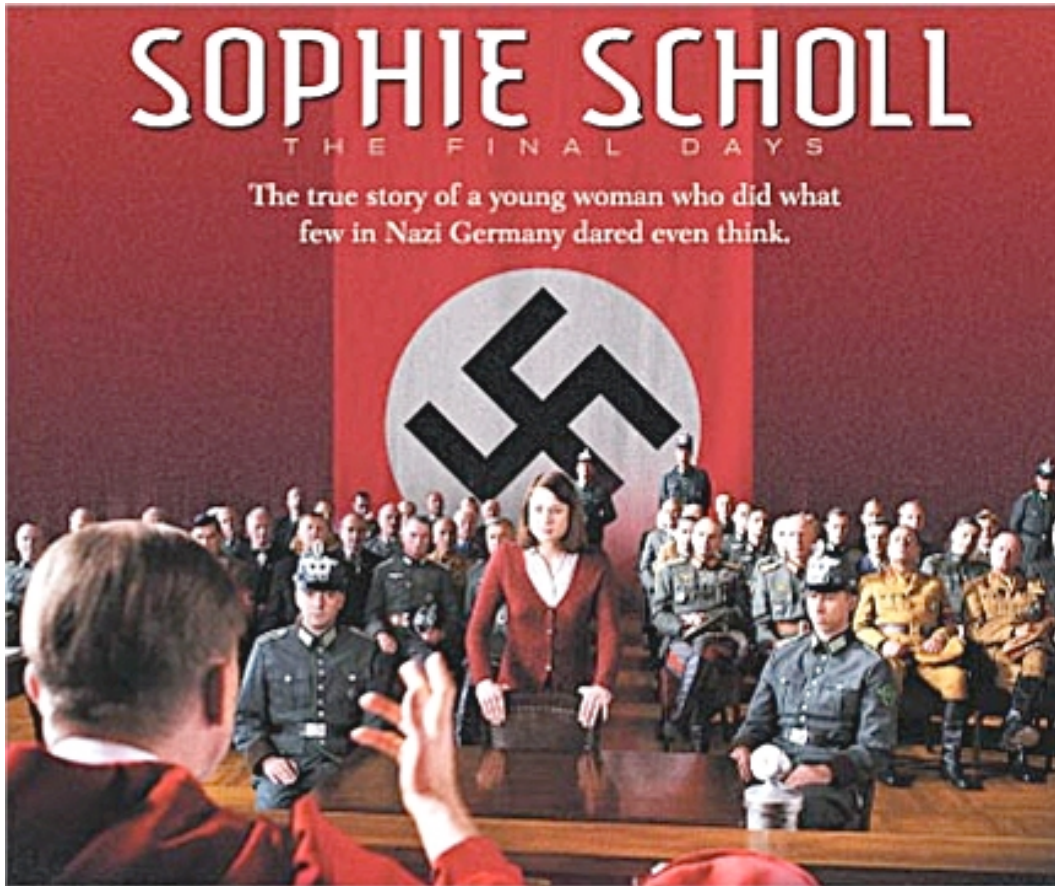


# How accurate is the depiction of the 'White Rose' in the film 'Sophie Scholl – The Final Days'?



<http://www.germanmaltesecircle.org/images/SophieScholl.jpg>

International School of Toulouse  
Word Count: 1,998

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## **A. Plan of Investigation**

The investigation focuses on the depiction of the 'White Rose' within the film "Sophie Scholl - The Final Days". I have chosen this particular question as "Hollywoodization" frequently dumbs down history and thus I want to find out whether this is also the case in Rothemunde's film.

Regarding the analysis, I will divide this section into two main parts. The first will analyse what the White Rose did and who was involved whereas the second part will demonstrate how the members of the White Rose justified what they did.

In order to assess the values and limitations of the source with regard to these issues, I will compare the trial scene of the movie with an extract from the White Rose's fifth leaflet. Nevertheless, I will also make use of the other leaflets<sup>1</sup>, several books<sup>2</sup> and of historians such as Simon Henderson

Word Count: 143

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<sup>1</sup> Leaflet 1, leaflet 4, leaflet 6

<sup>2</sup> Greg Lacey, Keith Shephard, (1997). *Discovering the Past*. John Murray (ISBN: 071957059X), Richard Hanser (1979). *A noble treason*. New York: Putnam, (ISBN: 0399120416), Jud Newborn, Annette Dumbach, (2006). *Sophie Scholl and the White Rose*. Oneworld Publications (ISBN: 1851684743), David Welch (2002). *The Third Reich*. New York: Routledge (ISBN: 0415275083)

## B. Summary of Evidence

The 'White Rose' was a nonviolent resistance group, which attempted to oppose Adolf Hitler's regime from June 1942 until February 1943 by "attacking the Nazi's slaughter of the Jews and Poles"<sup>3</sup>. The core of the group consisted of Sophie Scholl, Hans Scholl, Alex Schmorell, Willi Graf, and Christoph Probst. Other participants of the 'White Rose' were Inge Scholl as well as a philosophy professor from the University of Munich.

The 'White Rose' "intended to represent purity and innocence in the face of evil"<sup>4</sup> and was famous for its anonymous leaflets, which greatly believed in "freedom of speech [and] freedom of religion"<sup>5</sup>. The members of the 'White Rose' had distributed six leaflets and the draft of the seventh leaflet was in possession of Hans Scholl when the Gestapo captured him. In all of the leaflets the members had included quotes from Aristotle and Novalis, the Bible, and German poets such as Goethe and Schiller, who greatly inspired them.

The first leaflets were sent to various citizens in Austria and Bavaria, as the group believed these to be more amenable than those in the North. As the male members of the 'White Rose' were obliged to go to the Eastern Front for military service at the end of July 1942, the group ceased and resumed their convictions in January 1943 when the male members returned from the Front. They then increased the number of leaflets sent away, producing between 6000 and 9000 copies of the fifth leaflet, which was distributed to various German cities<sup>6</sup> via courier runs. At the beginning of February 1943 Alexander Schmorell, Hans Scholl, and Willi Graf had written anti Hitler slogans<sup>7</sup> on the walls of the University of Munich as well as other buildings in Munich.

Despite the search for the publishers of the leaflets the resistance group distributed the sixth leaflet, explaining that the "day of reckoning"<sup>8</sup> had come for "the most contemptible

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<sup>3</sup> Lacey Shephard, "Germany 1918 – 1945", 1997, Hodder Education, ISBN ISBN: 0719570599, p.151

<sup>4</sup> Annette Dumbach & Jud Newborn, Sophie Scholl & The White Rose", 2006, One World Publications, ISBN: 1851684743, p. 58

<sup>5</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White\\_Rose](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_Rose) (15/09/08)

<sup>6</sup> Cologne, Stuttgart, Vienna, Freiburg, Chemnitz, Hamburg, and Berlin

<sup>7</sup> "Down with Hitler" and "Freedom" ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White\\_Rose](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_Rose)) (15/09/08)

<sup>8</sup> The White Rose, Leaflet 6, 1943

tyrant our people has ever endured”<sup>9</sup>, in the University of Munich whilst students were in lectures. As Sophie and Hans Scholl hadn’t distributed all the leaflets they went back to the top floor where Sophie flung the remaining leaflets into the air. Alas, the custodian John-Jakob Schmid was an observer and consequently called the police, resulting in the arrest of Sophie and Hans Scholl. They were taken in for interrogation and soon after the first to stand trial before the ‘Volksgerichtshof’ together with Christoph Probst. Even though they were found guilty of treason and sentenced to death, Sophie Scholl said to Roland Freisler “You know as well as we do that the war is lost. Why are you so cowardly that you won’t admit it?”<sup>10</sup>. Other members such as Alexander Schmorell and Kurt Huber were also beheaded and others who helped distribute and prepare the leaflets were sentenced to prison terms.

Nevertheless, the ‘White Rose’ survived as their last leaflet was smuggled out of Germany and air- dropped over Germany by allied planes, re-titled “The Manifesto of the Students of Munich”.

The film “Sophie Scholl – The Final Days”, which was released in 2005 is based upon the White Rose and was directed by Marc Rothemunde. It was nominated for Oscar as well as winning the Bavarian Film Award and many others <sup>11</sup>. Some believe that "the film's claustrophobic intensity and emotional punch certainly deserve[d] to be cheered"<sup>12</sup>, others think that “we can only [...] guess what it was inside [Sophie] that drove her to forsake her life in favor of a higher purpose”<sup>13</sup>.

Word Count: 589

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Richard Hanser, “A noble treason: The revolt of the Munich students against Hitler”, 1979, Putnam, ISBN: 0399120416

<sup>11</sup> German Film critics award

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/films/2005/10/17/sophie\\_scholl\\_2005\\_review.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/films/2005/10/17/sophie_scholl_2005_review.shtml)

<sup>13</sup> [http://uk.rottentomatoes.com/m/sophie\\_scholl\\_die\\_letzten\\_tage/](http://uk.rottentomatoes.com/m/sophie_scholl_die_letzten_tage/)

## C. Evaluation of Sources

### **Source 1:** [Appendix A]

In terms of purpose, the source is valuable because it clearly demonstrates the negative aspects of the Nazi Regime and hence why the White Rose opposed National Socialism. It can be seen from the source that some of the reasons for the opposition of Nazi Germany were suppression, censorship<sup>14</sup>, manipulation and the cunning transformation into cold-blooded murderers of the German population<sup>15</sup>, which consequently no longer had its own opinion or belief.

With regard to the origin, the leaflet was written in 1943 by the resistance movement 'White Rose', which consisted of German students opposing Hitler's regime. Thus the source is valuable as it provides first hand knowledge of the negative facts, which partially aroused a feeling of discontent and subsequently caused opposition to Hitler's regime.

On the other hand, the origin of the source can be considered a limitation as the 'White Rose' was too wrapped up in events, which denounced the regime and thus the source does not provide information about why other opposing groups refused to support Hitler. Opposing groups such as the 'Swing Youth', the 'Edelweiss Pirates' and the Confessing Church did not rebel for the same reasons as the 'White Rose'. Both the 'Swing Youth' and the 'Edelweiss Pirates' consisted of juveniles, who resented the regimentation of the Hitler Youth, hence demanding "eternal war on the Hitler youth"<sup>16</sup> as well as desiring a certain freedom, enabling adolescents to develop a certain culture and personality.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> "a state in which all free expression of opinion is unscrupulously suppressed" (The White Rose, Leaflet 6)

<sup>15</sup> "conscienceless exploiters and executioners" (The White Rose, Leaflet 6)

<sup>16</sup> David Welch, "The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda", 1993, Routledge, p.62 - 63

<sup>17</sup> The Confessing Church opposed the Nazi Regime, as they disliked the idea of merging both politics and religion. Hence the 'White Rose' could be considered the least noble resistance movement as many of the members had been part of Hitler's army or the Hitler Youth before possibly opposing the ideals of the regime due to the realization that Germany's defeat was imminent ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confessing\\_Church](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confessing_Church))

**Source 2:** [Appendix B]

The source is valuable because it depicts the White Rose's motivation as well as methods of suppression during Hitler's regime. In this scene, the Nazi soldiers seem blindly obedient but when looking closer it can be seen that many of them feel guilty and share the same opinion with Hans and Sophie Scholl. This can be seen through the way their pose and facial expression alters during the trial since at the end many of them look guilty and ashamed, especially when Sophie Scholl states that "the thoughts [they] have expressed and written are shared by many, they just don't dare to speak up"<sup>18</sup>. Even though Nazi soldiers were permitted to observe the trial, it is unknown whether their pose and facial expression actually altered in such a way. Nevertheless, the overall idea is justified since army members such as Stauffenberg and Haeften attempted to assassinate Hitler in the famous Bomb Plot of 1944 [3], showing that there were actually army members ashamed of Hitler. In terms of origin, the source is valuable as Breinersdorfer made use of primary sources<sup>19</sup>; hence the information of the source is accurate and reliable.

Nevertheless, the source also has limitations. As Rothemunde's purpose within the scene is greatly to demonstrate the suppression at the time and also the way in which many of the spectators are shaken by the Scholl's speeches and bravery, certain facts have been omitted at the end of the trial.<sup>20</sup> Rothemunde possibly omitted these happenings in order to emphasize that the majority of Germans were being suppressed and compelled to obey rather than sharing the same belief as Roland Freisler and other influential politicians.

Word Count: 523

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<sup>18</sup> Marc Rothemunde, "Sophie Scholl – The Final Days", 2005, Broth Film, ASIN: B000H5V8H2

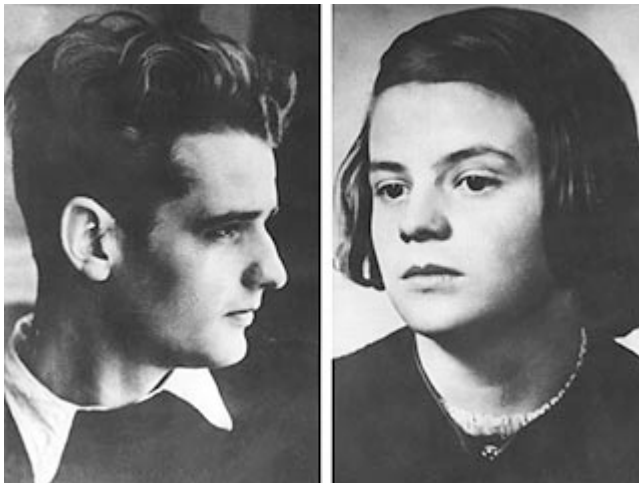
<sup>19</sup> Archives (<http://www.fff.org/freedom/fd0705g.asp>) and White Rose leaflets

<sup>20</sup> For example, in the actual trial one of the soldiers criticized the mother for not having brought her children up correctly when both the mother and father intruded, which has been omitted in the trial scene of the movie. Another fact, which was not included in the movie was that one of the lawyers concluded "I can only say fiat justitia. Let justice be done" ("The White Rose: A Lesson in Dissent", Jacob G. Hornberger, 2008).

## D. Analysis

The White Rose is historically significant as it showed to the world that there was a difference between the Nazis and the ordinary German people, which was crucial in rebuilding relations after World War II and preventing the German people being demonized. The White Rose is still of great importance today as it proves Martin Luther King's point<sup>21</sup> just as the film demonstrates the "hollywoodization" of history, which somewhat dumbs down history, providing people with incomplete or inaccurate information.

### i) What did the White Rose actually do and who was involved?



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Concerning what the White Rose did, the film does not show that the White Rose asked the Germans to “work [...] against fascism and any similar system of totalitarianism.”<sup>23</sup> The films also excludes that the White Rose’s aim was to “to achieve a renewal from within of the severely wounded German spirit”<sup>24</sup>. Regarding the members of the White Rose, the film has not mentioned Hans Hirzel and professor Huber. Consequently the film has not mentioned the fact that “the sixth and final document was written by Professor Huber”<sup>25</sup>, who demanded

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<sup>21</sup> "until a person finds something they are willing to die for, their life is not worth living"  
(<http://www.hccentral.com/ddsmith/bornodie.html>)

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.realconversations.org/white%20rose2.jpg>

<sup>23</sup> The White Rose, Leaflet 1

<sup>24</sup> The White Rose, Leaflet 4

<sup>25</sup> Simon Henderson, “The White Rose and the Definition of ‘Resistance’”, 2005

German students to “fight against the party!”<sup>26</sup>. Rothemunde possibly didn't mention members such as Professor Huber as he wanted a more dramatic story. Thus he focused on Sophie Scholl, a young, intelligent, attractive lady who gave her life for her people, subsequently making him "hollywoodize" history in order to make the movie more dramatic and a larger profit. The exclusion of Hans Hirzel is possibly because Hans Hirzel "had confided in two friends"<sup>27</sup> concerning the White Rose, one of who "informed the Gestapo"<sup>28</sup>, which subsequently confronted Hirzel with the name Sophie Scholl. This incident has been omitted in the film, which is possibly why Rothemunde was obliged not to mention Hans Hirzel and his importance. Nevertheless, the definition of resistance is debatable. The 'Bavaria Project' by Martin Broszat suggests that "all acts which actually helped to limit the infiltration of Nazism into everyday life"<sup>29</sup> could be considered a resistance. However, could 'resistenz' in its broadest sense then also include sexual promiscuity within the Hitler Youth? <sup>30</sup>

ii) **How did they justify what they did?**

Within the film Christoph Probst justifies writing the seventh leaflet by explaining that he was “suffering a psychotic depression”<sup>31</sup>, which was caused both by the war and the fact that his wife was having a childbirth fever. Sophie Scholl, on the other hand, justifies her actions by explaining that Germany wants peace, human dignity to be respected again, conscience and empathy. According to Sophie “[Hitler] led Germany into a bloody war where every victim dies in vain”<sup>32</sup>. Hans Scholl explains that he was at the “Eastern Front and saw streams of blood with his own eyes in Poland and Russia”<sup>33</sup> just as he saw women and children being shot by German soldiers and hence why he was part of the resistance group – to put an end to the war in order to introduce moral and peace again.

Further information can be found in the fifth leaflet, written by the White Rose where they explain that Germany will forever be “a nation which is hated and rejected by all mankind” if the population does not “dissociate [itself] from National Socialist gangsterism”. In “Passive Resistance to National Socialism” they explained that the overthrow of the system was necessary, as “a victory of fascist Germany in this war would have immeasurable, frightful consequences”<sup>34</sup>. <sup>35</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> The White Rose, Leaflet 6

<sup>27</sup> Simon Henderson, “The White Rose and the Definition of ‘Resistance’”, 2005

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> Ian Kershaw provides three categories of conflict with Nazi Germany. The first would be for those who actively participate "in organised attempts to work against the regime" (Henderson, "The White Rose and the Definition of ‘Resistance’", 2005), the second "encompasses actions of ‘limited aims’" (Ibid), meaning those who simply sympathized with some elements of Nazism and the final category is "that of ‘dissent’" (Ibid), aimed at those who were critical of the regime. Thus it could be said that the White Rose were, according to Kershaw, part of the first category

<sup>31</sup> Marc Rothemunde, “Sophie Scholl – The Final Days”, 2005, Broth Film, ASIN: B000H5V8H2

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup> Marc Rothemunde, “Sophie Scholl – The Final Days”, 2005, Broth Film, ASIN: B000H5V8H2

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/GERschollS.htm>

<sup>35</sup> In the book “Sophie Scholl and the White Rose” it is explained that Sophie suffered of “heavy labor and indoctrination under the thumb of fanatical Nazi women leaders” (Annette Dumbach & Jud

Nevertheless, the film accurately shows the reasons for their resistance as Rothemunde shows both why Germany in general should oppose the Nazi Regime just as it shows why the White Rose members personally opposed the Nazi Regime, which would have been irrelevant to mention in the leaflets aimed at everyone in the country.

Word Count: 628

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Newborn, "Sophie Scholl and the White Rose", 2007, Oneworld Publications, ISBN 978-1851684748 p.14), possibly a reason why she wanted to put an end to National Socialism. The book also demonstrates the concern Sophie had for Fritz Hartnagel as well as other friends at the Front. "The right to enjoy oneself when others were in agony" (Ibid) was something Sophie Scholl and many others could not do.

## **E. Conclusion**

Rothemunde was obliged to omit certain scenes in order to show the overall purpose that most Germans shared Scholls' viewpoint rather than actually believing in Social Nationalism. Rothemunde was attempting to demonstrate that most Germans were in a state of apprehension and thus he took some liberties. Nevertheless, it is arguable whether the actual question is whether the depiction of the White Rose within the film is about accuracy. It is rather about incompleteness as Rothemunde made use of the White Rose's leaflets as well as archives concerning this resistance movement. Hence the accurateness of the film is not questionable but rather the incompleteness as Rothemunde omitted certain scenes, which would have shown inconvenient truths.

Word Count: 115

Total Word Count: 1, 998

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**ASIN:** B000H5V8H2

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The White Rose, Leaflet 6, 1943 (<http://libcom.org/library/white-rose-leaflet-6>)

### **[Appendix A]**

Extract from the sixth leaflet written by the White Rose:

*“We grew up in a state in which all free expression of opinion is unscrupulously suppressed. The Hitler Youth, the SA, the SS have tried to drug us, to revolutionise us, to regiment us in the most promising young years of our lives. "Philosophical training" is the name given to the despicable method by which our budding intellectual development is muffled in a fog of empty phrases. A system of selection of leaders at once unimaginably devilish and narrow-minded trains up its future party bigwigs in the "Castles of the Knightly Order" to become Godless, impudent, and conscienceless exploiters and executioners - blind, stupid hangers-on of the Fuhrer.”*

**[Appendix B]**

The Trial Scene from "Sophie Scholl- The Final Days"

