

Series title: Traces of the White Rose

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Episode title: Legacies

Episode Description

In this final episode, Tom Herring and Dr Alexandra Lloyd explore the enduring legacy of the White Rose, with contributions from students, academics, and authors working on this remarkable resistance group.

Music

Extracts from:

Johannes Brahms Warum ist das Licht gegeben?

Episode Transcript

REBECCA DONNER

I think the White Rose demonstrates the power of youth to fight the establishment, to fight for justice. They had integrity, they stood up for what they believed in. Even when they knew the tremendous risks that faced them in doing so, they demonstrated tremendous courage.

And it must be remembered that Sophie and Hans Scholl and others in the group grew up during this regime. You know, as the sixth leaflet says, 'we have grown up in a state which ruthlessly gags all freedom of expression. The Hitler Youth, the SA, and the SS have tried to homogenise, radicalise, and anaesthetise us in the most fruitful of our formative years.' So for these young people to stand up to this regime took incredible strength and moral integrity and courage.

TOM

I'm Tom Herring...

ALEX

and I'm Dr Alexandra Lloyd...

TOM

and you're listening to Traces of the White Rose.

ALEX

In this final episode we're going to hear from some of my colleagues and from

student members of the White Rose Translation Project. They'll share their perspectives on the White Rose and what this remarkable story means for us today.

TOM

You've already heard Rebecca Donner describing the amazing courage of the members of the White Rose. Here's Stephani Richards-Wilson reflecting on another important characteristic.

STEPHANI RICHARDS-WILSON

I think most people, at least my experience has been, will talk about their courage and they certainly were courageous, you know, doing what they did against overwhelming odds, being in the minority and going up against Hitler and the Nazis. But my answer probably would be their compassion because, you know, evil can be bold and brazen and brash, but to be compassionate and courageous like the White Rose, to be in solidarity with the victims, to see atrocities and to actually do something, to move from being an observer to an upstander - I think compassion can be very powerful.

And I think that's what is one of their most inspiring they did not remain indifferent and that they got involved. It was very difficult when you have, in that time, nothing to gain and everything to lose, including your life. I think their compassion and the ability to align with others, many people, nationalities, faith formations, religious backgrounds that they might not have much in common with except their humanity and I think their compassion connected them to the fellow human beings who were suffering and really needed help. So I would say their compassion followed by their courage.

ALEX

Another key characteristic, which is highlighted in the title of part two of the podcast series, is conscience. Here's former student project member Lydia Ludlow.

LYDIA LUDLOW

For me, maybe bravery is a big aspect, but I think conscience is probably the heart of what I got from it, which is, you know, if you feel inside you that something's wrong, you should trust your own conscience. And they went to show how challenging that can be and how dangerous that can be. But that ultimately was the right thing to do.

TOM

These three elements, courage, compassion and conscience, are all central to the lasting legacy of the White Rose. They're also key aspects of their leadership, something which Stephani Richards-Wilson thinks is often underexplored.

STEPHANI RICHARDS-WILSON

I see a lot of adjectives for the White Rose and they're certainly deserving of all kinds of accolades and honours. But of course, as we know with the story, they were initially branded as traitors and tried for high treason. Throughout time, they've had different ways of being described, German students, young students, heroes, saints. But I would like to see more verbiage and connections to their leadership traits. My first doctorate is in leadership studies, and maybe that's what drew me to resistance

in my first course when I was at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, leadership in the last part of the 20th century, leadership studies has to do about challenging the status quo as influencers, not positional power or formal authority. Here's a group of people who didn't have formal authority, they didn't have a lot of resources, who challenged the status quo.

I would like, going 80 years now, more conversations about their leadership traits. After all, a lot of the world's problems can be solved with people exercising leadership to challenge a status quo. Steadfastness, critical analysis, communication, strategy, shared sacrifice, what wonderful examples they are for leadership and leadership traits. And the fact that we're having this conversation today, you know, 80 years later, tells you that they're even leading from the grave. Their legacy is their leadership traits. So I think connecting them to that field is something we can talk more about in the future. They're really wonderful role models when you talk about leaders, as opposed to followers. And we know a lot of followers in Nazi Germany. There's so much that can be said when you look at their leadership traits.

ALEX

This idea of leading from the grave is part of what we wanted to explore in this podcast series. The ways in which by telling their story in their own words, we could give voice to their legacy. Here's Judd Newborn on what he sees as the importance of the White Rose for us today.

JUDD NEWBORN

The most important thing about the White Rose for today is the need for people to fight against peer pressure, to overcome peer pressure, and to find one another again, as the White Rose had said in one of their leaflets, so that there's some strength in number, so you're not totally isolated, and to speak up, to speak truth to power, to do it publicly. Thomas Mann, the great Nobel laureate had said in a radio broadcast that he sent back to Germany from exile in 1943 after he learned about the White Rose: he said the White Rose knew and publicly declared - calling for freedom, the overturn of the Nazi regime, and so forth. It has universal significance, in specific ways.

The White Rose students were authentic, they were moral, they were courageous. As the White Rose story unfolds with new revelations, which I'm very glad to say I have contributed to, they come in step with the expansion of human rights in the world and in the fight against reactionary culture wars, which would renege on the progress we've made.

The White Rose message couldn't be stronger than it is today.

TOM

For Stephani Richards-Wilson, the relevance of the White Rose is found in what we can learn from them.

STEPHANI RICHARDS-WILSON

They suffered many of the things that we currently suffer. I mean, we have wars and conflict and chaos and corruption and pandemics going on. A lot of horrible things

going on in the world. It's cruel, it's cold, and it can be very depressing. Their ability to get past being paralyzed by the overwhelming bad news and the evil in the world is very impressive. And I think we can learn that they had coping mechanisms and one of them was to find like-minded people and kindred spirits who shared their values and priorities and humanity and learning to get past all the bad news, and there's lots of it around the world, and being a doer as opposed to someone who sits on the sidelines. I think that's what we can learn, that this is a human condition.

Evil's been around for a long time, we have it now, and trying to get to know yourself, where you stand, what you want to do about it, as I think that's how they are relevant in today. We still have many of the same challenges, a little bit different as well, but we have to find a way to navigate in that.

I think discernment and discerning is one of the more aspirational traits because we have the same thing, especially when we talk about the internet and social media, the ability to discern and seek the truth, propaganda is out there, misinformation, disinformation, fake news, outright lies. They found some of those same challenges of trying to navigate that and the ability to discern and take a stand.

ALEX

This idea of discernment is also important for George Newton, another of the students who worked on the White Rose Translation Project.

GEORGE NEWTON

I think their legacy is one based on the pursuit of truth and on the pursuit of transparency and being able to distinguish between what is manufactured and what is truthful. And I think their desire to expose the evil regime at the time, I think, is of course a very courageous endeavour, given the circumstances in which they were working. The pursuit of truth and transparency, I think, is important today as well, particularly in certain political climates around the world. And I think that that's an endeavor that should always exist really. Their courage is truly exceptional. And for us to be able to work on a project of such strong-willed, brave individuals was really an honour.

TOM

For student Rachel Herring, who happens to have the same surname as me, the White Rose doesn't have a single legacy.

RACHEL HERRING

I think the White Rose has many legacies. I think there's the legacy it's most well known for, which is this legacy of resistance, of free thinking, of staying true to your principles in a situation and a regime where it was incredibly hard to do that. But I think also other legacies and one which really stood out to me was this idea of collective action. These weren't just individuals who were recording their thoughts, who were distributing pamphlets, this was a group and I think that that legacy of working together and gaining strength from working with other people is a really powerful one.

ALEX

If you enjoyed listening to this podcast series, please follow the example of the White

Rose and spread the word by sharing it with your friends. To close out the series, here's Rebecca Donner on why the White Rose matters to us now more than ever.

REBECCA DONNER

I think we have a current urgent need for stories about resistance. The rise of authoritarianism concerns me deeply. And I think that these black and white newsreels that we see about the Third Reich, they seem ancient to contemporary viewers. And I worry about people dismissing them as outdated and irrelevant, as if there were these distant sepia-toned, dust-caked, you know, of an era, of the past. And yet the threat to democracy today is terribly relevant and urgent. And so I think we have much to learn from the members of the White Rose.

END OF EPISODE