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# Nazi Eugenics: The Sterilization Act of 1933

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History Student

When people think of Nazi Germany and the suffering caused by the Nazi Party, the Holocaust is the first thing to be brought to attention. Yet, the Nazi Party implemented many laws in the years leading up to the Holocaust, one being the Law for the Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Diseases, also known as the Sterilization Act of 1933. This law was the beginning of civil rights being stripped from German civilians. It is a topic not heavily covered by historians due to the crimes committed in the decade after it was enacted making it seem less significant. Yet, this Sterilization Act was important because it was used by the Nazi Party to test their influence over Germans and secure their control over German identity before pushing their more radical agenda. This is shown through the lack of limitations within the Sterilization Act, extreme propaganda, and the lack of recognition sterilization victims received for their pain. The damage caused by the Sterilization Act and the connection it had to other Nazi agendas is a topic debated by historians since the 1950's.

In 1955, the Director for the School of Public Health at Hamburg, Hans Harmsen, wrote an article for *The Eugenics Review*. In this article, he discussed the Sterilization Act of 1933 and the numbers involved with the sterilizations. He addressed the reasons for the sterilizations and that the most common reason for them was imbecility and schizophrenia. Harmsen supported his claims that the sterilizations were ethical by providing data tables on the records of those sterilized and the numbers of rejected sterilization appeals. He also brought in the issue of sterilizations being used as a means of voluntary birth control. He concluded that this use of

birth control was unnecessary but did not explicitly say it is unethical. He did state that there were issues with the belief system surrounding hereditary disorders but the discussion on women's sexual habits and morality gives the impression that Harmsen did not completely disagree with sterilizations.<sup>1</sup>

Kamila Uzarczyk was published in the *International Journal of Mental Health* in 2007. She chose to focus on sterilizations in German Silesia. Uzarczyk argues that the Germans and Polish were sterilized at the same rate but only because of the Geneva Convention. The Geneva Convention was used as a way to prevent the discrimination of the Polish minority after sterilizations began, so the number of sterilizations recorded in Silesia was around 10,379.<sup>2</sup> Uzarczyk also addressed the reasoning behind the procedures, with the majority of all sterilizations being due to feeblemindedness. She argues that this stopped being the case after 1938 because of the realization that one's lifestyle and opportunities affected their abilities and was replaced with schizophrenia as the main cause for sterilization.

A book titled *Sexual Violence Against Women During the Holocaust* focused on women's experiences of sexual violence during the Third Reich and was published in 2010. One chapter, written by Ellen Ben-Sefer, focused on forced sterilization and abortions. Ben-Safer argues that

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Harmsen, "The German Sterilization Act of 1933: 'Gesetz zur verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses,'" *The Eugenics Review* 46, no. 4 (1955): 230-231, accessed February 19, 2021, 4 (1955): 230-231, accessed February 19, 2021, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2974526/?page=4>.

<sup>2</sup> Kamila Uzarczyk, "War Against the Unfit: Eugenic Sterilization in German Silesia, 1934-1944: Sine Ira et Studio (Without Anger or Bias)," *International Journal of Mental Health* 36, no. 1 (2007): 87, accessed on February 19, 2021, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41345203>.

the forced sterilization of women before and during the Holocaust is an issue that has not been explored fully but greatly affected Jewish women. She connects the Sterilization Act of 1933 to racial motives, with statements on children getting sterilized because of their racial background and the sterilization of gypsies.<sup>3</sup> Her writing differs from both Harmsen and Uzarczyk because she connects it to race. Uzarczyk focused more on the targeting of lower-class individuals<sup>4</sup> while Harmsen discredited any mass misconduct of the sterilizations all together.<sup>5</sup>

Jakob Tanner wrote an article on the history of eugenics in relation to Nazi Germany for the *Journal of Modern European History* in 2012. Tanner argues that it is important to disconnect eugenics from Germany and the negative beliefs around it. He concluded that eugenics is an “expression of a liberal governmentality which aims not at exhausting or consuming, but at producing and multiplying life.”<sup>6</sup> What he meant is that eugenics was a practice that focused on improving quality of life and the quantity of healthy life. This is a standout article because of the way Tanner addressed the Nazis eugenics policy in correlation to the history of eugenics before and after in other democratic countries. The focus differs between all the historians mentioned so far, but they do all maintain that this law was targeted towards a group of people that was not directly outlined in the law itself. Whether women, the

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<sup>3</sup> Ellen Ben-Sefer, “Forced Sterilization and Abortion as Sexual Abuse,” in *Sexual Violence Against Women during the Holocaust*, ed. by Sonja M. Hedgpeth and Rochelle G. Saidel (Lebanon: Brandeis University Press), 153, accessed February 19, 2021, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.cameron.edu/lib/cameron-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1084919>.

<sup>4</sup> Uzarczyk, “War Against the Unfit,” 85.

<sup>5</sup> Harmsen, “The German Sterilization Act of 1933,” 229.

<sup>6</sup> Jakob Tanner, “Eugenics before 1945,” *Journal of Modern European History* 10, no. 4 (2012): 477, accessed on February 20, 2021, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26266044>.

poor, or the disabled, this law was not just aimed for those suffering from hereditary conditions.

In 2016, Amelia Farrow wrote her dissertation on the direct effects of sterilization on women. She chose to focus on the experiences women had, and how eugenics was a popular belief across the world at the time. She argues it was the Nazi eugenic practices and the lasting effects of sterilization that led to the condemning of eugenics practices. Farrow states that the fact that reparations were not made until the 1980's and that the Sterilization Act was not rejected in Germany until 70 years later, in 2007, shows the stigma surrounding sterilization and the emotional trauma of the intrusive operation that went without reparations for the majority of these victims.<sup>7</sup>

Melissa Kravetz wrote a book in 2019 titled *Women Doctors in Weimar and Nazi Germany: Maternalism, Eugenics, and Professional Identity*. This book was an exploration of the build up to Nazi Germany and how the women doctors contributed to the party. The first chapter specifically focuses on eugenics and the beliefs the doctors held while practicing eugenics. Kravetz argues the doctors believed they were servicing other women, specifically of the lower class, by counseling against marriage and procreation in unhealthy or poor environments. She also states that the sterilization was started to prevent abortions being

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<sup>7</sup> Amelia Farrow, "An Attack on Womanhood: The Sterilization of Woman in Nazi Germany," (BA Diss., University of Canterbury, 2016), 30, accessed on February 19, 2021, [Amelia Farrow HIST480 Dissertation.pdf \(canterbury.ac.nz\)](#).

carried out consistently with lower class women being unable to use birth control properly.<sup>8</sup> Kravetz argues against the doctors' opinions on birth control effectiveness by stating that the doctors believed lack of intelligence was the reason for failed birth control attempts, rather than their socio-economic environments. She does go on to support the doctors' intentions of preserving the nation by limiting marriages and encouraging sterilization, although this is for German citizens and separate from the forced sterilizations that would come for those deemed "unworthy", like the mentally ill and handicapped.<sup>9</sup>

Hitler and the Nazis had many years before the Holocaust began to implement their agenda. Those years laid the foundation for their long-term goal of an Aryan nation. One of the first signs that Hitler was headed towards a much larger event was the Law for the Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Diseases. This law allowed for anyone in German occupied regions to apply for sterilization or be forcibly sterilized if found incompetent. This law was like many others that were enacted under Hitler, in that it was broad and allowed for more than what Germans initially thought.

Adolf Hitler enacted the Sterilization Act on July 14, 1933. It allowed for the forced sterilization of anyone who had one of the nine outlined diseases it deemed hereditary: mental deficiency, schizophrenia, manic-depression, epilepsy, Huntington's Chorea, blindness,

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<sup>8</sup> Melissa Kravetz, *Women Doctors in Weimar and Nazi Germany : Maternalism, Eugenics, and Professional Identity*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 51, accessed February 19, 2021, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.cameron.edu/lib/cameron-ebooks/detail.action?docID=5743860>.

<sup>9</sup> Kravetz, *Women Doctors in Weimar*, 52.

deafness, physical deformity, and alcoholism.<sup>10</sup> It allowed for people to apply for sterilizations themselves but most notably, it allowed guardians and doctors of those deemed legally incompetent to apply for sterilization. If approved by the Eugenics Court assigned to sterilization applications, the procedures were carried out against the will of the person being sterilized. These forced sterilizations are what makes the Sterilization Act so controversial and one of the first signs of what was to come under the Nazi regime. This led to the forced sterilization of an estimated 400,000 people.<sup>11</sup>

Of the nine outlined diseases that could require sterilization, feeble-mindedness (also documented as imbecility) and schizophrenia were the top two documented for the reason behind sterilization. Combined, these two diseases made up at least 60% of all documented sterilizations.<sup>12</sup> This is problematic because of the instability surrounding diagnosis. While many people did suffer from mental disorders, anything could be labeled schizophrenic given the lack of research done on the disease at the time. Likewise, the process of diagnosing feeble-mindedness was flawed. Kamila Uzarczyk cited a Polish state medical record, that had a doctor's description of why a woman failed the imbecile test. The doctor claimed she did not know "'why there is night and day' or 'why one must not cover the flame if one wants to maintain fire.'"<sup>13</sup> This measure of intelligence to determine if a person should be sterilized set

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<sup>10</sup> German History in Documents and Images, "Law for the Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Diseases (July 14, 1933)", *German History in Documents and Images*, accessed February 21, 2021, [https://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage\\_id=2422](https://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=2422).

<sup>11</sup> Farrow, "An Attack," 30.

<sup>12</sup> Harmsen, "The German Sterilization Act," 228.

<sup>13</sup> Uzarczyk, "War Against the Unfit," 82.

the lower class at a disadvantage, given their environment inevitably led to a lower-quality education.

One man in particular, Paul Eggert, recalled his experience of being sterilized in relation to his upbringing. He discussed in an interview his difficult childhood where he was forced to beg for food so his siblings could eat. He states he was taken to Bielefeld hospital one day and operated on without any indication as to what the operation was for. He found out later that he was sterilized when he could not have children with his wife because he was diagnosed as “feeble-minded” at age 11.<sup>14</sup> This is a prime example of how the system was geared against the lower class. If Paul had a better upbringing and more opportunities, he would not have been so quickly diagnosed at a young age. It is also possible that if the reality of the sterilization process was known by Germans, the rate of those forced into the procedure would have been smaller.

One common misconception on the sterilizations happening in Germany at this time is what role the German people played. Some would assume that the Germans did not know what was happening, since it is debated what, precisely, the German people knew during the Holocaust. Yet, victim testimonies and propaganda recorded from the 1930’s shows otherwise. The German government pushed out media to convince their people that the Sterilization Act was beneficial to Germans and would make their country more prosperous. It began as just a way of discouraging the unfit from producing offspring with their supposed genetic disorders.

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<sup>14</sup> Paul Eggert, personal interview, January 15, 2003, accessed on March 21, 2021, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn60510>.

For instance, a poster titled *Feeble-mindedness in Related Families in Four Neighboring Towns* was released in 1935 and shows how feeble-mindedness would affect a whole community through the supposed hereditary nature of it.<sup>15</sup> This was a tactic used to prevent those deemed “feeble-minded” from procreating with those with desirable genetics.

*Neues Volk* was a magazine that was published by the Racial Policy Office of the Nazi Party. A H. Rodenfels wrote an article for it in 1939 that explained why the sterilizations were necessary. He included unflattering pictures of mentally handicapped people while stating that the money “paid to support a single crazy person unable to survive by himself would have helped 40 poor families with children.”<sup>16</sup> His language shows the hatred he feels towards these patients, and his statement is further shown by Nazi propaganda.

Propaganda posters and films were heavily produced to support the Sterilization Act in Germany. In 1934, a photograph of mentally disabled patients at a mental institution was captioned “Moral and Religious Concepts of Life Demand the Protection of the Congenitally Ill.”<sup>17</sup> This was propaganda against the disabled, presented in a way to make Germans feel like they were doing what was right by keeping those suffering from hereditary disorders locked up and sterilized. Another poster showing a German family being compared to a disabled person

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<sup>15</sup> *Feeble-mindedness in Related Families In Four Neighboring Towns*, illustration, (Stuttgart: Verlag für Nationale Literatur 1935), from United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, series *Erblehre und Rassenkunde*, accessed March 24, 2021, <https://www.ushmm.org/collections/bibliography/people-with-disabilities>.

<sup>16</sup> H. Rodenfels, “Frauen, die nicht Mutter werden dürfen,” *Neues Volk* 7, May 1939, trans. by Randall Bytwerk, accessed March 1, 2021, [Women Who May Not Be Allowed to Become Mothers \(bytwerk.com\)](https://www.bytwerk.com).

<sup>17</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Moral and Religious Concepts of Life Demand the Protection of the Mentally Ill,” Germany, 1934, accessed March 28, 2021, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa1067464>.

circulated Germany in 1936. The poster had a description stating the cost of care to keep both the family of four, and the single disabled man, was the same.<sup>18</sup> This was a common tactic used by the Nazi Party. By positioning the ill as threatening to the German way of life and its ability to better itself, they turned their people against each other. Lastly, the Nazi Party pushed even further towards radical ideology in a 1934 propaganda poster titled “Life Only as a Burden.”<sup>19</sup> This poster speaks for itself, as it tries to justify the sterilization of those with hereditary illness as a means of preventing a terrible life. It was this theory, paired with the popularization of the idea of deeming certain people unworthy of procreating, that eventually led to the belief these people were unworthy of life all together.

The experience that these victims had is something no propaganda or data can explain. There are many interviews and documents that give better insight into these experiences of sterilization victims. One of the most notable survivors is Dorothea Buck. She was diagnosed as a schizophrenic as a teenager and taken from her home. She was placed in a mental hospital where she was sterilized without knowing it. She describes the isolation of the hospital and how she did not know why no one visited her. She, like Paul Eggert, did not know until after that she could not have children and was devastated. Dorothea recognized that she was labelled inferior, and her sterilization was due to misconceptions of her disease.<sup>20</sup> Dorothea’s

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<sup>18</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Propaganda Slide,” Germany, 1936, accessed March 28, 2021, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa1072055>.

<sup>19</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Life Only As A Burden,” Germany, 1934, accessed March 28, 2021, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa1067446>.

<sup>20</sup> Dorothea Buck, interview with Izhar Harpaz, personal interview, January 14, 2003, accessed on March 21, 2021, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn60498>.

experience as a mentally ill person was jarring enough that she spent the rest of her life dedicated to reforming psychiatric care.

Helga Gross was also sterilized but in 1939. She recalled when Hitler came to power and said she actually saw her parents cry when Hitler took over after Paul von Hindenburg's death, and how shocked they were. They knew even then that Hitler was not good for Germany. She had hearing parents but attended a school for deaf children. She states that a man came from the government and told their teacher to choose which kids would get sterilized when she was 12, when the Sterilization Act took effect. She was told that the government did not want more deaf children so when she was 16, three years later, she was taken to a hospital and sterilized.<sup>21</sup> This is interesting because her deafness was not guaranteed to be hereditary, since her parents were both hearing and only one of her siblings was also deaf. She had a classmate who had deaf parents and when she was sterilized, so were her parents. Helga, throughout the whole interview, kept mentioning how young they were and how they did not completely understand why they were being sterilized or what it fully meant. Unlike other victims, she knew in advance that she was getting sterilized, as did her entire community. She told her interviewer she did not completely feel the grief of being sterilized until the 1950's after she met her sister's baby.

This emotional toll was present in almost all sterilization victims and is the reason many victims felt they deserved to be recognized for their suffering. Horst Biesold held a survey of

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<sup>21</sup> Helga Gross, interview with Stephen Stept, personal interview, January 22, 2003, accessed on March 21, 2021, <https://collections.eshmm.org/search/catalog/irn60511>.

deaf Nazi Germany sterilization survivors in 1999. His survey reported that 76% of victims still suffered from psychological pain, while 49.5% suffered from physical pain. Of that pain, 52.5% was in the abdomen, while a combined 22% felt pain in their groin/scrotum.<sup>22</sup> As stated earlier, the Sterilization Act was not officially rejected until 2007. Since the law was officially deemed unlawful, 3696 people applied for compensation for their trauma. Out of those people, 2100 of them were denied any compensation.<sup>23</sup> This meant that even those few who lived to see the act rejected, were forced to accept that they had spent their whole lives in pain and suffering without any recognition by their government that they were wronged. While the deaths of thousands of Jews was in itself a horrific event, those who were traumatically sterilized are a part of a group long forgotten because of the tragedy of the Holocaust.

Through the Third Reich, Hitler and the Nazi Party caused mass amounts of suffering. Before the Holocaust or World War II even began, there was German suffering. While the pain of others cannot be appropriately compared, the trauma inflicted on those deemed unworthy of procreating by Nazi's has been long overshadowed by World War II. Their pain was dragged out over a lifetime with little to no recognition. Through misdiagnosis, low quality research of hereditary disorders, and pure prejudice against those with unfavorable qualities, almost half a million people were stripped of the right to have children. The Sterilization Act was used as a bridge between common eugenics beliefs and the Holocaust, by slowly introducing more control over who could breed children and who was considered valuable to the Nazi idea of a

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<sup>22</sup> Horst Biesold, *Crying Hands – Eugenics and Deaf People in Nazi Germany*, trans. by William Sayers, (Washington D.C.: Gaullaudet University Press, 1999), 147, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.cameron.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=12026>.

<sup>23</sup> Farrow, "An Attack," 30.

perfect Germany. Propaganda was a large part of this plan and shows how manipulative the Nazi Party was in the early years as they headed towards euthanasia.

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# Dog Faced Warriors

*James Mills*

History Student

‘We did not come here to run!’ These are the words that still rumble through the United States Army’s mighty 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division today. They were activated as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division on November 1917. “Rock of the Marne” is a nickname that was given to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division for their valor at the Marne River during the Second Battle of The Marne, between July 15 and August 6, 1918. Today the 3<sup>rd</sup>. Division is one of the most prestigious and the most decorated division in the United States Army, They have spearheaded many military operations since its establishment.



Photo 1: France - Battle of Chateau-Thierry WWI Second Battle of The Marne - [FG-014].

In World War II, the division produced heroes such as Audie Murphy, the United States Army’s most decorated soldier to date. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division was the only division to fight on every front during WWII, from North Africa, Sicily, and the Italian mainland, then into France to end the war with Germany. The Marne Division saw combat in the Korean War and throughout Germany during the Cold

War.<sup>24</sup> The 3<sup>rd</sup> Division was combat activated in January 1980 to spearhead the invasion into Iran if the American hostages held captive there were not released by January 15, 1980.<sup>25</sup> They were the first division to cross the Border of Iraq and the first to enter Baghdad during Desert Storm. All their prestige, honor, and courage stems from a few days on a river where green young American men chose to make their stand for freedom in “the war to end all wars,” in lands far away from their homes. Their choice to stay and fight that day at the Marne River when everyone around them was retreating and was the event that changed the tide of the war in favor of the allies. For the first time during the war the allies were on the offensive because of the bravery of the young soldiers of the 3<sup>rd</sup>. Division. Their steadfastness and tenacity solidified to the world that the United States was a rising world military power. In their determination the 3<sup>rd</sup>.Division had earned the well-deserved and distinctive title “Rock of the Marne!” They had changed the course of the war.

Their first taste of fame came on July 15, 1918, when they formed their skirmish lines along the Marne River in northern France. On the morning of May 27<sup>th</sup> German artillery began a bombardment and infantry attack in their third offensive of 1918, beginning the Second Battle of the Marne. During the attack the Germans rapidly push into the allied defensive lines completely overwhelming them at first.<sup>26</sup> As the Germans tried to push into Paris, Marshal

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<sup>24</sup> James Elphick, “This is why the 3rd Infantry Division is called ‘Rock of the Marne.’” Oct. 18, 2021. Accessed, Oct.19, 2021. <https://www.wearethemighty.com/mighty-history/this-is-why-the-3rd-infantry-division-is-called-rock-of-the-marne/>.

<sup>25</sup> Author was a part of the hostage retrieval operation in 1980, serving in A Battery 1/76<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery, 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division. If the Hostages were not released buy January 15, 1980, by order of President Regan the division was to cross into Iran in a full-scale invasion.

<sup>26</sup> Jennings C. Wise, *The Turn of The Tide: American Operations at Cantigny, Chateau Thierry, and The Second Battle of the Marne* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920), 42. Accessed, Sept. 10, 2021. <https://archive.org/details/turnoftideameric00jenn/mode/2up..>

Ferdinand Foch, the Chief of staff of the French army realized that in order to stabilize the battle lines between Chateau Thierry and Dormans, he needed to bring in French and American reserve troops to fill in the gaps along the defensive front. After seeing the battle action at Cantigny on May 28, the American troops had impressed Marshal Foch, he now believed the green Americans were ready for battle on the Marne River line of defense. On May 30<sup>th</sup> he ordered both the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> U.S divisions to the front lines to be distributed as small units embedded with the French Troops <sup>27</sup>

On July 21<sup>st</sup> General John J. “Black Jack” Pershing, United States General of the Armies and American Expeditionary Forces on the Western Front Commander, met with Marshal

Foch.<sup>28</sup> They both agreed that American units should be formed, deploying one unit to the Marne while the other two groups were to deploy to Nancy-Toul. The group that



contained the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 26<sup>th</sup> divisions were held in reserve.<sup>29</sup> The Sixth Army Sector held the principal American units, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division commanded by Major General Joseph Dickman and the 28<sup>th</sup> Division commanded by Major General Charles H. Muir. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Division was attached to the French de Mondesir’s XXXVIII Corps. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Divisions’ 4th, 7th, 30th, and the

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<sup>27</sup> Wise, *The Turn of The Tide*, 50- 51.

<sup>28</sup> Citizens watching the American Soldiers digging in for the Battle of the Marne; Photo 2.

<sup>29</sup> Wise, *The Turn of The Tide*, 208.

38<sup>th</sup> infantry regiments along with their artillery and engineers were dug in on a twelve-kilometer front stretching from Chateau-Thierry in the west to the hillsides of the Surmerlin River to the east.<sup>30</sup> They were supported by French divisions on their right and left flanks.<sup>31</sup> Colonel Ulysses Grant McAlexander commander of the 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, suspected that the French on his right flank would retreat during battle allowing the German forces to take advantage of the cover of the Surmelin Valley to infiltrate their right flank. In preparation of his suspicions, McAlexander positioned four companies along with the 6<sup>th</sup> Engineers to prevent the Germans from crossing the river in an area called the “outpost zone”<sup>32</sup> In preparation for a heavily fortified defense Colonel Edmund L. Butts, who was in command of the 30<sup>th</sup> infantry, distributed his battalions to fill in the gaps in the American defensive lines to strengthen them. The defensive lines along the Marne consisted of rifle and machine gun pits in the first line, the second line were entrenchments running parallel to the river. The third line of defense would be in the tree line for final defensive resistance.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Stephen C. McGeorge, and Mason W. Watson, *The Marne 15, July- Aug. 6, 1918: The U.S. Army Campaigns of World War One Commemorative Series*, edited by Brian F Newman, (Center of Military History United States Army Washington D.C. 2018), 21.

<sup>31</sup> See Map 1, Second Battle of the Marne- Phase 1, Fifth Ludendorff Offensive: July 15- 17, 1918.

<sup>32</sup> Stephen, C. McGeorge, *The Marne 15, July- Aug. 6, 1918*, 22.

<sup>33</sup> Stephen, C. McGeorge, *The Marne 15, July- Aug. 6, 1918*, 22.

In the days leading up to German offensive of July 15<sup>th</sup> , American reconnaissance patrols crossed the river frequently between Chateau- Thierry and Mezy capturing German prisoners gaining important information on the number and movement of German troops,



foiling any chance of a surprise German attack.

But, likewise, the Germans were able to attack the defending units on the south bank without a great number of casualties.<sup>34</sup>

Although this area was easy to cross, the rest of the battlefield was not. The Marne River valley is lined with high, steep slopes and deep valleys.<sup>35</sup> The high cliffs at Chateau- Thierry overlooks the many narrow valleys that flow into the winding Marne River valley making for excellent defensive positions. The hills rose some 265 meters from the valley plateau and the valleys made natural trenches at least 100 meters deep along the river basin. The Marne River Region is lined with forests, hedge rows with flowing streams, with villages of stone houses nestled in the vineyards and orchards.<sup>36</sup>

On the evening of July 14, 1918, Kaiser Wilhelm and Germany's 1<sup>st</sup> Army at Reims were waiting for H-Hour to launch his surprise attack in the drive for Parris. Those plans were

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<sup>34</sup> Francis J. Reynolds and Allen L. Churchill. *World War Events: Recorded by Statesmen, Commanders, Historians, And by Men Who Fought or Saw the Great Campaigns*. vol. III. (New York, P.F. Collier & Son, 1919), 213.

<sup>35</sup> A Battlefield on the Marne Sketched by J. Andre Smith; Photo 3.

<sup>36</sup> Francis J. Reynolds, *World War Events*. vol. III, 217.

discovered by a company of French infantry soldiers who had crossed no-man's-land in a daring raid of German outposts capturing several German prisoners. The prisoners held important documents of the places and times of the imminent surprise attacks. This information spread rapidly throughout the allied lines ending any and all chances of a surprise attack.<sup>37</sup> The German offensive opened at approximately 12:10 a.m. on the 15<sup>th</sup>. The Germans commenced the attack with a heavy barrage of rolling artillery fire with high explosive ordnance and gas rounds into the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division's lines. The heavy bombardment allowed the first wave of German infantry to cross the river in an attempt to gain a foothold on the southern bank.

More than eighty German artillery batteries pounded and harassed the young green troops of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division for over ten straight hours. The German troops that these young men faced were not like them, they were some of Germany's most hardened and experienced troops like the *Stosstruppen* (Stormtroopers); highly experienced, tough, and unrelenting soldiers designed to strike psychological fear in their enemy.<sup>38</sup> General Ludendorff understood the best and only way to Paris was through Surmelin Valley because it was a large enough gap on the valley floor that had the ability and resources to support a large army. His choice to enter the valley there put his army face to face with Major General Dickman's 3<sup>rd</sup> Division. The 7<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiments were on the flank supporting the 4<sup>th</sup> Division at Chateau-Thierry. The 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was deployed where the Summerlin River emptied into the Marne, leaving them to defend against Ludendorff's spearhead attack with the German 10<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Stephen L. Coode, "The American Expeditionary Forces in World War I: The Rock of the Marne." (East Tennessee State University, 2008). Electronic Theses and Dissertations. Paper 1908, 24. <https://dc.etsu.edu/etd/1908>.

<sup>38</sup> Stephen L. Coode, "The American Expeditionary Forces in World War I," 28.

division.<sup>39</sup> Parts of the German 398<sup>th</sup> Infantry had successfully crossed the river while other parts of the division met with heavy resistance from the American artillery and machinegun fire and had not succeeded in their crossing.<sup>40</sup> German prisoners reported that the pontoons they used to ferry troops across the river had been sunk by machine-guns inflicting many casualties by wounds and many more soldiers died by drowning in the river.<sup>41</sup>

By 5:30 am only seven battalions of the German 10<sup>th</sup> Division had crossed with any success and some of those had suffered heavy losses inflicted by the steadfast Americans.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Grenadiers had managed to penetrate the defenses and threatened to out flank the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division's 28<sup>th</sup>



Infantry sector. The 6<sup>th</sup> Grenadiers also had managed to find itself in the enemy lines tangling with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division along the railroad tracks. By 7:00 am the Grenadiers were totally overwhelmed by the American counter attacks, putting a halt on their advancement and by 8:30 that morning they had been pushed back across the river.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Stephen L. Coode, "The American Expeditionary Forces in World War I," 29.

<sup>40</sup> "Peace Talk: Near Dommiers. Typical American artillery battery deployed at the Second Battle of the Marne; Photo 6.

<sup>41</sup> W. F. Heavey, "German Crossing of the Marne River" *The Military Engineer* 18, no. 99 (1926): 178. Accessed Sep. 11, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44691194>.

<sup>42</sup> W. F. Heavey, "German Crossing of the Marne River," 178-179.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 5<sup>th</sup> Grenadier Regiment devastating probe of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Divisions was an indication that crossing the river there would be quite impossible, but this did not deter the Germans from attacking the allied positions.

The 6<sup>th</sup> Grenadiers attacked the American 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment commanded by Captain Jesse W. Wooldridge. As soon as the French preemptive artillery strike ceased the 6<sup>th</sup> Grenadiers launched their initial attack on “G” Company.<sup>43</sup> After an hour of intense fighting the Germans were able to



gain a slight foothold on the southern bank forcing “G” Company to fall back due to high casualties.<sup>44</sup> The Germans ability to cross the river came only after every man in the company was killed or put out of action including platoon commander Lieutenant David C. Calkins, who was wounded and taken prisoner. “E” and “H” Companies were able to destroy all the boats and German personnel. One American Regiment had engaged two highly trained German divisions with devastating results, inflicting great injury and loss of equipment on the advancing German Army.<sup>45</sup> With the German rolling artillery moving up into a forward position their barrage was falling completely behind the lines of the 30<sup>th</sup> Regiment. The German Infantry had to advance into an open field of ruthless and relentless enemy fire. Their lack of proper artillery support proved to be a fatal mistake for the 6<sup>th</sup> Grenadiers.

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<sup>43</sup> Water ditch full of dead Germans in front of Company G at Mezy; Photo 4.

<sup>44</sup> Stephen L. Coode, "The American Expeditionary Forces in World War I," 34.

<sup>45</sup> Jesse W. Wooldridge, *The Giants of the Marne: A Story of McAlexander and His Regiment*, (Salt Lake City, The Seagull Press. 1923), 34- 35. Accessed Oct. 15, 2021.

<https://archive.org/details/giantsofmarnesto00wool/mode/2up?view=theater>.

The Grenadiers' unyielding attacks were repeated over and over without success until they eliminated the 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon along with its commanding officer Lieutenant Mercer M Phillips. The Germans were able to advance some distance until the 3<sup>rd</sup> platoon made a charge etched in the memories of those involved and those who witnessed the event. "Bayonets, butts, fist, and teeth!" Wooldridge exclaimed in his description of the charge, "Did you ever turn yourself loose in mad passion that knew no limits?"<sup>46</sup> The 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon under the command of Lieutenant E.C. Thacker forced the 6<sup>th</sup> Grenadiers back across the Marne in brutal hand to hand combat. They now occupied the forward line along with the support of Lieutenant Carl C. Gehring commanding the 4<sup>th</sup> Platoon. Both platoons had gained a strategic defensive position that allowed the Americans the ability to launch repeated counter attacks.<sup>47</sup>

*The San Diego Union* reported on July 16, 1918 "Hun Drive Breaks Down on First Day; Americans Hurl Foes Across Marne." The Americans had captured many German prisoners including some of Germany's best Stormtroopers while crawling through the fight on their hands and knees in their gas masks to greet the invaders. The Americans were now in command of the riverbank and the Germans has no recourse but to retreat under heavy American fire.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Jesse W, Wooldridge, *The Giants of the Marne*, 36.

<sup>47</sup> Jesse W, Wooldridge, *The Giants of the Marne*, 37.

<sup>48</sup> "Hun Drive Breaks Down on First Day; Americans Hurl Foes Across the Marne," *The San Diego Union*, July 16, 1918. Accessed Sep. 11, 2021.

<https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/150-years/sd-me-150-years-july-16-htlstory.html>

“Yankees Pour Deadly Hail into Enemy Rank” was the headline in *The San Diego Union* on the morning July 16<sup>th</sup> Describing the bloody events that took place at the Second Battle Marne to the American public it read:

American machine gunners along the river assisted materially in breaking up the early Boche Plans, for the stuck to their post and poured deadly streams of bullets into the enemy and only withdrew when their guns were so hot, they could not be fired. One group of machine gunners happened to be in the right place where the Germans were anxious to erect a bridge but their efforts were fruitless. The American bullets piled up the German dead on the opposite side of the river every time the enemy started to cross.<sup>49</sup>

While the Battle raged on, the French 125<sup>th</sup> division had retreated to the south in the confusion, leaving their position undefended.<sup>50</sup> They failed to inform the American 28<sup>th</sup> division of their departure. As a result, many soldiers of the 28<sup>th</sup> Division were killed or taken prisoner, earning them the nickname



“Bleeding Keystone Division.” The gap in the lines allowed the German 36<sup>th</sup> Division to infiltrate and capture Varennes while continuing to advance to the south. The Germans were gaining ground until they were stopped by “F” Company of the 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. The French retreat left the 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry and the rest of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division in a precarious predicament. They

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<sup>49</sup> “Hun Drive Breaks Down on First Day”

<sup>50</sup> The handwritten notation on the back of this photograph reads: “an actual photo of our boys going ‘over the top’, thru a gas attack at Chateau Thierry (7/11/18). The chap without a mask is already ‘croaked’.” The photograph is one of a set of nine taken by Lieutenant Gordon E. Griffiths. July 11.1918. World Digital Library, <https://www.wdl.org/en/item/18798/>; Photo 5.

were exposed to enemy fire from the front as well as both the left and right flanks as the Germans performed a pincer move to surround the 38<sup>th</sup>. Despite being surrounded the young men of the 38<sup>th</sup> fought on valiantly.<sup>51</sup> Captain Wooldridge later spoke about McAlexander's savvy intuition that the French would not hold their ground and with that in mind, he had prepared for such an event.

McAlexander later told his tale of heroism that he and his men had faced that day. "So, for three days we fought on our flanks, for three days the German high command gave us all they had in their desperation to open the gateway. The colonel received an order 'Fall back if you think best.' He answered, 'Is it up to my decision?' The answer: 'Yes.' The colonel's answer: 'Then I hold my lines!'"<sup>52</sup> The 3<sup>rd</sup> division had survived the first two days of horrific fighting with great loss of life. The young inexperienced Americans survived the onslaught of the German war machine, pushing back with a ferocity that was unmatched. Although the battle of the day was won and the Germans were rocked back on their heels, the war was not over.

A report by the Associated Press in the *Omaha Daily Bee* on July 17, 1918 describes the opening day of the battle to the American people back home. "The Germans Offensive east and west of Rheims has had the brakes applied to it by the strong resistance of the American, French, and Italian armies. Nowhere has the enemy found it possible to press forward and tear

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<sup>51</sup> Stephen L. Coode, "The American Expeditionary Forces in World War I," 50.

<sup>52</sup> Frank M. Fretwell, *The Rock of the Marne: A Narration of the Military Exploits of Gen. Ulysses Grant McAlexander at the Second Battle of the Marne*, Seattle, 12. Accessed Sept.10.2021.  
<https://archive.org/details/rockofmarneanarr00fret/page/n4/mode/2up>

his way through opposing positions to point of vantage.”<sup>53</sup> After that battle Colonel Mc Alexander said: “There was only one thing that saved us, the spirit of kill or be killed. And I want to say that I was willing to sacrifice the regiment and myself with them rather than yield one foot of ground to those Germans.”<sup>54</sup>

This was the end of any more major offensives of the war initiated by the German Army. The “Dog Faced Soldiers” were the “Rock of the Marne” they had struck fear in the Germans, bloodied their noses, and put them on the run for the first time since the beginning of the war.<sup>55</sup> The Allies were now on a relentless offensive and new battle lines were drawn.<sup>56</sup> On July 18<sup>th</sup>, the Anise-Marne counter offensive began. On July 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division began crossing the river in boats and on pontoon bridges constructed by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division while under heavy German resistance.<sup>57</sup> The 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry began its river crossing around Mezy and by late afternoon with support from the 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry were able to secure the line from the towns of Le Chanois and La Theoderie to the town of Jaulgonne on the eastern flank.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> “Americans Take Four Towns: Check Germans at the Marne.” *The Omaha Daily Bee*, Jul.17, 1918. Accessed. Sep. 28, 2012. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn99021999/1918-07-17/ed-1/seq-1/>.

<sup>54</sup> Frank M. Fretwell, *The Rock of the Marne*, 7.

<sup>55</sup> The 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry’s mascot is a bulldog named Rocky, Therefore any 3<sup>rd</sup> ID. soldier is a “Dog Faced Soldier.”

<sup>56</sup> See Map: 2 Second Battle of the Marne- Phase II.

<sup>57</sup> Engineers of the U.S. 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division Preparing to cross the Marne River near Mezy, France July 1918. Photo 7.

<sup>58</sup> Stephen, C. McGeorge, “The Marne 15, July- Aug. 6, 1918,” 57- 58.

The night of the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, the Germans had withdrawn from the river opening a



path for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division. Elements of the 4<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiments advanced on the village of Le Charmel, capturing it on the 25<sup>th</sup> of July under extreme German gunfire from the Chateau.<sup>59</sup> Again the Germans had

withdrawn from the advancement of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division. The 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment had gained new territory all the way to the Villardelle Farm.<sup>60</sup>

The Morning of the 28<sup>th</sup> the allies attacked the Germans at the Ourcq River and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division along with the 4<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup>, 33<sup>rd</sup>, and 42<sup>nd</sup> infantry divisions faced the German 4<sup>th</sup> and 84<sup>th</sup> Guard Divisions, the 6<sup>th</sup> Bavarian Division, and the 201<sup>st</sup> Infantry division.<sup>61</sup> The last ten days of the Battle of the Marne, at Ourcq Rivers against the highly skilled German forces, was described in the *Charleston News and Courier* headline, “River Ourcq Runs Red with Blood Where Americans Triumph Over Prussian Guard.”<sup>62</sup> From July 14<sup>th</sup> to August 1<sup>st</sup> the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division engaged in daily battles. The Division lost 7,705 men along with their officers. At midnight on July 29-30, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division received stand down orders and were officially relieved. The Battle of the Marne was over for them and six days later the battle ended in a great victory for the

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<sup>59</sup> Stephen, C. McGeorge, “The Marne 15, July- Aug. 6, 1918,” 61.

<sup>60</sup> Stephen, C. McGeorge, “The Marne 15, July- Aug. 6, 1918,” 65.

<sup>61</sup> Earl Starbuck, “The Battle of the Ourcq River” (Liberty University. May 2019). 4. Accessed. Oct.24, 2021. <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1579&context=masters>.

<sup>62</sup> Earl Starbuck, “The Battle of the Ourcq River,” 11.

allies.<sup>63</sup> “At no time had the German army been more powerful or menacing than when, on July 15<sup>th</sup>, it struck again to destroy in one great battle the brave men opposed to it and to enforce its brutal will upon the world and civilization,” exclaimed John J. Pershing, General Commander-in-Chief.<sup>64</sup>

There is no doubt that many brave young Americans had put their lives on the line for freedom and liberty in the war to end all wars. Although this investigation was focused on the exploits of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division at the Second Battle of the Marne and how they changed the course of the war on that bloody day making the battle a major turning point of World War. It would be extremely negligent not to speak of other heroes of the conflict and their contributions in ending the war, such as the Famous Rainbow Division (42<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division). The Yankee Division (26<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division). The bravery displayed that day by the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 26<sup>th</sup> was impeccable, bold, and daring their efforts allowed the 3<sup>rd</sup> division to stand its ground and fight with such fierceness.

One captured German soldier described the fight at the Marne: “Our retreat across the river (Marne) was awful; those Americans certainly did clean us up, \*\*\* they fight like tigers \*\*\*. If those in front of us are fair specimens of the average American troops, and if there are as many as they say there are, then goodbye to us,”<sup>65</sup> The Surlin Valley held by the 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry was the German army’s road to Paris and held great strategic value and they were

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<sup>63</sup> Earl Starbuck, “The Battle of the Ourcq River,” 30.

<sup>64</sup> Frank M. Fretwell, *The Rock of the Marne*, 19.

<sup>65</sup> Frank M. Fretwell, *The Rock of the Marne*, 8.

prepared to do whatever was necessary to take the valley. There was one flaw in the German's plan, they had not considered, and instead underestimated, the warrior spirit of the young green Americans who were under the command of a daring insightful leader. McAlexander was a great commander who led from the front with grit and unbridled determination. There is no doubt that the 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry regiment of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division kept the gates to Paris closed to the advancing German army, whipping them well, turning the tables, putting them on the run when the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division attacked and crossed the river pushing them completely out of the river valley for good. From this point in the war the Germans were on the defense for the rest of the war.

It was "The Great War" and in that one small moment in time young men with the loyalty and tenacity of a bulldog changed the world forever. Colonel McAlexander and the men of the 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion set traditions of honor that has lasted for more than a century and still can be seen today if one knows where to look. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division may be the *Rock of the Marne* but the 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion was the *Top of the Rock!*

" I Wouldn't Give A Bean / To Be A Fancy Pants Marine..."<sup>66</sup>

*Nous resterons la!*

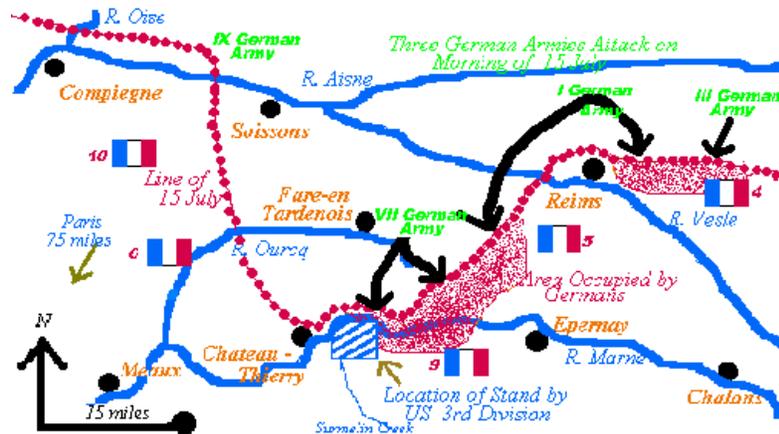
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<sup>66</sup> "Dogface Soldier Song"

# Maps

## Second Battle of the Marne – Phase I

Fifth Ludendorff Offensive: July 15 – July 17, 1918

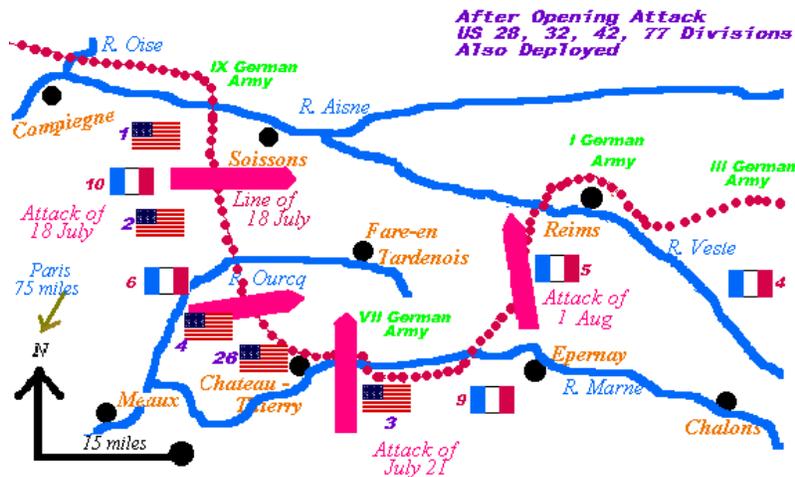


Map 1

The Second Battle of the Marne: The Story of The American Expeditionary Forces,” Doughboy Center, Accessed Sep.16, 2021. <http://www.worldwar1.com/dbc/2marne.htm#back..>

## Second Battle of the Marne – Phase II

Aisne-Marne Counter-Offensive: July 18 – August 17, 1918



Map 2

The Second Battle of the Marne: The Story of The American Expeditionary Forces,” Doughboy Center, Accessed Sep.16, 2021. <http://www.worldwar1.com/dbc/2marne.htm#back..>

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#### Photos

Photo 1: France - Battle of Chateau-Thierry WWI Second Battle of The Marne - [FG-014], <https://www.hippocard.com/listing/france-battle-of-chateau-thierry-wwi-second-battle-of-the-marne-fg-014/10441477>.

Photo 2: Citizens watching the American Soldiers digging in for the Battle of the Marne. <http://www.worldwar1.com/dbc/2marne.htm#back>.

Photo 3: A Battlefield on the Marne, sketched by J. Andre Smith. [https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah\\_445757](https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_445757).

Photo 4: Water ditch full of dead Germans in front of Company G at Mezy. Wooldridge, Jesse, W, *The Giants of the Marne: A Story of McAlexander and His Regiment*, Salt Lake City, The Seagull Press. 1923. 35. <https://archive.org/details/giantsofmarnesto00wool/mode/2up?view=theater>.

Photo 5: An actual photo of America soldiers going 'over the top', through a gas attack at Chateau Thierry (7/11/18), by Gordan E. Griffiths July 11.1918. World Digital Library, <https://www.wdl.org/en/item/18798/>.

Photo 6: "Peace Talk": American artillery piece near Dommiers. McGeorge, McGeorge, Stephen, C., and Mason W. Watson, "The Marne 15, July- Aug. 6, 1918": *The U.S. Army Campaigns of World War One Commemorative Series*, edited by Brian F Newman, Center of Military History United States Army Washing D.C. 2018.

Photo 7: Engineers of the U.S. 3rd Infantry Division preparing to cross the Marne River near Mézy, France, July 1918. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Second-Battle-of-the-Marne#/media/1/365975/142076>.

**"Dogface Soldier Song"**

I Wouldn't Give A Bean / To Be A Fancy Pants Marine, / I'd rather Be A Dogface Soldier Like I Am. / I Wouldn't Trade My Old O.D.'s / For All The Navy's Dungarees / For I'm The Walking Pride Of Uncle Sam; / On All The Posters That I Read / It Says The Army Builds Men / So They're Tearing Me Down To Build Me Over Again / I'm Just A Dogface Soldier / With A Rifle On My Shoulder / And I Eat A Kraut For Breakfast Every day. / So Feed Me Ammunition, / Keep Me In The 3rd Division, / Your Dogfaced Soldier Boy's Okay.

CPL. Bert Gold and LT. Ken Hart, both of Long Beach, New York, co-wrote "Dogface Soldier" in 1942.

<http://www.dogfacesoldier.org/info/dogface.htm>

Dogface Solider Song by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Band,  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6uC\\_Girwaig](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6uC_Girwaig).



**Rocky**

<https://home.army.mil/stewart/index.php/about/history/rocky>.

# Does Social Media Contribute to Political Polarization?

*Matthew Martin*

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## Introduction

Throughout history numerous developments and inventions have had a profound impact on the way human beings communicate and interact with one another. From the first written languages, to the printing press, to the telephone, all of these have had a noticeable impact. The contemporary culture is filled with new and old communication technologies, such as cable, cellphones, and video conferencing software. The advances in these technologies are rapidly changing and at the same time awe inspiring. It is important to appreciate the ingenuity of human beings. However, like ourselves these technologies can have disadvantages. For instance, cable television limits the number of channels one has access to. Cellphones need networks to connect to if they are to function properly.

One of the newest communication technologies is social media. Social media can be defined as an online network where people gather to interact by sharing ideas, thoughts, photos, videos, and so on. There are various platforms around the world, e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Reddit, LinkedIn, etc. Many of these platforms have millions of users across the globe. Many people use these platforms daily. Connecting with people has never been easier or so we thought. Like communication technologies of the past social media has some obvious downfalls especially in the field of mental health. Social Psychologist Jonathan Haidt

(2020) finds that increased time spent on social media is contributing to increased rates of adolescent depression. But despite this, social media has benefits and is still a new and emerging technology. Within the past several years scholars have begun to conduct research into the effects these technologies have on various aspects of human life. The body of literature is brief but is constantly being updated with new contributions. This research seeks to add to said body.

Politics has always been a hot button issue, often leading to heated and violent exchanges between those with opposing ideas. This has been demonstrated around the globe in events, such as the American Civil War, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Arab Spring. However, it is possible to have exchanges in a sensible and respectful manner. Like the years leading up to the American Civil War, we can see two clear cut sides on opposite sides of the political spectrum. This phenomenon is known as political polarization. The body of evidence suggests that the two sides have been growing farther away or have become more polarized over time. This plays a significant role in the American political system. Currently the United States (U.S.) is feeling the effects of political polarization. These include one sided legislation, legislative gridlock, and violent political protests. Seeing how this is an issue that needs to be addressed and solved, political scientists are conducting research into the causes and effects. The goal of this paper is to acquire more knowledge on the topic of political polarization and to conduct empirical research on whether social media is playing a significant role in the further polarization of our politics.

Literature Review

Since social media is a relatively new technology, scholars are still observing and investigating its significance within contemporary American society. While there is an abundance of academic research on the effects of social media within the fields of psychology, there is little within the field of political science. However, as social media continues to play an important role in democratic politics, political science research into its effects will increase. Up to the present moment, research into the effects media plays in polarization focuses on a few key areas: selective exposure, homophily, and partisan media exposure. These three factors are key components of social media and are themselves individually correlated to political polarization.

Very little research has been conducted to test the effects social media has on political polarization within the American political system, to the point that the literature is almost nonexistent. The following paragraphs discuss the theories thought to be behind the polarization we see in the mass public. In addition, they will also examine the findings of past political science research on selective exposure, homophily, partisan media, mobilization, and user generated content. Hopefully the findings of past research can strengthen the argument that social media is now a major driving force behind the polarization in American politics.

Many scholars agree on the timeframe in which political polarization became evident. In their research about the polarization of contemporary American politics, Christopher Hare and Keith Poole (2014, 415) wrote that “beginning in the 1970s, the parties began to move farther apart. Democrats and Republicans began to stake out more ideologically consistent positions.”

However, there is much debate on the cause of political polarization. There are numerous arguments regarding the origins of political polarization that have been presented. A few of these arguments were presented by Bruce Campbell in his book "Polarized" (2018). The most well-known and accepted theory is known as emergence theory. Emergence theory is the theory that political polarization happened at the elite level and trickled down to the mass public overtime. In other words, leaders in government became polarized and their attitudes and positions were adopted by the mass public. There is no clear consensus on how or why this happened. A potential explanation may be the election of more polarizing leaders. However, this would seem to contradict emergence theory, offering a bottom-up explanation. This means polarization would have started at the mass level and worked its way up to the elite level. This presents a flaw within emergence theory. Campbell (2018, 51) notes, "hard evidence for a substantial increase in polarization is at best, ambiguous, and scholars are not clear as to what event caused it." It is possible that political polarization has been occurring gradually over several decades and was muted until recently.

Hare and Poole (2014) argue, the Goldwater presidential campaign may have been a likely source for the rightward shift of the Republican party. However, even if that was the event that caused the rightward shift of the Republican party, we still need to figure out what caused the leftward shift of the Democratic party. On the contrary, Campbell offers revealed theory which argues the opposite of emergence theory. In this theory the polarization occurred at the mass level and worked its way up to the elite level. "The electorate became polarized long ago, most likely in the mid to late 1960's, and once the parties began to sort themselves out rather than muting the polarization, they revealed it" (Campbell 2018, 53). While there is

debate over the cause, there is little debate over the fact that the contemporary political environment is highly polarized. DW Nominat scores which track roll call voting of the members of congress paint a stark picture. The roll call votes provide evidence of the growing polarization between the two parties at the elite level (Moskowitz et al., 2019). However, they do not explain the polarization at the mass level. One cause for polarization at the mass level may be a phenomenon known as selective exposure.

“Exposure to a diverse set of opinions is an essential tenant of deliberative democracy” (Garrett 2013, 113). The literature on selective exposure suggests that those who take into consideration a wider variety of opinions show lower levels of political participation. Contrary to this, those who engage in selective exposure and consume likeminded media are more likely to participate in the political process (Boutyline 2017 and Dilliplane 2011). Selective exposure is when a person picks and chooses which news media to rely upon and discredit. Stroud (2008, 342) states, “early researchers were divided on their interpretations of the evidence; however, modern researchers have acknowledged that the fact that selective exposure has been widely demonstrated in the mass public.” One likely cause of selective exposure is the abundance in news choice. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century an abundance of news choice has increased one’s chances of finding a congenial news source (Leeper 2014). This abundance in choice has led to what many scholars call media fragmentation. Media fragmentation may be a key factor behind political polarization. Arceneaux (2012, 175) notes, “the proliferation in choice has enabled Americans to wall themselves off from news if they choose to.”

Some research argues that news choice is predicated upon political leanings. This is argued by Natalie Stroud (2008), whose findings suggest that people choose news media based upon their political predispositions and that Republicans are almost three times as likely to consume ideologically consistent news media. One reason for increased selective exposure among Republicans may be the need for certainty. Boutyline (2017, 553) states, “conservatives have a greater tendency to experience threat or anxiety when faced with uncertainty. To counter they must reach firm conclusions quickly.” This avoidance of uncertainty in the political realm is positively linked with homophily, the tendency to only associate with the those whom you share something in common.

Homophily is another issue that is a possible agitator of political polarization. This could also be exacerbated by social media where one can construct their political environment. “Citizens in the contemporary political environment base their policy preferences on the interests of their group and party identification more so than they did in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century” (Garner 2011, 226). Unlike traditional communication settings from the past, such as the classroom, the modern online communication settings are more self-constructed (Feezell 2016). Social media users can create a rather homogenous online social circle. What is interesting is that numerous studies find that exposure to heterogenous and homogenous political views have opposite consequences.

Having exposure to a heterogeneous set of political views is important not only at the individual level, but at the aggregate as well. This is something that Dillaplane (2011) argues is essential to democracy, and the development of more informed and tolerant citizens. The

importance of exposure to oppositional information cannot be understated. Andrei Boutyline's research on political echo chambers shows that people who lack personal ties to those with differing political opinions are likely to be less politically tolerant (2017, 552). In addition, Boutyline (2017, 552) notes, "those without exposure to cross cutting discourse are less likely to see opposing opinions as legitimate and are less able to provide proper justification for their political decisions." A possible cause for the intolerance of people with or without cross cutting ties might be their media choices. Exposure to partisan media has had notable effects on the public, but to what extent does partisan media polarize its viewers?

Partisan news media has been scrutinized by scholars. Its effects on political polarization have been debated and examined, but to what extent do the effects of partisan news media spill over to social media? Social media users can post news articles. What if all the articles a user posts happens to be from a partisan news source? What effects does this have on the one who is sharing and those within their social networking group? Will it make them more polarized? Matthew Levendusky (2013, 611) argues "news outlets such as Fox News provides viewers an echo chamber of their own beliefs, which in turn may polarize them." These are important questions to ponder. Partisan news outlets engage in biased story selection that favors their side and downplay information that contradicts their side.

When these outlets do discuss oppositional positions, they do so in straw-man fashion (ibid). Levendusky (2013) found that exposure to partisan media makes those who are already extreme, more extreme. In addition, Levendusky (2013) found that the effects of likeminded news that reinforces previously held beliefs could last several days on viewers. Morris examined

the effects that Fox News had on viewers in the 2004 United States (U.S.) presidential election. He found “exposure to network news, Fox in particular, was associated with a higher probability of shifting a Democrat vote to a Republican vote in the election.” (Morris 2007, 722). Partisan media exposure has been demonstrated to move viewers along the political spectrum. Is this the same for those who engage in selective exposure in a partisan social media environment? To what extent can social media move people not just across a spectrum, but move them to action?

The ability of media platforms to mobilize mass groups into action has been demonstrated. This can be seen in the Arab Spring and other events in the past decade. Scholars argue about how much of a factor social media played in these important events, but the ability of social media platforms to have an impact on the political process is something that scholars have examined and should continue to, especially if the information people are acting upon is false or misleading. One of the key differences between traditional media and social media is the creation and consumption of user generated content; whereas the traditional reporter is typically a part of a larger network, individual citizens can publish political information in an independent fashion online. Graber and Dunaway (2018, 468) “state millions of Americans can post their political views online where other people can read them. Anyone can with no training can produce content. These individuals are not bound to principles, such as fairness, and honesty.” If publishing content about complex political issues is vital to democracy, content created by the individual citizen is a bad choice (ibid). The publication of such content has serious implications, especially when accountability for publishing false or misleading information is almost non-existent.

Questions about the effects of user generated content and the effects it has on political polarization came into the focus during the 2016 U.S. presidential election. User generated content, its accuracy, and accountability became the subject of a congressional inquiry. It was found that a group of Russian trolls created numerous fake Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts. The owners of these accounts posted false and misleading information regarding both candidates. Their goal was to create further division in the public and distrust in the political system (Department of Justice 2018). In turn, social media companies like Facebook have employed fact checking measures, but the proliferation and publication of false user generated content is still widespread. For instance, the popular notion that victory in the 2020 U.S. presidential election was stolen from President Donald Trump was argued on many social media platforms, but it has been proven false. However, that information which was mainly user generated content spurred many Trump supporters into action against congress on January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

The possibility of social technology to have noticeable negative effects on humans is alarming. If the electorate is already polarized and a recent technological invention inadvertently causes political polarization to grow exponentially, the users of that technology should be informed about its effects. The topics discussed in the previous paragraph are issues within the social media platforms. Individually they may be further polarizing the public to a lesser extent than if they were combined. Sadly, the latter is the current reality. It is possible that all of these factors combined has caused political polarization to grow tenfold over a very short period of time. This paper seeks to test whether increased social media usage is positively

associated with increased political polarization, and to answer some of the questions previously proposed questions.

#### Data and Methods

This paper seeks to test the following hypothesis: Increased social media usage leads to increased political polarization. To test this hypothesis, I created a survey on SurveyMonkey to test the effects social media usage has on political polarization. The survey consisted of fourteen questions using the Likert scale to assess responses. The survey was open for six days and got forty-six total responses. The respondents were students at Cameron University. The students were given a link to the survey by their professors. These students were either in a history class or a political science class. The first two questions of the survey asked about party identification and ideological position. The respondents were then asked if they had a social media account, what platform they primarily use, how much time they spend on social media during the day, and what their primary use of social media is. They were then asked about where they get their news information from and if they trust news information sources. The last seven questions were designed to gauge respondent's trust level in congruent and oppositional political information and how likely they are to engage in a political discussion with people who hold similar and dissimilar opinions. Three different analyses were run to test the effects that party identification, ideology, and time spent on social media have on political polarization, selective exposure, and homophily. The third analysis tests the hypothesis.

Analysis 1: Effects of Party Identification

The latter questions were designed to test the hypothesis whether party identification leads to increased rates of social media usage, political polarization, selective exposure and homophily. My first analysis demonstrated some rather inconclusive results.

First, does party identification have any impact on the amount of time an individual spends on social media? The answer is no. The result shows that most respondents regardless of party, spend anywhere from 1- 2 hours on social media.

Second, does party identification lead to an increase in political polarization? The answer is no. Questions 2, 11, 13, and 14 demonstrate this finding. Question 2 demonstrates that around 60 % of respondents that identified as Democrat fell on the liberal side of the political spectrum. In addition, 60 % of respondents that identified as Republicans fell on the conservative side. However, not even a quarter of the 60% that answered either Republican or Democrat fall into the far end of the ideological spectrum. Question 13 shows that Republicans are slightly more likely to engage in discussion with those who agree with them compared to the other respondents of other parties. Question 14 shows those who identify as democrat are slightly less likely to engage with those who hold opposing beliefs.

Third, does party identification lead to increased rates of selective exposure? The answer to this is no. The results can be explained by question 8 – 12. Republicans find news sources slightly less trustworthy than the respondents with differing party identification. Question 9 demonstrates those who identify as Democrat are 20 % more likely to trust

congruent news information. The responses to question 10 are relatively similar, albeit the one third party respondent. Question 11 illustrates those who identify as Democrat are slightly more likely to view opposing viewpoint as valid when compared to respondents who identified as Republican and independent. Question 12 shows a small fraction of both Democrat and Republican respondents might not assess the validity of opposing viewpoints before arguing against it or dismissing it.

Last, to see if party identification leads to an increase in homophily we must look at questions 13 and 14. The responses to question 13 demonstrate Republican respondents are 20% more likely to engage with those who agree with them. The results from question 14 show Democrat respondents are slightly less likely to engage with those who hold opposing viewpoints. So, does party identification have any effect on rates of homophily? The answer is no.

#### Analysis 2: Effects of Ideology

This analysis examines whether a respondent's ideology leads to increased rates of social media usage, polarization, selective exposure, and homophily. The results from the second analysis shows some interesting results.

First, does ideology have an impact on the amount of time respondents spend on social media? The answer is yes. As one moves from the conservative end to the liberal end of the ideological spectrum, time spent on social media increases.

Second, does ideology have any impact on political polarization? The answer is no. Questions 11, 13, and 14 demonstrate varying and inconclusive results.

Third, does ideology lead to increased rates of selective exposure. The answer to this question can be found by looking at the results from questions 8-12. The results show that ideology slightly impacts one's trust level in news and informational sources, with those who are on the liberal side being slightly more trusting. Question 9 shows that moderates and liberals are more likely to trust congruent news information. Despite this, questions 10 and 11 demonstrate that ideology does not play a role in whether one is likely to trust opposing news sources or whether they consider opposing views as valid.

Last, does ideology have an impact on rates of homophily. The answer to this question is no. The results from questions 13 and 14 are inconsistent and varying.

### Analysis 3: Effects of Time Spent on Social Media

The third and final analysis tests the hypothesis: Increased social media usage leads to increased political polarization. The results from the third analysis disconfirm my hypothesis. The amount of time one spends on social media does not impact political polarization.

The results from question 2 show that conservatives spend slightly less time on social media. The results from questions 11, 13, and 14 show that time spent on social media does not correlate with whether one is likely to be more polarized. The second question in this analysis is whether increased time spent on social media impacts selective exposure. The answer is no. Questions 8 and 9 demonstrate varying results across all respondents. However,

the results from question 10 demonstrate that increased time spent on social media makes one slightly less trusting of oppositional news information. The results from question 11 show that time spent on social media does not play a factor in one's assessment of opposing political beliefs. The results from question 12 show that spending two hours or more on social media might make one slightly more likely to engage in selective exposure, but not to a significant degree. Therefore, the results from question 12 should be taken lightly considering these results do not line up with any of the results from the other questions. Last, it does not appear that increased time spent on social media makes one more likely to engage in homophily. The results from questions 13 and 14 demonstrate this finding.

#### Conclusion

In conclusion, this study disconfirmed the hypothesis. Increased time spent on social media did not correlate to increased political polarization. In addition, when looking at whether increased time spent on social media would make one more likely to engage in homophily and selective exposure the results were inconclusive. One thing that can be taken away from this study is that even though most of the results were inconclusive it appears that party identification may be a more probable cause of political polarization.

It should be noted that this study suffers from numerous limitations. First, the fact that this is an undergraduate research project means that there was no funding to conduct large scale academic research. This project was conducted at the local level. The second limitation is all of those who were surveyed happen to be college students, and therefore the sample is not an accurate representation of the public. In addition, it should be noted that the individuals

contained within the sample seemed to be more moderate. Seldom were responses on the extreme. It is worth asking if a college education makes an individual more likely to hold moderate political opinions. Future research might be able to answer this question. The third limitation is the sample size. Like the demographics, the size of the sample taken is not large enough to apply to the general U.S. population.

However, this research does have value. Even with the small sample size and one-dimensional demographics, spending an increased amount of time on social media influenced how respondents handled oppositional political information. Yet, the effect is very minimal. The question should be asked if one were to conduct a survey that is more representative of the U.S. population, would spending more time on social media correlate to one being less trustworthy of oppositional political information. The same could be asked for rates of selective exposure and homophily.

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