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# The Nuremberg Laws: Creating the Road to the T-4 Program

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The Nuremberg Laws: Creating the Road to the T-4 Program

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History 499, Senior Seminar

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## **Introduction:**

On September 15, 1935 the Nazi party initiated the Nuremberg Laws, a new series of laws codes that legally cemented the principles of Nazi ideology.<sup>1</sup> Written by Bernhard Loesener and Dr. Wilhelm Stuckart, the different sub-articles of the Nuremberg Laws removed the legal protection of Jews in German society and began a process of redefining German Jews as the “other.” The first, the “Reich Citizenship Law” revoked the status of Jews as legal citizens and created the framework the Nazis would use to persecute by defining what it meant to be German or Jewish. Later this law was expanded by the Nazis to label minorities as non-German citizens. The “Law for the Protection of Hereditary Health” stated that anyone the Nazis deemed as carrying inheritable diseases would be forced to undergo sterilization in T-4 centers throughout Germany, these centers were six hospitals that were repurposed into killing centers for the mentally ill and disabled. Together, these laws established a foundation for a eugenics program that the Nazi doctors performed on inmates in T-4 centers and concentration camps from 1939 to 1945. The Nuremberg Laws were the first law codes to give racial discrimination a strong legal standing and removed repercussions against doctors’ actions towards their patients which created the Nazi eugenics program. The Nazi party used their complete control of the government and propaganda to promote their eugenics program to the German people.

The combination of totalitarian control and the propaganda machine worked together to cement Adolf Hitler’s consolidation of political power over Germany and racist ideology that targeted Jews, Romani, Slavs, blacks, and other ethnic minorities through a process known as *Gleichschaltung*. *Gleichschaltung* was a coordination program that reorganized all aspects of

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<sup>1</sup> "The Nuremberg Laws: The Reich Citizenship Law," *The Reich Citizenship Law*, edited by Jason Levine, Accessed January 23, 2016, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/nurmlaw3.html>.

German society to create a new “national-unity” that the Nazis directed.<sup>2</sup> One example of this coordination was seen in the Nazis’ approach to local clubs and associations which were absorbed by the Nazi party and repurposed to promote Nazi ideology and eugenic theory.<sup>3</sup> *Gleichschaltung* also removed perceived sources of opposition towards the Nazis, such as unions which were completely dismantled.<sup>4</sup> The Nazis used *Gleichschaltung* to bring German institutions under party control. *Gleichschaltung* promoted eugenic theory that the Nazis constructed in their legal codes, specifically in the Nuremberg Laws. The implementation of the Nuremberg Racial Laws was the first step of several that led to medical experiments. One of the objectives of the Nuremberg Laws removed patients’ ability to refuse any kind of treatment in a Nazi medical facility, which could range from forced sterilization of women to the earliest euthanasia programs. In this context, Nazi doctors could conduct experiments without any legal consequences during times of peace; once WWII began, some of these doctors were able to experiment openly and freely in concentration camps on whichever victims they preferred.<sup>5</sup>

The Nuremberg Race Laws were the first in the Third Reich to allow doctors to act without their patients’ express consent in medical procedures. Other laws were passed through the Reichstag after the Nuremberg Laws, such as the “Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor,” and each one removed more of the patients’ rights until they were voiceless the second they entered a Nazi medical facility. Before WWII, doctors were free to experiment on their patients if they kept their activities hidden from the German people; once the war began, Nazi doctors were able to act freely with little consequence as they violated their oaths to heal.

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<sup>2</sup> William Sheridan Allen, “The Atomization of Society,” In *The Nazi Seizure of Power; the Experience of a Single German Town, 1930-1935*, (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965), 215.

<sup>3</sup> Allen, “The Atomization of Society,” 214. Clubs that remained were ordered to place N.S. before their name which showed their connection, an example being the “National Socialist Chess Club.”

<sup>4</sup> Allen, “The Atomization of Society,” 217.

<sup>5</sup> Human experiments were also conducted in the United States as part of the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiments in the 1930s, and Japan’s Unit 371 conducted human experiments on biological and chemical warfare in China.

The actions of the Nazi doctors before and during the Holocaust illustrates the dangers of allowing medical personnel to act without any repercussions, and also demonstrate why patients' ability to refuse consent to medical treatment is vital.

**Historiography:**

This paper explores the connection between the Nuremberg Laws and the eugenics program, specifically the T-4 program, by using the analysis of historians, psychologists, and Holocaust survivors. Some historians argue that the human experiments conducted during the Holocaust were part of a steady progression of anti-Semitic behavior, while others argue that experiments on this scale could only occur once. Psychologists also have different interpretations; some create mental profiles to highlight how anyone could be affected adversely by Nazis policies, while others highlight the abnormality of key individuals in positions of power. Examination of Nazi law codes, like the Nuremberg Laws, give insight into the how the Third Reich implemented and perfected their eugenics program. These Nazis documents combined with the memoirs of survivors, usually written by adults who experienced the consequences of these laws as children, present a more emotional, personal, individual perspective to these experiences. Even the accounts of survivors from the same camp highlight different aspects of their experiences.<sup>6</sup> Each individual provides their own unique interpretation of the Holocaust, and by examining the different sides together a better understanding of Nazi persecution and eugenics can be reached.

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<sup>6</sup> Eli Wessel and Eva Mozes Kor are two Auschwitz survivors, and both present different aspects of camp life in their memoirs. Wessel writes about how his individuality was stripped from camp prisoners in *Night*, while Mozes Kor writes about being experimented on by Dr. Mengele in her memoir.

Historian Doris L. Bergen created one of the most approachable explanations when it comes to understanding genocide in *War and Genocide*.<sup>7</sup> To understand how the Holocaust occurred, her examination begins long before the 1930s. Bergen started her analysis with accounts of anti-Semitism going back to medieval times in German society. Germany was not the only nation to persecute Jews, the majority of Europe participated in this long trend of racism and anti-Jewish sentiment.<sup>8</sup> Her study revealed that anti-Semitism existed in Germany long before the Nazis seized power, meaning that the Nazis built their eugenics program off of Germany's past volatile relationship with Jews. Bergen states that even though German Jews faced persecution in the past, they had largely been assimilated into German society before Hitler's rise to power. In order to isolate Jews from the rest of society, the Nazi party developed racial theory based around the concept of the superior Aryan race and characterized minorities as the "other" in German society.<sup>9</sup> The Nazis then targeted this "other" group with their eugenics program first with sexual sterilization which escalated into the idea of societal sterilization through extermination in T-4 facilities, and later in extermination camps.

The end result of the Nazis' eugenics program was the Final Solution, which systematically targeted minorities with extermination in order to create a superior German race. One aspect of this was the death squads located in Eastern Europe that targeted Jews and other minorities. Historian Christopher Browning analyzed the conditioning of the men in these death squads in his work *Ordinary Men*. This work traces the evolution of Reserve Police Battalion 101, one of the most notorious killing squadrons from 1940 to 1945 in Eastern Europe.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Doris L. Bergen, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust*, 2nd ed, (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009).

<sup>8</sup>Bergen, *War and Genocide*, 5.

<sup>9</sup>Bergen, *War and Genocide*, 147.

<sup>10</sup> Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

Originally, as the men involved with Battalion 101 started killing and began to think about what they were doing, they became more reluctant to continue the shootings. Their reluctance is revealed in the fact that the Nazi party had to “organize” a steady stream of alcohol halfway through to be sure the men continued shooting, and even then about a dozen men still refused to continue killing.<sup>11</sup> In order to combat this refusal, Nazi officials would get the members of Battalion 101 drunk or they would only inform the soldiers of orders to exterminate villages moments before they arrived, giving the soldiers no time to think about the act of killing innocent men, women, and children.<sup>12</sup> When given time to think about their orders, the soldiers had to find ways to justify their actions because they were trapped in a vicious cycle of killing by the Nazi party’s orders and could not see a way out of it.<sup>13</sup> As the hopelessness of their situation grew, the men of Battalion 101 stopped resisting their orders. This source is one of the only ones to examine how even battle hardened soldiers had moral objections to their orders, and the great lengths the Nazis went to in order to overcome these objections to create a superior Aryan race.

Psychiatrist Robert Lifton’s text *The Nazi Doctors* is recognized as one of the leading the sources on examining the mental states of Nazi medical officers and the psychological impacts of their experiments. This study of multiple Nazi doctors examines the psychological process that occurs when doctors act without any legal repercussions. Doctors were able to disregard ideas of ethics and human decency as they began to experiment on their patients because there were no checks against the doctors’ autonomy.<sup>14</sup> The doctors believed that they were tasked with removing the “human ballast” from Nazi Germany and killed men, women, and children with

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<sup>11</sup> Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 61.

<sup>12</sup> Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 82.

<sup>13</sup> Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 108.

<sup>14</sup> Lifton, Robert Jay, *The Nazi Doctors*, 73.

syringes and gas chambers.<sup>15</sup> Without any form of governmental oversight and no checks against doctors' autonomy, these doctors were able to disregard ideas of ethics and human decency as they began to experiment on the patients forced into their care. This disregard was seen in the actions of Dr. Hermann Pfannmuller who slowly starved groups of disabled children to death in order to "humanely cleanse" them from Nazi society.<sup>16</sup> With this analysis, Lifton reveals how Nazi doctors violated oaths that emphasized protecting patients from harm and instead turned to experimentation and torture.

The Nazis kept meticulous records so there is a multitude of primary sources on both the Nuremberg Laws and the Nazi eugenics program. Numerous legal records dictated the types of lawful persecution the Nazis employed against minorities, ranging from laws like the "Reich Citizenship Law" to the orders for the Final Solution. Nazis legal codes were preserved by the Nazis and then later by the Allies. One of the primary law codes that legalized Nazi persecution was the Nuremberg Race Laws. Written by members of the Reich Ministry of the Interior Bernhard Loesener and Dr. Wilhelm Stuckart, the Nuremberg Race Laws became the foundation for Nazi law during the 1930s and 1940s. On September 13, 1935, the first published copy of the Nuremberg Laws became the primary law codes of Nazi Germany and were made up of three sub-articles: the "Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor," the "Law for the Protection of Hereditary Health," and the "Reich Citizenship Law."<sup>17</sup> The Nazi party continuously updated the Nuremberg Laws, and each new addition expanded the eugenics program from the previous laws to create a more oppressive situation for German Jews. Written

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide*, (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 47, 71.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors*, 62.

<sup>17</sup> "The Nuremberg Laws," *The Holocaust: The Nuremberg Laws*, edited by Jason Levine, July 2008, Accessed January 21, 2016, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/nurlawtoc.html>.



on July 14, 1933, the “Law for the Protection of Hereditary Health” was included in the first publication of the Nuremberg Laws. This sub-article stated that anyone the Nazis deemed as carrying inheritable diseases would be forced to undergo sterilization.<sup>18</sup> This part of the Nuremberg Laws established a foundation for scientific human experimentation that the Nazi doctors performed on inmates in concentration camps from 1941 to 1945.

While laws give insight into the Third Reich from the Nazi’s perspective, testimonies from Holocaust survivors reveal the deep impact Nazi persecution, eugenics policies, and experiments had on minorities. Survivors of Nazi doctors speak about their experiences as human experiments in their memoirs and through interviews. Eva Mozes Kor is one of the most outspoken survivors of Mengele’s twin experiments.<sup>19</sup> Her memoir, *Surviving the Angel of Death: The Story of a Mengele Twin in Auschwitz*, reveals the numerous experiments that Mengele inflicted on her and her twin sister Miriam from 1940 to 1945 in the medical barrack of Auschwitz. While Mengele primarily experimented on Jewish twins, he targeted all twins that came into Auschwitz. Her writings also reveal how the Nazis’ dehumanized these children by only referring to them by their experiment number.<sup>20</sup> This source reveals the process of dehumanization on children, and the negative impact it had on these children later in their lives.

This paper will primarily focus on examining legal codes along with survivor testimony in order to reveal the connection between the Nazi law and the eugenics program. The Nuremberg Laws created a legal culture of hatred and persecution that marginalized Jews and other minorities. Other official Nazi documents reveal how the Holocaust was organized by the

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<sup>18</sup> "The Nuremberg Laws: Law for the Protection of Hereditary Health," *Law for the Protection of Hereditary Health* edited by Jason Levine.

<sup>19</sup> Eva Mozes Kor, and Lisa Rojany-Buccieri, *Surviving the Angel of Death: The Story of a Mengele Twin in Auschwitz*, (Terre Haute, IN: Tanglewood Pub., 2009).

<sup>20</sup> Eva Mozes *Surviving the Angel of Death*, 41.

Nazi government. One of these documents is the “Minutes of the Wannsee Conference.”<sup>21</sup> These minutes reveal the finalization of the plans for the Holocaust. It discusses everything from the forced hard labor in concentration camps to the deportations of German citizens who married Jews.<sup>22</sup> Another type of primary source examined is the testimonies of the survivors and perpetrators of the Holocaust and they reveal how the situation in Nazi Germany escalated from legal persecution to organized violence and finally attempted extermination. Survivor testimonies also reveal the personal impact that Nazi persecution had on the individuals who suffered under Hitler’s regime.

### **The Nuremberg Laws: Creating a Culture of Hatred:**

The Nazi party began to advance their anti-Jewish attitudes into the lives of everyday Germans. The first economic attempt by the party to turn the population against the Jewish community was a nationwide boycott of all Jewish stores and products on April 1, 1934.<sup>23</sup> The Nazi party released articles claiming that German Jews had been spreading bad press against the Third Reich to foreign nations and also began to promote the idea that it was because of the Jews that Germany lost World War I.<sup>24</sup> The official boycott was a disaster for the Third Reich. German citizens ignored the boycott and continued to frequent stores owned by Jews and the Nazis learned quickly from the failure. Instead of simply giving up, they turned their attention away from boycotting Jewish products to more sinister methods.

With attempts to alienate Jews economically and socially through unofficial means failing, the Nazi party turned to legal proceedings like the “Reich Citizenship Laws” among

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<sup>21</sup> Benjamin C. Sax, and Dieter Kuntz, eds, "Minutes of the Wannsee Conference," *Inside Hitler's Germany: A Documentary History of Life in the Third Reich*, (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1992).

<sup>22</sup> Sax, and Kuntz, eds, "Minutes of the Wannsee Conference," 437, 440.

<sup>23</sup> Holocaust Museum, "Timeline of Events: 1933-1938."

<sup>24</sup> Holocaust Museum, "Timeline of Events: 1933-1938."

other legal codes to cement their supremacy. Shortly after the failed boycott, the Nazi party managed to pass the law that would manage to silence not just Jewish voices, but also the voice of anyone the Nazi party felt was a political enemy. The “Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service” was quickly passed, and it excluded anyone who the Nazis felt were a political enemy from working in public service positions, except for Jews who had served on the front for Germany in WWI.<sup>25</sup> This law forced political opponents of the Third Reich out of any position of power while also allowing Hitler and his followers to cull anyone in the Nazi party who was considered to be a serious threat. The passing of this law also helped to cement the Nazi party’s complete control over the state because it created a complete lack of opposition in the government. This law also removed anyone considered inferior in the eyes of the Third Reich from political power which destroyed their ability to fight back legally against the Nazis; a few examples of groups considered to be inferior were Jews, the disabled and mentally ill, Free Masons, Muslims, and Africans. The lack of opposition from any other sphere of influence caused by this law allowed the Nazis to continue to pass more and more laws that pushed people they deemed inferior out of all positions of power.

The Nuremberg Race Laws came into effect in 1935 and affected German citizens until the end of WWII. These racially based laws allowed the Nazi party to establish systematic persecution against Jews specifically. These laws were composed of three major parts: “Law for Protection of Hereditary Health,” the “Reich Citizenship Law,” and the “Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor.”<sup>26</sup> The Nuremberg Race Laws allowed for the Nazi party to implement the racial theories that made up the basis for their party’s ideals. The laws defined

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<sup>25</sup> Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Timeline of Events: 1933-1938."

<sup>26</sup> Jewish Virtual Library, "The Nuremberg Laws: Background and Overview," *The Nuremberg Laws* edited by Jason Levine, July 2008, Accessed March 16, 2016, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/nurlaws.html>.

what it meant to be an actual German, creating charts that showed what percentage of Jewish blood led to a person being considered a Jew instead of a German.<sup>27</sup> In Nazi Germany, the Nuremberg Laws were used to classify what being a Jew was. If a person was found to have three to four Jewish grandparents or two Jewish parents, they were considered to be a Jew by the Nazi government.<sup>28</sup> The Nazi sponsored chart titled "Die Nurnberger Gesetze" illustrated blood purity for the German people; it established that a person who has one to two grandparents was considered to be Mischling, or a half breed.<sup>29</sup> It did not matter if the person actively practiced Judaism, or if they were even connected to the Jewish community, they were still considered to be Jewish no matter what. They also used race and ethnicity to track and restrict travel inside the Third Reich. Added to that, the laws existed on the assumption that all Jews were "hostile against Germany" which meant the state needed to monitor them closely and eventually remove them in order to protect the nation from the Jewish threat.<sup>30</sup> The actions of Nazi Germany to single out their Jewish citizens are well known. They forced Jews to carry identification papers with the letter "J" which indicated who was a Jew along with the yellow star of David on their clothing for quick identification in public.<sup>31</sup>

The Nazis forced German Jews to put signs on their businesses and homes, making them easily identified targets for Nazi boycotts.<sup>32</sup> Added to that, German interracial marriages were outlawed in 1935 and every person in the nation was forced to fill out "racial questionnaires" that

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<sup>27</sup> Jewish Virtual Library, "The Nuremberg Laws: Background and Overview," *The Nuremberg Laws* edited by Jason Levine, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Holocaust/nurlaws.html>.

<sup>28</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Nuremberg Race Laws." United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Accessed January 23, 2016, <http://www.ushmm.org/learn/timeline-of-events/1933-1938/nuremberg-race-laws>.

<sup>29</sup> Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust, "Die Nurnberger Gesetze," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Photo Archive.

<sup>30</sup> Holocaust Museum, "Nuremberg Race Laws."

<sup>31</sup> Holocaust Museum, "Nuremberg Race Laws."

<sup>32</sup> Holocaust Museum, "Nuremberg Race Laws."

would allow the Nazi party to track a person's bloodline back through their grandparents and beyond.<sup>33</sup> This was the first major step that allowed the Nazis to begin systematically turning the German population against not just Jews, but also other groups the Nazis opposed. In other words, the Nazi government worked very hard to transform the identity of Jews into a more sinister "other" in everyday life. However, the goal to force Jews out of everyday life was not only limited to paper identification but also carried over into how everyday citizens treated Jews.

The *Schutzstaffel*, better known as the SS, made Nazi Germany infamous with their initial treatment of their Jewish citizens beyond the forced identification; they used intimidation, terror, and violence towards Jewish communities to isolate this group as the "other" in German society.<sup>34</sup> This organization was the paramilitary police force that helped to reinforce Hitler's power source during WWII in domestic affairs. The SS constantly harassed Jews living in Germany at this time. They beat Jews in the streets, destroyed their shops and homes, and created a general state of terror for everyone.<sup>35</sup> In 1935, on September 15 the SS implemented a night filled with violence against the Jewish community that happened all across the Third Reich. There were assaults that had been planned far in advance on Jewish businesses, religious centers, and even homes and became known as *Kristallnacht*, also known as the Night of Broken Glass.<sup>36</sup>

The Nazi party ostracized Jewish people through the Nuremberg Laws and attacks to turn Jews into the "other," someone to target and blame whenever a problem occurred in the Nazi state. Jews who lived in Germany at this time faced severe discrimination in all aspects of their

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<sup>33</sup> Holocaust Museum, "Nuremberg Race Laws."

<sup>34</sup> *Jews in Pre-War Germany*, Retrieved February 1, 2015, from <http://www.ushmm.org/outreach/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007687>.

<sup>35</sup> Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust, *Pictures of Jewish Homes and Businesses*, RG-01, Collection of Personal Memoirs, Testimonies, and Diaries, Museum Archives and Exhibits.

<sup>36</sup> *Jews in Pre-War Germany*.

lives, as revealed in several survivor testimonies. Holocaust survivor Rudolf Abraham spoke about the discrimination he faced in Germany as a young boy in his testimony. Born in Durboslar Germany in 1908, Abraham stated that before the implementation of the Nuremberg Laws his family was accepted by the city even though they were Jewish.<sup>37</sup> After the Nuremberg Laws were created he was banned from the majority of stores and movie theaters. He was also unable to receive haircuts from the barber who had cut his families hair for forty years before the rise of Nazism. Abraham's testimony reveals that the alienation in Nazi Germany was so great, that even people who had formed deep personal connections over previous decades were separated by this new "otherness."

A key part of Nazi eugenics was the use of these laws to isolate targeted groups from the rest of the German population. By isolating them, the Nazis continued passing laws that made Jews and other targeted groups have less and less to protect them. Specifically, laws based on blood and "blood purity" had a lasting impact on how everyday Germans viewed Jews.<sup>38</sup> One of the laws that had a lasting impact on everyday life for all Germans was a law regarding the suitability of marriage. The "Law for Protection of Hereditary Health" established that German citizens could only marry with to government approval.<sup>39</sup> The law banned couples of different religious faiths from marrying under official orders and stated that anyone with an "inheritable disease may be surgically sterilized...in the judgement of medical science."<sup>40</sup> The law also mandated that "sterilization may also be recommended by: 1) the official physician 2) the official

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<sup>37</sup>USC Shoah Foundation, "Rudolf Abraham-Jewish Survivor," IWitness:Video Testimonies from Holocaust Survivors and Witnesses, August 28, 1995.

<sup>38</sup> Holocaust Museum, "Nuremberg Race Laws."

<sup>39</sup> "The Nuremberg Laws: Law for the Protection of Hereditary Health," *Law for the Protection of Hereditary Health* edited by Jason Levine.

<sup>40</sup> Levine, "The Nuremberg Laws: Law for the Protection of Hereditary Health."

in charge of a hospital, sanatorium, or prison” without the consent of the person being sterilized.<sup>41</sup>

Under the “Law for Protection of Hereditary Health,” the Nazis enforced a nation-wide eugenics program. Doctors were able to legally sterilize anyone who did not meet their idea of what a “true German” was, which led to people with mental illness, physical, and mental disabilities to be forcefully sterilized even if they were German. An estimated 300,000 to 400,000 Jews, Romani, and other ethnic minorities were forcefully sterilized under this law from the moment of its ratification.<sup>42</sup> This law made it so that these targeted groups were at risk for sterilization every time they stepped into any hospital throughout the Third Reich. However, due to the wording of this law, Jewish and German citizens were not safe from sterilization in prison either. Added to that, the medical doctors in concentration and extermination camps throughout Europe could force the inmates to be sterilized against their will. Written in July of 1933, this law was added as a sub-article to the Nuremberg Laws in 1935 because it first created the Nazis eugenics program. The “Law for Protection of Hereditary Health” strengthened the precedent of who was superior and inferior and distinguished people forced to undergo these sterilizations from the rest of the German population. It reinforced the idea that there was something intrinsically wrong with anyone who would be forced to undergo the procedure while convincing those that were not subjected that they remained superior to these people. The “Law for Protection of Hereditary Health” added to the already constructed racial hierarchy created by Third Reich where non-German were deemed to be lesser and helped to further ostracize Jews, Romani, and other groups from the rest of the civilian population.

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<sup>41</sup> Levine, "The Nuremberg Laws: Law for the Protection of Hereditary Health."

<sup>42</sup> “Forced Sterilization,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Accessed April 27, 2016, <https://www.ushmm.org/learn/students/learning-materials-and-resources/mentally-and-physically-handicapped-victims-of-the-nazi-era/forced-sterilization>.

The “Law for the Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring” was also written in 1933. It worked with the “Law for the Protection of Hereditary Health” to define a wide number of afflictions that were classified as being detrimental to society, ranging from schizophrenia to severe alcoholism.<sup>43</sup> The Nazis, therefore, ordered their removal from society and their sterilization in order to protect the future of the German race.<sup>44</sup> Together, these two laws worked to identify and sterilize anyone the Nazis deemed to be a threat to creating genetically superior children for the Third Reich.

The Nuremberg Laws were expanded upon after 1935 because of Hitler’s obsession with the total removal of Jews and other minorities as citizens in the Third Reich. The addition of a provision into Article 1 of the “Reich Citizenship Law” specified citizenship further. The first prospect that was established by the law was the benefits that came from being recognized as a Reich citizen. The law officially begins by stating that “a subject of the State...belongs to the protective union of the German Reich.”<sup>45</sup> This phrasing appealed to the citizens of the Third Reich because it stated that the Nazi party will protect them from any threat. However, it did not specify the types of threats so it allows for the Nazi leaders to be flexible about their use. This flexibility was apparent when the Nazi leader Heinrich Himmler used this portion of the law to implement the Final Solution to the Jewish Problem in 1942.<sup>46</sup> Nazi officials were intentionally vague when writing Article 1, specifically in the section that stated all citizens of the Reich had “particular obligations towards the Reich” without specifying what the obligations were.<sup>47</sup> The

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<sup>43</sup> “The Law for the Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring,” In *The Holocaust*, edited by Jeff Hill, (Detroit, MI: Omnigraphics, 2006), 175.

<sup>44</sup> “The Law for the Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring,” 176.

<sup>45</sup> Levine, “The Nuremberg Laws: The Reich Citizenship Law.”

<sup>46</sup> Heinrich Himmler, “The “Final Solution:” Himmler Orders the Completion of the “Final Solution,”” In *Himmler Orders Completion of the Final Solution*, edited by Jason Levine, (July 2008). Accessed February 02, 2016, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/Himorder.html>.

<sup>47</sup> Levine, “The Nuremberg Laws: The Reich Citizenship Law.”



obligations were left intentionally vague so that the leaders would be able to implement when the obligations were introduced; this could range from allowing SS officers search a person's home to serving in the military.

Article 2 of the law focuses primarily on how blood and heritage determined who was a German citizen. It built off of the ideas of eugenics that were so predominate throughout Nazi policy; that the German people were intrinsically superior to the Jews due to the purity of German bloodlines. Hitler wanted to protect German citizens from what he considered to be a Jewish threat and a large part of that was by declaring who could be a citizen. Article 2 was shaped by Hitler's idea of German superiority and supported it by stating that:

A citizen of the Reich is that subject only who is of German or kindred blood and who, through his conduct, shows that he is both desirous and fit to serve the German people and Reich faithfully.<sup>48</sup>

Article 2 established that only "pure" Germans and their families were allowed to be citizens. While this legally kept Jews from citizenship, it also denied Russians, Slavs, and Poles from becoming citizens as well. That meant that during WWII, a large portion of the land that the Nazis conquered had people who would never be allowed to become Third Reich citizens because they were not true Germans. This portion of Article 2 also made it apparent that German citizens had to be faithful to receive benefits from their citizenship. The benefits included official citizenship papers that allowed them to participate in the government, unlike Jews and other minorities who received specialized identification papers that marked them as non-citizens.<sup>49</sup> It also meant that anyone who was not a citizen was denied these papers and could not participate in the government which limited their ability to legally protest the Nazis actions. Hitler's regime accomplished a brilliant political move in Article 2 because it was what denied Jews and other

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<sup>48</sup> Levine, "The Nuremberg Laws: The Reich Citizenship Law."

<sup>49</sup> Levine, "The Nuremberg Laws: The Reich Citizenship Law."

minorities from being considered German citizens, which helped the Nazi party push the idea of their being intrinsically different than Germans.

The Nuremberg Race Laws also created a eugenics program to answer the question of citizenship based on blood and genetic inheritance which created a legal definition for Aryans and Jews. The idea of German blood superiority appeared due to later additions to the original text of the Nuremberg Race Laws, especially the wording that “German or kindred blood” were the only ones able to take part in legal procedures.<sup>50</sup> This issue of Germanic blood superiority moved the focus away from legal definitions of citizenship, like passports or official papers, and towards the idea that biology determined the supposedly “superior” race. Biology became a common theme for Nazi classification of Jewish descent, as seen by the fact that anyone who had three Jewish grandparents or two Jewish parents was considered to be ethnically Jewish even if they did not practice Jewish religious beliefs.<sup>51</sup> Instead of being a religious belief, Nazis made being Jewish a heredity condition that determined their status as second class citizens under Hitler’s regime.

The head of the Third Reich’s Bureau on Enlightenment on Population Policy and Racial Welfare, Walter Gross, demonstrated the close tie between citizenship and blood when he stated in an official document that the “main care is the preservation of the greatness...held together by the ties of blood relationships” while also making sure that Germans “do not...intermarry with those of an alien race.”<sup>52</sup> Gross and other Nazis pushing the idea of blood purity created the idea that superiority was found through genetics, which would go on to become the basis for

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<sup>50</sup> "Text of the First Regulation to the Reich Citizenship Law," In *The Holocaust*, edited by Jeff Hill, (Detroit, MI: Omnigraphics, 2006), 76.

<sup>51</sup> "Text of the First Regulation to the Reich Citizenship Law," 77.

<sup>52</sup> Walter Gross, "National Socialist Radical Thought," In *The Holocaust*, edited by Jeff Hill, (Detroit, MI: Omnigraphics, 2006), 106-7. Gross continued in the document to state that part of maintaining racial blood purity is necessary to preserve a nations culture, which links nationalism to heredity as well.

numerous human experiments conducted by Nazi medical doctors. Biology can be studied and quantified, which means that Nazi doctors would be able to quantify what made their blood superior during their brutal experiments. This legal connection between superiority and biology was created and implanted into the heads of many medical doctors and would become the basis for some of the most infamous experiments conducted during the Holocaust, such as Mengele's work.

### **The Path to the T-4 Program:**

Hitler solidified the Nazi party's complete economic and social dominance over Germany with his policy of *Gleichschaltung* which forced every part of daily life to follow all government laws and mandates.<sup>53</sup> The Third Reich did not just stop at controlling all legal means of German society; they also worked tirelessly to control the thoughts of the people as well. One of the most famous parts of this emerged as the Nazis' propaganda program. This propaganda program entered into all aspects of everyday life for Germans and promoted the Nazi ideas and policies. The *Gleichschaltung* program allowed for the implementation and promotion of a eugenics program. The Nazis used anti-Semitic propaganda to promote the idea of Germans being distinct and superior to Jews as seen in a picture taken from Nazi Germany after 1935. It shows a classroom of young men attending a "class in racial theory."<sup>54</sup> The image in the picture shows a group of young men staring intently at a blackboard where a teacher has drawn different profiles of various faces based on ethnic theory. One of the images on the blackboard is a clear indication of Nazi racial propaganda; the large beaklike nose comes from the stereotypical idea of what a

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<sup>53</sup> Allen, "The Atomization of Society," 215.

<sup>54</sup> Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, "Third Reich: An Overview-Photograph," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Accessed January 21, 2016.[http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media\\_ph.php?ModuleId=10005141&MediaId=834](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media_ph.php?ModuleId=10005141&MediaId=834).

Jewish person looks like according to the constructed “other” in society.<sup>55</sup> This is a clear example of how ingrained Nazi propaganda had become in the Nazi government seeing how teachers were mandated to incorporate racial theory into their lesson plans.

Nazi propaganda was not limited to the classroom. Under Hitler’s *Gleichschaltung* policy it ended up permeating all aspects of life. Jewish survivor Joshua Degani was born on October 26, 1924 in the city of Leipzig and grew up connected to the Jewish community of the city. He first experienced Nazi propaganda through literature. At the time, Nazis were publishing *schterma*, very cheap books that promoted Nazi ideology and racial theory. Degani managed to get his hands on one of the books and was stunned by the hatred towards Jews inside of it, stating that “This was how the populace was instigated. Instigated to hate.”<sup>56</sup> Tragically, the hateful ideology of the Nazis presented itself in all forms of German literature during this time. Nazi officials published novels that glorified their ideas and popular literature followed this trend and published racist messages.

The bluntest racist messages in literature that appeared during this time were based off of eugenic theory and appeared in political cartoons, novels, and the *schterma* which hid their messages behind flowery language. Political cartoons had to convey their messages through graphic images which depict the artists’ opinions without anything to hide behind, unlike prose works. One example of Nazi anti-Semitic political cartoons can be seen in the March 1934 issue of *Der Stürmer* which was a Nazi tabloid that was published every week. The image in the cartoon was a Jewish man looming over a crowd of men, holding a freemasonic symbol and a skull.<sup>57</sup> The image of the Jewish man builds off of many of the stereotypes regarding Jews and

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<sup>55</sup> Staatsbibliothek, "Third Reich: An Overview-Photograph."

<sup>56</sup> USC Shoah Foundation, "Joshua Delgani-Jewish Survivor."

<sup>57</sup> Philipp Rupprecht, "Der Stürmer," *Cartoons of WWII*, Ed. Tony Husband, (London: Arcturus Holding Limited, 2013), 23.

many of these stereotypes were developed by Nazi eugenic theory. The large beaklike nose used to identify the man in the cartoon as being Jewish. The emphasis on this certain physical feature reveals that the Nazis used these physical characteristics to determine who belonged to the inferior “other” category in society. The coordination program promoted these stereotypes to the German people in order to teach them how to identify those deemed inferior by the Nazis’ eugenics program.

The final formation of the Nazis eugenics program was the attempted total extermination of Jews and other minorities, known as the Final Solution. There were several aspects of the last stage of the eugenics program, such as the T-4 Program and the death squads located in Eastern Europe that targeted Jews and other minorities. The individuals who were part of the final stage of the eugenics program were desensitized and conditioned by the Nazi party to accept any orders, even the ones that called for mass murder. This conditioning is seen in the examination of Reserve Police Battalion 101 in Jozefow, Poland, July 1942. He argued that members of Battalion 101 became upset when they had the time to think about their actions when they were ordered to kill Jews for the first time in the Jozefow Massacre, which can be seen in Lieutenant Heinz Buchanan’s refusal to participate in any action where “defenseless women and children were shot.”<sup>58</sup> Refusals like Buchanan’s were not accepted by Nazis and they combatted refusals by only informing the soldiers of orders to exterminate villages moments before they arrived or getting them drunk before the killing started.<sup>59</sup> Browning argues that the soldiers complied with their actions because they had no time to think about the act of killing innocent men, women, and children. When the men could no longer able to avoid thinking about their horrific actions, many

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<sup>58</sup> Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 56.

<sup>59</sup> Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 82.

of the men grimly accepted their orders as seen by the testimony of First Sergeant Ostman. His reaction to being ordered to take part in the Jewish massacre in Miedzyrec, Poland, was that “the Jewesses must be shot. You’ve gotten out of it so far, but now you must” take part in the killing.<sup>60</sup> Browning argues that Ostman and many others realized they were trapped in a vicious cycle of killing by the Nazi party’s orders and could not see a way out of it. As the hopelessness of their situation grew, the men of Battalion 101 stopped resisting their orders. Instead of needing to drink to complete killing order, they ended up embracing orders which had once been abhorrent and carried them out with an almost fanatic need.<sup>61</sup>

But why would the conditioning of Battalion 101 be important to understanding how the German people were conditioned to accept the Nazis eugenics program? A large part of this is because of who made up Battalion 101. They were typically middle-aged men with families who were originally from working-class or lower-class families; which demonstrated that even “ordinary” men could be conditioned into becoming battle-hardened killers due to Nazi policy.<sup>62</sup> Browning’s research revealed that by keeping people from thinking about the crime until the exact moment it occurs, it is far more likely that people will either commit or go along with the crime. It is only when they are able to step back and think about the consequences of their actions, on themselves and others, that they are likely to refuse. The Nazis were able to apply this idea against the German people and only gave them information about various war crimes that were being committed moments before they happened so civilians would have no time to respond. Battalion 101 also revealed that when people were shocked into committing war crimes,

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<sup>60</sup> Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 108.

<sup>61</sup>Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 123. The result of their accepting these orders was the “Judenjagd,” or the Jew Hunt. In a Jew Hunt, Nazi soldiers would scour ghettos, forests, and towns for any Jews who were attempting to escape. Once caught, the soldiers would kill the Jew and continue the hunt.

<sup>62</sup> Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 1.

they were less likely to rebel because were too stunned to think about their actions. The Nazi government also applied this strategy towards civilians in order to make them compliant with Nazi orders. The story of Battalion 101 and their subsequent actions is important for understanding the process of how the Nazi government conditioned civilians to accept the eugenics program. Civilian compliance had another effect on German society, it created silence in the population towards the eugenics program and later towards the Holocaust.

Even though the Holocaust occurred from 1940 to 1945 after WWII officially began in Europe, civilians had been exposed to experiments and murder well before the start of the Holocaust due to the eugenics program. Before the Holocaust, Nazi officials worked hard to keep state sanctioned actions against Jews and minorities relatively quiet; however, many people were still aware of the crimes being committed. Hitler's euthanasia program was an example of such actions in the medical field. Nazi medical facilities had been practicing euthanasia programs for years, but they were challenged by wide spread protest in August of 1941 in Poland. Even though the Nazis told the public that they would halt the "Euthanasia Program" that targeted the disabled and mentally ill; it was continued anyway with increased secrecy and moved away from government facilities into hospitals while massacres began in Eastern Europe.<sup>63</sup> The fact that there were protests is important to note because it means that the civilian population was aware of the Euthanasia Program well before 1941 but did not protest these actions before then.

The long held silence of civilians was the biggest factor in allowing the eugenics to flourish within the Third Reich, as seen in Martin Niemoller's famous quotation:

*First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out—Because I was not a Socialist.  
Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out— Because I was not a Trade Unionist.  
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out— Because I was not a Jew.*

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<sup>63</sup> *War and Genocide*, 132-3. Another name for euthanasia program, T-4.

*Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.*<sup>64</sup>

His observation is important because it demonstrates just how wide spread Nazi persecution became during the late 1930s and how many stood by as the persecution of individuals escalated.<sup>65</sup> Typically, scholars focus on Nazi anti-Semitic policies in part because of the sheer number of Jews who were targeted. However, it is important to remember that even though the wording in Nazi legal documents focused on Jews, other minorities including the disabled, mentally ill, and terminally ill were also targeted for extermination throughout Europe.

Numerous Jews, and other groups targeted by the Nazis, suffered from the silence Niemoller described. The implication that came from this type of silence was that the people accepted and supported the Nazis eugenics program, including the euthanasia program and other violent actions. One Holocaust survivor who spoke about the horrible impact that this cultural silence had on Jews was Kurt Messerschmidt who was born in Werneuchen, Germany in 1915. In his interview with the Shoah Foundation, Messerschmidt recounted his memories following *Kristallnacht*. He describes how he and his friend helped an old Jewish man pick up the pieces of broken glass while a crowd of Germans and *Sturmabteilung*'s, also known as the SA, watched them in silence.<sup>66</sup> However, Messerschmidt does not speak about the brutality of *Kristallnacht* in his testimony; instead he states that "I'm sure, in this particular situation, that some of the people standing there disapproved of what the Nazis did. But the disapproval was only silence. And

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<sup>64</sup> Martin Martin Niemöller, and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. "First They Came for the Socialists..." United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. January 29, 2016.

<sup>65</sup> There were notable cases of Germany clergy speaking out against the Nazis eugenics program. One notable example was Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor. He was one of the earliest critics of the Nazi eugenics and their treatment of Jews. He was executed by the Nazis in 1945. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer." United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Accessed May 28, 2016, <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10008205>.

<sup>66</sup> USC Shoah Foundation, "Kurt Messerschmidt-Jewish Survivor," IWitness: Video Testimonies from Holocaust Survivors and Witnesses, June 24, 1997. The SA or SA is the shortened name for the *Sturmabteilung*, a German para-military group that existed before the SS. Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Timeline of Events: 1933-1938."



silence is what did the harm."<sup>67</sup> He argued that the silence of everyday people made them compliant with the Nazis actions that targeted Jews. The compliance of the German people allowed the Nazis to escalate their eugenics program from using legal codes to isolate Jews to the extermination camps in the Holocaust.

This silence allowed for Hitler and other Nazi officials to continue pursuing their policies of extermination, and also created the legal system that caused human experimentation to be advocated by the government. The combination of the silence from civilians that Niemoller and Messerschmidt describe and the process of forced acclimation to violence from the authorities created a culture that tolerated the Holocaust; this deadly combination was what caused many civilians to keep quiet as WWII raged on throughout Europe.

However, examining doctors reveals an interesting dynamic that does not exist in the civilian response. The German people were reacting to the force displayed by the Nazis who held all of the power in the Third Reich. The mainstream population was forced into a submissive role compared to the domineering state. Doctors and other medical personnel create an interesting problem because they both hold dominant and submissive roles in society. In the Third Reich, doctors were submissive because they were still civilians, except for the ones who were army doctors. Nazi officials controlled all legal power which placed doctors beneath them in terms of usable power. On the other hand, doctors do have power inherent in their practices because of the power they have over their patients. Doctors are the ones who diagnose and treat a patient and they have the power to alter how a persons' body works, through medication or surgery. This gives doctors an incredible amount of power over their patients that exists in few other

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<sup>67</sup> USC Shoah Foundation, "Kurt Messerschmidt-Jewish Survivor." Messerschmidt was deported from Germany to a Jewish ghetto in Czechoslovakia. He survived five concentration camps before his liberation: Auschwitz II-Birkenau, Gollerschau, Sachsenhausen, Flossenbürg, and Ganacker.

professions. It also meant there had to be a different process to create an acceptance for genocide for the medical profession in Nazi Germany, especially one that condoned human experimentation and a large part of that process came from undermining the ideas expressed in the Hippocratic Oath.

### **The T-4 Program:**

Before the beginning of human experimentation during the Holocaust, German doctors and other medical professionals were expected to protect and heal the sick and protect them from harm.<sup>68</sup> However, the eugenics program and experiments in concentration camps caused the doctors who worked in the T-4 program and camps to violate this standard and turned them from healers to murderers. Instead, the image of T-4 and Nazi doctors became synonymous with torture; shoving prisoners into freezers to give them frostbite and purposefully exposing them to deadly illnesses like typhus and malaria.

Human experimentation and doctors committing crimes did not suddenly occur during the Holocaust. Instead, the Nazis approached the medical profession similarly to other aspects of everyday life, by slowly pushing the boundaries of acceptability and increasing pressure on medical practitioners into submitting to Nazi authority with the “Law for Protection of Hereditary Health.”<sup>69</sup> Without patients’ ability to revoke consent towards a medical treatment, doctors had complete control over their patients’ bodies. Added to the legal aspect, the Nazi policy of coordination also helped transition the doctors into believing that sterilizations were best for the German people with campaigns that showed minorities and the disabled as being “useless eaters” and deemed unworthy of living in the Third Reich.<sup>70</sup> The government targeted

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<sup>68</sup> Medical doctor refers specifically to individuals with a medical degree.

<sup>69</sup> Levine, "The Nuremberg Laws: Law for the Protection of Hereditary Health."

<sup>70</sup> Directed by Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell, *A World Without Bodies*, (Superfest Film and Video Festival: Brace Yourselves Productions, 2003).

doctors with the message of cleansing Germany of the unworthy and allowed physicians to justify the first killings in medical centers.

Medical programs continued to become even more extreme after 1939 as doctors began to test their new boundaries under the Nazi government. Sterilizations were still administered under the eugenics policies, but were escalated into the T-4 Program that was the precursor for mass killings and human experiments. The T-4 Program was part of the Nazis' eugenics campaign that focused on cleansing the Third Reich of individuals the Nazis declared to be "unworthy of life," specifically the mentally ill and the disabled.<sup>71</sup>

The T-4 Program did not begin inside of a concentration camp, but instead inside of the #4 Tiergartenstrasse government building in Berlin.<sup>72</sup> The fact that the Nazis created the T-4 program in an official governmental building demonstrates that the systematic killing was officially recognized as part of the Nazis eugenics program. While nearly all of the hospitals in Nazi Germany participated in the killings, there were six official T-4 killing centers and this paper will focus primarily on the Hadamar and Bernberg killing centers.<sup>73</sup> T-4 program targeted the mentally ill and the disabled. It is especially important to note that the first people placed in the sanatorium were not Jewish. The first victims the Nazis targeted with the T-4 Program were German citizens who were considered to be disabled or mentally ill.<sup>74</sup> The doctors in T-4 centers completely turned their backs on healing to promote Hitler's ideology by terminating the disabled to create a purer Germany. The first victims in Hadamar were not part of the carefully established "other" that the Nazi government had created and were German citizens, so why

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<sup>71</sup> Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell, *A World Without Bodies*.

<sup>72</sup> Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell, *A World Without Bodies*.

<sup>73</sup> Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell, *A World Without Bodies*.

<sup>74</sup> National Archives Trust Fund Board, National Archives and Records Service Washington, "United States of America vs. Alfons Klein," (Washington: 1980 The Records Reproduced in the Microfilm Publication).

were they targeted? A large part of the answer to this is because of the culture of hatred that was discussed earlier in this paper. While the Nazi party paid particular attention towards targeting Jews as the enemy, originally targeting the disabled had another impact of German culture by creating the idea of the pure German race. Anyone who was not recognized as being part of this “true” German race was considered to be inferior, even if they were not Jewish.

The disabled and the mentally ill fell into this category of inferiority simply because they were different. Added to that, because the disabled and the mentally ill were placed into sanatoriums during this time, it was easy to isolate them away from the rest of the population. Proof of the desire for isolation from the doctors can be seen in a photograph taken of the outside walls surrounding the Hadamar sanatorium. The photo reveals one of the walls which surrounds the cemetery where the dead patients were buried after they were killed in the facility. Jagged pieces of glass were placed on the wall, and the caption from the photograph stated that this was to discourage people from venturing close and investigating the cemetery.<sup>75</sup> This image emphasizes the complete and utter isolation of the T-4 killing centers. The doctors benefited from isolation; with no one looking in on their actions they were now free to do whatever they wanted to their patients. No one was around to dissuade them from pursuing radical actions against their patients when they were isolated away from the rest of the German community. The lack of regulation led to the doctors having complete freedom to do anything they wanted inside of Hadamar, causing these doctors to take the process of sterilization to new extremes.

Hadamar, Bernberg, and other T-4 centers technically counted as part of the government mandated sterilization; however, instead of sterilizing individuals, the Nazis turned the concept of sterilization to the issue of blood purity. The Nazis considered individuals who suffered from

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<sup>75</sup> Rosanne Fulton, *Photograph of Glass on Walls*, Hadamar Photographs, Jewish Virtual Library, Hadamar.

illnesses ranging from schizophrenia, to epilepsy, to alcoholism as being detrimental to society.<sup>76</sup>

In order to fix this problem, the Nazis ordered their removal from society and their sterilization in order to protect the future of the German race.<sup>77</sup> These doctors no longer considered isolation to be a sufficient form of sterilization because it still afforded the disabled and mentally ill a chance to interact with the rest of German society. The doctors at Hadamar ultimately decided that the only way to isolate the disabled from the rest of the population was to kill them.

After the complete isolation of the centers began the systematic murder of the inmates. The earliest killing methods in Bernberg and other T-4 buildings utilized injections and overdoses of sleep medication. Later, however, the physicians decided to use poison gas.<sup>78</sup> Part of the reason why the doctors ordered this shift came from the Nazis' need for quick and efficient mass murder. Another reason to use poison gas was to prevent personal connection between murderer and victim that injections created. An injection is a very intimate form of death and the Nazi physicians would be forced to interact personally with their victims. The same holds true for the overdosing patients on medication. The use of gas chambers was less personal for the physicians; the Bernberg gas chamber could fit seventy to seventy-five persons inside of it. The higher number of bodies made it easier for the doctors and nurses to distance themselves from the situation and allowed them to later rationalize that their actions were for the good of the German people.

After the gassing of adults had been implemented and accepted by the medical physicians, the T-4 program added disabled children to the list for extermination.<sup>79</sup> The doctors

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<sup>76</sup> "The Law for the Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring," In *The Holocaust*, edited by Jeff Hill, (Detroit, MI: Omnigraphics, 2006), 175.

<sup>77</sup>The Law for the Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring," 176.

<sup>78</sup> Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell, *A World Without Bodies*.

<sup>79</sup>Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors*, 51-4.

might have refused to kill if they had started with children instead of adults. In order to counteract this, the Nazis waited until the doctors had accepted the killings as a necessity. By the time that the doctors were being ordered to kill children, they had convinced themselves that they were showing mercy to these children.<sup>80</sup> The other reason why the Nazis waited to kill children was so they could gauge the public's reaction to the T-4 program through propaganda *schterma* literature and films. The killing centers did little to cover up the deaths of the disabled. Many of the people in the communities surrounding the centers knew that people were dying inside, which was indicated by the children of Bernberg calling the buses delivering the disabled to the sanatorium "death buses."<sup>81</sup> However, when the everyday people of Germany did nothing to stop the deaths of disabled adults, the Nazi government pushed forward and started killing children. After WWII started, the Nazis would take this policy one step further and began the mass murder programs in concentration camps.

Even though the T-4 doctors were able to act without any legal repercussions, the directors in charge of the killings felt vulnerable for committing mass murder. Instead of refusing to kill, the doctors sought legal justification by turning the Nuremberg Laws to make the situation more acceptable for themselves. The connection between the Nuremberg Laws and this new sterilization policy can be seen in one of the letters sent from Dr. Wurm at Hadamar to the Reich Minister in 1940. The letter states that the hospital staff felt uncomfortable with their actions against the disabled due to the "legal insecurity" surrounding the killings.<sup>82</sup> The wording of the letter implies that the doctors were not as affected by the act of committing murder as to

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<sup>80</sup>Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors*, 51-4, find exact page for mercy killing in there.

<sup>81</sup> Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell, *A World Without Bodies*.

<sup>82</sup> "Letter from chief of institution for feeble-minded in Stetten to Reich Minister of justice Dr. Frank," *The Nazi Euthanasia Program: Nazi Extermination of People with Mental Disabilities*, edited by Jason Levine, (July 2008).

the fact that they might be acting outside of the law. Wurm's letter indicates that the early Nazi doctors wanted a legal precedent to explain why they were killing the disabled and mentally ill. The Hadamar doctors' need for legal reasoning had two benefits for them. The first is that with a legal precedent in the sanatorium, the doctors did not have to view themselves as being murderers. Before the legal precedent was established, Wurm's letter revealed that doctors' "feelings (were) badly hurt" by acting outside the law. His plea was for a law that was similar in nature to the Nuremberg Laws focusing on inheriting hereditary diseases to alleviate doctors' concerns about their actions.<sup>83</sup> The way for the doctors of Hadamar to counteract this negative view was to shift the blame regarding the actions onto the shoulders of the governments. A law regarding medical killing would mean that Hitler and the Nazis ordered the deaths of the patients in Hadamar, so they would be responsible for every death instead of the doctors. This worked to remove some of the guilt from the doctors because they were ordered to do it by Hitler; they would also be able to convince themselves that they could not refuse Hitler's orders, so the deaths were not their fault.

Legalizing a euthanasia program in Hadamar had another benefit for the doctors; it rewarded the doctors' actions. The patients' ability to refuse sterilization had already been destroyed by the Nazi party, and this combined with the isolation of the sanatorium allowed the doctors to do whatever they wanted with the patients under their care. Wurm's letter indicates that as their actions became more extreme, the doctors turned towards Hitler who was the only authority left to gauge a response to their actions. By 1939, if the Nazi government had opposed what was occurring in Hadamar, it could have easily shut down the gas chambers and penalized the doctors. Instead, the opposite occurred and the government fully supported the doctors as

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<sup>83</sup> "Letter from chief of institution for feeble-minded," *The Nazi Euthanasia Program*.

seen in Hitler's official recognition of the euthanasia program.<sup>84</sup> The endorsement of the government rewarded the doctors for each murder they committed which encouraged them to continue killing the disabled. The endorsement stated that Hitler trusted the doctors with the honor of cleansing Germany by "charging (the doctors) with the responsibility" to determine who was "accorded a mercy death" inside of the medical institution.<sup>85</sup> By sending out this document, Hitler actively encouraged the atrocities that happened in Hadamar and established a disturbing precedent that would come into play during the Holocaust. Doctors were no longer being held accountable for their actions towards their patients. They could now do whatever they wished and would receive official governmental encouragement. Hadamar proved that doctors could kill their patients without any legal consequences. It also authorized doctors' experiments on patients and made them acceptable.

The T-4 centers led to Nazi scientific human experimentation and systematic murder. The murder that the doctors perfected in Hadamar and Bernberg was kept hidden by the Nazis during the late 1930s because Hitler wanted to preserve the image of a perfect Germany to foreign nations. However, this all changed once WWII began. The Nazis no longer hid their atrocities from the public and instead began to commit crimes against the disabled, Jews, and other minorities openly. While eugenics does not require anti-Semitism, the Nazi party used this hatred to promote their extermination policy. On July 31, 1941, Herman Goering sent a public letter to Reinhard Heydrich calling for a "complete solution" to the Jewish question in Germany and this letter had two very important impacts on German society.<sup>86</sup> The first impact was that it openly

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<sup>84</sup> Adolf Hitler, "Adolf Hitler Endorses the Nazi T-4 Program," In *The Holocaust*, edited by Jeff Hill, (Detroit, MI: Omnigraphics, 2006), 177.

<sup>85</sup> Adolf Hitler, "Adolf Hitler Endorses the Nazi T-4 Program," 177.

<sup>86</sup> Herman Goring, "Authorizing the 'Complete Solution,'" In *The Holocaust*, edited by Jeff Hill, (Detroit, MI: Omnigraphics, 2006), 183.



classified Jews as a problem for Germany, which demonstrated that Hitler's coordination program to turn Jews and other minorities into the "other" succeeded. The deaths of the disabled in the T-4 program were publicized by the Nazi government, each disabled or mentally ill person killed proved that a purer Germany was being created. The other impact it had was that Goring demanded all branches of the Nazi government cooperate with implementing the Final Solution in the Third Reich.<sup>87</sup> By ordering all other agencies to cooperate, Goring made it so that the army and police had to contribute to the extermination that took place in Eastern Europe. As a result of this directive, concentration camps modeled after T-4 centers were set up in territories occupied by the Third Reich and the total extermination program of minorities began.

Parallels can easily be seen between T-4 centers and concentration camps. Both forcibly transported their victims from their homes into isolated killing centers. T-4 centers did so by gekrat buses and the camps did so by train.<sup>88</sup> Once the victims arrived at both locations, they were stripped of their clothing and lost all aspects of their individuality before being sent into gas chambers to be exterminated. The reason for the similarities of the T-4 centers and the concentration camps is that the former were the test run for the Holocaust. The Nazi doctors experimented with what would be the easiest killing process, which is why the T-4 centers tried several methods while the concentration camps only used poison gas. T-4 centers also developed a mass cremation process of the dead in crematoriums, as can be seen from the similarities between the crematoriums in Bernberg and the ones in Auschwitz.<sup>89</sup> Another sign that the T-4 centers were a test run for the processes of the concentration camps was that the T-4 centers

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<sup>87</sup> Goring, "Authorizing the 'Complete Solution,'" 183.

<sup>88</sup> Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell, *A World Without Bodies*. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, "German Railways and the Holocaust-Photograph," Digital image, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, [https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media\\_ph.php?ModuleId=10005445&MediaId=1616](https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media_ph.php?ModuleId=10005445&MediaId=1616).

<sup>89</sup> Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell, *A World Without Bodies*. SS, "Auschwitz II-Birkenau, Incinerators of Crematorium II," 1943, Photograph.

collected the gold teeth and fillings of their victims, a practice which was continued in concentration camps throughout the Third Reich.<sup>90</sup> The T-4 centers were also a way to test the populace's reaction to mass extermination. Even though the disabled were considered to be "unworthy of life" by the Nazis, they were still Germans.<sup>91</sup> When there was no widespread protest against murdering the disabled, the Nazis felt comfortable moving against groups that they had cast as the others, particularly Jews.

The T-4 centers created the process that directly resulted in human experimentation. Any patient that had "anatomy that interested a researcher" was singled out during the selection process.<sup>92</sup> Selecting victims that interested a physician and experimenting on them did not end in the T-4 facilities, this process also escalated in concentration camps. This is most likely due to the fact that the majority of doctors received training in T-4 facilities before being assigned to concentration camps. During training, the doctors would be in charge of the gas chambers and no doubt witnessed and were influenced by the selection process of the T-4 physicians and carried that process with them into the concentration camps.<sup>93</sup> One of the most infamous Nazi doctors, Josef Mengele, expanded on this framework and turned it into one of the most horrific ongoing experiments of the Holocaust. When Mengele selected his victims, he primarily chose to experiment on identical twins and dwarfs.<sup>94</sup> He chose these victims because they caused a strange fascination in him, which correlated with the thought process T-4 physicians showed in singling out specific disabilities.

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<sup>90</sup> "Letter from chief of institution for feeble-minded," *The Nazi Euthanasia Program*.

<sup>91</sup> Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell, *A World Without Bodies*.

<sup>92</sup> Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell, *A World Without Bodies*.

<sup>93</sup> Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell, *A World Without Bodies*.

<sup>94</sup> Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors*, 360.

However, Mengele's selection process was not based on biology and science like many of the T-4 decisions but was instead based off the strange idea of discovering the truth behind the "Jewish abnormality" that he felt made Jews inferior to Germans.<sup>95</sup> An example of this strange fascination can be seen in his experiments with eye color. Mengele attempted to force the correct Aryan eye color on his victims by injecting methylene blue, a blue dye, into the eye.<sup>96</sup> By attempting to correct their "abnormality" and medically give his victims the correct Aryan eye color, Mengele continued the T-4 program's attempt to better the Aryan race. Mengele also expanded on the T-4 process of autopsying bodies and escalated that part of the program as well. Mengele often experimented on one twin, or injected one with a deadly disease, and then waited for that twin to die; after the first twin's death he would kill the other twin and autopsy both bodies to study the results of his experiment in comparison to the other twin's condition.<sup>97</sup> Other experiments that he conducted also demonstrated how easy it was for Nazi doctors to escalate their actions inside of concentration camps.<sup>98</sup> Like the T-4 centers, the camps had a law of their own based off of the Nuremberg Laws and the massive numbers of prisoners and complete isolation allowed doctors like Mengele to torture and experiment on his victims on a massive scale.

Another similarity between the T-4 centers and concentration camps was what happened to the bodies of the victims. According to the Nazis, the numerous autopsies conducted inside of T-4 centers were done for scientific purposes, specifically to demonstrate how the doctors were

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<sup>95</sup> Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors*, 360.

<sup>96</sup> Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors*, 362.

<sup>97</sup> Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors*, 353.

<sup>98</sup> Louis Bulow, "Eva Mozes Kor: Echoes from Auschwitz: Dr. Mengele's Twins," Eva and Miriam, <http://www.auschwitz.dk/eva.htm>. One of the most infamous experiments that Mengele conducted was the conjoined twin experiment. In this instance, Mengele selected a pair of identical twins and sewed them together back to back in an attempt to create Siamese twins. The twins suffered for three days before dying of gangrene.

eliminating the German population of disabilities through sterilization and extermination.<sup>99</sup> Although some of the experiments conducted during the Holocaust were pure sadism like Mengele's actions, other experiments were conducted for scientific reasons. One example of experiments conducted for medical reasons came from Dachau. In this particular experiment, the doctors in Dachau forced their victims into vats of freezing water in order to induce frostbite. Some individuals were subjected to warming techniques in an attempt to learn more about effective ways to treat victims of frostbite.<sup>100</sup> In the instance of the Dachau frostbite experiments, there is a tie in with the T-4 program because both were attempting to promote scientific knowledge. Other camps also conducted experiments on inmates. Ravensbruck experimented with bone-grafting; Dachau and Buchenwald infected prisoners with diseases like typhus, malaria, tuberculosis and experimented on treatments for these illnesses.<sup>101</sup> Both the T-4 autopsies and the Holocaust experiments have another connection; the medical results are still used today by numerous medical communities.

The human experiments made during the Holocaust would not have occurred without the T-4 centers, and the T-4 Program would not have existed without the Nuremberg Laws. The Nuremberg Laws legalized systematic persecution and implemented the eugenics program. T-4 came from the escalation of the eugenics program to cleansing Nazi Germany of people deemed "inferior" by the government. Even the idea of inferior and superior blood came from the Nuremberg Laws, specifically the "Reich Citizenship Law" and the "Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor." T-4 also revealed the intensification of Nazis eugenics when

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<sup>99</sup> Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell, *A World Without Bodies*.

<sup>100</sup> Robert L. Berger, "Nazi Science - The Dachau Hypothermia Experiments — NEJM," *New England Journal of Medicine*, <http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJM199005173222006>. It is important to note that these victims were primarily male, prisoners of war. Some were submerged in clothes, while others were not.

<sup>101</sup> *Nazi Medical Experiments*, National Holocaust, Organization.<https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005168>.

they moved away from isolation into mass murder. T-4 legalized and perfected medical killing which was later applied to the concentration camps after WWII started. Concentration camps built off of the framework of the T-4 centers and expanded them to horrific new depths because of the massive numbers of individuals deported there. In the T-4 program, the autopsies were the main form of recording medical information even though extermination was the primary goal. In the Holocaust, the human experimentation started in the T-4 Program was expanded in the majority of concentration camps. The heinous experiments conducted in the Holocaust did not start suddenly in the concentration camps; it was a long grueling process that was a direct result of T-4 and eugenics, and eugenics started originally with the Nuremberg Laws.

**Conclusion:**

The human experiments conducted by Nazi scientists during the Holocaust demonstrate the fine line between healers and killers. The actions of the German doctors, both in the T-4 programs and inside of concentration camps, reveal the dangers of allowing medical personnel to act without any constraints. Laws are a necessity to keep doctors in check because they create a layer of accountability with a higher authority and hold doctors to clear ethical guidelines. However, the Nuremberg Laws demonstrate how unjust laws can create dangerous power vacuums inside of medical institutions. When the Nuremberg Laws allowed doctors to act without their patients' consent, it created the precedent that allowed doctors to do whatever they wished. The doctors in question, especially in the T-4 facilities, continued to push the boundaries of what was considered to be acceptable medical practices. Each time the doctors pushed these boundaries and the government rewarded them, the physicians' actions against their patients increased.

The Nuremberg Laws also revealed the importance of medical patients being in control of their own bodies. The “Law for the Protection of Hereditary Health” removed patients’ ability to refuse medical treatment, and the law specifically mentions that patients cannot refuse sexual sterilization. This law created the legal foundation for the Nazis eugenics program that grew into T-4. The T-4 Program was a major part of the Nazi eugenics and focused on making mass sterilization more efficient for the Third Reich.

After 1935 the concept of sterilization changed in Nazi Germany from sexually sterilizing individuals to sterilizing the German population. The T-4 Program evolved with the change in Nazi ideology and the six T-4 buildings turned from sanatoriums to killing centers. Centers like Bernberg and Hadamar murdered the mentally ill and disabled with injections, gas chambers, and sleeping pills as part of Hitler’s eugenics program that focused on making a “purer” Third Reich by eliminating groups the Nazis considered to be undesirable.

After 1939, T-4 centers were connected to the training of personnel sent to concentration camps in the Holocaust. Personnel assigned to concentration camps received training on how to work gas chambers and crematoriums at centers like Hadamar. The Third Reich used training at T-4 facilities to desensitize the guards sent to extermination camps like Auschwitz and Dachau.

The Nuremberg Laws also revealed how the Nazis used eugenics to turn citizenship into a weapon against minorities. The “Reich Citizenship Law” established that only pure blooded German were citizens in Nazi Germany and also established that only Reich citizens had legal protection. Under this law, Jews, Romani, and other minorities were turned into the “other” in German society all because they did not have pure German blood. They were isolated away from the rest of society, and the Nazis forced them from their homes and into ghettos and concentration camps. The “Reich Citizenship Law” added to the foundation created by the “Law

for the Protection for Hereditary Health,” together both of these laws solidified Nazi ideology and made eugenics the center of Nazi law from 1933 to 1945.

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