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### Art as a Form of Resistance in France during World War II:

From 1940-1944, the City of Lights was dimmed as Nazi flags hung over French national icons which brought them pride. The Second World War is a topic that most French do not wish to discuss, but it is nonetheless unavoidable, as it is in world history in general. The French and other European nations may have been occupied by outside forces, but their need for the arts as well as the need for resistance was not shattered like the environment around them.

The spark that led to World War II was started surrounded by some of the world's most beautiful art and architecture. After the Treaty of Versailles was signed in 1920, an already devastated Germany was now blamed for the majority of World War I. Now in debt, Germany needed something, or someone, to bring a little bit of color to the dark days the Germans were living in. That color came in the form of red flags with black swastikas and that someone was Adolf Hitler. Hitler had a great sense of German nationalism and encouraged the Germans to stand up and love their country. Before Hitler was a public figure, he was determined to live out a Bohemian artist lifestyle in Vienna. He applied to the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna twice, in 1907 and 1908, only to be rejected twice, (Bullock). The director remarked that he was "unfit for painting", but showed promise in the study of architecture. As we know, Hitler had a tendency to destroy buildings rather than building them.

The city of Paris is known for its art and its nightlife, just to name a few things. Though the Nazis occupied them, the French were not going to give up their culture. In Alan Riding's book, "And the Show Went on Cultural Life in Nazi-Occupied Paris", Riding writes that the Germans wanted the Parisians to be distracted while they occupied their city. Therefore, the arts continued to flourish, sometimes with an underlying theme of resistance. The artists, writers, and intellectuals who contributed to this form of resistance were not just found in Paris.

Before the start of World War II, there was a piece of art that reflected a sense of resistance. On April 26, 1937, German and Italian warplanes bombed the Spanish village of Guernica, killing and injuring 1,600 civilians and destroying 75% of the village. It was later discovered that the bombing occurred only as a "training mission" for the Germans, (Stokstad and Cothren pgs. 1062-1063) Pablo Picasso had been invited to contribute a work of art of the 1937 Paris International Exposition at the World's Fair. Having had trouble finding a topic to paint, the Spanish artist now had one. Picasso finished *Guernica* in June 1937 and just looking at an image of it, the sense of pain and humanity is quite evident. A hidden image of a skull, chaos, death, destruction, etc. are all seen and Picasso was successful at showing his viewers the horrors of what happened that April day. In Alejandro Escalona's Huffington Post column regarding the 75 anniversary of the bombing, Escalona writes, "*Guernica* is to painting what Beethoven's Ninth Symphony is to music: a cultural icon that speaks to mankind not only against war but also of hope and peace. It is a reference when speaking about genocide from El Salvador to Bosnia."

As we have learned in class, life in occupied Europe was not glamorous, but as mentioned above, the Nazis allowed the Parisians to continue enjoying themselves as they immersed themselves in culture in order to forget the major life changes around them. In "Americans in Paris", Charles Glass talks about Kathleen Cannel, a former New York Times

fashion writer and how she was living in Paris during the German occupation. Cannel observed how the Parisians were malnourished, turning on each other, and how the metro system was not the best form of transportation when there were electrical shortages. The one thing that did not change was how the Parisians lived their nightlife. "Though there is little bread there are plenty of circuses. People escape from the galling irritation of perpetual difficulties into the realm of art. Theatres and talkies are crowded even in the winter when the halls are unheated. The Grand Opera is sold out for both opera and ballet half an hour after the opening of the box office." (Glass page 351) Though the Nazis allowed the Parisians to continue their lifestyle, that did not make up for the fact that everything else around them was wrong. The Parisians resisted this by doing whatever it took to get to the arts.

The Germans could have closed down the museums, opera, theatres, etc., but they didn't. I think a reason for this could have been because they wanted to experience and enjoy themselves as well. After WWI, they were could not experience this, so when they came into one of the most artistic cities in the world, they saw this as an opportunity to experience what they had been missing.

The Nazis, on the other hand, also did whatever it took to get to the arts. Having failed to become a professional artist himself, Hitler took it upon himself to force the aesthetic appeal of the arts on Germany. The art that the Germans wanted was stolen, taken to the Museum Jeu de Paume where it was inventoried by art historians before it was sent to Germany. When the allied troops began to bomb Germany, the Germans hid some of their loot in the salt mines. They were underground and safe. They also provided the appropriate amount of humidity and temperature conditions to keep the art preserved.

Like their persecution of “untouchables” art not made by German artists, was seen as degenerate art, especially modern art. Hitler even went as far as to host a degenerate art show in Munich in 1937. Priceless works of art were then auctioned off at bargain prices. A Van Gogh self-portrait was auctioned off at \$40,000 in 1939, according to Werner Hammerstingl. The arts that did not make the auction cut were ordered to be burned. In March 1939, 4,000 works of art and books were burned by the Berlin Fire Brigade. Most of the art burned had little value in the international art market.

Seeing how the Germans handled the arts in their possession, the occupied Parisians hid their prized pieces of art. According to an article published in USA Today, the Mona Lisa was covered in countless sheets of waterproof paper before it was crated and moved into the French countryside for safekeeping. The Mona Lisa was moved five times before the war was over. In a quote from the article from Guillaume Fonkenell, who was a curator in charge of an exhibit in the Louvre displaying black and white photographs of the art being packed and moved, the Germans knew very well what the French were doing. "The Germans were perfectly aware of the different places the artwork was being stored. Most of it was kept at chateaux, whose owners volunteered to safeguard the pieces as a way of preventing their properties from being requisitioned by the Nazis," Fonkenell said.

During the war, a few galleries in museums throughout Paris were open, including a few at the Louvre. Germans could get in for free and French had to pay an admission fee, said Fonkenell. Again, the French did whatever it took to get to their art.

Eventually, all terrible things must come to an end. After the war, the art slowly started to make its way back to its home. Fonkenell said that it was because of the lack of coal and gas

shortages, though some pieces of art are still in the French government's custody. The fact that the art is still intact today is amazing, and it was all because of the French men and women who stood up to the Germans and protected what was rightfully theirs.

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