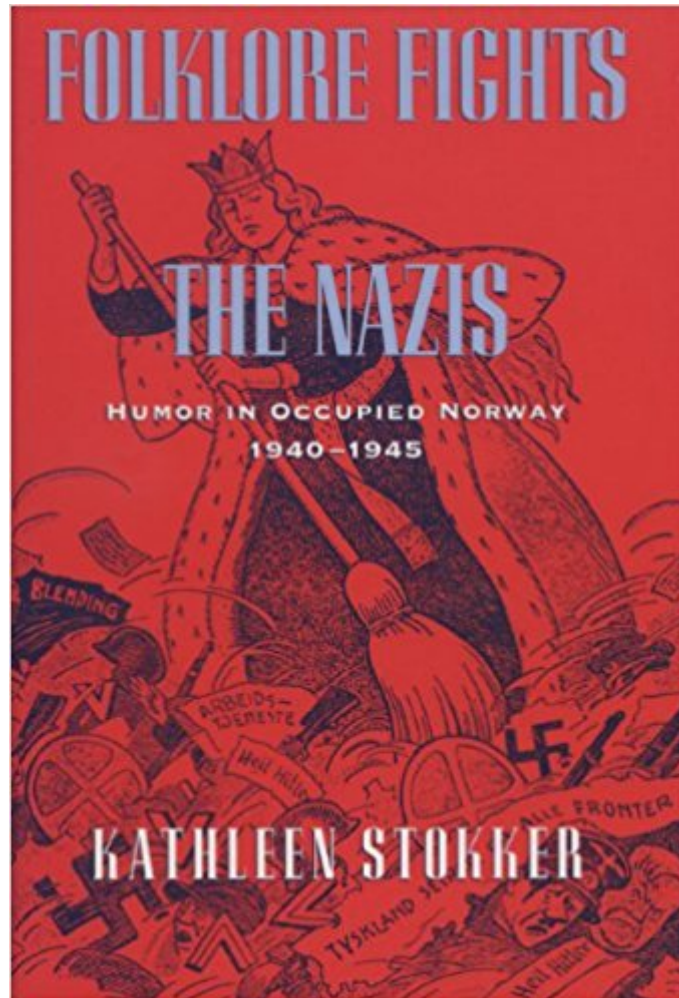


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Folklore Fights The Nazis: Humor In Occupied Norway, 1940–1945



Synopsis

Armed with jokes, puns, and cartoons, Norwegians tried to keep their spirits high and foster the Resistance by poking fun at the occupying Germans during World War II. Despite a 1942 ordinance mandating death for the ridicule of Nazi soldiers, Norwegians attacked the occupying Nazis and their Norwegian collaborators by means of anecdotes, quips, insinuating personal ads, children's stories, Christmas cards, mock postage stamps, and symbolic clothing. In relating this dramatic story, Kathleen Stokker draws upon her many interviews with survivors of the Occupation and upon the archives of the Norwegian Resistance Museum and the University of Oslo. Central to the book are four "joke notebooks" kept by women ranging in age from eleven to thirty, who found sufficient meaning in this humor to risk recording and preserving it. Stokker also cites details from wartime diaries of three other women from East, West, and North Norway. Placing the joking in historical, cultural, and psychological context, Stokker demonstrates how this seemingly frivolous humor in fact contributed to the development of a resistance mentality among an initially confused, paralyzed, and dispirited population, stunned by the German invasion of their neutral country. For this paperback edition, Stokker has added a new preface offering a comparative view of resistance through humor in neighboring Denmark.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"An indispensable history of a nation's resistance to occupation. . . . Stokker's penetrating study shows folk humor as a form of psychological

warfare. "Choice" "Folklore Fights the Nazis concludes that Norwegians "traditionally regarded as serious-minded folks" "employed a sly sense of humor at the expense of their invaders, even in the face of possible harsh retaliation." "Jack Hovelson, Des Moines Register

Kathleen Stokker is professor of Norwegian at Luther College. She is the co-author (with Odd Haddal) of *Norsk, Nordmenn og Norge*, the most widely used Norwegian-language textbook series in the United States, also published by the University of Wisconsin Press. Her life-long interest in Norway was stimulated by attending the Oslo International Summer School in 1968 and is increased by annual returns to the country.

This book is an interested examination of wartime occupation during WW2. As a Norwegian-American, I remember seeing some funny visual jokes regarding gas chambers in the 80s at my grandparents and I always wondered where they came from. Now, I know more not only about WW2 and my ancestors/relatives, but also of the human condition. Nazis won few converts in Norway. Their audacious and conceited world perspective was not shared by their Norwegian 'fellow Aryans' neighbors. Although there were several members of the Norwegian Nazi party, occupying soldiers and sympathizers faced constant ostracism and contempt. The author exemplifies this general feeling in Norwegian society by first hand diary accounts of WW2 survivors. These accounts seem enlightening and interesting, as do reports of the common jokes of the day. The book is scholarly in nature and a knowledge of Norwegian would be helpful. I found it to be a real page turner. The inherently suspenseful and sometimes tragic nature of the lengthy occupation and historical documentation would satisfy any history fan who reads this book. Also, like all good jokes, or more accurately funny jokes, they stand the test of time. Unlike the proverbial Nazi fart in the wind.

I've had a copy of this book for a number of years, and have finally gotten around to writing a review. This is a valuable addition to the number of books on the Resistance in Norway, and describes such delicious details as children surreptitiously collecting Nazi scabbard tassels (using scissors, on the trikk [that is a tram, for the non-Norwegian speakers]). Cartoons say a lot, and this collection is definitive. A valuable addition to the Resistance library, which usually tends to be dominated by texts rather than pictures. The Norwegian wit shines through here, and it is fun to see how long it takes the Nazi invaders to "get it". Such as wearing a red nisselue....

Any would-be despots should read this book first before venturing outside. This book shows why you should never invade a sovereign nation that's proud of its hard-won history.

I keep coming back to this book. In underground jokes that could bring draconian punishments on anyone who told or recorded them, Norwegians during the German occupation kept their spirits up and inspired resistance against the Nazis. It's a bit of light struggling against a great darkness, but not sugar-coated in Ms Stokker's account of the challenges that humor faced when fighting humorless evil. January 2017 addendum. We need these lessons from the past more than ever. Humor under oppression can be a rueful way to share the pain, or it can be a subversive way to fight the oppressor, project an image of strength and unity, and win allies from among the fence-sitters. Norwegian wartime humor worked. We need to learn why and how.

"Hitler and Goering were once out driving. Passing through a village, they ran over a pig. Goering thought he should find the farmer and apologize for what had happened. He was gone a very long time and received very fine hospitality. When he returned, Hitler asked why he had stayed so long. 'Well, there was so much celebration in the house over what I told them,' Goering replied, 'and finally I had to join in.' 'What did you tell them?' 'That the pig was dead.' This was one of hundreds of jokes told by the Norwegians from 1940 until 1945. While the phenomenon of occupation humor has certainly not been ignored, the role it played in developing a resistance mentality among the Norwegian people has until now been largely unexamined. This humor was expressed in overtly anti-Hitler and anti-Nazi jokes, but it was also found in snide replies, double-entendres, insinuating newspaper advertisements that were not understood by the occupying forces, children's stories, and even Christmas cards. Kathleen Stokker, extending an earlier study by Magne Skodvin, observes that "wartime humor granted a voice to those deprived of free speech, discouraged the undecided from hasty attachment to Nazism, and helped the initially amorphous group of individuals opposed to Nazism to develop a sense of solidarity." Norway was a neutral country in 1940, and just as it had done during World War One, it hoped to remain neutral. Geopolitical realities, however, including the German desire to control access to Swedish iron mines, made Norway and Denmark Hitler's first victims following the end of the Phony War in April of 1940. The Norwegians did not surrender. King Haakon VII established a government in exile in England, and the Norwegian people would wage one of the bravest and most effective resistance campaigns of the war. The popular image of Norwegian resistance has been created by films such as "The Heroes of

Telemark," but there were tens of thousands of ordinary Norwegians who resisted in more subtle ways, even if it were only to wear a red cap in defiance of their occupiers. Stokker points out, however, that the image of a people united against oppression is only partly true. There were many Norwegians who did accept and serve the new National Government headed by Vidkun Quisling, the leader of the Norwegian Nazi Party. But these people were for the most part shunned, and Stokker points out with brilliant originality the way the resisters used humor to debase the collaborators. Stokker, a professor of Norwegian at Luther College, is the author of the most widely used Norwegian-language textbook in America. She draws upon a large number of interviews with survivors of the Occupation, archives in the Norwegian Resistance Museum and the University of Oslo, and "joke notebooks" kept by women who experienced the event. It is a delightful book, well-crafted and historically meticulous. As other societies have discovered, oppression can be endured with humor, for it is a valuable form of psychological warfare. The Norwegians developed that humor, as Stokker so aptly proves, and in the process maintained the spirit that was necessary to prevail. As one reads the book, and looks at the drawings, posters, and cartoons, one gains a deep appreciation for the courage of a people. One also gets a good laugh! Dr. Gerald D. Anderson
Department of History North Dakota State University

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