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Nazi 'Chic?': Fashioning Women in the Third Reich

ISBN: 185973717X

By Irene Guenther

Review by: Elizabeth Whitmore

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I have always had a natural curiosity to understand the subtle ideas of the Nazi state, ever since I learned about the horrors of World War II as a child. Not only was I curious to try to understand what motivated such unspeakable acts of cruelty, but also what existed within a culture that was so evil. In this fascinating book, Dr. Irene Guenther examines Nazi ideology through the lens of female fashion.

Clear and exact, yet also meticulously researched, *Nazi Chic* explores the ideal Nazi female appearance as a sociopolitical tool. Because fashion was one of Germany's largest industries during the inter-war period, and because there was heated competition from France, it was important for Nazi dictators to utilize fashion to appeal to German women. Guenther writes of Nazi German fashion as "a fantasy world" that "persisted, even as bombs were destroying German cities and severe shortages in food, clothing, and shoes were causing grave problems on the home front" (270).

Guenther makes a clean, precise argument when she states that Nazi Germany's dedication to rendering fashionable clothing—usually from the skill of Jewish seamstresses—was a powerful political tool. She writes, "That 'Aryan' Germans could be worried about stylishness, when concentration camp prisoners considered themselves lucky if they had even one pair of underwear or rags to cover their feet, is yet one more sign of the specific forms of privilege—symbolic as well as real" (277).

Covering the fashion changes in Germany from World War I until the aftermath of World War II, *Nazi Chic* contributes rare, important research to the field, and sheds new light on an aspect of World War II that is often ignored. Reading *Nazi Chic* is a compelling experience that allows readers to contemplate the impact that fashion—and German women—had on the most tragic event of the twentieth century.



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