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A Study of the United States Influence on German Eugenics

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A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of History

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in History

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by

Cameron Williams

August 2020

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Keywords: Eugenics, United States, Racial Hygienists, Racial, Law, Health

## ABSTRACT

A Study of the United States Influence on German Eugenics

by

Cameron Williams

This thesis is a study of the influence and effects that the United States had upon Germany from the rise of eugenics to its fall following the end of World War II. There are three stages to this study. First, I examine the rise of eugenics in the United States from its inception to the end of World War I and the influence it had upon Germany. Then I examine the interwar era along with the popularization of eugenics within both countries before concluding with the Second World War and post war era.

My thesis focuses on both the active and passive influences that the United States had upon German eugenics and racial hygiene in the twentieth century. This study uses a wide range of primary and secondary sources. Many of the authors are experts in their field while the visuals are a window into understanding how eugenics was spread to the public.

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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION: PREEUGENICS

Before the term eugenics was coined by Francis Galton on May 16, 1883<sup>1</sup> the United States was responsible for implementing laws, referred to as the “ugly laws”, with the first of these laws being introduced on July 9, 1867 in the city of San Francisco as “Order No. 783”. Ugly laws were concerned with more than appearance, prohibiting both the activity of street begging and the appearance in public of “certain persons.”<sup>2</sup> Other cities such as New Orleans, Denver, and Reno enacted similar laws, while New York drafted but failed to enact them.

These laws were used primarily to discourage individuals with visible disabilities from being seen in public urban spaces begging, as well as providing a legal basis for their removal from such spaces.<sup>3</sup> The goal was to keep “certain persons” that were disease-ridden and physically deformed as well as having any disability that included feeble-mindedness and mental deficiencies from interacting with the public in these spaces. These laws were enacted and enforced between the American Civil War and World War I and can tell us much about the people who would be subjected, a generation later, to eugenics laws.

The Ugly Laws focused on the repression of those with a visible disability or behavior that interrupted or disturbed the urban social order. These later “eugenic laws” looked at less visible disabilities that allegedly threatened the health and wellbeing of future generations rather than the current social order. Still, the attention that was given to concerns of the visceral effects

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<sup>1</sup> “‘Eugenics’ Coined by Galton - Eugenics Timeline,” The Eugenics Archives, accessed January 13, 2019, <https://eugenicsarchive.ca/discover/timeline>)

<sup>2</sup> “Ugly Laws,” The Eugenics Archives, accessed January 13, 2019, <https://eugenicsarchive.ca/discover/timeline/54d39e27f8a0ea4706000009>)

<sup>3</sup>*Ugly Laws.*

on viewing those with visible deformities it was the start of a relationship of viewing someone as subhuman regarding the reactions of disgust.

Francis Galton published the influential work titled *Hereditary Genius* (1869) in which he attempted to understand the heritability of “intelligence from a social sciences perspective” and which proved a defining factor in the early eugenics movement.<sup>4</sup> Having been published following the influential 1865 articles, “Hereditary Talent and Character”, in *MacMillan’s Magazine*, Galton’s work draws upon the same influences such as Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* and Adolphe Quetelet’s *Letters on the Theory of Probabilities*. Much like these works Galton used the pedigree analysis on men and their relatives in order to prove that genius, character, and talent were heritable traits, as well as being more likely to appear between close relatives. This work was considered both provocative and as Galton’s most famous publication. His work is significant as Galton attempted to quantify and evaluate human traits in an effort to explore normal distribution.<sup>5</sup>

Galton’s work was not the only influential piece of “scientific literature” to be published prior to the eugenics being coined as a term. In 1877 Sociologist Richard Dugdale published his work *The Jukes: A Study in Crime, Pauperism, Disease and Heredity*. Both his work and Henry Gooddards’ work *The Kallikak Family: A Study in the Heredity of Feeble-Mindedness*, which would be published in 1912, were often cited in support of eugenic practice as family studies that demonstrated that undesirable traits were heritable.<sup>6</sup> The Jukes were used as an example of the

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<sup>4</sup> “Galton Publishes Hereditary Genius,” The Eugenics Archives, accessed March 13, 2020, <https://eugenicsarchive.ca/discover/timeline/51410d18a4209be523000002>)

<sup>5</sup> *Hereditary Genius*

<sup>6</sup> “Richard Dugdale Publishes The Jukes,” The Eugenics Archives, accessed March 13, 2020, <https://eugenicsarchive.ca/discover/timeline/51509ab5a4209be523000006>)

heritability of criminal tendencies whereas the Kalliks were used as an example for the heritability of feeble-mindedness. Although the studies had been discredited in the 1960s both Dugdale's and Goddards' works were extremely influential in eugenics practices in the United States. The study of the Jukes began when Elisha Harris, who during this time had been president of the American Public Health Association, mentioned a woman named Margaret who came from a poor social class and gave birth to delinquents.<sup>7</sup> Richard Dugdale took it upon himself to further study the family of Margaret, which he assigned the pseudonym "Jukes." He claimed that his work was the result of years of studying the Jukes and that the family had produced numerous "criminals, brothel-keepers, prostitutes and relief recipients, including two 'feeble-minded' individuals."<sup>8</sup> Dugdale's findings were focused on the environment as a critical factor rather than heredity.

The eugenics movement would use the study of the Jukes as a "genetic morality tale" and draw conclusions from the study that suggested that criminality was a heritable trait. The book was influential on a variety of scientists, doctors, judges, lawyers, politicians, and clergy. A prime example of this influence, which will be discussed in more depth later in this thesis, of Dugdale's work is that the study of the Jukes was "instrumental in testimony" in the *Buck v. Bell* case of 1927, the results of which allowed for the legal forced sterilization of those deemed unfit in the United States.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> D. Vergano, (2012, June 30). *Myth of 'The Jukes' offers cautionary genetics tale*. USA Today. Retrieved from: <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/tech/science/columnist/vergano/story/2012-07-02/eugenics-jukes-family/55944082/1>

<sup>8</sup> Vergano *Myth of 'The Jukes' offers cautionary genetics tale*

<sup>9</sup> Vergano *Myth of 'The Jukes' offers cautionary genetics tale*



Over a hundred years' worth of eugenics and eugenic themes in popular culture appeared in Victorian literature at the end of the nineteenth century. Not until the start of the twentieth century did these themes began to appear in full force, in part due to the extensive use of propaganda that the eugenicists used such as better baby contests, exhibits and tours, magazine and newspaper articles, books, radio shows, films, self-improvement literature, educational and lectures.<sup>10</sup> Many major Western works of literature dealt with themes of science, social class, and the evolution of man during the nineteenth and twentieth century. Often these works were influenced by scientific research, propaganda, and popular reports of the time. Notable works often associated with these themes include Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, and Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White*, with all these works published throughout the nineteenth century. The works of Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* as well as H.G. Well's novel *The Island of Doctor Moreau* show influence of eugenic thought, with both works seen as the consequence of what happens when "good" traits are not encouraged in humans.<sup>11</sup>

On August 2, 1882 the United States Congress passed an Act to Regulate Immigration. This act was seen as being passed in response to the rising immigration rates that resulted in a "public concern" that America would be overrun or flooded by "undesirable" persons.<sup>12</sup> The act stated:

Under this Act every person attempting to enter the country who is not a citizen of the United States can be charged a levy of fifty cents (§1). The funds collected from the levy

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<sup>10</sup> See: S. Currell & C. Cogdell, eds., *Popular Eugenics: National Efficiency and American Mass Culture in the 1930s*. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> "Popular Culture," The Eugenics Archives, accessed March 13, 2020, <https://eugenicsarchive.ca/discover/tree/535eed7a7095aa000000024a>

<sup>12</sup> P. Lombardo, *Three Generations No Imbeciles: Eugenics, the Supreme Court, and Buck v. Bell*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 17.

are then to be put toward paying for the cost of regulating immigration (§2). Each non-citizen attempting to enter the country needs to be examined according to a set of exclusionary criteria. If found to be "undesirable", they can be barred entry. The grounds for exclusion include: convicts, lunatics, idiots, or "any person unable to take care of himself or herself without becoming a public charge" (§3).<sup>13</sup>

Not only would the act end up paying for itself and the cost of regulating the immigrants into the country but it would allow the United States to select, based upon predetermined criteria that would later include IQ tests, the "cream of the crop" to enter and bolster the genetic stock of the country. The public worry over the idea that non-western, non-Anglo-Saxon peoples were entering the country, particularly from eastern Europe, coincided with the rise of eugenic theory and practice as only a year later would Francis Galton coin the term eugenics.

In 1886 Edward Payson Jackson anonymously published the fictional work *A Demigod*, with it being one of the first early fictional accounts that not only explored eugenic themes but also the possible positive effects eugenics could have for mankind, the production of 'super humans'.<sup>14</sup> It was well received by critics upon its publication with the *New York Times* claiming that the novel's lead protagonist was "a forcible hero", and the novel being "worthy of many readers."<sup>15</sup>

Reviews compared the protagonist of Jackson's novel to Hercules, Theseus, and Perseus, and as a "true man," a recall to older and more impressive heroes. Such heroism was attainable through eugenics. The *New York Times* reviewed the novel at the time, saying:

"A Demigod," as Mr. Jackson would explain it, is the romance of evolution or of artificial selection. To follow out this idea to its finality the perfect human being would not only possess the highest morality, but a skull of adamantine hardness. We might conceive of a

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<sup>13</sup> "United States Passes Immigration Law Banning 'Undesirables,'" The Eugenics Archives, accessed March 13, 2020, <https://eugenicsarchive.ca/discover/timeline/51509af7a4209be523000007>)

<sup>14</sup> "Edward Payson Jackson Publishes A Demigod," The Eugenics Archives, accessed March 13, 2020, <https://eugenicsarchive.ca/discover/timeline/543a2cefd2e5248e4000001b>)

<sup>15</sup> "'A Tough Hero," *New Your Times*, March 6, 1887, 12

man whose arm had been lopped off, but to whom this would be but a trifle, for he would, lobster like, grow another claw or arm. It is because Mr. Jackson, with this capital idea, boldly elaborating it and shewing what is trivial, has written a strong, an original, and a masculine romance.<sup>16</sup>

In 1888 Frederick Wines published the *Report on the Defective, Dependent and Delinquent Classes of the Population of the United States*. This report contained findings from the 1880 census and was influential in the creation of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* which would be used by the American Psychiatric Association in classifying mental disorders.<sup>17</sup> Wines had been assigned by the superintendent of the 1880 census, Francis A. Walker, to examine dependency. Wines' report would be published eight years later and examined the relationships between mental illness and variables such as age, gender, and race. Seven categories were described: Dipsomania, epilepsy, dementia, mania, melancholia, paresis, and monomania. The publication of this work was important to the founding of the DSM and its classifications that were used in eugenic practices.

My work here will demonstrate the connections between the United States and Germany in regard to eugenic ideology, policy, and practice. The United States was just as much an active influence as a passive example for German eugenicists and racial hygienists. Up until the American entry into World War II the United States had some shape or form of being involved with German racial policies in regard to eugenics as well as medical policies. The goal of this thesis is to not only bring back attention to the influence and involvement the United States had

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<sup>16</sup> *A Tough Hero*

<sup>17</sup> "Frederick Wines Publishes the 'Report on the Defective, Dependent and Delinquent Classes of the Population of the United States,'" The Eugenics Archives, accessed March 13, 2020, <https://eugenicsarchive.ca/discover/timeline/51509d49a4209be523000009>

upon the creation of the Holocaust but to show how influential a single country can be in a globalized world.

Germany would not have been able to achieve the goals it had set forth in its pursuit of racial hygiene had it not been for the groundwork established by the United States nor without the funding given during the early days of eugenics in Germany. While the United States is not responsible for the Holocaust, it is responsible for its influences and how it actively and passively caused German racial hygiene to look towards sterilization and eventual euthanasia as a solution, the Final Solution.

### *Historiography*

Prior to the work of Stefan Kühl's *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism* in 1994 the linkages of American eugenics to German racial hygiene was either omitted or not touched upon. Kühl's work is one of, if not the heaviest referenced material, in the historiography of the history of America's influence on German eugenics. Kühl traces the origins of the relationship between Germany and the United States from the early twentieth century and explores how this relationship changed and eventually fell apart during the Second World War.

Kühl's work focuses his work by looking at the active influences that the United States had upon Germany from Post-World War I to Nazi Germany by focusing on the figures in American eugenics that were involved in the shaping of German eugenic ideology. People such as Harry L. Laughlin, who authored the "model" sterilization law for Virginia, T.U.H. Ellinger who published an article in the *Journal of Heredity* in which he believed that the Nazi treatment of the Jews was merely a large-scale breeding project, and Lothrop Stoddard who saw the Nazi's as solving the issue of weeding out the worst strains of Germanic stock through a scientific and

humanitarian way. Stoddard even assisted several judges in the German Hereditary Supreme Court reach a positive verdict for sterilization regarding Jewish cases.

While Kühl's work is the definitive book on understanding the connections between American and German eugenicists, it lacks in its depth and further study of the passive connections beyond that of laws and legislative acts in the United States. The style of Kühl's work is also considerably weak and is further emphasized by the relative length of the book, only comprising little over a hundred pages. It is more focused on a generalized overview than an in-depth analysis of either German or American eugenics other than that is immediately relevant to his argument. Ultimately, while lacking, it is undeniable that Kühl presents extensive and detailed documentation along with substantial reference material that is easily the greatest asset of this book. Any works regarding American or German eugenics has more than likely cited Kühl's work, including this thesis.

In addition to Kühl's work is that of Edwin Black's *War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America's Campaign to Create a Master Race*. Published in 2004 Black traces the horrendous crimes of the Nazi's back to the eugenics movement in the United States. Unlike Kühl's work, Black looks more at the United States as a passive influence rather than that of an active influence on German eugenics. While Kühl's work focuses primarily from Post-World War I to the fall of Nazi Germany, Black's work takes a look at the United States up until the 1980's, further looking at the effects that the Second World War had upon American eugenics as well as eugenics and its transformation into genetics.

Black's work covers much of the same ground as Kühl's, yet Black dives much deeper into the United States' history with the pseudoscience and weaves it into a coherent narrative backed up by an extensive amount of documentation. While Black's work is much more

extensive on the side of the United States it leaves some to be desired in his focus on that of Germany, with much of his research focused towards the 1930's onwards regarding Germany. Black deserves credit in the shattering of the illusion that the Holocaust occurred because Hitler was a singular madman, as his work clearly shows that Germany was much more receptive to the idea of scientific based genocide due to the work and influence of the United States. While Black's work is descriptive and in-depth, it suffers from the lack of attention to more active roles of influence the United States had upon Germany.

This is where my Thesis differs from these two pinnacles of work in the historiographical study of eugenics. I look at both the active and passive influences of the United States on Germany from the creation of eugenics to its fall after World War II. This study is to make the connections that both Kühl and Black attempted while not ignoring the significance of any of the passive or active influences the United States posed. Without both passive and active influences, German eugenics would not have been able to justify or enact the policies and events that would lead to the genocide of the Jews and other affected victims of the Holocaust.

## CHAPTER 2: RISE OF EUGENICS

On May 16, 1897 Michigan became the first American state to introduce a compulsory sterilization bill. While the proposed law did not pass it had called for the mandatory castration of defined criminals and degenerates. It set a precedent for similar laws in other states.<sup>18</sup>

David Starr Jordan, a prominent American eugenicist, published his thesis entitled “The Blood of the Nation: A Study in the Decay of Races by the Survival of the Unfit” in *Popular Science* magazine. The article had been intended to promote eugenics among the general public and as such saw publication in book form in 1902 and again in 1910.<sup>19</sup> Jordan’s research was considered authoritative and accessible by non-academic audiences. The book contained anti-war messages intermixed with pro-eugenics beliefs.<sup>20</sup> Jordan’s thesis was that wars caused the fittest to die and as a result the weak and “unfit” lived and produced more children, leading to an overall disintegration of society. Jordan argued that his theory explained why the Greek and Roman Empires declined as they had.<sup>21</sup> His thesis was met with positive reviews upon its publication.

In 1904, the Carnegie Institution established a laboratory complex at Cold Spring Harbor on Long Island, New York. The laboratory stockpiled millions of index cards on American citizens so that researchers could carefully plot the removal of families, bloodlines and entire

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<sup>18</sup> Kaelber, L. Eugenics: Compulsory Sterilization in 50 American States. Retrieved from <http://www.uvm.edu/~lkaelber/eugenics/MI/MI.html>

<sup>19</sup> R. C. Engs. Samples from Section "B" in *The Eugenics Movement: An Encyclopaedia*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press. Retrieved from: <http://www.indiana.edu/~engs/ebook/samples.html>

<sup>20</sup> Engs *The Eugenics Movement: An Encyclopaedia*.

<sup>21</sup> Engs *The Eugenics Movement: An Encyclopaedia*.

peoples. From Cold Spring Harbor, eugenics advocates agitated in the legislatures of America, as well as the nation's social service agencies and associations.<sup>22</sup>

### *California*

California eugenicists played an important role in the American eugenics movement's campaign for racial cleansing.<sup>23</sup> Elements of the philosophy were enshrined as national policy as both forced sterilization and segregation laws, including marriage restrictions, enacted in several states. By 1909, California became the third state to adopt such laws. Ultimately, according to Edwin Black “eugenics practitioners coercively sterilized some 60,000 Americans, barred the marriage of thousands, forcibly segregated thousands in "colonies," and persecuted untold numbers in ways we are just learning.”<sup>24</sup> Before World War II, nearly half of all sterilizations in the United States had been done in California, and even after the war, the state accounted for a third of all such surgeries.<sup>25</sup>

California was considered one of the epicenters for the American eugenics' movement. During the early half of the 20th century, California's eugenicists included potent race scientists such as Army general disease specialist Dr. Paul Popenoe, citrus magnate Paul Gosney,

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<sup>22</sup> Edwin Black, *War against the Weak: Eugenics and America's Campaign to Create a Master Race* (Washington, DC: Dialog Press, 2012), 17-20

<sup>23</sup> Peter Longerich, *Holocaust: The Nazi Persecution and Murder of the Jews* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 18

<sup>24</sup> Black, *War against the Weak*, 17-20

<sup>25</sup> Edwin Black, “Eugenics and the Nazis -- the California Connection,”(San Francisco Chronicle, January 15, 2012), <https://www.sfgate.com/opinion/article/Eugenics-and-the-Nazis-the-California-2549771.php>



Sacramento banker Charles Goethe, as well as members of the California state Board of Charities and Corrections and the University of California Board of Regents.<sup>26</sup>

### *1890-1918 Wilhelmine Germany*

German eugenics originated as a reform movement looking to scientifically solve social problems that had been created by rapid industrialization and urbanization: poverty crime, and alcoholism, as well as diseases and afflictions such as tuberculosis.<sup>27</sup> Advocates for eugenics began in Germany as small, well-educated middle class intellectuals with medical backgrounds.

Richard Weikart's work *From Darwin to Hitler, Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics, and Racism in Germany* looks at the evolution of the rise of Darwinist thinking in Germany and the effects it would have upon German society. Weikart looks at two opposing views of whether Hitler either hijacked Darwinism and used it for his own malicious goals or if he merely jumped onto the bandwagon of applying Darwinist thinking to ethical, political, and social aspects of life. Weikart especially looks at the influence of eugenics and racist discourse in the pre-Nazi period and argues "we should not close our eyes to the many similarities and parallels with later Nazi thinking either"<sup>28</sup>

Nazi ideology cannot be pigeon-holed easily, as it was influenced by several aspects of eugenics from its evolution from Darwinism. While a central component, Darwinism wasn't alone in its influences on Nazism, as the key role of anti-Semitism in Nazi ideology would

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<sup>26</sup> Black, "Eugenics and the Nazis -- the California Connection"

<sup>27</sup> Sheila Faith Weiss, "German Eugenics, 1890-1933," in Susan D. Bachrach and Dieter Kuntz, eds., *Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race* (Washington, D.C.: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2004), 17

<sup>28</sup> Richard Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics and Racism in Germany* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 5

suggest. Looking at either aspect alone is ignorant of the relationship held to the evolution to Nazism. As Weikart points out there were several Jewish Darwinists, eugenicists, and men of science who would be ignored if one only focused upon the anti-Semitism of the Nazi ideology that emerged in the twentieth century.<sup>29</sup>

Hitler's view of eugenics can probably be summed up by eugenicist Fritz Lenz:

“The ethical ideal demands of us, that we place our entire life in its service; and the racial ideal is such that we really can live according to it. With every deed and with every inaction, we have to ask ourselves: does it benefit our race? And then make our decision accordingly.”<sup>30</sup>

This assertion was made in Lenz's 1917 article, “Race as a Principle of Value: Toward Renovating Ethics”. Fritz Lenz became the professor of eugenics at the University of Munich in 1923. In 1933 Lenz boasted this article “Contained all the basic characteristics of the National Socialist world view.”<sup>31</sup>

Germany found itself in a moral crisis that had culminated by the late 1890s and early 1900s in a sense of malaise and disorientation in the realm of morality. Lenz writes, “German intellectual life had become increasingly secularized during the nineteenth century, a process that Darwinism furthered.”<sup>32</sup> No longer did Germans find traditional ethics satisfying, and now looked to logic, science, and new ways of thought to apply to the rise in intellectual thinking.

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<sup>29</sup> Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler*, 6

<sup>30</sup> Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler*, 7

<sup>31</sup> Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler*, 7

<sup>32</sup> Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler*, 59

## *Colonial Germany*

During the colonial period of Germany, future Nazi policy was prefigured in its African colonies. The natives were viewed as inferior and treated in kind, with racism becoming institutionalized. Under the governor Heinrich Ernst Goering (father of Herman Goering) the natives of Namibia, German South West Africa, rebelled in 1904 with some 80,000 Hereros raising against German rule.<sup>33</sup> The German government sent an army under the pretense of a race war and declared to the German press that “no war may be conducted humanely against non-humans” and issued an annihilation order against the Hereros.

“...The Hereros are no longer German subjects. All Hereros must leave the country...or die. All Hereros found within the German borders with or without weapons, with or without animals will be killed. I will not accept a woman nor any child. ...There will be no male prisoners. All will be shot.”<sup>34</sup>

This order began a racial genocide that would be seen by some historians as foreshadowing of the Nazi final solution. The killings were framed in public health rhetoric with almost 65,000 Hereros killed and the remaining interned in a camp, a concentration camp.<sup>35</sup>

Urbanization had been a major contributing factor to the sense of disorientation and dislocation, causing many to reject the traditional form of traditional religion and ethics that had dominated German for several generations. An ambitious attempt was made to organize the newly emerging evolutionary ethics and was financed by Albert Samson, a Berlin banker who

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<sup>33</sup> Ervin G. Erdős, “Regarding ‘German Science and Black Racism—Roots of the Nazi Holocaust,’” *The FASEB Journal* 22, no. 6 (2008): 1623-1623, <https://doi.org/10.1096/fj.08-0602tr>

<sup>34</sup> B. Madley, “From Africa to Auschwitz: How German South West Africa Incubated Ideas and Methods adopted and Developed by the Nazis in Eastern Europe.” *European History Quarterly* 35 (2005), 429–463

<sup>35</sup>Erdős, “Roots of the Nazi Holocaust”

had retired to Brussels after acquiring a fortune.<sup>36</sup> Samson wished to use his fortune to promote scholarly research in natural sciences in relation to evolutionary ethics and was responsible for the funding of an institution on the study of evolutionary ethics. Despite massive funding Samson's projects failed in propagating evolutionary eugenics. However, other efforts in the early twentieth century were more successful. Heinrich Ernst Ziegler expanded the ideology of heredity and adaption and caused contestants of the Krupp Prize competition – established in 1900 to answer the question, “What can we learn from the theory of evolution about internal political development and state legislation?” – to struggle with the ethical implications of Darwinism in their works. Wilhelm Schallmayer considered his eugenics proposals as a straightforward ethical application of Darwinism to society. In his winning essay, Schallmayer focused on the problem of degeneration and stressed that the lesson to be learned from Darwin's theory of evolution was that the power of the state depended on the biological vitality of the nation. This, in turn, highlighted the necessity of finding ways to implement Darwin's principle of natural selection, for “selection is the prerequisite for progress, and the stronger the selection, the greater the progress.” While many prize-winning authors didn't agree with Schallmayer that ethics could be based on science, Schallmayer's and Ziegler's publications from this competition advanced the cause of social Darwinism and eugenics.<sup>37</sup>

Alfred Ploetz, the most influential member of the early of the German eugenics' movement, published in 1895 his work *The Fitness of Our Race and the Protection of the Weak*. In his work he originated the word *Rassenhygiene*, racial hygiene, as a German synonym for the

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<sup>36</sup> Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler*, 63.

<sup>37</sup> Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler*, 65; Sheila Faith Weiss, *Race Hygiene and National Efficiency: The Eugenics of Wilhelm Schallmayer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 69, 74-76.

term eugenics.<sup>38</sup> In 1904 Ploetz founded the first journal in the world dedicated to eugenics, the *Journal of Racial and Social Biology*. In 1905 he also founded the world's first eugenics organization with the intention to be international, but ultimately it fell as a casualty to World War I.<sup>39</sup>

### *Rise of Eugenic Societies*

The rise of social Darwinism and eugenics in early twentieth century Germany helped spawn several organizations seeking to apply Darwinism to ethics and society. The Monist League, founded in 1906 by Ernst Haeckel, attempted to replace religious and dualistic world views with a monistic view that the variety of existing things could be explained in terms of a single reality. For Haeckel, that reality was Darwinian evolution, which, in the theory of social Darwinism, linked biological life to the development of human society and civilization in a single meaningful totality. For Haeckel, the unity of matter and spirit in substance was mirrored by the unity of knowledge in natural science. The league was the most influential compared to other such scientific leagues in Wilhelmine Germany and boasted over 6,000 members by 1914.<sup>40</sup>

Another influential league was that of the Protection of Mothers founded in 1905 by Helene Stöcker. Also having connections to the Monist league, often lecturing at their annual meetings and writing articles for their journal, she was a pro-eugenicist. Connecting practical

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<sup>38</sup> Daniel J. Kevles, "International Eugenics," in Susan D. Bachrach and Dieter Kuntz, eds., *Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race* (Washington, D.C.: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2004), 49.

<sup>39</sup> Kevles "International Eugenics," 49

<sup>40</sup> Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler*, 67; Todd Weir, "When Was the Monist Century," *The Immanent Frame: Secularism, Religion, and the Public Sphere*, October 3, 2017, <https://tif.ssrc.org/2017/10/03/when-was-the-monist-century/>. Accessed March 25, 2020.

activity with theoretical underpinnings, the League for the Protection of Mothers played an important role in the movement to secularize ethics in Wilhelmine Germany.<sup>41</sup>

Many other organizations formed around the same time to promote various health or social reforms in Germany. Some aimed at overcoming the perceived biological decline in German society while others focused their efforts on counteracting moral decay. Many of these organizations believed that biological and moral decline were integrally related and thus both needed to be tackled simultaneously.<sup>42</sup> Many organizations in Germany, such as Ploetz's Society for Race Hygiene, promoted biological renewal as the means to moral rejuvenation. The Society for Race and Hygiene was extremely influential among physicians; however, it did not appeal to the masses since the society favored an elitist approach to the organization of the German Eugenics movement. In addition to the Society for Race and Hygiene many other societies that promoted social reform also had some inclination towards eugenics, and for some eugenics was the guiding principle. The antialcohol movement, parallel to the Anti-Saloon leagues and anti-alcohol movements in the United States during this time, was driven by eugenic concerns as many psychologists feared that alcohol caused biological degeneration in one's genes, thus resulting in various kinds of hereditary illness, primarily mental illness.<sup>43</sup> Many, if not most, German psychiatrists also considered alcohol a key cause of mental illness for not only the user but also the offspring.

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<sup>41</sup> Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler*, 68

<sup>42</sup> Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler*, 68

<sup>43</sup> Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler*, 68-69

A different kind of organization aimed at the moral renewal and improving the health of the German people was the German renewal Community. Founded by Theodor Fritsch, a prominent anti-Semitic publicist, it aimed promote the moral regeneration of Germans through establishing garden communities, utopian settlements in the countryside that would practice eugenics and health reform.<sup>44</sup> In 1908-09 he bought a landed estate and tried to launch his experience in communal living centered on his understanding of Darwinism and its implication for ethics. This reliance is reflected in the “Fundamental Principles of the Renewal Community”:

“The preservation of health of our generation belongs to our highest commands. . . . We do not approve of false humanness. Whoever aims at preserving the degenerate and depraved, limits the space for the healthy and the strong, suppresses the life of the whole community, multiplies the sorrow and burned of existence, and helps rob happiness and sunshine from life.”<sup>45</sup>

While Fritsch’s society and several others did not survive more than a couple of decades, the emergence of so many that were devoted to ethics and eugenics around 1900 shows the popularity of the Darwinist thought of the time. The members of these organizations included many of Germany’s leading professors, physicians, and writers, who with a zealous passion spread their views throughout the country. The demise of all these societies, however, came in part due to the fact none of them could agree on the same ethical implications of the ideology. In addition to these disputes none of the societies could agree on the best form of organization on these issues best suited to win the German people to their cause.<sup>46</sup>

Up until this point German racial hygiene had consisted of narrow, elite, social networks composed primarily of Ploetz’s acquaintances. All held medical degrees and would remain

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<sup>44</sup> Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler*, 69

<sup>45</sup> Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler*, 69

<sup>46</sup> Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler*, 69

active during the reign of the Third Reich. In 1911 the International Hygiene Exhibition in Dresden displayed tables and charts of racial hygienists who wished to spread this new ideology in Germany, yet it failed to attract official support before the war or have any impact on public policy.

Early German racial hygiene was diverse in its politics and aims. At this time anti-Semitism wasn't seen as calling for the eradication or elimination of the Jews from Germany, rather German racial hygiene was seen as the responsible and rational management of the population with the goal of increasing the efficiency of the nation through control of birthrates of various groups and classes within Germany.<sup>47</sup>

### *International Connections*

In 1912 the International Congress for Eugenics was held in London where Ploetz described the United States as “a bold leader in the realm of eugenics.”<sup>48</sup> Ploetz's comments foreshadowed the development of a relationship between American and German eugenicists that was grounded in an emerging international community dedicated to the goal of racial improvement.<sup>49</sup>

The International Congress in London was far longer and more comprehensive than the International Hygiene Exhibition previously mentioned. Drawing over three hundred participants from Europe and the United States, among these many prestigious and prominent individuals

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<sup>47</sup> Weiss, “German Eugenics” 21

<sup>48</sup> Stefan Kühl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 13

<sup>49</sup> "Der erste Internationale Kongress für Rassenverbesserung," *Berliner Tageblatt*, July 25, 1912.



were included American inventor Alexander Graham Bell, Charles B. Davenport the director of the Eugenics Record office in Cold Spring Harbor, Charles W. Elliot president of Harvard University, and David Starr Jordan President of Sandford University.<sup>50</sup> The congress was separated into four sections: the question of heredity, the influence of eugenics on sociological and historical research, the impact of eugenics upon legislation, and finally the practical applications of eugenic principles. During discussion in the final section participants discussed how to prevent procreation of the “unfit” through segregation and sterilization, and how to encourage the “fit” by promoting eugenic ideals. While the Congress succeeded in fulfilling its goals it also strengthened existing informal contacts between eugenicists of different countries and led to the creation of the Permanent International Commission of Eugenics.<sup>51</sup>

Although the International Commission promised to provide German racial hygienists with important contacts in the international community, primarily Great Britain and the United States, its founding represented a defeat for Ploetz. Ploetz had hoped to strengthen the influence of the International society for Racial Hygiene by integrating more eugenicists of non-German origin into his own organization. Only Scandinavian eugenicists supported a merger with the International Society for Racial Hygiene and was thus forced to accept British domination of the emerging organization. While the meetings for this organization ceased during World War I, the foundation for transnational cooperation had been created.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 14

<sup>51</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 14-15

<sup>52</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 15

American eugenicists enjoyed a strong position in the international community and were admired by their European counterparts for their success in influencing legislation and gaining extensive financial support for the American eugenics' movement.<sup>53</sup> The German racial hygiene movement, in fact, followed developments in the United States closely. During the First World War the Society for Racial hygiene began to distribute a public flyer extolling the "dedication with which Americans sponsor research in the field of racial hygiene and with which they translate theoretical knowledge into practical."<sup>54</sup> The previously mentioned flyer was in reference to a donation of several million dollars by a widow of a railway magnate in support of Cold Spring Harbor. Also mentioned was the foundation established in 1915 following a eugenics conference held in Battle Creek, Michigan, which provided over three-hundred thousand dollars for conferences and exhibitions in the field of eugenics.<sup>55</sup> The flyer also claimed that even American farmers believed that racial hygiene was the most important question of the century. It praised the funding of state commissions that attempted to awaken the nation to a eugenic centered consciousness. It applauded the control of immigration through legislation as well as laws in twelve states that regarded the prevention of procreation of "inferior families".<sup>56</sup> The Society for Racial Hygiene concluded that Americans recognized the "critical importance" of race improvement and were eager to adopt measures to further this goal.

The reason German racial hygienists were so well informed of American eugenics was due in part to Geza von Hoffmann who spent several years as Austrian vice-consultant in

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<sup>53</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 15

<sup>54</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 15

<sup>55</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 15

<sup>56</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 5

California. Hoffmann regularly informed his German colleagues and the public about eugenic developments in the United States, even going so far as in 1913 to publish a book titled *Rassenhygiene in den Vereinigten Staaten von Nordamerika [Racial Hygiene in the United States of North America]*.<sup>57</sup> Hoffmann's book would become one of the standard works of the early eugenics movement in Germany. He reported on the widespread acceptance of eugenic ideals in the United States and would go on to claim that Galton's hope of eugenics "becoming the religion of the future" was being realized in the United States.<sup>58</sup>

Darwin, Mendel, and Galton's ideals were penetrating American scientific thought and social life. As evidence, Hoffmann quoted the presidential address of Woodrow Wilson in which he claimed, "that the whole nation has awakened to the importance of the science of human heredity, as well as its application to the ennoblement of the human family".<sup>59</sup> Hoffmann would argue that the United States recognized that limited reproduction of "blue-blooded" Yankees would lead to a "race suicide." The term "race suicide" was first used in 1901 in an address before the American Academy of Political and Social Science by sociologist Edward A. Ross and would later be adopted by president Theodore Roosevelt.<sup>60</sup>

Hoffmann dedicated the largest section of his work to legislation involving sterilization. He described it as the "easiest measure to prevent the reproduction of inferior people."<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 16

<sup>58</sup> Géza von Hoffmann, *Die Rassenhygiene in Den Vereinigten Staaten Von Nordamerika* (München: J.F. Lehmanns Verlag, 1913) 14

<sup>59</sup> Hoffmann, *Rassenhygiene*, 15.

<sup>60</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 16

<sup>61</sup> Hoffmann, *Rassenhygiene*, 69

Hoffmann claimed that the first eugenic sterilization in the United States had been performed in Indiana in 1899, and had been done without legal authorization. Not until 1907 was the doctor who had done the procedure able to persuade legislators to enact a law permitting the sterilization of the mentally handicapped in Indiana. Other states were quick to follow in passing similar legislation: California and Connecticut in 1909, Nevada, Iowa, and New Jersey in 1911, New York in 1912, and Kansas, Michigan, North Dakota, Wisconsin, and Oregon in 1913.<sup>62</sup>

Eugenicists in both Germany and Great Britain found Hoffman's account of the American eugenics' movement of great importance. Still, there were critics, foremost among them Fritz Lenz, coeditor of the principal German journal of racial hygiene. Lenz's criticism focused not on the actions of the American eugenics movement, but primarily on what he saw as Hoffmann's overly optimistic assessments of the effectiveness of American sterilization and immigration restriction laws. Interestingly, Lenz stressed that birth control in the United States had begun to restrict reproduction among the so-called best elements, and argued that it was more important to promote high birth rates among the best elements of society (positive eugenics), rather than focus on limiting reproduction among the allegedly unfit (negative eugenics).<sup>63</sup> While Lenz would admit that the negative eugenic measures in the United States were more advanced than they were in Germany he would point out the disparity between legislation and practice. He argued that the lack of enforcement was not surprising in a nation governed by an "extremely democratic administration".<sup>64</sup> The differing positions voiced by Hoffmann and Lenz reveal the conflicting perceptions of American eugenic measures held by

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<sup>62</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 17

<sup>63</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 17

<sup>64</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 17

German eugenicists prior to World War I. While German eugenicists would applaud the legislation of American eugenic policies, they would in the same breath criticize the policies as being haphazard and poorly enforced. Until the late 1910's Hoffmann would serve as the primary link between German and American eugenicists with contact becoming difficult following the outbreak of World War I.<sup>65</sup>

### *After the War*

The end of World War I affected no country more than Germany. The monarchy was toppled and Wilhelm II, the last Kaiser, fled into exile, which led to the creation of Germany's first attempt at democracy. In some ways, the war was also responsible for the eventual rise of Hitler and the Nazi party. Worldwide the Great War had been viewed by eugenicists as a dysgenic upheaval.<sup>66</sup> The German racial movement was affected by the end of the war as well, as tensions and issues that had permeated German society before the war had erupted with Germany's defeat and treatment following the end of the war by the victorious powers. The Weimar era of Germany laid the groundwork for later developments for the Racial Hygiene movement under National Socialism.<sup>67</sup>

Before the war racial hygienists had concerned themselves with the degeneration of the national hereditary stock, population policy, and the alleged financial drain of maintaining the unfit in mental institutions, hospitals, and care homes.<sup>68</sup> This concern continued after the war;

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<sup>65</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 19

<sup>66</sup> Weiss, "German Eugenics," 22

<sup>67</sup> Weiss, "German Eugenics," 22

<sup>68</sup> Weiss, "German Eugenics," 23

however, to it had been added the concern that over two million men had been lost to the war. Weimar racial hygiene centered on restoring the health of the German nation, with biomedical professionals now seeing themselves as the self-proclaimed healers for the wounds the nation had suffered.<sup>69</sup> Their goal was to save the Germans from the scourges of crime, venereal disease, tuberculosis, alcoholism, the falling birthrate, as well as reducing the social tensions and costs by rational state planning.

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<sup>69</sup> Weiss, "German Eugenics," 23

### CHAPTER 3: POPULARIZATION

Eugenics became wildly more popular during the interwar years in the Weimar republic as left-leaning Prussian medical experts found racial hygiene appealing as a way of dealing with a host of health issues. Race hygienists were reaching a wider audience in a variety of ways including traveling exhibitions, brochures, pamphlets, newsletters, and other widely accessible materials to the public.<sup>70</sup> A new tool being utilized was eugenics propaganda films that dealt with topics such as infant care, tuberculosis, alcoholism prevention, and the risks of sexually transmitted diseases.

Following the war international relations upon eugenicists were strained. The Second International Congress of Eugenics was postponed, and the Permanent Committee ceased meeting until 1919. During this meeting German participation was out of the question due to international complications with regrets being expressed to Ploetz with the expression of hope that such complications would be resolved by the next conference.<sup>71</sup> Charles B. Davenport would use his influence to grant German racial hygienists a stronger position within the movement, acting upon the initiative of Scandinavian eugenicists. Yet, even then German eugenicists such as Lenz and Erwin Baur would refuse to sit on a committee with French and Belgian eugenicists in 1923, following the occupation of the Ruhr during this time. It wouldn't

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<sup>70</sup> Weiss, "German Eugenics," 25

<sup>71</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 19

be until 1924 that Germany would return to the conference with demands that German be the conference language and that the conference be held in neither be Brussels nor Paris.<sup>72</sup>

In 1914, eugenicist Harry Laughlin published a *Model Eugenic Sterilization Law* that proposed to authorize sterilization of the “socially inadequate” – people “maintained wholly or in part by public expense.”<sup>73</sup> The law included sterilization of the “feeble-minded, insane, criminalistic, epileptic, inebriate, diseased, blind, deaf, deformed, and dependent” – including “orphans, ne’er-do-wells, tramps, the homeless and paupers.”<sup>74</sup> Laughlin’s publication was the basis for Virginia’s *Eugenic Sterilization Act*, passed in 1924, which was first tested in the well-known *Buck v. Bell* case.<sup>75</sup>

#### *The Rockefeller Foundation*

Ten years after Virginia passed its sterilization act, Joseph De Jarnette, superintendent of Virginia's Western State Hospital, observed in the Richmond *Times-Dispatch*, "The Germans are beating us at our own game."<sup>76</sup> America funded Germany's eugenic institutions as well as providing the framework and guidance for the development of their eugenics research. By 1926, the Rockefeller Foundation had donated some \$410,000, almost \$4 million in today's money, to hundreds of German researchers.<sup>77</sup> In May 1926, the Rockefeller Foundation awarded \$250,000

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<sup>72</sup> Geza von Hoffmann, "Das Sterilisierungsprogramm in den Vereinigten Staaten von Nordamerika," *Archiv für Rassen- und Gesellschaftsbiologie*, 16 (1924) 458

<sup>73</sup> Black, "*Eugenics and the Nazis -- the California Connection*"

<sup>74</sup> Black, "*Eugenics and the Nazis -- the California Connection*"

<sup>75</sup> "Sterilization Laws," DNALC Blogs, accessed March 13, 2020, <http://blogs.dnalc.org/2012/01/18/sterilization-laws>)

<sup>76</sup> Black, "*Eugenics and the Nazis -- the California Connection*"

<sup>77</sup> Black, "*Eugenics and the Nazis -- the California Connection*"



toward creation of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Psychiatry. Among the leading psychiatrists at the German Psychiatric Institute was Ernst Rüdin, who became director and eventually an architect of Hitler's systematic medical repression.<sup>78</sup>

Another in the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute's complex of eugenics institutions was the Institute for Brain Research. Since 1915 it had only operated out of a single room, and in 1926 everything changed when the Rockefeller money began to arrive.<sup>79</sup> A grant of \$317,000 allowed the institute to construct a major building and take center stage in German race biology.<sup>80</sup> The institute received additional grants from the Rockefeller Foundation during the next several years. Leading the institute, once again, was Hitler's future medical henchman Ernst Rüdin.<sup>81</sup>

Adolf Hitler had praised and incorporated eugenic ideas in *Mein Kampf* in 1925 and once he took power emulated eugenic legislation for the sterilization of "defectives" that had been pioneered in the United States once he took power.<sup>82</sup> Hitler believed the nation had become weak, corrupted by dysgenics, the infusion of degenerate elements into its bloodstream.

By 1925 Germany had begun to rejoin the international eugenics movement. Relations between German and American eugenicists had been restored. Fritz Lenz had now assumed Hoffmann's previous role as the main link between movements. He established relations with Laughlin and Davenport at the Eugenics Record Office and cooperated with Paul Popenoe, an important eugenic figure on the American west coast.<sup>83</sup> In 1924 Popenoe translated an article

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<sup>78</sup> Black, *War against the Weak*, 108-110

<sup>79</sup> Black, *War against the Weak*, 120

<sup>80</sup> Black, "Eugenics and the Nazis -- the California Connection"

<sup>81</sup> Black, *Eugenics and the Nazis -- the California Connection*

<sup>82</sup> Black, *War against the Weak*, 274-295

<sup>83</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 19

about the German racial hygiene movement in which Lenz had stated that “there were no differences between the position of eugenicists in the United States and Germany.”<sup>84</sup> Lenz would even admit that Germany lagged behind the United States in terms of legislation, which he explained by stating that “Germans are more disposed toward scientific investigation than toward practical statesmanship”.<sup>85</sup> Little did Lenz know that in less than two decades that Germany would surpass the United States in a horrifying way.

Wishing to reach a wider audience with the message of eugenics in 1925 racial hygienists in Berlin formed the National Regeneration and Hereditary Society, a eugenics education organization. The league was determined to spread eugenic ideals to all Germans, with an emphasis on the working class, to target social problems and illnesses. Its name reflected the optimistic hope of a national reconstruction of the 1920’s with its slogan appealing to nationalists “Protect German Hereditary and Thus the German Type.”<sup>86</sup> While the league itself wasn’t considered anti-Semitic its chairman, Karl von Behr-Pinnow, had accepted the notion of a racial hierarchy and regarded the Nordic race as superior to all others. It also endorsed both positive and negative eugenics, including the sterilization of degenerates. The league published three popular journals during the Weimar years and held significant influence in government circles.<sup>87</sup>

In the Catholic sphere eugenics centered on Hermann Muckermann whose ties to the Catholic Center party afforded him great influence in some government circles.<sup>88</sup> His lectures on

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<sup>84</sup> Fritz Lenz, "Eugenics in Germany," trans. Paul Popenoe, *Journal of Heredity*, 15 (1924): 22

<sup>85</sup> Lenz, “Eugenics in Germany,” 22

<sup>86</sup> Weiss, “German Eugenics,” 26-27

<sup>87</sup> Weiss, “German Eugenics,” 26

<sup>88</sup> Weiss, “German Eugenics,” 27

eugenics won him a reputation as a leading propagandist, The Social Democratic Party was also attracted to these ideas. By the later Weimar years of the late 1920's and early 1930's, eugenics had made its way into German secondary-school curriculum, further encouraging the spread of eugenics to the wider German population.<sup>89</sup>

### *Institutionalization*

Following the popularization of eugenics in Weimar Germany came the institutionalization and professionalization of racial hygiene. Of those who were responsible for its professionalization during the Weimar Republic, as well as lending an air of international respectability was that of Fritz Lenz.<sup>90</sup> Responsible for the publication of over six hundred articles and book reviews in his lifetime, Lenz was active in the Munich chapter of the German eugenics society prior to the First World War. Lenz came to international attention in 1921 as the co-author of what became the discipline's standard work, *Foundations of Human Genetics and Racial Hygiene*.<sup>91</sup> This text was the racial hygiene text Hitler claimed to have read during his stay in prison following his failed 1923 beer-hall *putsch* in Munich.

The professionalization of Weimar racial hygiene coincided with substantial institutional expansion. In 1923, the University of Munich established a chair for the new discipline, one held by Fritz Lenz, and by 1932 many German universities offered eugenics lectured courses with most of them centered on medicine.<sup>92</sup> The most significant establishment for the establishment of eugenics scientific respectability was the creation of the Kaiser Wilhelm Society. The KWS

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<sup>89</sup> Weiss, "German Eugenics," 27

<sup>90</sup> Weiss, "German Eugenics," 28

<sup>91</sup> Weiss, "German Eugenics," 28

<sup>92</sup> Weiss, "German Eugenics," 32

encompassed more than thirty research institutes in the natural and applied physical sciences.<sup>93</sup> Racial hygiene had found its home in the KWS in 1924 when the society took over the German Research Institute for Psychiatry.

May 1923 marked the first attempt for adoption of a sterilization law in Germany came through-the initiatives of Gerhard Boeters who was a district physician in Saxony. He had sent out a report to the government of Saxony demanding the sterilization of the hereditarily blind and deaf, the mentally handicapped, the mentally ill, sexual perverts, and fathers with two or more illegitimate children. Boeters directly referred to the experience of the United States stating:

“in a cultured nation of the first order- the United States of America, that which we strive toward [sterilization legislation] was introduced and tested long ago. It is all so clear and simple.”<sup>94</sup>

In 1923 Franz Bumm, the leader of the Reich Health Office, faced legal, religious, scientific, and political barriers to enacting a sterilization law. Opponents claimed that racial hygiene had not provided enough conclusive proof that sterilization would reduce the number of “inferiors and undesirables” effectively.<sup>95</sup> The political atmosphere of Germany in 1923 did not provide a favorable setting for a legislative act that would have led to serious disagreement. The Reich Health Office decided to initiate an inquiry in the United States regarding the legal and scientific basis of sterilization.<sup>96</sup> By fall of 1923, the German embassy and consulates in the

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<sup>93</sup> Weiss, “German Eugenics,” 32

<sup>94</sup> Gerhard Boeters, “Die Unfruchtbarmachung der geistig Minderwertigen,” *Sächsische Staatszeitung*, July 9-11, 1923, quoted in Robert Proctor, *Racial Hygiene: Medicine under the Nazis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 98

<sup>95</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 23

<sup>96</sup> Bumm to the Reich Ministry of the Interior, October 15, 1923, BAP, RMI 9247. Cited in Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 23

United States began an extensive examination, which revealed that the implementation of sterilization laws in several states had ceased, and that “sterilization in the United States compared to the first decade of the century does not play such an important role.”<sup>97</sup>

After 1925 scientific and medical literature about sterilization regularly referred to the United States. Robert Gaupp, professor at the University of Tübingen, reported that contrary to the Reich Health Office, sterilizations in the United States were increasing quickly.<sup>98</sup> From 1907 to 1920 3,233 persons were sterilized in the United States, while from 1921-1924 2,689 persons were sterilized- a much higher annual rate than in the 1910’s.<sup>99</sup> Going from 200-600 sterilizations a year to 2,000-4,000 by the 1930’s, Gaupp was cautious of promoting a similar case of compulsory sterilization. He claimed it was ironic that, in contrast to the United States – “the country of freedom” – “the right of self-determination” in Germany was too strong to allow for the adoption of eugenic principles.<sup>100</sup>

The 1920’s witnessed a rapid increase of interest in sterilization questions and experiences of the United States. Harry H. Laughlin, the assistant director of the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratories, published an article about legislative developments in the influential *ARGB*. The article was based upon a talk he had given at the meeting of the IFEO in Munich in 1928. Laughlin provided German readers with detailed information about the status of sterilization laws in twenty-three states.<sup>101</sup> He claimed that eugenic sterilization was no longer

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<sup>97</sup> Bumm to the Reich Ministry of the Interior, January 23, 1924, BAP, RMI 9247. cited in Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 23

<sup>98</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 24

<sup>99</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 24

<sup>100</sup> Robert Gaupp, *Die Unfruchtbarmachung geistig und sittlich Kranker und Minder wertiger* (Berlin: Julius Springer, 1925) 42

<sup>101</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 24

seen as a radical method in the United States and was seen as a necessary to the well-being of the country. However, Laughlin stressed that laws alone were insufficient and needed to be enacted in conjunction with education, marriage restrictions, and other measures.

German racial hygienists were aided by two books published in 1929. One, a study on sterilization in California by eugenicists Paul Popenoe and Eugene S. Gosney, was regarded as especially important to the field of eugenic sterilization.<sup>102</sup> The other, by German sterilization expert Otto Kankeleit, a work based upon examples from the United States, praised the recent 1927 Supreme Court decision that had ruled compulsory sterilization legislation constitutional. He also cited Laughlin's studies in supporting his demands that the sterilization of "inferior women" be accorded the highest priority.<sup>103</sup>

By 1930 Germany and the United States had become the leading forces of the international eugenics' movement. The Eugenics Record Office and the Station for Experimental Evolution in Cold Spring Harbor and the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute in Berlin prepared a questionnaire that was distributed to over 1,000 English, German, French, Spanish, and Dutch physicians, missionaries, and consulates to collect information about miscegenation in different areas of the world.

The United States' importance for German eugenics was revealed by the allusion in nearly every German medical dissertation about sterilization in the United States as the first country to enforce comprehensive eugenics legislation.<sup>104</sup> These dissertations often referred to

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<sup>102</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 25

<sup>103</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 25

<sup>104</sup> Frithjof Hager, "Der gegenwärtige Stand der Frage der Sterilisierung Minderwertiger in Deutschland," diss., University of Kiel, 1934, 16

literature by Geza von Hoffmann, Hans W. Maier, and Laughlin.<sup>105</sup> An explanation for the United States leading role in eugenics was that racial conflicts had forced the white population early on to employ a systematic program of race improvement.<sup>106</sup> While these dissertations normally supported the compulsory character of American sterilization they were highly critical concerning the lack of enforcement.<sup>107</sup>

This admiration also extended beyond sterilization laws and marriage restrictions, particularly the American Immigration Restriction Act of 1924 was applauded by German racial hygienists. Hans F. Gunther, a famous race anthropologist in Germany, praised the measure for its joint approach of prohibiting both entire ethnic groups and degenerate individuals from entering the United States. Walter Schultz, a Bavarian Health Inspector, wrote approvingly of this restrictive immigration legislation and argued that German racial hygienists should learn from the United States on how to restrict the influx of “Jews and eastern and southern Europeans”.<sup>108</sup> Schultz took the fact that the law had drastically decreased the annual immigration as evidence that “racial policy and thinking has become much more popular than in other countries. Another book written in 1924 also praised American immigration restrictions: *Mein Kampf* by Adolf Hitler.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Herbert Hüllstrung, "Über gesetzliche Bestimmungen und Erfolge der Zwangssterilisierung und Zwangskastration," diss., University of Bonn, 1934, 3.

<sup>106</sup> W. Knapp, "Statistisches und Empirisches über das Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses," diss., University of Bonn, 1934, 6-7.

<sup>107</sup> Ursula Krause, "Erfahrungen und Ergebnisse bei 315 Sterilisationen aus eugenischer Indikation vom 4. April 1934 bis zum 1. April 1936," diss., University of Kiel, 1937, 5-6.

<sup>108</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 26

<sup>109</sup> Walter Schultze, "Der nordische Gedanke," *Ziel und Weg*, 2 (1932): 4.

## *Buck Vs. Bell*

*Buck v. Bell*, 274 U.S. 200 is the United States Supreme Court ruling which upheld a Virginia law for sterilizing persons assessed as “socially inadequate.” The case was centered on Carrie Buck who, at the time of the trial only 18, had been ordered sterilized after becoming pregnant illegitimately and institutionalized.<sup>110</sup> The decision of the court was based on the testimony of Arthur Estabrook, a physician with experience at Cold Harbor Spring, New York. Estabrook refused to re-apply the IQ test Carrie had been given in the state home, rather deeming she was feeble-minded based upon the sufficient talks he had with Carrie.

The court also used the excuse that Carrie’s mother, who had been under government care, was feeble-minded and that Carrie’s child, who was only six months old, was likely feeble-minded as well. Vivian’s school reports would later refute this assessment.<sup>111</sup> Also not mentioned during the trial was the fact that Carrie’s pregnancy was the result of rape; instead the court heard from her former teacher how Carrie would send notes to boys, which, the teacher implied, indicated her promiscuity.

The case of *Buck V. Bell* smoothed the way for many coerced sexual sterilizations across the United States. It was also responsible for the spreading of legislation regarding the sterilization of the “feeble-minded.” Carrie’s case also demonstrated the factors which influenced the understanding of who was considered “feeble-minded”<sup>112</sup> The purposeful ignorance of

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<sup>110</sup> Buck v. Bell, 274 U.S. 200 (1927), Justia: U.S. Supreme Court, accessed February 14, 2020: <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/274/200/>.

<sup>111</sup> Buck v. Bell

<sup>112</sup> Buck v. Bell



evidence that refuted the claim that Carrie was “feeble-minded” shows the implication for the court to have been against Carrie from the beginning. While Carrie had significant proof against her “feeble-mindedness” the court refused to take it into consideration and focused on the factors that were not within her control.

### *Passive Influence on German Eugenics*

Friedrich Ratzel, who in 1886 would become a professor at the University of Leipzig in geography, was a large proponent for immigration policies similar to that of the United States. Weikart writes that Ratzel “applauded the United States for restricting rights of Indians and blacks and for introducing immigration restrictions for Asians.”<sup>113</sup> He believed Germany would benefit by introducing racial policies encouraging immigration from Scandinavia and restricting it from Poland.

American immigration laws designed to keep out people with hereditary diseases and citizens from non-Nordic countries won special approval in Germany. German economist H. H. von Schneidewind claimed that the aim of such policies was the preservation of Nordic blood. He was impressed by the influential role that the eugenic studies of Lothrop Stoddard and Madison Grant had played in shaping the thinking and policies of the Harding administration.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler*, 114

<sup>114</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 38

Hitler studied American eugenics laws.<sup>115</sup> He tried to legitimize his anti-Semitism by medicalizing it and wrapping it in the more palatable pseudoscientific facade of eugenics.<sup>116</sup> Hitler was able to recruit more followers among reasonable Germans by claiming that science was on his side. Hitler's race hatred sprung from his own mind, but the intellectual outlines of the eugenics Hitler adopted in 1924 were made in America.<sup>117</sup> Hitler proudly told his comrades just how closely he followed the progress of the American eugenics' movement. "I have studied with great interest," he told a fellow Nazi, "the laws of several American states concerning prevention of reproduction by people whose progeny would, probably, be of no value or be injurious to the racial stock."<sup>118</sup> Hitler even wrote a fan letter to American eugenics leader Madison Grant, calling his race-based eugenics book, *The Passing of the Great Race* his "bible."<sup>119</sup>

In Nazi Germany, the American term "Nordic" was freely exchanged with "Germanic" or "Aryan." Race science, racial purity and racial dominance became the driving force behind Hitler's Nazism.<sup>120</sup> Nazi eugenics would ultimately dictate who would be persecuted in a Reich-dominated Europe, how people would live, and how they would die.<sup>121</sup> Nazi doctors had become the generals in Hitler's war against the Jewish people and other Europeans deemed unfit or

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<sup>115</sup> Black, "Eugenics and the Nazis -- the California Connection"

<sup>116</sup> Black, "Eugenics and the Nazis -- the California Connection"

<sup>117</sup> Black, "Eugenics and the Nazis -- the California Connection"

<sup>118</sup> Black, "Eugenics and the Nazis -- the California Connection,"

<sup>119</sup> Timothy Ryback, "A Disquieting Book from Hitler's Library," *New York Times* December 7, 2011; Edwin Black, *War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America's Campaign to Create a Master Race*. New York: Basic Books, 2003, 259

<sup>120</sup> Black, "Eugenics and the Nazis -- the California Connection"

<sup>121</sup> Black, "Eugenics and the Nazis -- the California Connection"

inferior. Doctors would create the science, devise the eugenic formulas, and hand-select the victims for sterilization, euthanasia and mass extermination.<sup>122</sup>

During the Reich's early years, eugenicists across America welcomed Hitler's plans as the logical fulfillment of their own decades of research and effort. California eugenicists republished Nazi propaganda for American consumption.<sup>123</sup> They also arranged for Nazi scientific exhibits, such as an August 1934 display at the L.A. County Museum, for the annual meeting of the American Public Health Association.<sup>124</sup>

In 1934, as Germany's sterilizations were accelerating beyond 5,000 per month, the California eugenics leader C. M. Goethe, upon returning from Germany, ebulliently bragged to a colleague,

"You will be interested to know that your work has played a powerful part in shaping the opinions of the group of intellectuals who are behind Hitler in this epoch-making program. Everywhere I sensed that their opinions have been tremendously stimulated by American thought . . . I want you, my dear friend, to carry this thought with you for the rest of your life, that you have really jolted into action a great government of 60 million people."<sup>125</sup>

At the time of the Rockefeller endowment, Otmar Freiherr von Verschuer, a hero in American eugenics circles, functioned as a head of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity and Eugenics.<sup>126</sup> Rockefeller funding of that institute continued both directly and through other research conduits during Verschuer's early tenure.<sup>127</sup> In 1935,

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<sup>122</sup> Black, *War Against the Weak*, 56-63

<sup>123</sup> Black, "Eugenics and the Nazis -- the California Connection"

<sup>124</sup> Black, "Eugenics and the Nazis -- the California Connection,"

<sup>125</sup> Black, "Eugenics and the Nazis -- the California Connection,"

<sup>126</sup> Black, "Eugenics and the Nazis -- the California Connection"

<sup>127</sup> Black, "Eugenics and the Nazis -- the California Connection,"

Verschuer left the institute to form a rival eugenics facility in Frankfurt that was much heralded in the American eugenics press.<sup>128</sup> Research on twins in the Third Reich exploded, backed by government decrees. Verschuer wrote in *Der Erbarzt*, a eugenics doctor's journal he edited, that Germany's war would yield a "total solution to the Jewish problem."<sup>129</sup>

On May 30, 1943, Josef Mengele arrived at Auschwitz. Verschuer notified the German Research Society:

"My assistant, Dr. Josef Mengele (M.D., Ph.D.) joined me in this branch of research. He is presently employed as Hauptsturmführer (captain) and camp physician in the Auschwitz concentration camp. Anthropological testing of the most diverse racial groups in this concentration camp is being carried out with permission of the SS Reichsführer (Himmler)."<sup>130</sup>

Rockefeller executives never knew of Mengele. With few exceptions, the foundation had ceased all eugenics studies in Nazi-occupied Europe before the war erupted in 1939. But by that time the die had been cast. The talented men Rockefeller and Carnegie financed, the great institutions they helped found, and the science they helped create took on a scientific momentum of their own.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Black, "Eugenics and the Nazis -- the California Connection"

<sup>129</sup> Black, "Eugenics and the Nazis -- the California Connection,"

<sup>130</sup> Black, "Eugenics and the Nazis -- the California Connection,"

<sup>131</sup> Black, "Eugenics and the Nazis -- the California Connection"

## CHAPTER 4: NAZISM TO FALL OF EUGENICS

Eugenicists in the United States were some of the strongest supporters of Nazi race policies, while other eugenic movements, such as the one in Great Britain, were relatively critical of Nazi Germany. The *Rassenpolitische Auslandskorrespondenz*, the main German observer of foreign positions towards Nazi policies, published eleven different reports on the United States and its eugenic activities.<sup>132</sup> Four of these dealt with the support of the American eugenics' movement for Nazi Germany. No other country played such a prominent role in Nazi propaganda as the United States. The Nazi administration referred to the United States as a model in playing an important role in shaping its own race policy.

Otto Wagener, head of the Nazi Party's Economic Policy Office from 1931-1933, wrote of Hitler's personal interest regarding the eugenic developments in the United States. Wagener claimed that Hitler said:

“Now that we know the laws of heredity, it is possible to a large extent to prevent unhealthy and severely handicapped beings from coming into the world. I have studied with great interest the laws of several American states concerning prevention of reproduction by people whose progeny would, in all probability, be of no value or be injures to the racial stock. I'm sure that occasionally mistakes occur as a result. But the possibility of excess and error is still no proof of the incorrectness of these laws.”<sup>133</sup>

In 1935, the *Rassenpolitische Auslandskorrespondenz* stated that Germany was a good disciple of other civilized societies in terms of eugenics.<sup>134</sup> In 1939, the *Archive fur Rassen – und*

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<sup>132</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 37

<sup>133</sup> Otto Wagener, *Hitler aus nächster Nahe: Aufzeichnungen eines Vertrauten 1929-1932*, ed. Henry A. Turner (Frankfurt a.M.: Ullstein, 1978), 264

<sup>134</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 38

"Das Ausland als Vorbild für die deutsche Rassengesetzgebung," *Rassenpolitische Auslandskorrespondenz*, 2.4 (1935), 1

*Gesellschaftsbiologie* claimed that the United States had “had achieved something great” based upon its passage of the first sterilization measures.<sup>135</sup> *Volk und Rasse* referred to the decisions of the United States Supreme court that legitimized compulsory sterilization in 1916 and 1927 as a great achievement.<sup>136</sup> Although sterilization in the United States was more limited than it was in Germany, many German hygienists argued that in some parts the practices of the United States were even more radical than Nazi Germany.

Paul Heinz Beselmann, a German economist, explained that the early acceptance of such policies of drastic measures reflected the overwhelming willingness of politicians to implement such radical laws.<sup>137</sup> However, Nazi racial hygienists opposed the policy adopted by some American states by using sterilization as a punishment. The Nazis criticized the arbitrary way in which states enforced these measures.<sup>138</sup> Rather, the Nazis preferred their own elaborate decision-making process that was implemented by special racial courts for hereditary health in Germany.

Immigration laws of the United States, designed to keep out people with hereditary diseases and from non-Nordic countries, won overwhelming approval in Germany. Another German economist H. H. von Schneidewin claimed that the goal of these policies was the preservation of Nordic blood. Schneidewin was impressed by the influential role that the studies

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<sup>135</sup> Jens Paulsen, 'Politische Entwicklungsrichtungen in den europäischen Volkern,' *Archiv für Rassen und Gesellschaftsbiologie*, 33 (1939), 224

<sup>136</sup> *Volk und Rasse*, 9 (1934): 398. The statement from Supreme Court Judge Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. is quoted in Ellsworth Huntington, *Tomorrow's Children: The Goal of Eugenics* (New York: John Wiley, 1935), 43

<sup>137</sup> Paul Heinz Besselmann, "Nationale eugenische Ausleseprobleme in der Volkswirtschaftslehre," diss., University Heidelberg, 1934, 67.

<sup>138</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 38

of Lothrop Stoddard and Madison Grant had played in the thinking and policies of the Harding administration.<sup>139</sup>

In 1934 Hans F. K. Günther, a race anthropologist, explained to his audience at the University of Munich that “it was remarkable that American immigration laws were accepted by the overwhelming majority, although the United States appeared the most liberal country of the World.”<sup>140</sup> He referred to Madison Grant and Lothrop Stoddard, both prominent American proponents of scientific racism and eugenics, as the “spiritual fathers” of Nazi Germany.<sup>141</sup> Nazi racial hygienists were impressed by the way in which the United States immigration policy combined both ethnic and eugenic selection.<sup>142</sup>

By 1930 America was the preeminent example of a race state a nation that systematically divided its people into different classes of citizenship along racial and ethnic lines.<sup>143</sup> James Q. Whitman, author of *Hitler’s American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law*, describes how in the United States, primarily the southern states, an inferior sort of citizenship existed for blacks and Native Americans. The Nazis, of course, targeted the Jewish people for a second-class citizenship of a kind far worse than the discrimination that had been previously seen. The racial state of the United States began in 1882 with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which eventually became the Immigration Act of 1924 that limited the entry visas

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<sup>139</sup> H. H. von Schneidewind, *Wirtschaft und Wirtschaftspolitik der Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika* (Wiirzburg: Konrad Triltsch, 1933), 29-32.

<sup>140</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 38

<sup>141</sup> Günther at a meeting of the 'Kampfbundes für deutsche Kultur' on February 21, 1934. "Der Vererbungs- und Rassegedanke innerhalb der Einwanderungsgesetzgebung," *Völkischer Beobachter* (February 23, 1934).

<sup>142</sup> Steinwallner, 249-50; Walter Gross, "Die Welt und der Rassengedanke in Deutschland," *Zeitungsdiens* (November 2, 1934)

<sup>143</sup> Edward J. Larson, "A Race to Nowhere," *The American Interest*, August 11, 2017, <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2017/06/30/a-race-to-nowhere/>)

of people based on national origin. Legal limits on citizenship is also evidence that Whitman provides, with the examples of non-citizen nationals as well as the denied right to vote for African Americans in Southern States.<sup>144</sup> These laws created a second-class citizenship based on race or ethnicity.

Hitler attempted to encourage the emigration of Jews by stripping them of their rights, excluding them from economic activity, and having them treated as second-class citizens. The policies for euthanasia and genocide didn't come until later. The United States didn't encourage emigration for either African Americans or Native Americans, rather the parallel exists with Hitler trying to subjugate an established domestic community. Differences still existed, as German Jews had greater economic power than African Americans or Native Americans, which was a principal justification for Nazi efforts at eliminating their influence.<sup>145</sup> Segregation was not an answer or option for Hitler, rather all-but-forced emigration, followed by genocide was. In the United States, by contrast, segregation remained the favored means of dealing with this alleged racial problem. What the Nazis latched onto that was similar to the legislation in numerous American states were the anti-miscegenation laws and the draconian penalties that these laws offered for violators.

Eugenicists in the United States readily acknowledged, with some pride, their influence on eugenics legislation in Nazi Germany. In particular, both the California sterilization law and the Model Eugenic Sterilization Law designed and developed by Harry Laughlin in 1922 reflected significant American influences. The German Law on Preventing Hereditarily Ill Progeny, in fact, followed Laughlin's model quite closely, in terms of its basic guidelines.

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<sup>144</sup> Larson, "A Race to Nowhere"

<sup>145</sup> Larson, "A Race to Nowhere"



Amazingly, though, the German law was, in some respects, more moderate than Laughlin's American model.<sup>146</sup> Where the German law demanded sterilization in cases of mental retardation, schizophrenia, manic depressive insanity, inherited epilepsy, Huntington's chorea, hereditary blindness, deafness, and malformation, Laughlin had also advocated sterilization for habitual criminals and the economically dependent.<sup>147</sup> Both urged the sterilization of alcoholics, although in the German case under a different category. Both these laws delegated power of decision making to a special court. *Eugenic News* commented that "to one versed in the history of eugenic sterilization in America, the text of the German statute reads almost like the American model sterilization law."<sup>148</sup>

The Nazis had passed their eugenics law a mere six months after having come to power. Access to information regarding legal and medical aspects of sterilization in the United States offered one reason why the Nazis were able to pass the sterilization law so quickly.<sup>149</sup> Before the law had been passed German experts had done extensive study of the experiences of foreign countries regarding sterilization, and the German sterilization law was the first of such legislation to be based on a systematic analysis of experiences and discussions from abroad.<sup>150</sup>

Along with the learning from practical and legal experiences, the Nazis also drew upon the vast research conducted in the United States after 1870. The first family eugenics study was carried out by William L. Dugdale of New York by examining thirteen jails in Ulster County,

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<sup>146</sup> Laughlin's Model Law is printed in Harry H. Laughlin, *Eugenic Sterilization in the United States* (Chicago: Psychopathic Laboratory of the Municipal Court of Chicago, 1922), 446-47.

<sup>147</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 39

<sup>148</sup> *Eugenic News*, 18 (1933), 89.

<sup>149</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 39

<sup>150</sup> Jacob H. Landman, *Human Sterilization: The History of the Sexual Sterilization Movement* (New York: Macmillan, 1932), 218.

New York.<sup>151</sup> Dugdale examined four families with blood ties in order to prove that pauperism was a hereditary trait. Dugdale's study inspired a wave of research about degenerate families. Only after 1904 did Cold Spring Harbor also conducted several family stories and in 1907 Charles Davenport's wife, Gertrude C. Davenport, published a report about the "Zero family" based upon reports from a Swiss insane asylum.<sup>152</sup>

The sterilization measures adopted by California were extremely important for the German law. Popenoe and his colleagues in the California Sterilization movement routinely kept German eugenicists informed of new developments in the state, which was responsible for nearly half of all American sterilizations.<sup>153</sup> A representative of the American Committee on Maternal Health visiting Nazi Germany detected the influence of the Californian law on the German law on Preventing Hereditarily Ill Progeny. After the discussions with the judges of the courts, she concluded:

"The leaders in the German sterilization movement state repeatedly that their legislation was formulated only after the careful study of the California experiment as reported by Mr. Gosney and Dr. Popenoe. It would have been impossible, they say, to undertake such a venture involving some 1 million people without drawing heavily upon previous experience elsewhere."<sup>154</sup>

An essential basis for the development of the German sterilization law was a study conducted by Popenoe and Eugene S. Gosney, who was president of the primary eugenics organization in California, the Human Betterment Foundation. Having originally appeared in 1929, *Sterilization for Human Betterment* was translated and appeared in a German edition in

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<sup>151</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 39

<sup>152</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 39-40

<sup>153</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 42

<sup>154</sup> Marie E. Kopp, "Legal and Medical Aspects of Eugenic Sterilization in Germany," *American Sociological Review*, 1 (1936), 763.

1930.<sup>155</sup> This article was meant to counter one of the main arguments of social reformers who opposed sterilization in part because they believed sterilized women were more likely to become prostitutes. Popenoe and Gosney were only able to find one case of a sterilized woman becoming a prostitute and thus was able to prove the beneficial effects of the sterilization of unfit women.<sup>156</sup>

During the 1930s, the California Branch of the American Eugenics Society and the Human Betterment Foundation remained important sources of information for Nazi Germany.<sup>157</sup> Popenoe, in particular, was regarded as a major influence on both the American and German eugenics movements. So highly regarded was he, in fact, that *Der Erbarzt*, a leading German eugenics journal, published an article which portrayed him as a eugenicist of international stature and argued that the Human Betterment Foundation's journal enjoyed influence throughout North America.<sup>158</sup>

Nazi Germany, concerned with the public acceptance of their own sterilization policies, had reported through German propaganda in 1936 that most Californians supported sterilization laws. Up until the late 1930's did German scientific journals and Nazi propaganda report new publications, developments, and demands of the California eugenics movement.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Paul Popenoe, "Rassenhygienische Sterilisierung in Kalifornien," *Archiv für Rassen- und Gesellschaftsbiologie*, 23 (1931), 249-59.

<sup>156</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 43

<sup>157</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 44

<sup>158</sup> *Der Erbarzt*, 3 (1936): 175.

<sup>159</sup> Paul Popenoe and Eugene S. Gosney, *Twenty-eight Years of Sterilization in California* (Pasadena, Calif.: Human Betterment Foundation, 1939), and Human Betterment Foundation, *Human Sterilization Today* (Pasadena, Calif.: Human Betterment Foundation, 1939)

In view of its recognition of California eugenics, Popenoe and Gosney strongly supported the Nazi sterilization law, the former praising it as “well conceived.” In 1934, the California eugenics movement organized the presentation of an exhibition of the Reich’s eugenics program. The exhibition was shown during the annual meeting of the American Public Health Association at the Los Angeles County Museum. A newsletter written by the Southern Californian Branch of the American Eugenics society stated:

“It portrays the general eugenics program of the Nazi government, giving special attention to the need for sterilization. Those who have seen this exhibit say it is the finest thing of the kind that has ever been produced. Take this opportunity to see this while it is in Los Angeles. Tell your friends about it.”<sup>160</sup>

Popenoe viewed the sterilization law enacted by the Nazis as the fulfillment of ideals and principles developed by the California movement. He remarked that “since the Nazi’s came to power, changes have been so frequent that it has been difficult to keep track of them”.<sup>161</sup>

Popenoe would go on to defend the German sterilization law, writing:

“The law that has been adopted is not a half-baked and hasty improvisation of the Hitler regime, but is the product of many years of consideration by the best specialists in Germany. . . I must say that my impression is, from a close following of the situation in the German scientific press, rather favorable.”<sup>162</sup>

In a scientific evaluation of sterilization laws of different countries Popenoe identified favorable trends during the first three years following the German sterilization law.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 45

<sup>161</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 45

<sup>162</sup> Popenoe to L. C. Dunn, January 22, 1934, Dunn Papers, APS: Popenoe, quoted in Kenneth M. Ludmerer, *Genetics and American Society: A Historical Appraisal* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.,1972), 118.

<sup>163</sup> Paul Popenoe, "Trends in Human Sterilization," *Eugenic News*, 22 (1937): 4243.

California's example reveals the critical role that the transfer of knowledge about medical, scientific, and political aspects of sterilization played in the formulation of Nazi sterilization legislation. However, California wasn't the only state to support Nazi eugenic law. Joseph DeJarnette, a leading member of Virginia eugenics and sterilization movement, penned a letter of enthusiastic support and argued that Virginia needed to extend the sterilization law to more closely resemble the German law.<sup>164</sup>

In 1934 one of Hitler's staff penned to Leon Whitney for a copy of his recently published book, *The Case for Sterilization*. Whitney, who had earlier praised Hitler's "courage and statesmanship" and had justified the Nazi sterilization law by asserting, "sterilization and race betterment are ... becoming compelling ideas among all enlightened nations," complied almost immediately and received a personal letter of thanks from Adolf Hitler.<sup>165</sup> In a conversation with Madison Grant about the letter, Grant revealed that he had received a letter of thanks from Hitler for his work, *The Passing of the Great Race* in which he claimed that Hitler acknowledged that "the book was his bible".<sup>166</sup> Hitler's personal correspondence with American eugenicists shows both the influence that they had upon the highest figures in the Nazi regime and the importance that the Nazi's imposed on garnering support for their policies from foreign scientists.

One of the most effective ways of garnering this support was by honoring this foreign scientist in Germany with honorary degrees from German universities. In one case in the mid 1930's the Nazi government saw a way to honor two renowned eugenicists from the United

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<sup>164</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 45

<sup>165</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 85

<sup>166</sup> Unpublished autobiography of Leon F. Whitney, written in 1971, Whitney Papers, APS, 204-5.

States with honorary doctorates during the 550<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the University of Heidelberg.<sup>167</sup> The recipients were Foster Kennedy and Harry H. Laughlin. Kennedy was well known for his advocacy of killing mentally handicapped persons as well as his membership in the Euthanasia Society of the United States. Even after the revelation of the mass killings of the mentally handicapped in Nazi Germany had been revealed Kennedy still called for the mass euthanasia of those born defective.<sup>168</sup> Laughlin himself did not attend the ceremony due to the critique of the event by the American public media. Fearing that those who attended would become nothing more than propaganda tools for the Nazi regime, Laughlin was afraid what the trip would weaken his position within the Carnegie foundation as it had already become more critical of the Eugenics Record Office.<sup>169</sup>

The Nazi desire to cultivate non-German eugenicists was not primarily for scientific research, rather it was with the goal of garnering support for a propaganda strategy aimed at quelling the opposition to Nazi race policies.<sup>170</sup> The Nazis believed this endorsement by foreign scientists would give the German people a sense that these policies were seen as favorable abroad and quell dissent towards them. The Nazis also relied on these endorsements to further their own propaganda outside German borders.

The relations between the German racial hygiene movement and the United States eugenics movement began to cool during the late 1930s due to a combination of factors: primarily the recognition of the public and scientific communities that anti-Semitism was at the

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<sup>167</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 86

<sup>168</sup> Foster Kennedy, "The Problem of Social Control of the Congenial Defective: Education, Sterilization, Euthanasia," *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 99 (1942), 13-16.

<sup>169</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 87

<sup>170</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 88

core of Nazi racial policy, a power shift inside the scientific community of the United States toward a more progressive social eugenicists, and the decline of the reputation of the Nazis in the United States.<sup>171</sup>

The decrease in contacts was closely connected with the radicalization of anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany. Anti-Semitism was the dominant element of the National Socialist race ideology became clear for many of the American eugenicists during the late 1930s. While anti-Semitism existed in the American eugenics movement, very few actually agreed with the degree to which the Jews were being persecuted and discriminated against in Germany.<sup>172</sup> Nazi propaganda attempted to argue ethnic minorities in the United States were treated in a similar way in the United States as the Jews were in Germany. Yet the true and final break came with the American entry into the war due to the Japanese attack upon Pearl Harbor, and no contact between American eugenicists and Racial hygienists would occur until the conclusion of the war.

Following the conclusion of World War II American eugenicists wished to distance themselves from their former support for Nazi race policies. The genocide waged against the targets of the Nazis had completely discredited the policies of the Nazis. Former support for the racial hygienists in the media following the war was not mentioned or was conveniently “forgotten” in an attempt to conceal the involvement the United States had in promoting such policies. During the Nuremberg trials in 1946 only a small group of German racial hygienists were accused of participating in the government-sponsored massacres, and even then, those accused would defend themselves by directing the attention to the support American eugenicists

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<sup>171</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 97

<sup>172</sup> Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 98

held for the Nazi policies. The United States had proven itself a model for Germany and that Germany's elimination of "weaker elements" was not unique to the country.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Alexander Mitscherlich and Fritz Mielke, *The Death Doctors* (London: Elek, 1962), 256; Proctor, *Racial Hygiene*, 180.



## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Eugenic ideas emanating from the United States played a significant role in shaping the eugenics movement in Germany. The role of the United States, influence, and severity differed over the decades, yet it did not change the fact that Germany looked towards the United States and its history, legislation, and scientific research regarding eugenics to further its own agenda. The goal of Germany wasn't always the reality that had become the Holocaust, as it had changed and even differed from the goals the United States held just as well. Various groups, people, and organizations either influenced, funded, or guided the goals of German eugenicists. The changing political climate, in both the United States and Germany, was also an uncontrollable factor that saw how eugenics was shaped throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

From legislation regarding sterilization to the publication and literature that was sent over to Germany the American eugenics movement was a force that influenced the history of Germany. International factors outside the United States influence, such as The First World War, The Great Depression, and the rise of the Nazi party also made conditions for the reception of eugenics much more viable.

With the United States focusing so much effort on segregation and racial control following the American Civil War it was already primed to accept the idea that scientifically the white race was superior to that of all others. The fear that these groups could one day rise up violently or reduce the white race to a minority is also something that spurred the United States into its fast acceptance of eugenics and the incorporation of legislature. Germany, on the other hand, was dealing with the familiar issues revolving around anti-Semitism and social degradation. With the unification of Germany taking place after the American Civil war there

was no unified German nation witnessing the factors that lead to the United States embracing eugenics. Rather, it was the results of the First World War and the decimation of the male population in Europe as well as setting up the path Germany followed to the rise of the Nazis, Hitler, and the Holocaust.

Understanding the influence and origins of the eugenics movement, as well as influences, of both the United States and Germany, is essential to the understanding of ideologies are influenced and develop throughout history. Germany wasn't simply copying what the United States did, and the United States wasn't trying to create the Holocaust with its various influences on Germany. Rather, eugenics was used as a tool to promote the racist ideas of one race being better than the rest and how both countries could use eugenics-driven policies to ensure that the "superior race" would remain unchanged and unchallenged.

The United States wasn't simply a pillar of influence for Germany either, rather during the Nazis rule of Germany the United States found itself scaling back its support during the buildup to the Second World War as well as finding itself reevaluating several of its practices or legislation, especially following the end of the war. The greatest effect the Germans had upon eugenics was to cause the near disbandment of the science and drive away public opinion from sterilization and other negative eugenic practices due to the relationship they held with the Holocaust.

One can look to the evolution and differences in communism as a comparison to the differences of eugenics in other countries, as no two countries practiced it the same. The Soviet Union differed from communism as practiced in the People's Republic of China, Vietnam, North Korea, and Cuba. The Soviet Union influenced each of these countries the practice and ideals of a communist society, yet in each of these countries the soviet model was never exactly followed.

The same can be seen with eugenics and how it changed from its conception by Galton and its implementation by Hitler for the Holocaust.

Eugenics couldn't have spread like it did before the twentieth century as the evolution of international relations and communication had evolved in a short amount of time. No longer did communication between the United States and Europe take months but weeks, scientific thought had risen and began to replace the previous dominant religious thought that had dominated the world for centuries, and society was now looking for solutions to issues that did not exist before a pre-industrialized society. It has been evident through this work that eugenics began spreading slowly, almost forced, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century yet it had spread like a wildfire by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Even today the effects of eugenics can still be seen with the science of genetics. Cold Spring Harbor, no longer a Eugenics Record Office, but now a Genetics Research Laboratory is still active and producing scientific literature and research that couldn't have existed without eugenics. The understanding of the connection of hereditary diseases and conditions, as well as genetic deformities and issues such as Autism, would not be as well understood had it not been for the racist goal of promoting racial superiority and racial hygiene.

It is important to understand the aspects that eugenics held in history and how it affects our present and future. It is equally important to understand the influence a single country can have upon any aspect of society, especially that of ideology. Eugenics was a driving force of the early twentieth century, yet it was not the only or most important source. Eugenics was spread worldwide and implemented by countries on six of the seven continents, with Antarctica being the only continent that eugenic ideology was not observed upon. The repercussions are still seen to this day with apologies made in the past ten years by countries, and even states within the

United States, of the sterilizations, practices, and various other events done in the name of eugenics and racial purity.

While eugenics is a thing of the past in the United States and in Germany, it does not mean that the ideology isn't still around or inactive. As recently as March 2020 under the recent outbreak of Covid-19, popularly known as the Corona Virus, Italy has made the decision for doctors not to treat elderly patients due to the lower chance of recovery and the limited access to supplies.<sup>174</sup> This is similar to the rationing of food in Germany during and after World War I due to the British naval blockade, which resulted in the large-scale death of certain groups in the population deemed inessential to the war effort, as well as the distribution of food during the Ukrainian famine and Genocide of 1932-1933. The State has decided those who will receive treatment, supplies, or other resources necessary for their survival during a time of crisis. Even though the term eugenics is no longer being used, it does not mean the ideology has disappeared from the world. It has been shown that all it takes for the revival of such extreme measures endorsed by the ideology is a crisis.

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<sup>174</sup> Jason Horowitz, "Italy's Health Care System Groans Under Coronavirus - a Warning to the World," The New York Times (The New York Times, March 12, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/12/world/europe/12italy-coronavirus-health-care.html>)

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