

tar dyes, bright green copper sulfates (banned in 1887 but relegalized in 1928 so domestic vegetables could compete with French produce), and much else besides. (Licorice, for example, was often colored with lampblack soot derived from the burning of candles.) It is not hard to imagine that the liberal use of colorings and preservatives may have caused some of the stomach cancers of that era.

Here I want to look at Nazi views on food, but also at the fate of food itself—who ate what, why, and how much; what was promoted and what was reviled. Cancer, of course, was only one of several reasons Nazi food philosophers emphasized a healthy diet. Foods were often opposed or endorsed for complex symbolic reasons—whipped cream for its association with effete overindulgence,⁵ for example, or whole-grain bread for its association with peasant culture (see fig. 5.1). Nazi ideologues didn't like the "false blonding" of butter, just as they disapproved of people altering the shape of their noses by cosmetic surgery or bleaching their hair to falsify racial ancestry. Dietary politics seeped into questions such as "What was the original human diet?" (meat or fruit?) and "How can we best achieve agricultural self-sufficiency?" (one answer: engineer new kinds of foods). Food is highly charged in any climate, and Germany in the 1930s–1940s was no exception.

It should not be forgotten, of course, that Germany's physician-führers were less concerned about the health of individuals than about the vigor of "the race," the so-called folk community (*Volkgemeinschaft*). Nazi food policies were supposed to prevent disease, but they were also supposed to elevate the fitness of Germans in other respects as well. Understanding this helps us grasp the Nazi fascination with performance-enhancing foods and drugs—such as caffeine and various synthetic "uppers." Research into such drugs culminates in the war years, when steps were taken to maximize human performance on both the military front and the factory floor. Efforts were also launched to engineer new dietary substitutes, especially for foods made scarce as a result of the war. All of these concerns—proximity to nature, work performance, and cheap ersatz foodstuffs—were at play in Nazi food reforms.



FIG. 5.1. Whole-grain bread, with the seal of approval of the NSDAP's Office of Public Health. German bakeries were required to produce whole-grain bread to strengthen the health of the German people. Source: Reiter and Breger, *Deutsches Gold*, p. 123.