

Public Hygiene to Racial Cleansing: Scientific Racism, Eugenics, and the Development of the Operation T-4 Euthanasia Program

Elizabeth Anne Noren*

M.A. in History, Department of History, Cleveland State University, Westlake City School District, Westlake, Ohio, USA

*Corresponding author: Dr. Elizabeth Anne Noren, M.A. in History, Department of History, Cleveland State University, Westlake City School District, Westlake, Ohio, USA, Tel: +374 10 23-72-61; E-mail: noren@wlake.org

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Abstract

The concept of creating a superior master race was prevalent in western society in the wake of European imperialism and nationalist movements. It was no surprise that in Adolf Hitler's mind Germany offered the ideal setting and racial stock to make this concept a reality. The only obstacles in his way were those deemed undesirable in German society, namely the mental and physically handicapped, and the Jews. The rise of the social sciences and the new belief in Social Darwinism allowed Hitler and the Reich to seize upon the new findings in the world of the natural sciences to find a means to prune German society of its unfit. To find a means to prune society Hitler and his supporters only needed to turn to other western powers that embraced the notion of race betterment, such as the United States, to find the necessary means to cut-off the supply of the socially unfit. But it was not even within the natural sciences that they found their answer to their race dilemma. Instead, it was within the pseudo-science of eugenics and the findings of America's lead eugenicists that Hitler found the means to perfect his master race. This paper will show how American eugenic law and concepts of race betterment contributed to the development of the Nazi T-4 program. By examining the writings of both American and German eugenic supporters one will be able to see how the pseudo-science of eugenics helped fuel scientific racism in western society and in particular, within Nazi Germany.

Keywords: Eugenics; Social darwinism; Adolf hitler; Scientific-racism; Jews; Mentally handicapped; Physically handicapped; Euthanasia; Sterilization; T-4

Research Objectives

Adolf Hitler's vision [1] of a superior master race hardly served as an innovative concept in western society in the early part of the twentieth century. In fact, the belief in the supremacy of one's given race had been embedded in western social thought throughout history. By the late nineteenth century, the western ideals of economic and political competition, as evidenced in imperialism and nationalism, fueled European and American dominance and allowed for overt displays of racism to emerge throughout the world. But even within the insular realm of western society, race and class stratification occurred. It was in this period that European and American elites, fueled by Social Darwinian theory, substantiated the beliefs evident in what can only be characterized as the development of scientific racism. To further their beliefs, these elites utilized the pseudoscience of eugenics; a belief that through the application of evolutionary science and genetics society could improve and perfect itself. And though race, ethnicity, and class all acted as indicators of the stratified social structure by many of these elites, it would be Adolf Hitler that would take the notion of eugenics to a whole new perverted level through his adoption of, not only compulsory sterilization but also, euthanasia. Hitler neglected to recognize the impetus behind the foundation of the eugenics movement; the idea of perfecting humanity. He never intended for all of humanity to be perfected. Instead, Hitler used the

eugenic policies developed by other western cultures, in particular America's model, as a means to create a singular superior society comprised solely of the Aryan race at the expense of those in German society deemed to be unfit.

Throughout history one can see how various groups often implemented measures to secure the perpetuation of their own existence over that of an opposing group. From ancient times to present day, one can see evidence of the stratification of society between the dominant class and their subordinate subjects. For example, the history of ancient Rome illustrates how the empire's leaders sought to expand their economic holdings by subjugating a variety of indigenous people incorporated into their realm through land acquisition by way of military force. Rome's intention was not only to expand their geographic holdings but also to reaffirm their dominance in the Mediterranean world¹. Following the lead of their predecessors, western imperial powers propagated the idea of European hegemony to penetrate the ever increasing globalized world. Colonial powers often used their European pedigree and Christian faith as supremacy devices to legitimate their dominance on the world stage². Hitler too believed in the concept of hegemony. But for Hitler, hegemony was never intended to be applied equitably to the aggregate of European powers. Rather, Hitler believed that true power and authority equated to the Aryan people that he perceived to be of the utmost superior of racial stocks. It was because of this sense of superiority that Hitler believed that the Aryan people deserved the proper landscape to perpetuate their kind. And Hitler often looked to history as a model for his own expansionist intentions for Germany. In

¹ Hans Kohn, *The Age of Nationalism: The First Era of Global History* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1962), 31.

² Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Myths of Gender: Biological Theories about Women and Men*, rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 9-10.

fact, Hitler would use the field of history as one means to legitimate his intentions for German supremacy by way of the Aryan race.

Hitler acknowledges his dependency on history in *Mein Kampf* [2]. In reflective fashion Hitler comments on how his engagement in his schooling included his exemplary performance in the subject of history. For Hitler, history provided a path to follow to secure a unified Germany. And when he “examined the results of that period” during his academic career he could see how important his achievements in the disciplines of history and geography were to his political ambitions³. Hitler conjectured that it was because of his achievements in the academic discipline of history that he could reason why he became a German nationalist. He further states that, “world history became a never-failing source of my understanding of the historical events of the present, that is, politics. What is more, I do not want to learn it, but I want it to teach me”⁴. And it would be his veneration of history that would become his justification for promoting and cultivating an Aryan population for Germany. Hitler believed that history was a story of racial conflicts and that Germans were destined to rule the world but were permeated by inferior races, namely the Jews⁵. But Hitler’s validation of Aryan supremacy did not require him to delve too far back to antiquity to attain legitimacy for his racial ideal. His belief in racial supremacy need only be traced to nineteenth-century western intellectual thought and the development of the social sciences. These intellectual fields provided not only historic reasoning for Hitler’s proposal of cleansing the Germanic racial pool but also, Social Darwinian theory [3] and the rising field of eugenics augmented his racial purification agenda⁶.

At the turn of the twentieth century, academics and intellectuals, including those in Germany, found inspiration in the evolutionary discovery by Charles Darwin a half century earlier. Observing that the differences between the species could be seen in variations on the older genus form, Darwin hypothesized that the species evolved through modifications that improved the order and allowed for its perpetuation. Darwin argued that natural selection occurred in any environment when a divergent species appeared to threaten the established higher order and as a result of this perceived threat, a struggle for survival ensued⁷. This intellectual group believed that Charles Darwin’s biological theory of natural selection could be applied to the social model⁸. Their school of thought became known as Social Darwinism. The Darwinian notion of ‘survival of the fittest’, though actually coined by Herbert Spencer [4], worked well in free

market economies and so it was not too far of a stretch for Social Darwinists to believe it could be applied to society as well⁹. The problem with Social Darwinian theory was that they were applying Darwin’s biological model to a socially constructed institution¹⁰. But to further substantiate their position Social Darwinists sought a means to utilize science as a way to bolster their argument for racial purity. Together with the spread of the public hygiene movement, the development of eugenics, a term meaning “well-born,” helped to legitimate western elites’ belief system that can only be equated as scientific racism.

By the 1920s, one’s social position in western culture was often determined by race, specifically those individuals that were not considered white. The idea of whiteness, or rather those of Anglo-Saxon pedigree, caused leaders in the west, including Hitler, to utilize Social Darwinian theory and the field of eugenics as the means to justify their ideas of perfecting their existing and future populations. Furthermore, Hitler, like his political contemporaries, utilized the popular writings of some of the leading social theorists to emerge from the Social Darwin movement including Comte Joseph de Gobineau [5-7], Karl Pearson [8], Herbert Spencer [9], and Americans William Graham Sumner [10-14] and Lothrop Stoddard [15]. These authorities in the field of Social Darwinism developed a race ideology that lent credence to their form of scientific racism. It was in the theories of Social Darwinism that social scientists and public leaders found the necessary scientific reasoning to procure a perceived superior and sanitized race.

In the western world, the classification of humans in terms of race, class, and gender served a distinct social function in hierarchal form. Racial purity was first proposed in 1853 by Comte Joseph de Gobineau in his racial ideological treatise entitled *Essai sur l’Inégalité des races humaines* (The Inequality of Human Races)¹¹. The affluent Gobineau promoted a stratified racial order, situating the Negroid variety [Gobineau’s emphasis] on the lowest strata while placing the white race, specifically those of Aryan pedigree, at the top of the societal structure¹². Gobineau argued against the intermingling of racial blood because it diluted the desirable traits so evident in his determined higher racial order¹³. Heeding Gobineau’s warning, British-born Karl Pearson [16] promoted the concept of a homogenized Anglo-Saxon race by the turn-of-the century. Pearson’s thinking aligned with Gobineau’s position and he argued that, “We have to remember that man is subject to the universal law of inheritance, and that a dearth of

³ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (excerpt), translated by Ralph Manheim, in *Hang-ups from Way Back*, edited by Frederick Gentles and Melvin Steinfield, Vol. 2 of *Historical Myths and Canons* (San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1970), 189..

⁴ *Ibid*, 190.

⁵ Anthony P. Adamthwaite, *The Making of the Second World War*, reprint (New York: Routledge, 1992), 40.

⁶ Gretchen E. Schafft, *From Racism to Genocide: Anthropology in the Third Reich* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 222.

⁷ Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection: Or the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1896), 39, 75, 97.

⁸ Suzanne E. Evans, *Forgotten Crimes: the Holocaust and people with Disabilities* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2004), 97.

⁹ Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, rev. ed. (Boston, Beacon Press, 1992), 87-90.

¹⁰ Robert C. Bannister, *Social Darwinism: Science and Myth in Anglo-American Social Thought* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979) 182-186.

¹¹ S.T. Joshi, preface to Comte Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, 1853-1855, “The Inequality of Human Races”, in *Documents of American Prejudice: an Anthology of Writings on Race from Thomas Jefferson to David Duke* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 64.

¹² Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, 1853-1855, “The Inequality of Human Races” in *Documents of American Prejudice: an Anthology of Writings on Race from Thomas Jefferson to David Duke*, S.T. Joshi ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 64-66.

¹³ *Ibid*, 68.

capacity may arise if we recruit our society from the inferior and not the better stock¹⁴. And to Pearson and his contemporaries, eugenic practices seemed the logical means to eradicate the unfit within the social structure so as to allow for a stronger and more cohesive citizenry to emerge¹⁵.

The term 'ethnic cleansing' corrupts observation, interpretation, ethical judgment and decision-making, thereby undermining the aim of public health. Public health should lead the way in expunging the term 'ethnic cleansing' from official use. 'Ethnic cleansing' bleaches the atrocities of genocide, leading to inaction in preventing current and future genocides.

Western powers had utilized the eugenics movement's arguments of racial purity and the eradication of the unfit to benefit their global position since the turn-of-the-century. By 1933, the Nazis recognized the merit in the rationale eugenics provided for dominate power structures. Already embedded in German culture since 1890, eugenics was an accepted belief system and mode of operation for bettering society. Many Germans subscribed to the notion of creating a stronger species.¹⁶ But for the Nazis, dominance by way of racial purity would allow for their perpetuation of a singular superior human race as believed to be evident only within the Aryan people. The Nazis "vision of a healthy and ethnically homogenous community [was] driven by a racist ideology."¹⁷ And the means needed to allow for this objective to come to fruition could be found in the continued application of the pseudoscience of eugenics.

Eugenics allowed western leaders a means to "scientize" the social structure and in essence, a means to cleanse the racial pool. Science offered legitimacy to social reform for western leaders because the discipline seemed to offer irrefutable evidence to their social reasoning, a reasoning that in itself was irrefutably biased. According to Ellen Brantlinger [17,18], "Science, a highly social activity, is not sealed off from the values of the society in which it is practiced"¹⁸. One way of cleaning-up society was to discourage undesirables from perpetuating their kind (negative eugenics) while simultaneously promoting those with desirable racial stock to procreate (positive eugenics). And what often would occur was that the dominant power structure would resort to negative eugenics because of the immediacy

of the results that cut off the supply of socially inferior racial stock, either by way of compulsory sterilization or in certain cases they would apply euthanasia.

But who determines for a society the criterion for what is deemed desirable and what would be determined as unfit? Science, or in the case of eugenics a pseudoscience, was "often used as justification to propose, project, and enact racist social policies" in western culture¹⁹. It was within the political agenda that the scientific factor and reasoning was removed. But when dictated by the dominant power structure, science and politics superseded the rights of the individuals in society. Ironically, Herbert Spencer [19], famous for his catchphrase 'survival of the fittest,' supported the concept of individualism²⁰. As long as individuals remained isolated and were relegated to remain static within their own social grouping then progress would continue²¹. But Spencer cautioned that, "When roads and other means of transit become numerous, the different districts [classes] begin to assume different functions, and to become mutually dependent" and this dependency would place an undue burden upon the state which would have negative repercussions for all members of society²². And for Nazi Germany in the early 1930s, the negative repercussions could be seen in the mentally and physically handicapped.

The interdependency of progress stemming from the growth in industry caused society to evolve into a heterogeneous organism. As a result of this intermingling, a reciprocal working relationship evolved threatening the social structure. A threat that American William Graham Sumner would argue could be illustrated by the dependency on the state of those individuals living on the periphery of society namely the physically handicapped, the feeble-minded, or in the case of Hitler, it also included the Jews²³. Sumner rejected the concept of collective welfare to provide for the needs of social misfits. He believed that collective welfare placed too much pressure on the state to help the weak at the expense of the socially fit²⁴. Sumner's argument would lend credence to the Nazi agenda. The socially unfit in Germany, as seen in the patients housed in state run medical institutions, placed too much of a burden on the state and action was needed to alleviate the state's liability.

¹⁴ Karl Pearson, *National Life from the Standpoint of Science*, 1900, ed. Peter Halsall, from the *Modern History Source Book: Violent Racist Anti-Semitism*. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1900pearsonl.html>. (accessed February 5, 2010).

¹⁵ Wendy Kline, *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 103.

¹⁶ Shelia Faith Weiss, "German Eugenics, 1890-1933," in *Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race*, editor Sara J. Bloomfield (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 15.

¹⁷ Sarah J. Bloomfield, *Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 7.

¹⁸ Ellen Brantlinger, *Sterilization of People with Disabilities: Issues, Perspectives, and Cases* (Westport: Auburn House, 1995), 3.

¹⁹ Rutledge M. Dennis, "Social Darwinism, Scientific Racism, and the Metaphysics of Race," *The Journal of Negro Education* 64, issue 3 (Summer, 1995): 243.

²⁰ Peter Halsall, preface to Herbert Spencer's "Progress: Its Law and Cause." excerpt from *The Westminster Review* 67 (Apr., 1857), ed. Peter Halsall, from the *Modern History Source Book: Social Darwinism*. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/spencer-darwin.html>. 1996. (Accessed February 5, 2010).

²¹ Herbert Spencer, "Progress: Its Law and Cause." excerpt from *The Westminster Review* 67 (Apr., 1857), ed. Peter Halsall, from the *Modern History Source Book: Social Darwinism*. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/spencer-darwin.html>. 1996. (Accessed February 5, 2010).

²² Ibid.

²³ William Graham Sumner quoted in Mike Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 108-111.

²⁴ William Graham Sumner, *The Challenge of Facts*, 1914. Paul Halsall, *Modern History Sourcebook: Fordham University*, 1996. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/spencer-darwin.html> (accessed February 05, 2010).

It is the interdependency within society that Hitler would have issue with in regards to not only the mentally and physically handicapped, but also the Jews. For his Fatherland to be truly free Hitler believed that Germany needed to eradicate the Jews from the landscape. Hitler stated that the Jews saw this interdependency as an advantage for their group by infiltrating many facets of German society “be it [in] religion, socialism, democracy, [it] is to the Jew only a means to an end, the way to satisfy his lust for gold and domination”²⁵. Fritz Lenz, one of Hitler’s leading racial hygienists, saw the Jews as a race that sought control over other people while the rest of humanity sought control over nature²⁶. For Hitler, the Jews only sought glory on an individualized level and did not care to secure the well-being of the collective nation²⁷. Nation before self was the focus of the Nazi party. Individualism did not serve a purpose within the Reich and therefore those deemed unfit, be it the mentally and physically handicapped or the Jew, offered no viable purpose to the strength of the state and therefore, were not afforded the right of social membership.

The idea that collective welfare superseded the rights of the individual was in accord with Germany’s existing public hygiene movement. Steeped in scientific legitimacy, public hygiene became the scientific mechanism to allow for a political agenda to be implemented. Leaders during this period often equated public hygiene to science. According to John P. Jackson [20], these political and eugenics leaders utilized the social sciences as a means to situate political and social problems as their objects of study²⁸. Jackson concurs with Hamilton Cravens’ [21-26] position that there is nothing scientific in principles or application at all about Social Darwinism or eugenics²⁹. Instead, eugenics acted “as a ‘modern way’ of talking about social problems in biologizing [author’s word choice] terms”³⁰. Social leaders and eugenicists selected “the very objects of scientific study” based on the “reference to the needs and values of a particular society,” namely their own³¹. And their application of science incorporated biased testing, methodology, and corrupted results to aid their political objective³². Kurt Danzinger [27] posits that the use of psychology, in conjunction with eugenics, was not “motivated [by] the normative study of individual performance” but rather by “an interest in establishing who would most effectively conform to certain socially

established criteria”³³. Often times, the dominant political structure established this criteria and in Germany by the early 1930s the political structure was dominated by the Nazi party.

Many western elites, including the Nazis, heeded the racial messages of the Social Darwinists. The Nazis believed it would be in their best interest if the social stratification of the races remained separate and segregated so as not to taint the purity of their perceived superior race³⁴. But these segregated functions could not remain a separate and autonomous static condition. Infiltration of those deemed unfit was bound to taint the racial pool, and the Nazis, like their predecessors within the Reichswehr, needed to address the perceived immediacy of this supposed threat. In a letter addressed to Herr Adolf Gemlich, a member of the Reichswehr during the Weimar Republic, dated September 16, 1919, Hitler responded to the rising concerns of the “Jewish question” within the German state. Hitler negated the religious aspect of Judaism and instead defined Judaism as a race³⁵. He called for “Entfernung – [the] irrevocable removal of the Jews”³⁶. For the Nazis, the Jews were considered a major part of Germany’s social burden. And the Nazis were not unique in this thought process in terms of the threat of the socially unfit. Though he did not focus on the Jews specifically, the American political scientist and eugenicist Lothrop Stoddard readily believed that the unfit presented a clear and present danger to the social order and indicated as much in his written work. And after spending time in Germany, Stoddard would come to readily agree with the Nazi assessment of the Jews³⁷.

In his 1922 book entitled *The Revolt Against Civilization*, Lothrop Stoddard argued that social degradation was a result of “racial impoverishment, which destroyed the great civilizations of the past and which threatens to destroy our own”³⁸. Stoddard argued that a positive environment alone was not enough to correct the social ills of the unfit. He believed that “environment may bring out all there is in a man, but heredity predetermines what there is to bring”³⁹. According to Stoddard, one way to segregate the unfit from the fit was to institutionalize the undesirable individuals, a practice that was well received and admired by western elites, namely Hitler⁴⁰. In reciprocal fashion Stoddard also admired the comprehensive racial policies of the

²⁵ Adolf Hitler, First Anti-Semitic Writing, September 16, 1919. Ed. Peter Halsall, from the Modern History Source Book: Violent Racist Anti-Semitism. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/pwh/naziviews.html> (Accessed February 5, 2010).

²⁶ Elof Axel Carlson, *The Unfit: A History of a Bad Idea* (Cold Spring Harbor: Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press, 2001), 322.

²⁷ Adolf Hitler, First Anti-Semitic Writing, September 16, 1919.

²⁸ John P. Jackson, “Argumentum Ad Hominem in the Science of Race,” *Argumentation and Advocacy* 43 (Summer, 2006): 21.

²⁹ Hamilton Cravens, *The Triumph of Evolution: American Scientists and the Hereditary-Environment Controversy, 1900-1941* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), 53.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

³¹ J.M. Fish, *Race and Intelligence: Separating Science from Myth*, (Mahwah: Erlbaum Publishing, 2002), 47.

³² Jackson, “Argumentum Ad Hominem in the Science of Race,” 22.

³³ Kurt Danzinger, *Constructing the Subject: Historical Origins of Psychological Research* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 108.

³⁴ Daniel J. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 84.

³⁵ Hitler, First Anti-Semitic Writing, September 16, 1919.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Stefan Kuhl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 61-63.

³⁸ Lothrop Stoddard, *The Revolt Against Civilization* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1922), preface. Paul Halsall, *Modern History Sourcebook: Fordham University*, 1996. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/spencer-darwin.html> (accessed February 5, 2010).

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Nazis. Stoddard focused on two aspects of Hitler's race ideology: racialism, the notion that racial stocks were inherently different and therefore should not be crossed and eugenics, the belief in race betterment⁴¹.

Political leaders such as Hitler saw legitimacy in the arguments put forth by Stoddard. To preserve the Aryan stock in Germany measures needed to be introduced that would curb the tendency to reproduce those within the German population considered to be unfit. Compulsory sterilization provided the answer to address Nazi social concerns. Ultimately, the Nazi sterilization program would evolve into what would become the Nazi euthanasia program. Both programs can trace their roots to the legacy of Germany's public hygiene movement and in particular, turn-of-the-century eugenic policies⁴². Germany's public hygiene movement reflected the prevailing attitude of many western cultures and was not overtly reflective of what would become Nazi racial ideology.

Pre-Nazi Germany followed the lead of other western cultures in initially applying the concept of positive eugenics. Positive eugenics included promoting the act of procreation among society's best individuals⁴³. In fact by 1923, support for the desire to maintain the integrity of the Aryan race by way of procreation increased. Simultaneously, support for compulsory sterilization of non-Aryans began to increase in Germany as well⁴⁴. By the time the Nazis came to power their concept of eugenics did not subscribe to the notions of positive practices, at least not at the beginning. The Nazis believed positive eugenics could only work if the unfit were eradicated first⁴⁵. But before the Nazi takeover of the Weimar Republic, Germany's eugenic policy was aligned to that of many western societies, not a program based on annihilation but rather, one based on the overall betterment of society.

Like other western nations, Germany wanted to eradicate society of all the social degenerates, regardless of race, class, or gender, so as to secure the welfare of the collective nation⁴⁶. But by the time the Nazis came to power this aggregate approach to eugenics was refined. According to Elof Carlson [28], the Nazi eugenics movement was an intrinsic part of Nazi ideology, an ideology that's roots reflected the German physician Rudolf Virchow's public hygiene theory⁴⁷. But while Virchow's theory advocated for public hygiene he did not target a particular classification of individuals as a root cause for society's ills. It was the work of Virchow though that influenced the concept of racial hygiene for later German eugenicists.

The shift from public hygiene to racial hygiene evolved from the discourse of social theory that advocated a stratified racial structure.

Race hygiene differed from public hygiene because it removed the nurture variable from the "nature versus nurture" debate that was prevalent in the social science of psychology⁴⁸. As a result, nature, or rather race, was no longer a variable or part of the debate. Rather, race became the constant in what constituted racial purity. For the Nazis the only true constant of race was Aryan stock. All other race variations would taint their racial pool and inevitably result in the interdependency between the racial classes that Hitler feared would occur⁴⁹. Hitler found his answer in the research of Alfred Ploetz [29,30], a German physician and dedicated eugenicist, who developed the concept of racial hygiene from his studies of Virchow's hygiene theories. Ploetz, like most eugenicists from this period, promoted the eradication of the degenerate gene pools that were often a result of perceived racial poisoning.

Alfred Ploetz advocated for racial purification but like Virchow, Ploetz did not target one group specifically. He believed that "the health of society, construed as an atemporal [sic] genetic collective, should be patrolled by medical experts" that determine who should reproduce and who should not have that advantage based on their racial composite⁵⁰. Ploetz advocated against medical care for the unfit. He argued that such care "helped the individual but ultimately endangered the race" and that "racial hygiene considered not just the good of the individual but more important, the good of the race"⁵¹. The proposal of racial cleansing appealed to leading Nazi officials such as Heinrich Himmler, Joseph Mengele, and of course Adolf Hitler all of who would be behind the development of the Nazi euthanasia program. They saw merit in the reasoning put forth by Ploetz and as such, took the necessary steps to address what they deemed a dire situation through the implementation of public eugenic policy⁵². And the Nazis, like their German predecessors, wanted a means to implement the removal of the socially unfit, especially those considered to be racially inferior.

The Nazis only needed to look to America for an answer to address their perceived dire situation. America erected the perfect model for actively addressing the issue of society's degenerates. American eugenics leaders proposed and passed legislation that would permit state sanctioned sterilization of the unfit, an idea that the Nazi party resoundingly approved. In 1927, in the eight to one decision of *Buck v. Bell* [31], the United States Supreme Court legalized compulsory sterilization of America's unfit⁵³. As a result of their decision the government was given the go ahead to sterilize America's socially marginalized. The court case legitimated the plans of Harry H. Laughlin [32-36], the leader of America's eugenics movement, to sterilize society's degenerates without regard for those subjected

⁴¹ Kuhl, *The Nazi Connection*, 62 - 63.

⁴² Weiss, "German Eugenics, 1890-1933," in *Deadly Medicine*, 17.

⁴³ Ruth F. Chadwick, *Ethics, Reproduction, and Genetic Control*, rev. ed. (London: Routledge, 1992), 119-122.

⁴⁴ Carlson, *The Unfit*, 325.

⁴⁵ GotzAly, Peter Chroust, and Christian Pross, *Cleansing the Fatherland: Nazi Medicine and Racial Hygiene* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 1.

⁴⁶ Kuhl, *The Nazi Connection*, 22.

⁴⁷ Carlson, *The Unfit*, 402-403.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 274-275.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 320-321.

⁵⁰ Michael Burleigh, *Ethics and Extermination: Reflections on Nazi Genocide* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 156.

⁵¹ Alfred Ploetz, "The Importance of Racial Hygiene Argument," quoted in, Robert Proctor, *Racial Hygiene: Medicine Under the Nazi* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 22-26.

⁵² Carlson, *The Unfit*, 274.

⁵³ *Buck v. Bell*, 274 U.S. 200, 47 S. CT 584 (1927).

individuals 'right to due process and more importantly, to bodily integrity.

By the early 1930s, Laughlin's [21] sterilization model would be the impetus behind the development and passage of the Nuremberg Laws. In fact in 1935, the same year as the passage of racial legislation at Nuremberg, Nazi eugenicist Ernst Rodenwaldt [37-39] wrote to the dean of the University of Heidelberg, Carl Schneider, on behalf of Harry H. Laughlin's [32] "contribution to Reich policy," in particular his contributions to the science of racial hygiene by way of compulsory sterilization⁵⁴. Rodenwaldt enumerated the contributions of Laughlin to the racial hygiene program that was implemented by the Third Reich. Rodenwaldt concluded that, "Every race hygienist knows Laughlin as a champion of the [sic] eugenic sterilization"⁵⁵. Though unable to receive his honorary doctorate in person, Laughlin wrote a letter of gratitude to Carl Schneider for the university's offering and recognized the racial pedigree of the Aryan people that could readily be seen in the blood of America's elites. Laughlin stated that the university reflected "the highest ideals of scholarship and research achieved by those racial stocks which have contributed so much to the foundation blood of the American people"⁵⁶.

Beginning five years after the United States Supreme Court legitimated compulsory sterilization of America's unfit; the Nazis began their own quest for a purified Germany directed at those deemed to be the country's weakest and unfit: the mentally and physically handicapped. Implemented just prior to Hitler assuming the chancellorship in Germany, but reached its pinnacle under his tenure, the Nazi sterilization program resulted in the forced sterilization of nearly 350,000 individuals determined to be outside the Nazis' established rubric for superior racial stock⁵⁷. As stated previously, the inspiration for the Nazi sterilization program did not come from a European contemporary of Germany. Rather, the Nazis looked to the sterilization practices implemented in the United States as the basis for their program because the Americans, in particular Harry H. Laughlin, seemed to have perfected it.

In 1912, Harry H. Laughlin created the "Questionnaire on the Sterilization of Defectives" that would help to identify the socially unfit. Included in his prescribed criteria of the socially degenerate were those determined to be: "feeble-minded, paupers, the inebriated, criminals, epileptics, the insane, the deformed, those predisposed to specific diseases, those with defective sense organs namely the blind and deaf, and the physically weak" as unfit and harboring racial poisons [of the] unfit"⁵⁸. Laughlin's eclectic survey included certain

labeling that was not quantifiable in application but rather, qualitative in definition. Ambiguous at best, the term feeble-minded included individuals that were not just mentally handicapped by the day's medical standards but also, those individuals that were considered paupers and lacked access to the educational process were also deemed feeble-minded and subjected to state mandated sterilization⁵⁹.

Harry Laughlin's contribution to the Nazi sterilization campaign can be seen throughout the wording of the Nuremberg Laws. The verbiage chosen by the Nazis to define the terms of their sterilization program echoed the wording of Laughlin's model that was instituted in the United States in 1927. Harry H. Laughlin developed ten proposals to rectify the situation of dealing with the socially marginalized. Examining the wording of Laughlin's Means Proposed for Cutting off the Supply of Human Degenerates and Defectives, one can see evidence of his influence within the doctrine of the Nuremberg Laws pertaining to racial purity⁶⁰. In the cases of the mentally and physically handicapped, Laughlin promoted segregation of these groups by way of miscegenation law, eugenics education, and also, he proposed sterilization and even euthanasia⁶¹. The Nazis too found use for Laughlin's developed criterion. They followed Laughlin's enumerated list of the unfit as can be seen in the Nuremberg Laws passed in 1935 that defined Germany's unfit.

The model sterilization law developed by Laughlin determined not only the means to eliminate the threat of future generations of degenerate offspring but also, how to determine those already living in society that posed an immediate threat to the social structure. It was this contribution to eugenic practices that the Nazis used to identify those individuals that posed a threat to the Third Reich. Examining the wording of Laughlin's sterilization model one can see how the legacy of his determined criteria had an impact on the implementation of the Nuremberg Laws pertaining to heredity health. Furthermore, Laughlin's model acted as a springboard for the Nazis as they began to apply their own spin on the idea of eugenics.

In section 2, clause B of Laughlin's original sterilization model delineates those individuals that exhibited degenerate behavior. Laughlin considered a "socially inadequate person [to be] one who by his or her own effort, regardless of etiology or prognosis, [that] fails chronically in comparison with normal persons"⁶². Laughlin goes on to define the socially inadequate as those same groups he proposed in his 1912 questionnaire that allowed him to determine who was unfit⁶³. Comparatively, the Nazis used almost the same wording in the development of their own sterilization law twenty-three years after

⁵⁴ Edwin Black, *War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America's Campaign to Create a Master Race* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2003), 312.

⁵⁵ Ernst Rodenwaldt, "Letter, Dr. E. Rodenwaldt to Carl Schneider, 11 December 1935: B-1523/5 UH" quoted in Edwin Black, *War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America's Campaign to Create a Master Race* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2003), 313.

⁵⁶ Harry H. Laughlin, "Letter, Harry H. Laughlin to Carl Schneider, 11 August 1936: Truman E-1-3:8. quoted in Edwin Black, *War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America's Campaign to Create a Master Race* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2003), 312.

⁵⁷ Philip R. Reilly, *The Surgical Solution: A History of Involuntary Sterilization in the United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 109.

⁵⁸ Harry H. Laughlin, "Questionnaire on the Sterilization of Defectives," 1912, American Philosophical Society, Dav, BD27, Ser 2, letters.

⁵⁹ Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics*, 46, 77-79.

⁶⁰ Harry H. Laughlin, "Means Proposed for Cutting Off the Supply of Human Defectives and Degenerates," in *The Harry H. Laughlin Papers*, Truman State University, Lantern Slides, Brown Box, 605, Kirksville, MO.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Harry H. Laughlin, *Eugenical Sterilization in the United States* (Chicago: Psychopathic Laboratory of the Municipal Court of Chicago, 1922), 446.

⁶³ Ibid.

Laughlin proposed the criteria and seven years after Laughlin's model law received legitimacy by way of the Supreme Court ruling in *Buck v. Bell*. Examining Article I of the Nuremberg statutes pertaining to hereditary conditions the Nazis determined that, "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."⁶⁴ The law went on to enumerate the specifications of Germany's unfit to include those persons exhibiting; "congenital feeble-mindedness, schizophrenia, manic-depression, congenital epilepsy, inheritable St. Vitus (Huntington's Chorea), hereditary blindness, hereditary deafness, serious inheritable malformations" and in a later clause, those who suffer from chronic alcoholism⁶⁵. This list includes many of those persons proposed in Laughlin's model to be unfit. In the commonalities of each proposal one can see how the objectives of eugenics were well embedded into the social landscape of both America and Germany. But whereas the two laws exhibited strong similarities in doctrine, they exhibited divergent results in regards to the long term application of eugenics.

In America, sterilization removed the immediate threat of the individual as a social burden. Once the threat was removed the individual was permitted back into the community, albeit restricted by the terms of their parole. Upon the release from the medical institution that performed the sterilization procedure, America's unfit were permitted to reenter society even though they remained marginalized for the remainder of their lives for the most part⁶⁶. Medical discharge from the country's health facilities was not to be the case for the unfit in Nazi Germany. Those individuals institutionalized as unfit and identified as a social burden, were permanently removed from the social structure, never to reenter German society.

Initially borrowing from the compulsory sterilization program in the United States, Hitler and his inner circle implemented the Nazi sterilization program that not only aligned with popular eugenics theory but also, evolved in accordance with Nazi racial ideology. But whereas American eugenicists allowed society's unfit to live a life of some sense of normalcy after sterilization was performed, Hitler's intentions, in rapid evolutionary fashion, took on a more immediate and permanent result when the pace of the sterilization program showed to be too slow of a process. As a means to speed up the purity process of the Aryan race, Hitler took the model created by America's eugenic leaders to a whole new distorted level. By shifting past the concept of compulsory sterilization of the socially unfit, Hitler implemented the practice of euthanizing those determined to be socially inferior instead.

But euthanasia was never initially conceived as a eugenic practice by the movement's founders. In fact, euthanasia emerged from the "right to die" movement that began in the latter part of the 1800s. It emerged because of the increase in life expectancy and the ailments that became part of the aging process.⁶⁷ Euthanasia was meant to give the dying individual the personal choice to die with dignity. It was an option that some American eugenic leaders, such as Harry H. Laughlin, considered to be an acceptable solution to society's ills⁶⁸. And it can be argued that Hitler's impetus for his euthanasia program may have come from the proposal by Harry H. Laughlin in his "Means Proposed for Cutting Off the Supply of Human Defectives and Degenerates," in which he advocates for euthanasia as a means to mercifully end the life of the socially inferior⁶⁹. But the operative word in Laughlin's suggestion was 'merciful', something conspicuously missing from the Nazi euthanasia program entitled Operation T-4.

In the fall of 1939, Nazi officials began their shift from sterilization of Germany's unfit to the implementation of mass euthanasia efforts across the Reich. Hitler organized the process through Operation T-4, the unofficial state sanctioned euthanasia program that derived its name from the place in Berlin where the plans were conceived; at an inconspicuous office at number 4, Tiergartenstrasse⁷⁰⁷¹

Nazi leaders in the Reich Ministry of the Interior developed a questionnaire that was sent to state run medical institutions that inquired about the viability of the patients that were admitted to their facilities. Unlike the questionnaire that Harry H. Laughlin developed that identified social degenerates the Reich's questionnaire determined the economic worth of the individuals readily known by prior means as a social burden⁷². Already identified as a social defective that offered nothing in the way of contribution to the Fatherland, Nazi elites expressed a need to rid the country of these individuals and yet when their intentions were implemented they were cloaked in secrecy.

Utilizing a practice developed for the child "euthanasia" program, T4 planners began in the autumn of 1939 to distribute carefully formulated questionnaires to all public health officials, public and private hospitals, mental institutions, and nursing homes for the chronically ill and aged. The limited space and wording on the forms, as well as the instructions in the accompanying cover letter, combined to convey the impression that the survey was intended to gather statistical data.

Initially, the Nazi euthanasia program targeted only those infants and children that harbored mental or physical handicaps that resulted in their institutionalization because of their condition. The Nazis commissioned physicians to administer either a lethal dosage of narcotics or allowed the infant or child to starve to death. Though

⁶⁴ The Nuremberg Laws. "Laws of Protection of the German Race: Heredity Health." 1935. <http://frank.mtsu.edu/~baustin/nurmlaw1.html> ed. Peter Halsall, from the Modern History Source Book: Violent Racist Anti-Semitism. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/jewish/jewishbook.html>. (accessed February 5, 2010).

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Paul A. Lombardo, *Three Generations, No Imbeciles: Eugenics, the Supreme Court, and Buck v. Bell* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 189-190.

⁶⁷ Carlson, *The Unfit*, 323.

⁶⁸ Kuhl, *The Nazi Connection*, 86.

⁶⁹ Laughlin, "Means Proposed for Cutting Off the Supply of Human Defectives and Degenerates."

⁷⁰ Aly, *Cleansing the Fatherland*, 22.

⁷¹ Michael S. Bryant, *Confronting the "Good Death": Nazi Euthanasia on Trial, 1945-1953* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2005), 33.

⁷² Aly, *Cleansing the Fatherland*.

often not the contributing factor, death certificates reported that these children died of natural causes attributed to their health concerns rather than listing the cause to be man-made⁷³. By the onset of World War II, Hitler expanded the program to include not only the very young but also, to euthanize adults that exhibited the same deficient traits as the children. This new aspect of the program, known as Operation T-4, evolved from Hitler's initial euthanasia program and was not readily known among those in German society. The Nazis were able to maintain the secrecy of the program due in part because of the intensity of the war effort. Most people focused on the war situation and not on the plight of society's weakest members.

From its inception in 1939, the T-4 program remained such a well-guarded secret that only the highest of the Nazi order were privy to its inner workings. Michael T. Bryant [40-49] states that, "The clandestine nature of the euthanasia program is one of its most arresting aspects"⁷⁴. Bryant posits that the secrecy surrounding the program was due in part because Hitler feared the German people would react negatively to the program's objective. Furthermore, Bryant offers that the covert nature of the Nazi agenda was a direct result of Hitler's awareness that the T-4 program went against the moral fabric of German culture, something that could result in his power to be stripped from him⁷⁵. And though he had no formal authority from the German people to move forward with his euthanasia project, Hitler continued to order the administration and expansion of his racial cleansing program. The T4 staff would determine which patients would be euthanized. Program medical staff reviewed forms sent by institutions and doctors throughout Germany. They did not examine individual patients or delve into their medical records. Nevertheless they made decisions on life or death.

With total disregard for protocol and having no legal precedent to substantiate his euthanasia plans, Hitler continued with his master plan for a purified race by privately ordering his personal assistants, Dr. Karl Brandt and Phillip Bouhler, to "broaden the powers of physicians designated by name, who will decide whether those who have - as far as can be humanly determined - incurable illnesses [that] can, after the most careful evaluation, be granted a mercy death"⁷⁶. But the euthanasia methods used to carry out the program were anything but merciful. Realizing that to achieve speed and efficiency new methods of death needed to be implemented, Hitler turned from individualized lethal injections to mass gassing campaigns. The T-4 campaigns resulted in the herding of patients into a gas chamber, disguised as a group-size shower stall that emitted carbon monoxide gas that would kill the occupants⁷⁷. In time, the Nazis would begin to incorporate this method of annihilation to other aspects of the war effort to address the ever present threat to the Aryan race.

As the war erupted across Europe, so too did expansion of Hitler's euthanasia program. The expansion of the gassing program can be

attributed to Hitler's continued ordering of the extermination of those in the Reich determined to be unfit⁷⁸. Not relegated to just those individuals possessing mental and physical abnormalities, race became a determinant in regards to who would align with the Nazis' racial cleansing objective. Those persons of racial stock other than Aryan were subjected to the same fate as the mentally and physically inferior. In essence, these gassing campaigns became the model for Hitler's Final Solution. Many scholars of the Holocaust "regard the T-4 euthanasia program as the prelude to the murder of the European Jews, conceptually, organizationally, and logistically related to that infamous event"⁷⁹. Henry Friedlander [50,51] confirms that there was an intimate relationship between the T-4 program and the implementation of the Final Solution⁸⁰. In time, Hitler's objective would expand further still to encompass his distrust and hatred of the "other" in German society, namely the Jew.

Any assessment of the T4 program has obvious connections with the Holocaust. The Holocaust especially targeted the children and elderly at first because they were "non producers". And after the T4 program was supposedly closed, the industrial killing of Jews began in the German death camps built in Poland. The SS drew from the experience of the T4 program as to how to efficiently kill large numbers of people. And some of the staff working on the T4 program became involved in the SS killing operations.

By the end of the war nearly eleven million people, six million of which were of Jewish ethnicity, would be killed under Hitler's Final Solution, a solution whose origins can be traced to the theory of racial superiority and its application to the anticipatory methods of the pseudoscience of eugenics. Using Social Darwinian theory as a means to scientize their socially constructed ideas, Hitler and the Nazis, systematically annihilated those groups within Germany that posed a threat to their singular Aryan ideal. The shift from compulsory sterilization to the implementation of the T-4 euthanasia program illustrates the objectives of Hitler and the Nazis to cleanse the Fatherland in an evolutionary, yet systematic, fashion. Like other western cultures, the Nazis felt that preservation of one's nation required the need to rid society of the lesser racial stocks, and when sterilization did not address the threat to country in expedient fashion, measures of a more severe and expansive nature needed to be implemented. And so the shift from eugenic sterilization to euthanasia occurred. But just as eugenics promoted a "good life", euthanasia promoted a "good death", and neither of which was an option in the Third Reich for those on the periphery of German society.

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⁷³ Carlson, *The Unfit*, 326.

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⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Adolf Hitler, "Order Authorizing the Involuntary Euthanasia in Germany, October, 1939". <http://h-net.org/~german/gtext/nazi/euthanasia-eng.html>. Ed. Peter Halsall, from the Modern History Source Book: Violent Racist Anti-Semitism. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/jewish/jewishbook.html>. (accessed February 5, 2010).

⁷⁷ Bryant, *Confronting the "Good Death"*, 55.

⁷⁸ Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 66-68.

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