

of German industry is a splendid accomplishment, but the utter repudiation of democratic control and the silly worship of race, makes this aspect of Hitlerism one of the most dangerous things in the modern world"<sup>117</sup> (emphasis added).

Lewis's observations on Du Bois's 1936 visit only mildly criticized his stance toward Germany and its handling of the Jewish question. While it is correct to note the inability of Du Bois and others to predict the coming Holocaust against Jews, plenty of evidence existed that the Nazis were not retreating in their discrimination, nor was it minor that anti-Semitism had broad popular appeal. Du Bois's love for Germany seems to have blinded or at least clouded his usually sharp reading of racism. It is also notable that neither Du Bois's nor Lewis's critique of this period acknowledged the presence of Afro-Germans and Africans in Nazi Germany. While not as observable as the attacks against the Jews, discrimination and racist rhetoric toward Blacks in Germany were occurring.

It is highly unlikely and would be inexplicable that Du Bois did not meet Afro-Germans and Africans given both his own lifetime of work and research on Blacks and the black diaspora and the probable effort by Blacks in Germany to reach out to someone with the stature of the world-renowned American. For there to be no comment from Du Bois on black Germans is remarkable in and of itself. Either Du Bois felt these encounters, to the degree they occurred, were too trifling or insignificant to note, or he lived such an extraordinarily isolated and insular life while in Germany that he had no significant recordable interaction with any German Blacks.

## Made in America, Perfected in Germany

### The Nazi Sterilization Program against Blacks

*Shall we silently accept that in the future instead of the beautiful songs of white, pretty, well-informed, intellectually developed, lively, health Germans, we will hear the raucous noise of horrific, broad skulled, flat nosed, ungainly, half-human, syphilitic half-castes on the banks of the Rhine.*

—Dr. Rosenberger<sup>1</sup>

*If you think that we scientists do not join in the call "Heil Hitler," you are very much mistaken. We, the German scientists, are very much aware of what we owe to Adolf Hitler, not the least the purification of our people from foreign-race elements, whose way of thinking is not the one we have.*

—Dr. Theodor Mollison<sup>2</sup>

### Racialized Science: The Eugenics Movement as a Global Campaign

One chief means by which the Nazi regime attempted to deal with its "black" problem was through involuntary sterilization. The sterilization program employed under Nazism, which went well beyond just Afro-Germans, had its roots in the global eugenics movement that began in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Eugenics, in essence, is the reduction of society and human relations to biologicalism leading to determinant outcomes in intelligence, behavior, and overall human characteristics. Taking this approach to its logical social and political conclusions, eugenicists advocate perpetuation of supposedly superior genes and the removal of those that in biological terms are physically or mentally unworthy. While eugenics was not always exclusively predicated along racial lines, in most circumstances it became impossible to separate biology and race, particularly in Germany and the United States. The fact that some

EUGENICS

Whites or Aryans fell into the category of the "unfit" did not mitigate the general view that all "non-Whites" or "non-Aryans" did.

Eugenics was embedded in modernity and the industrial revolution. With its emphasis on science and "progress," it was easy to propagate the view that races could be not only scientifically measured but also managed and engineered. In an ironic postmodernist way, it was the early racists who truly believed that races could be (re)constructed. Once the biological (and immutable) racial foundation was set by nature, then state support and popular participation could assist science in its goal to simultaneously successfully breed and progressively weed the correct and desirable racial configuration.

Sir Francis Galton, a first cousin of Charles Darwin who wrote a definitive scientific study on fingerprints, left his own originating and decisive fingerprints on the field of eugenics. After reading Darwin's *Origin of Species*, Galton had an epiphany that would take social prejudice to a qualitatively new level. Applying his cousin's insights regarding the evolution of different animal species, he came to believe that science could intervene and alter the human evolutionary process. This British scientist began with the premise that there were worthy populations and individuals and those that were not. He believed not only that the former should be promoted and the latter eliminated but that scientific breeding could accomplish such a deed. In 1907, Galton gave this concept, which had been previously embraced by such prominent figures as Socrates and Thomas Jefferson, the name eugenics.

Racism was at the center of its founder's thinking. He considered Blacks to be at the bottom of the human ladder and argued that they had failed "to sustain the burden of any respectable form of civilization."<sup>3</sup> Galton called for the gradual displacement of Africans, suggesting the Chinese because he did not want Europeans to suffer from the intemperate weather.<sup>4</sup> Galton's followers in the United States would appropriate the link between race and eugenics.

#### Corn Flakes and Bettering the Race: Eugenics in the United States

*The Germans are beating us at our own game.*

—Dr. Joseph S. DeJarnette, a leader in the Virginia eugenics movement.<sup>5</sup>

For generations, millions have spooned a daily breakfast of Kellogg's Corn Flakes, one of the best-known brand names of any cereal. Will Keith Kellogg founded Kellogg in 1906 in Battle Creek, Michigan. Today, the company sells its cereals and other food products in more than 160 countries. It claims that it is the "world's leading producer of ready-to-eat cereal and a leading producer of grain-based convenience foods, including toaster pastries, frozen waffles and cereal bars." In 1998, it had consolidated net sales of more than \$6.7 billion. The cereal that made Will and his brother John millionaires was discovered by accident. John was the physician in chief at the Battle Creek Sanitarium and had spent many unsuccessful years looking for a vegetarian diet—a digestible bread substitute—for his patients. In 1894, according to the company's official history, Will "accidentally left a pot of boiled wheat to stand and become tempered. When it was

put through the usual rolling process, each grain of wheat emerged as a large, thin flake. Will persuaded his brother to serve the food in flake form, and it was an immediate favorite among the patients." John left it to Will to eventually package and sell the increasingly popular product, and the company was soon raking in millions.

While Will concentrated on selling corn flakes and other cereals, John became a major player in the eugenics movement. Financed by the fortunes made from the food line, John founded the Race Betterment Foundation in 1911, also in Battle Creek. The foundation sponsored three national conferences on race betterment and eugenics, in 1914, 1915, and 1928. It worked closely with the Eugenics Records Office (ERO) and the man considered to be the heart and soul of the U.S. eugenics movement: Charles Davenport.

A University of Chicago biologist, Charles Davenport was the catalyst for the eugenics movement in the United States. In 1910, he established the ERO, located in Cold Spring Harbor, New York, which over the next thirty years would be the epicenter of U.S. eugenics. The ERO published an influential newsletter, *Eugenical News*, produced monographs and papers, lobbied against immigration, and supported mandatory sterilization. Davenport and other U.S. eugenicists, such as Madison Grant and Harry Hamilton Laughlin, belied their advocacy of so-called positive eugenics—the breeding of "good" genes—by their nearly exclusive focus on the eradication of "negative" traits through breeding and sterilization. Sterilization as a form of social intervention began as a form of punishment specifically aimed at African American men in the 1850s. In 1907, this practice became legal when Indiana passed the first involuntary sterilization law. In 1914, the eugenicist Laughlin proposed a schedule that called for sterilizing fifteen million people in the United States over a twenty-year period.

The political and racial work of the ERO and eugenics organizations such as the American Eugenics Society, American Genetics Association, Human Betterment Association, and Galton Society was buttressed by an intellectual coterie that produced several popular books. This included Davenport's *Heredity in Relation to Eugenics* (1911), Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race* (1923), Thurman B. Rice's *Racial Hygiene* (1929), and Carl C. Brigham's *A Study of American Intelligence* (1923). In all of these works and many others, a discourse presented the argument that the white race was threatened with impurity and even eradication by the breeding habits of lower, that is, colored, races. That some lower breeds of Whites, who carried "undesirable" traits such as mental illness and promiscuity, would also have to be removed did not undermine the view that the main danger rested in the growth and procreation of Blacks, Asians, and others.

It is important to emphasize that eugenicists, whether they advocated "positive" or "negative" eugenics, were fairly united that its social application should be compulsory. A thesis of social engineering at the most fundamental level informed the eugenicist movement from the beginning, and it was understood that the goals of the movement could only be achieved by obligating society to the enforcement of sterilization no matter the personal, social, or democratic costs. The so-called distinction between "positive" and "negative" eugenics in the United States and Germany was a facade. Tucker

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notes perceptively, "As in the United States, German eugenics tended to pay lip service to the Galtonian ideal of encouraging proliferation of the fit while concentrating in practice on elimination of the unfit."<sup>6</sup>

In the United States, as elsewhere, eugenics was a racialized movement. What made African Americans especially worrisome to the eugenicists was the latter's belief in an extraordinary black tendency of uncontrolled sexual activity. Davenport, echoing the view of fellow eugenicists, wrote that African Americans have "a strong sex instinct, without corresponding self-control."<sup>7</sup> The link between eugenics and sterilization in this discourse was manifest in the manner in which crime was sometimes punished. Black men, in particular, were subject to judicial and extrajudicial castration. As Roberts notes, "The idea of imposing sterilization as a solution for antisocial behavior originated in the castration of black men as a punishment for crime."<sup>8</sup> There are two things to note here about that history. First, crime was completely defined by the white racist social structure. Second, black male castration was a punishment not limited to the crime of rape or attempted rape—those "crimes" also being socially structured in that the rape of black women by white men or black men and the rape of white women by white men were seen in much less severe terms. Laws were advocated that would allow castration if a black male was convicted of being "vicious, disobedient, drunken."<sup>9</sup>

Under the rhetoric of stemming the hereditary passing of criminal and antisocial behavior, eugenicists and legislators argued for the compulsory sterilization of prison inmates, and by 1913, "twenty-four states and the District of Columbia had enacted laws forbidding epileptics, imbeciles, paupers, drunkards, criminals, and the feeble-minded," from reproducing.<sup>10</sup> Even President Theodore Roosevelt would endorse the call for sterilization as a means of preventing "racial suicide."<sup>11</sup>

Eugenics-oriented legislation was also linked, in part, to the racializing of the nation's immigration laws. The National Origins Act of 1924, which effectively eliminated immigration from southern and eastern Europe, targeted racially undesirable Europeans, a move that had long been in place against people from the developing and colonialized worlds.<sup>12</sup> A critical change occurred in the racial focus of American-style eugenics from the early period to the 1930s. As Robert writes, "The eugenics movement was also energized by issues of race. In the 1930s, it turned its attention from the influx of undesirable immigrants to the black population in the South."<sup>13</sup> Just as Herrnstein and Murray would do in *The Bell Curve* more than seven decades later, eugenicists of the teens and 1920s blended class and racial characteristics, seeing them both as biological and immutable, as when the Harvard geneticist Edward East argued for ending prenatal care for the poor because it prevented the "natural elimination of the unfit."<sup>14</sup> Thurman B. Rice, a prominent eugenicist and author of *Racial Hygiene*, wrote, "the colored races are pressing the white race most urgently and this pressure may be expected to increase."<sup>15</sup>

Besides advocacy aimed at policymakers, eugenicists would also become engaged in political and social movements that were often baldly racist in nature, such as forming alliances and providing "scientific" discourses to the Ku Klux Klan and the birth con-

U.S. EUGENICS NATIONAL RACIAL (P.F.) MOVEMENT PUNISHMENT FOR CRIME

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trol movement during the first half of the twentieth century. The most disturbing national collaboration, however, would happen between eugenicists in the United States and Germany.

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### The Eugenics Brotherhood of Nazis and Americans

Germany is the first of all the great nations of the world to make direct practical use of eugenics.<sup>16</sup>

Working in tandem, eugenicists from the United States and Germany dominated the global movement. Although they would generally deny the accusation, eugenicists from the two nations were more bonded by their racial views than any genuine scholarship.

The U.S. movement cheered the work of their German counterparts even as many of the latter began working in the service of Nazism. There was plenty of evidence to support the contention that eugenics was profoundly linked to questions of race and racism. In 1921, at the Second International Congress of Eugenics, where U.S. and German representatives dominated, papers were presented with titles such as "Some Notes on the Negro Problem," "The Problem of Negro-White Intermixture," and "Intermarriage with the Slave Race." Eugenicists and their supporters in the United States hailed the publication of *Human Heredity*, the first part of a two-volume series written by three of Germany's most prominent eugenicists, Erwin Baur, Eugen Fischer, and Fritz Lenz. Despite its ominous intonations, the book was called a "masterpiece of objective research."<sup>17</sup> This work would elevate the status of German eugenicists in the eyes of those in the United States who envisioned the eugenics movement as a global calling.

In 1933, in celebration of the passage of the new Nazi sterilization law, the *Eugenical News*, a leading U.S. publication on the eugenics movement, wrote, "It is probable that the sterilization statutes of the several American states and the national sterilization statute of Germany will, in legal history, constitute a milestone which marks the control by the most advanced nations of the world of a major aspect of controlling human reproduction, comparable in importance only with the states [sic] legal control of marriage."<sup>18</sup> It was even suggested by a staff member of the Eugenics Record Office that Adolf Hitler himself should be made an "honorary member" of the organization.<sup>19</sup> Given the politics of the Eugenics Office, it could be argued that he already was.

Reflecting a core view of the Nazis, many U.S. eugenicists were also anti-Semitic and, like the Nazis, would sometimes view Jews as more dangerous and horrid than African Americans or Blacks. The sociologist and eugenicist Edward Alsworth Ross, for example, commenting without evidence in the early days of Nazism, wrote that even Blacks would leave for "a more spotless environment" when Jews moved into the neighborhood. Like the Germans, American eugenicists also tended to view Jews as a racial group rather than a religious one.

The relationship between American and German eugenicists was one of mutual admiration. The Nazis not only envied the proposed ideas and programs of their U.S. counterparts but also coveted the policy initiatives that had been implemented. As

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Tucker notes, "German scientists saw the United States with its antimiscegenation statutes leading the way."<sup>20</sup> Unlike the southern United States, with its Jim Crow segregation laws in full force in the first half of the century, Germany at the beginning of the National Socialist era did not have explicit laws that segregated different racial, ethnic, or religious groups. Until Hitler, the practice of racism and anti-Semitism operated mostly de facto rather than de jure. Praise for the eugenics movement in the United States came from many quarters in Germany, but especially from the race scientists.

There was not only ideological unity between eugenicists in the United States and Germany but a direct and ongoing relationship from the turn of the century through the Nazi era. Key eugenicists in the United States, such as Charles Davenport, Harry Laughlin, superintendent of the Eugenics Records Office, and their corporate and academic supporters closely allied themselves with Eugen Fischer, Fritz Lenz, and other leading German eugenicists. U.S. and German eugenicists worked together through the International Society for Racial Hygiene. Laughlin, who successfully lobbied the U.S. Congress to pass the 1924 anti-immigrant National Origins Act, would later receive an honorary degree from the University of Heidelberg, in 1936. In 1934, the California eugenics movement organized an exhibit of the German eugenics program, showing it during the American Public Health Association annual meeting. Five years later, American eugenicists met with Fischer, then director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics, and with Wolfgang Abel, the SS anthropologist who had been in charge of the sterilization campaigns against the Gypsies, the Afro-Germans, and the Africans under German colonial rule.

**Nazi Sterilization of Afro-Germans**

*We want to prevent ... poisoning the entire bloodstream of the race.*  
—Counselor of the Reich Ministry of the Interior<sup>21</sup>

Hitler subscribed to the so-called *Entmischung* thesis, which rejected those eugenicist supporters who argued that eugenics led to a betterment of the superior race, *Entmischung* proponents believed that after many generations something akin to pure racial types would reemerge out of mixed-race people. However, these people would still be inferior, disproving the "betterment" goal of so-called positive eugenics. Only in the most exceptional of cases, it was argued, would betterment occur.<sup>22</sup> The most direct implication for Blacks in Germany (as well as other racial groups) was another rationalization for stopping their reproduction, if not their existence altogether. Race mixture, in other words, left a permanent contamination that could only be arrested, short of genocide, by sterilization. Although the Nuremberg laws and other statutes forbade the sexual liaison between Aryans and other races, the Nazis wanted to guarantee that the generation of mixed African and German children living under National Socialism would be the last. The racial hygiene attack on the Rhineland children was the basis of a discourse on race driven by biology that merged with the Nazi racial ideology in Germany. In the three decades leading up to the turn of Hitler's brainwashing eugenics movement, studies

ideological continuity between Germany U.S.

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GERMAN EUGENICS STARTED 3 DECADES

that produced a number of the key race doctors who would emerge in the 1930s. It is telling that the largest figure in Germany's pantheon of eugenicists was trained in the United States.

Alfred Ploetz, the acknowledged founder of German eugenics, spent time in the United States where undoubtedly he solidified his admiration for the South's segregation laws and popular practice.<sup>23</sup> In Germany, he would also be credited with coining the term *Rassenhygiene* (racial hygiene), whose deadly meaning would leave its bloodstain on the Nazi era.<sup>24</sup> He founded the first German eugenics journal in 1904, *Archiv fur Rassen- und Gesellschaftsbiologie* (Journal of Racial and Social Biology), and, a year later, organized the *Gesellschaft fur Rassenhygiene* (Society for Racial Hygiene).<sup>25</sup> In 1907, the influence of the Society for Racial Hygiene would lead to a major debate within the Reichstag regarding a proposed sterilization bill that would eventually be rejected. The issue and its advocates would not die, however. Increasingly, eugenicists found support from the Weimar government. Many proponents of eugenics were employed at state-funded *Rassenhygiene* institutes and clinics. A decade before Hitler came to power, eugenics had migrated from a theoretical discourse to an applied science and effort at social engineering.

Some have argued that anti-Semitism did not play a strong role in the pre-Hitler eugenics movement or that at least it was contested by a number of leading proponents who even considered the Jews to be Aryan.<sup>26</sup> In fact, German eugenicists were race conscious in their actions throughout. The Society for Racial Hygiene began performing sterilizations for "eugenic reasons," that is, eliminating "racial diseases," as early as 1919.<sup>27</sup> German eugenicists did not necessarily want initially to jump into the political fray, that is, take responsibility for the policy implications (and implementation) of their ideas. At first, they rejected the policy of mandatory government intervention. In October 1921, the Society for Race Hygiene adopted a twenty-one-point eugenics program that, inter alia, strongly opposed compulsory sterilization. Within a very short time, however, this attitude would change.

The German eugenics movement was strongly influenced by the work of the American eugenicists Ezra Gosney and Paul Popenoe. Gosney was a wealthy philanthropist who became obsessed with eugenics, and Popenoe was the editor of the *Journal of Heredity*. In 1929, Gosney and Popenoe published *Sterilization for Human Betterment*, a study of work and efficacy under the 1922 California sterilization law. A number of German eugenicists would claim that this book was the singular inspiration for the 1933 law enacted by the Nazis. As Dorothy Roberts notes, "the Nazis modeled their compulsory sterilization law after the one enacted in California."<sup>28</sup> That California statute and the Model Eugenic Sterilization Law developed by Harry Laughlin in 1922 had global impact. Notably, the Nazi law was more moderate than the one proposed by their American counterparts. The Laughlin model, which influenced the California and other state laws, called for sterilizing the mentally retarded, insane, criminal, people who were habitually drunk, blind, deaf, deformed, and economically dependent. In the United States, between 1929 and 1941, more than 70,000 people had been involuntarily

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*N.B.* sterilized. Under the California law twice as many Blacks as Whites were sterilized. The law allowed for sterilization based on "hereditary diseases" including weakmindedness, schizophrenia, insanity, epilepsy, blindness, deafness, bodily deformities, and alcoholism.<sup>29</sup> Even with all of these stipulations, there were, from the beginning, complaints that the law was not broad enough because it did not address hidden "defects" such as race or other traits that were not visible to the naked eye, a complaint that would be echoed in Nazi Germany.

The link between Nazism and the pre-1933 eugenics movement was strong. The anti-Semitic rantings of Ploetz and others informed the theoretical basis of Nazi thinking. Tucker contends that "while Hitler was still imprisoned in Landsberg am Lech fortress and just beginning *Mein Kampf*, renowned university scholars like [Fritz] Lenz and [Eugen] Fischer and cruder race theorists like [Hans] Gunther had already provided the intellectual and scientific foundation for much of what would become the Nazi program."<sup>30</sup> In 1931, at the conference of the National Socialist Pharmacists and Physicians, it was proposed that the Aryan or Nordic part of the German population be nurtured, a middle group that was near Aryan be tolerated, and the lowest, most unfit, and non-Aryan sector be sterilized.<sup>31</sup>

*Thesis* As this brief history demonstrates, eugenics was well established in Germany long before Hitler came to power, and before the fascist state turned its attention to the Afro-German young people and other Blacks. Although in 1927, addressing the issue of the mixed-race Rhineland children, an "official of the Bavarian Ministry of the Interior recommended sterilization, but the suggestion was turned down at Reich level because of the demoralizing effects upon the children's German mothers."<sup>32</sup> Six years later, on 14 July 1933, the Law for the Prevention of Genetically Defective Progeny passed and became the legal justification for the Nazis' euthanasia and sterilization programs. The German law passed, in part, due to the appropriation of legal and medical arguments that had been used to pass similar laws in the United States. The objective of the law was to prevent or stop the spreading of so-called negative and impure hereditary diseases and illnesses.

The Nazi sterilization law went into effect on 1 January 1934. (See accompanying Table 1.) According to Kevles, about 225,000 were sterilized in the first three years of the program.<sup>33</sup> Beginning on the effective date, medical professionals had to report all "unfit" individuals to the Hereditary Health Courts that had been created by the hundreds across Germany. According to the law, each court had a jurist and two physicians. This body would make a determination whether an individual was to be sterilized or not. There are no official or trustworthy figures on how many sterilizations were done overall after that time. Camp gives a figure of 300,000-400,000 individuals between 1934 and 1945.<sup>34</sup> She goes on to note, however, that those figures "exclude countless illegal sterilizations carried out in secret on the basis of racial/racist, rather than 'hereditary' or 'biological' grounds"<sup>35</sup> (emphasis in the original). These included, of course, Afro-Germans and others of African descent in addition to Gypsies and Jews. Finally, Muller-Hill estimates that 350,000-400,000 sterilizations were performed between 1934 and 1939, and then were effectively ended after the passage of new laws.<sup>36</sup>

### Law for the Protection of Hereditary Health: The Attempt to Improve the German Aryan Breed (July 14, 1933)

#### Article I.

- (1.) Anyone who suffers from an inheritable disease may be surgically sterilized if, in the judgment of medical science, it could be expected that his descendants will suffer from serious inherited mental or physical defects.
- (2.) Anyone who suffers from one of the following is to be regarded as inheritably diseased within the meaning of this law:
  1. congenital feeble-mindedness
  2. schizophrenia
  3. manic-depression
  4. congenital epilepsy
  5. inheritable St. Vitus dance (Huntington's Chorea)
  6. hereditary blindness
  7. hereditary deafness
  8. serious inheritable malformations
- (3.) In addition, anyone suffering from chronic alcoholism may also be sterilized.

#### Article II.

- (1.) Anyone who requests sterilization is entitled to it. If he be incapacitated or under a guardian because of low state of mental health or not yet 18 years of age, his legal guardian is empowered to make the request. In other cases of limited capacity the request must receive the approval of the legal representative. If a person be of age and has a nurse, the latter's consent is required.
- (2.) The request must be accompanied by a certificate from a citizen who is accredited by the German Reich stating that the person to be sterilized has been informed about the nature and consequence of sterilization.
- (3.) The request for sterilization can be recalled.

#### Article III.

Sterilization may also be recommended by:

- (1.) the official physician
- (2.) the official in charge of a hospital, sanitarium, or prison.

#### Article IV.

The request for sterilization must be presented in writing to, or placed in writing by, the office of the Health Inheritance Court. The statement concerning the request must be certified by a medical document or authenticated in some other way. The business office of the court must notify the official physician.

Article VII. The proceedings of the Health Inheritance Court are secret.

Article X. The Supreme Health Insurance Court retains final jurisdiction.

Source: *The Holocaust/Shoah Page*.

Other relevant laws included the 26 June 1935 Law for the Alteration of the Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Disease Progeny and the 18 October 1935 Law for the Protection of Hereditary Health of the German People. The former sanctioned compulsory abortion (for up to six months!), while the latter required that all those who

sought to get married carry a "certificate of fitness to marry."<sup>37</sup> Also, the Nazi eugenics racial program was one of "weed" and "breed." The SS chief, Heinrich Himmler, instituted the *Lebensborn* (The Well of Life) program that consisted of encouraging SS members to impregnate as many racially suitable women as they could who would then be given the best prenatal care possible in spalike resorts set up across Germany. Moral issues notwithstanding, these women were both married and unmarried.

On 13 April 1933, three months after Hitler came to power, Hermann Göring, the Prussian minister of the interior and one of Hitler's most loyal henchman, ordered data to be collected on the Rhineland children from the local authorities in Dusseldorf, Cologne, Koblenz, and Aachen. Dr. William Abel of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Heredity, and Eugenics used the information collected from 145 children to conclude that these children were racially inferior and something should be done to "prevent their reproducing."<sup>38</sup> Around the same time, Dr. Hans Macco, who produced a pamphlet, *Racial Problems in the Third Reich*, that also called for the sterilization of mixed-raced children as well as Gypsies, echoed these conclusions.<sup>39</sup> And in that same year, Hitler's minister of agriculture Richard-Walther Darre, made the case that for the future of the German nation, the Rhineland children had to be taken care of. In the harshest terms possible, he wrote:

It is essential to exterminate the leftovers from the black Shame on the Rhine. These mulatto children were created either through rape or by white mothers who were whores. In any case, there exists not the slightest moral obligation toward these racially foreign offspring. . . . Thus, as a Rhinelander I demand: sterilization of all mulattoes with whom we were saddled by the black Shame at the Rhine. This measure has to be carried out within the next two years. Otherwise it is too late, with the results that hundreds of years later this racial deterioration will still be felt.<sup>40</sup>

Since the 1933 sterilization law did not allow for sterilization based solely on race, the Nazis were aware that they had to rewrite or amend the law, create a new law, or operate outside their own regulations. In the end, the Nazis simple choose to carry on in secret and in violation of the ordinance, usually employing the mask of "parental" consent. Applying a formal reading of the statute, as Friedlander noted, "The sterilization law did not, however, permit sterilization of children whose only hereditary disease was their race. The ministry decided to sterilize them secretly."<sup>41</sup> The counselor of the Reich Ministry of the Interior, responsible for the enforcement of the sterilization law, made it clear what the Nazi objectives were with the law when he stated, "We want to prevent . . . poisoning the entire bloodstream of the race."<sup>42</sup> Perhaps few outside the Nazi leadership saw this as the first step in a diabolical plan eventually to physically eliminate the "racially" unsuitable. The complete dominance of the Nazi state over the political and social life of the nation ensured that legal recourse was closed and popular resistance, to the degree it existed, was muted and brutally repressed. Although initially, about half of those sterilized were labeled as "feeble-minded," this charade would soon

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STERILIZATION DONE IN SECRET

be dropped. It is also evident that feeble-mindedness itself was a cover that could be used to target any group, especially given the racial hierarchy that informed Nazi and, more generally, German thinking.

The decision to sterilize the Rhineland children was explicit. On 11 March 1935, a group that was part of the Committee of Experts for Population and Racial Policy met to address "ways to solve the question of [the Rhineland] Bastards." The children who had been born during the occupation were about to reach childbearing age, an unacceptable danger to the Nazis. It was suggested by one attendee, Dr. Walter Gross, and agreed upon by the group that the way to handle the situation was by sterilization of the children. First doing an anthropological investigation was mere window dressing for a policy of slow genocide. For unknown reasons, it took another two years to decide that there would be no pretense of a legal cover—such as extending or amending the 1933 law—and that the parent(s) or guardian(s) would be forced to sign consent statements initiating sterilization procedures.

Rather than have the process go through the Hereditary Health Courts that had been created by the 1933 law, the Gestapo created Special Commission No. 3, whose task was to locate, identify, and implement "the discrete sterilization of the Rhineland bastards."<sup>43</sup> The members of Special Commission No. 3 included Eugen Fischer, Wilhelm Abel, and Heinrich Schade.<sup>44</sup> Abel was in charge of the Department on Race at the Wilhelm Institute run by Fischer.<sup>45</sup> Among the characteristics that were attributed to the *Mischlings* by the Nazi leadership and Reich scientists were "biological inferiority," "disharmonies in the phenotypic appearance," "preponderantly negative character traits," and "torn by inner conflicts."<sup>46</sup> The medical attacks on the young Afro-Germans and other Blacks, as were all national racial policies, were sanctioned by Hitler himself.

Between 1935 and 1937, at least 385 Rhineland children were sterilized, according to available documents. These were mostly done in open secret. Hitler's race experts collected data on 385 of the Rhineland children in the Bonn and Cologne areas with the collaboration of churches, schools, and other institutions. Once identified, the youths were taken from their schools or homes, usually with the coerced signature of their parent or legal guardian, and brought before a special commission and tried. In nearly every instance, it was determined that the person on trial should be sterilized; the person was then taken away and the procedure performed.<sup>47</sup> The Bonn University Women's Clinic and the Evangelical Hospital in Cologne-Sulz were among the sites used for the sterilizations.<sup>48</sup> Besides the young people, black men who had been sterilized had to carry certificates showing that they had had a vasectomy.

While information concerning black sterilization exists about Afro-German and African men, there were also a significant number of sterilizations of black women although exactly how many were done is unknown. Nazi romanticizing of German womanhood did not extend to women of African descent. This is an open arena of research and likely to demonstrate some important differences in rationale and argument. It is known that in at least one instance, a young black girl was saved at the last minute. Doris Reiprich, whose Cameroonian father bought German citizenship for fifty gold marks in 1896 and eventually married a white German woman, was taken to

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the clinic to be sterilized in 1943. Extremely distraught, she cried and apparently aroused the sympathy of a man at the clinic who let her go. She eventually married and had two children, including one daughter with blue eyes and blonde hair.<sup>49</sup>

The ritual of an examination generated a report that served as the legal document authorizing sterilization. A typical report or finding noted the undesirable racial traits possessed by Blacks. The 2 June 1937 report from Frankfurt on Marianne Braun, who was born 16 May 1925, describes how she was driven to the hospital and questioned, with the inevitable conclusion:

According to statements by the mother and the anthropological opinion it was established that Marianne Braun is a German citizen who, as the descendent of colored occupation forces, has characteristics alien to her race. The father of the child was then informed about the results of the examination, and it was pointed out to him that the descendents of the child would retain the colored blood alien to the race, and that for this reason propagation by the child is undesirable. He was thoroughly informed about the character and the consequences of sterilization.<sup>50</sup>

A similar report was issued regarding Cacilie Borinski, who was born on 7 April 1922. The 17 June 1937 report from Bonn notes that her father was an American soldier. As with Marianne Braun, it is noted that Borinski is a German citizen. The document states:

The Commission has reached the following conclusion: The German citizen Cacilie Borinski . . . is the descendent of a member of the former colored occupation troops and distinctly has the corresponding characteristics. Therefore she is to be sterilized.<sup>51</sup>

A third example is the report done on Josef Feck. His report was issued on 19 June 1937 in Frankfurt. Again, the language is chillingly clinical and strikingly similar to those already noted:

The German citizen Josef Feck, born 26 September 1920, and residing in Mainz is a descendent of the former colonial occupation troops (North Africa) and distinctly displays the corresponding anthropological characteristics. For that reason he is to be sterilized. His mother consents to the sterilization.<sup>52</sup>

More than fifty years later, victims of these torturous operations would speak in cold bitterness of the psychological, let alone physical, destruction they felt. The Afro-German Hans Hauck, who was featured in the film *Black Survivors of the Holocaust*, tells sourly of how the Gestapo came and got him and his grandmother into a car and took them to the Health Office, where he was examined and measured. A decision was made to sterilize him without the benefit of anesthesia. After it was over, Hauck was given a vasectomy certificate and warned not to have sexual relations with white German

women. He also had to sign papers stating that he would commit to that agreement and that his sterilization was not forced.<sup>53</sup> Another Afro-German shown in *Black Survivors*, Thomas Holzhauer, is also resentful about being operated on by the Nazis. He was picked up along with his sister and taken to the Elizabeth Hospital in Darmstadt. He remembers distinctly that the doctor, who was wearing a Nazi uniform, "made two cuts around my testicles" during the procedure. There is more than a little anger when he tells the filmmakers, "Sometimes I'm glad I could not have any children."

The deleterious impact of these sterilizations on Black Germans cannot be overstated. This slow holocaust terrorized an entire generation of Blacks. While there is no evidence that any of the U.S. eugenicists were aware of the secret sterilizations that had been carried out against Afro-Germans, the threat of sterilization had been addressed fairly early in the Nazi era and was even discussed in U.S. black newspapers of the time.

Although a number of American eugenicists would begin to break with and criticize the fascist tendencies of the movement as early as the early 1930s, it was not until the early 1940s that the discrediting was full and that nearly all involved in the U.S.-based movement would denounce the policies of the Nazis, policies that they had championed only a short time before. Without rejecting eugenics as a "science," many contended that the violent and unrelenting execution of the Jews of Europe was not what they had been advocating. Instead, they argued, they wanted to pursue a course of "positive" and noncoercive encouragement to breed a better racial stock for the nation. There were others, of course, who continued to embrace the Nazis long after they had been exposed for the medical terrors that were being unleashed against German citizens. In 1936, upon receiving a University of Heidelberg honorary doctorate award, the Eugenics Record Office's Laughlin stated that the award was "evidence of a common understanding of German and American scientists of the nature of eugenics."<sup>54</sup>

#### *African Americans, Afro-Germans, and the Response to Sterilization*

As early as 1934, a year before the Nazis officially met and decided to carry out their program of slow extermination of German Blacks, the issue of the sterilization of Afro-Germans and other Blacks in Germany was being raised in the U.S. black press. On 17 February 1934, the *Washington Afro-American*, in a page-one story, warned about a "new Nazi plan is to sterilize all children born as a result of affairs between French African troops and German women during the after-war occupation."<sup>55</sup> The report of the plan came from a black Republican representative, Oscar Stanton DePriest, who was the first African American elected to Congress in the twentieth century and the only Black in the U.S. Congress at the time. Although elected from a black enclave of Chicago, DePriest (as would others to follow) saw himself and was seen as a voice of black interests nationally and internationally. Though powerless to affect the status of black America and the broader black world, DePriest used his congressional platform to articulate a politics of resistance. He was far from being a radical, but in Jim Crow America, he had little choice but to become a "race" man, if only by default, and articulate the real, perceived, and threatened grievances of black people.<sup>56</sup>

The black movement against sterilization was addressed at the intersection of race, class, and gender. Roberts points out the contradictory relationship that many African Americans, including a number of leading intellectuals and civil rights leaders, had with the eugenics movement. Criticism of the so-called immoral behavior of lower-class African Americans by Du Bois, parts of the black press, and other black leaders led them to support the birth control movement that overlapped substantially with the eugenics movement. Their arguments reflected many of the same claims of "betterment" spoken by more racist elements. This debate was also a gendered discourse in a number of ways. Black women, held responsible for the socialization of their children, were principally held accountable for the "irresponsible" behavior that was manifest in the black community. As a class, they were also chastised for having children out of wedlock, promiscuity, and attempts at gaining equal footing with men, black men in particular. The responsibility of black men in these instances was elided and simply not a part of the debate. Neither was a contextualized framework that recognized the socially driven forces that determined under what circumstances poor blacks, women, and, especially, poor black women could exercise the agency necessary to control any of these factors. A (black-white) matrix of power from any number of vantage points always resulted with white men at the top, followed by white women, trailed by black men and, last, black women.

While white men could freely exercise sexual power over white and black women, and racial power over black men, white women were circumscribed to exhibit only racial power, still a very significant force nevertheless. Black men, trumped by the racial power of white women and the totalizing power of white men, were then left with only a limited gender power whose boundaries were thrown over the political and social spaces of black women. Thus, black women were doubly vulnerable due not only to the direct assault upon their physical and psychological being by white men, black men, and white women, but also to the explanatory race-sex discourse that then justified their exclusion, marginalization, and oppression in the first instance.

Though real and expressive of the diasporic solidarity tendencies always present in black political life, the alarm sounded by some black newspapers about the sterilization threat to Afro-Germans and Africans was compromised by the political frame and behavior of black male leaders and intellectuals of the period regarding eugenics-driven birth control in the black community. Beyond the fact that there was precious little that African Americans could do to prevent the attacks on Afro-Germans, little had been concretely done to stop the profoundly racialized eugenics and sterilization campaigns that operated in the United States. It is not known if Blacks who were sterilized by the Nazis ever knew that their kinfolk of sorts had raised the issue, but no direct action of prevention was possible and none was forthcoming.

### **Conclusion**

Sterilization was perhaps the worst action that could be taken by the Nazis against Blacks in Germany short of mass execution. It not only destroyed the future of individual Blacks but also sought to erase any future blackness on German soil. At the same

time, the sterilization option reflected the complicated relationship that the Nazis had toward its black population. Unable to win consensus on extermination, yet compelled to address the "otherness" of Blacks, they used sterilization as a gradual, but inexorable death, long-term erasure that, in part, solved some of Germany's black dilemma. Hitler and other Nazi leaders made it clear that Blacks were not desired in the Third Reich, but a number of factors out of their control such as the international situation forced them to compromise.

Yet sterilization was not the end of the story. While the efforts at sterilization were an initial means by which the Nazis attempted to address one of their black dilemmas, at least as it concerned young Afro-Germans, a more evil and fatal destiny awaited many more. In the period leading up to the war and during the war, the Nazis would initiate a hurricane of brutality and death that swept all in its path. One of the most tragic legacies of Nazism was the construction, peopling, and administration of those earthbound abysses of hell known as concentration camps. For millions of those who did not die on the spot at the hands of the Nazi onslaught from the East and the West, as well as their enemies within Germany, the last stop in this life was in the thousands of death, concentration, labor, transition, and prisoner of war camps. Many of the black victims of sterilization would end up in the camps as well as other Blacks who were unlucky enough to be caught. It is to their stories that we turn next.