Concealed for decades in the archives of postwar Germany, the final days of Sophie Scholl provide a record of German resistance to the Nazi regime, civilian perception of war and a desire for freedom so strong it exceeded the fear of death. The 2005 film *Sophie Scholl: The Final Days* follows the arrest, interrogation, trial and execution of Sophie Scholl, her brother Hans Scholl and their friend Christoph Probst following their distribution of leaflets condemning Hitler, the Nazi regime and German actions during the war as part of a non-violent resistance group—the White Rose. The White Rose advocated for freedom; freedom of speech, freedom of belief and freedom from war. The account of Sophie Scholl’s interrogation, resolve, trial and punishment provides insight into not only the justice system of Nazi Germany but also the everyday life of mid-war German citizens. Historical understanding of World War II Nazi Germany and events that took place within it can be gained from *Sophie Scholl: The Final Days* through indirect observations and direct actions as the film is historically accurate in terms of events and portrayals of people and the time period. Nazi suppression, draconian punishment, common German knowledge of the war and the dropping of White Rose leaflets over Germany by Allied planes are only some of the factors and events given clarity in the film.

*Sophie Scholl: The Final Days* is a 2005 movie directed by Marc Rothemund based on the interrogations and final days leading up to the execution of Sophie Scholl, a core member of the White Rose—a student led non-violent resistance against Nazi rule. The film begins with the distribution of anti-Nazi leaflets condemning the war and German losses in Stalingrad by Sophie and her brother Hans at their university. After distributing the flyers near lecture hall entryways, Sophie pushes a stack off of the third-floor balcony balustrade upon the ringing of the dismissal bell and they are discovered by the university janitor who reports them to the gestapo. After being detained by the gestapo, Sophie is interrogated by Robert Mohr who eventually coerces her, with evidence, to confess to distributing the leaflets and holding anti-Nazi sentiments. Throughout her interrogations, Sophie remained steadfast in her beliefs and dedication to the idea of the White Rose. By explaining and defending her idea, beliefs and observations, Sophie gains the respect of Mohr who attempts to lessen the severity of Sophie’s fate by encouraging her to give up her idea of a free Germany and claim that she was only assisting her brother. Despite his attempt, Sophie declines and is sentenced to death along with her brother and Christoph Probst, a writer of White Rose leaflets, after a show trial in the ‘people’s court’. During their statements, Sophie and Hans appeal to the military members in the audience by describing the atrocities committed by German soldiers in war areas, the Eastern front, the extermination of European Jews and question the shame that will befall Germany after they lose the war to the Allies. The president of the People's Court, Roland Freisler, dismisses their words despite unrest amongst the attending military audience. Sophie, Hans and Christoph are then taken to the prison and executed via guillotine with the last words of Sophie and Hans carrying the message and hope of the White Rose: “the sun is still shining” (Sophie), “long live freedom” (Hans)! This hope is then distributed across Germany as the closing scene shows Allied planes dropping millions of White Rose leaflet number six over Germany after a leaflet was given to the Allies who renamed it the "Manifesto of the Students of Munich". Although not a feature of plot, windows and light were used symbolically for freedom throughout the film. When Sophie was free and inspired, scenes were outside and full of sun. When she was detained with the possibility of release, scenes contained windows overlooking the sky with bars. When she confessed to Robert Mohr and sealed her fate, shades were drawn over the interrogation room windows and following barred windows overlooked brick walls. At the end of the film, the sky is once again open and Sophie is free as she embraces the idea of the White rose despite her impending death.

*Sophie Scholl: The Final Days* emphasizes the presence of civilian resistance and unrest in Germany. It is often assumed that German citizens supported Hitler unanimously with little opposition however, this is not the case. There were large populations of Germans who opposed the war yet were suppressed by fear of Nazi retaliation and punishment. Not unlike the people of the nations Hitler terrorized with war, strict suppression was imposed on German citizens by the policing gestapo and draconian penalties for minor infractions such as denouncing the war or criticizing Hitler’s actions. Numerous groups, among them the White Rose, and individuals emerged as secret non-violent and violent anti-Nazi advocates who encouraged freedom and condemned the war, its effect on Germany, the treatment of invaded people, the extermination of massive groups of people and Nazi suppression. The film does an exceptional job of depicting the regular fear and caution German citizens, especially those who did not agree with Hitler, experienced under Nazi rule as well as punishments delivered to offenders. In the film, activities violating the expectations of the Nazi regime, even those conducted within the home, were done with extreme caution and secrecy; In the opening scene, Sophie and her friend were quietly listening to a British radio station playing African American jazz singer Billie Holiday’s *Sugar* and singing along in hushed voices despite being inside an apartment. Additionally, suspicion was raised if one did not repeat the standard greeting, “heil Hitler” in passing, as seen with lingering gazes directed towards the Scholl siblings by others in the streets. In addition to providing evidence of the fear of the Nazi regime by German citizens, the film also provides insight to German support of Hitler with Mohr stating that Hitler eliminated inflation, poverty and unemployment caused by the Treaty of Versailles and Sophie herself saying that she initially had hope that Hitler would bring Germany peace and prosperity when describing why she joined the Nazi Girls Organization (BDM).

Nazi-Germany wanted to ensure its citizens supported the war effort; at the very least, Germany wanted to appear to be united in ideology and belief in Germany’s success. Speaking out against the war was considered high treason and draconian punishment was the result; as was the punishment of the White Rose members. German leaders and military officials only declared Germany’s impending victory, not the possibility of loss. Nazi-Germany also deceived its citizens and distorted the information they received about the war; frequently, citizens would know little about the horrors committed by German troops under the special wartime policies. This lack of information began to decline nearing 1945; as war continued, knowledge of Jewish exterminations and war losses became more commonplace as information was more widely shared. While some citizens believed in the possibility of a German victory in the war, others realized Germany’s imminent defeat by the Allies. As the war drudged on, and Germany suffered more losses against the Allies, people began to realize that the whispers that they had heard all along were actually shouts of truth. The disparity of knowledge is evident in the film in two instances: Sophie’s interrogations with Mohr and audience reactions at the show trial. During Sophie’s interrogations with Mohr, she describes information that she has learned about German actions and the fate of the war from people who had witnessed the atrocities in person. Sophie describes how her mother’s friend—a nurse in a mental hospital—watched the children she cared for taken away on a bus to be gassed by the German government as Hitler deemed them Lebensunwertes Leben (“life unworthy of life”), soldiers returning from the fronts spoke of extermination camps for European Jews and the death caused by German soldiers on the Eastern front in Poland and Russia as described by her brother.

The events of *Sophie Scholl: The Final Days* take place in February 1943, a time in which an Allied invasion of Germany was expected at any moment by German resistors and the White Rose. The time at which the events in the film occur is significant as it helps explain the reasoning of the White Rose’s drive to risk their lives to open the eyes of the German public and fight for a free Germany. The White Rose believed that their actions would supplement an Allied invasion and aid in German acceptance of free thinking and democracy; they also believed that they would be freed from punishment upon an Allied invasion if discovered. Until her execution, Sophie believed that she had ninety-nine days of imprisoned life remaining; within this window, she believed an Allied invasion would occur to free her, spread the hope and core message that the White Rose fought for with words and liberate Germany from the blinding oppression that was Hitler. Although Sophie was killed before an Allied invasion occurred, the Allies helped spread her hope and the idea of the White Rose. In the final scene of the film, Allied planes drop millions of copies of Helmut von Moltke, White Rose leaflet number six, over Germany in mid-1943 under the title of “A German Leaflet, Manifesto of the Students of Munich”. This scene is historically significant as it signifies the perseverance and impact of the White Rose’s idea; therefore, it can be argued that, Sophie, Hans and Christoph did not die for nothing as their message lived on and was able to reach greater numbers of people and inspire further change. The leaflets were also significant to the Allies as they were physical manifestations of anti-Nazi resistance and German unrest within their country.

*Sophie Scholl: The Final Days* is a film that gives insight to German life under Nazi rule, civilian resistance and oppression as well as the fear and paranoia of the Nazi regime. Hitler’s desperation to fulfill his vision of a master race and willingness to do anything to fulfill his vision—even kill the German people he claimed to be fighting the war for—is brought to life in the film as Sophie Scholl, Hans Scholl and Christoph Probst are executed for speaking out against the war and Germany’s actions in an attempt to curb further advocacy against Hitler and internal German resistance. Hitler’s use of force and fear on his own people resulted in draconian punishments for minor infractions, such as free speech, that the regime previously encouraged in its early days; these punishments often included imprisonment, death or internment in labor camps. The show trial and justice system depicted in the film was also controlled by fear of Hitler rather than blind belief in his vision and intentions for Germany. Many of the military officials in attendance at the show trial, inspector Mohr and Freisler realized the truth in the leaflets and idea of the White Rose yet refused to acknowledge or defend them in fear of their own punishment. In response to Freisler’s question regarding who would believe the information provided by the White Rose, Hans Scholl responds, “If you and Hitler weren’t afraid of our opinion, we wouldn’t be here” (Rothemund, 2005). Hans’ response relates heavily to a recorded quote by Sophie Scholl that emphasizes the power of the common people as well as explains Hitler’s paranoia and the suppression of his people, “The real damage is done by those millions who want to ‘survive.’ The honest men who don’t want their little lives disturbed by anything bigger than themselves. Those with no sides and no causes” (Rothemund, 2005). The White Rose knew that opening the eyes of the German civilian population to Hitler’s deceit and the crimes being committed in the name of Germany could tip the scales of control and the war. They fought for this freedom—the freedom of truth—in an attempt to save the fate of Germany and its people. In the final words of Hans Scholl, as he was placed in the guillotine, “long live freedom” (Rothemund, 2005)!

Source:

Rothemund, M. (Director). (2005). *Sophie Scholl: The Final Days* [Motion picture]. Germany: Broth Film.