DEADLY MEDICINE
CREATING THE MASTER RACE

United States
Holocaust Memorial Museum
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GERMAN EUGENICS, 1890–1933
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Racial hygiene, or eugenics—the strategy aimed at improving the genetic qualities of a population through control of reproduction—is commonly linked to the racial purity policies of the Third Reich, and is often portrayed as leading directly to the Holocaust. Simply to view the German eugenics movement as a direct and inevitable precursor to Nazism would be a distortion. German racial hygiene, unlike Nazi racial ideology, was rooted not in antisemitic concepts but in reform movements concerned with public health and social welfare. Still—and very important—both eugenics and Nazi racial theory shared common beliefs in the central role of heredity in determining physical and mental traits and in the innate inequality of individuals and groups. The roots of Nazi eugenics that culminated in the Holocaust were laid in the preceding decades, particularly in the 15 years following World War I, the period of the Weimar Republic.

From its beginnings, Anglo-American eugenics and its German counterpart, racial hygiene, presupposed a belief in the innate inequality of individuals and "races." Proponents of eugenics viewed individuals and groups in terms of their genetic "value," ranking them from "superior" to "inferior." In the name of a higher good—the health of humanity as a whole, or of a nation (in Germany, of the Volks), and of the
need to decrease the burden of care for mentally and physically disabled persons, viewed as “defects” or “inferior”—eugenicists everywhere argued that populations should be scientifically managed. Part of the program, referred to as “negative” eugenics, was the control of individual reproduction by means of physically segregating and surgically sterilizing the “unfit,” who, it was believed, were multiplying at faster rates than the “fit.”

Nazism also presupposed innate or biological differences between individuals and races, and, like eugenics, privileged heredity’s role in determining physical and mental traits. During the 1920s, the turbulent political and economic years of the Weimar Republic, eugenics became well established in government circles, and within the German medical and scientific community. It also reached a wider audience, including the nascent Nazi Party. Eugenic ideas were absorbed into the ideological platform of the party. Even before Hitler took power in 1933, anti-Nazi writers were beginning to express fears of the form that medicine and public health might take under a Nazi regime. Hitler and other Nazis had publicly expressed contempt for traditional religious and charitable care that permitted the unfit to continue to procreate and multiply. In the Nazi view, they were but “human ballast” that should be jettisoned.¹

In view of the institutional development and increasing popularity of eugenics during the 1920s and the early years of the Great Depression, it is not surprising that many racial hygienists welcomed the Nazi takeover as an opportunity to see eugenic measures implemented, such as a compulsory mass sterilization law, that, owing to democratic opposition, had been politically unfeasible before. At the same time, Hitler’s regime, embracing a radical and racialized interpretation of eugenic
ideas, would welcome the collaboration of academic experts, proponents of eugenics, as they would lend legitimacy to and help implement Nazi racial hygiene policies. The relationship would be a symbiotic, mutually beneficial one.

ORIGINS OF GERMAN RACIAL HYGIENE, 1890–1918

Eugenics in Germany originated in the late nineteenth century as a reform movement looking for a scientific solution to social problems created by the nation's rapid industrialization and urbanization—poverty, crime, alcoholism, and such chronic afflictions as tuberculosis and venereal diseases. Advocates of eugenics comprised a small group of educated, middle-class intellectuals with medical backgrounds. German eugenics developed independently of its British counterpart, although both were heavily influenced by Charles Darwin's principles of evolution.

In Germany, the zoologist Ernst Haeckel popularized social Darwinism—the extension of Darwin's theory of survival of the fittest (natural selection) to competition in human society. Haeckel's writings substantiated the fears of a falling birthrate among the "better" (or "productive") elements of society and pointed ominously to an increasing hereditary "degeneration"—the transmission of physically and mentally unhealthy traits—of the human species. The work of German biologist August Weismann lent additional scientific support to the concern that natural selection no longer operated effectively in contemporary society, because modern medicine and social welfare enabled the unfit to survive and reproduce their own "genetically defective" kind.
Attempting to counteract this process, a small but growing group of medical experts began to promote eugenics as the best way to restore Germany's long-term health. Physicians enjoyed extraordinary prestige in Germany because of the medical breakthroughs of the nineteenth century, reinforcing their view of themselves as the one professional group possessing the expertise to safeguard the health and welfare of the German people. The medically trained cofounders of the German eugenics movement, Wilhelm Schallmayer and Alfred Ploetz, both wrote their first eugenics treatises during the last decade of the nineteenth century.

A prize competition in 1900, funded by the Krupp munitions family, brought the ideas of what, in Germany, would be known as “racial hygiene” to a limited public audience. Schallmayer's work, *Heredity and Selection in the Life Process of Nations*, won first prize for answering, “What can we learn from the theory of evolution about internal political development and state legislation?” He argued that long-term national power depended upon the biological vitality of its citizens, and neglect of the genetic fitness of its population led to the downfall of the state. Adopting a eugenics program was urgent, as the future of the nation depended on the “good management” of its human resources. Schallmayer’s treatise outlined early racial hygiene goals: a heavy emphasis on “positive” eugenic measures designed to increase the number of the so-called fit—or socially productive individuals—who seemed headed for extinction because of late marriages and birth control; caution in the area of “negative” measures to limit the reproduction, through such means as surgical sterilization, of those in the population deemed unfit—or unproductive, and a special preoccupation with education and propaganda to promote eugenic goals. For
Schallmayer, the rational administration of Germany's human resources was the most effective way to redress the perceived imbalance between genetically inferior and superior human material. His plan of population management focused attention on the least productive (yet, to him, the seemingly fastest multiplying) individuals within German society, the "hereditary degenerates"—especially criminals, alcoholics, the insane, and the feebleminded.

Ploetz, however, was the far more influential of the two cofounders of German eugenics. In his 1895 book *The Fitness of Our Race and the Protection of the Weak*, he originated the word "Rassenhygiene" (racial hygiene) as a German synonym for "eugenics," a term coined in 1883 by Francis Galton, the founder of British eugenics. Ploetz viewed a *Rasse* (race) as any interbreeding human population that, over the course of generations, could demonstrate similar physical and mental traits. In 1904, he established the first journal in the world dedicated to eugenics, the *Journal of Racial and Social Biology* (Archiv für Rassen- und Gesellschafts-Biologie), and in 1905, the German Society for Racial Hygiene, the world's first eugenics organization. He intended the society to be international—to include members from all "civilized" nations—but, ultimately, his international society fell victim to World War I.

German racial hygiene during the first two decades of the twentieth century consisted of a narrow, elite, social network composed primarily of Ploetz's literary and scientific acquaintances—among them, the psychiatrist Ernst Rüdin, the anthropologist Eugen Fischer, the human geneticist Fritz Lenz, and the biologist Agnes Bluhm. All had medical degrees and all remained active during the Third Reich. Attended by 5.5 million, the 1911 International Hygiene Exhibition, in Dresden,
INTERNATIONALE
HYGIENE-
AVSTELLUNG
DRESDEN
MAI—OCTOBER
1911
displayed tables and charts of racial hygienists who sought to spread the new "applied science" in Germany. But the early racial hygiene movement failed to attract official support before the war or have any impact on public policy.

Most of Fleets's personal group of converts were (at least, privately) sympathetic to political doctrines of Aryan supremacy. But early German racial hygiene was diverse in its politics and its aims. Some, including the social hygienist Alfred Grotjahn, were on the political left. And both Catholics and Jews also had agendas that varied from those of Fleets and his circle. But even those in his circle with a political weakness for "Aryanism" were not calling for the total elimination of the Jews from Germany—rather, most shared the "respectable" form of antisemitism common among Germany’s non-Jewish, educated middle classes and academic elite. It would be misleading to view racial hygiene in Germany at this time as a mere prelude to "Nazi eugenics." The early German racial hygiene movement was preoccupied with eugenic issues common in most other countries with similar movements. There were no public pronouncements seeking to advance exclusively the "Aryan," or ethnic German, segments of the German Empire. The primary objective was rational management of the population—to make the nation more efficient through control of the birthrates of various groups and classes of German society.

By applying eugenics using modern managerial methods and biological principles, eugenicists hoped to secure the long-term vitality of the state. Among the proposed plans to stimulate reproduction were financial incentives for eugenically desirable couples to marry early and have large families, ranging from tax benefits and inheritance law reform to the creation of homesteads and colonies on Germany's
eastern borders. Eugenacists also devised strategies to fight venereal disease and lower infant mortality. To evaluate the biological vitality of individuals, racial hygienists proposed medical genealogies and health passports. They envisioned these as accompanying marriage applications, to enable the state to prevent the marriage of unsuitable couples.\(^{11}\)

**POSTWAR EUGENICS, 1919–1933**

World War I and its aftermath affected no country more than Germany. It toppled the monarchy, led to the birth of the largely unloved Weimar Republic—Germany's first attempt at democracy—and was, in no small measure, responsible for Hitler and his Nazi Party's rise to power. Worldwide, most eugenacists viewed the war as a necessary, if dysgenic, upheaval. The German racial hygiene movement, too, was profoundly altered by the aftershocks of the war. Tensions that simmered beneath the surface during the relatively untroubled prewar years ultimately erupted in the face of Germany's defeat and the harsh treaty concluding the war. Exacerbating the situation were attempts from the political right and left to overthrow the government, the occupation by the French of Germany's resource-rich Ruhr region, catastrophic inflation, devastating depression, and, finally, the appointment of Hitler as chancellor on January 30, 1933. Racial hygiene became an integral part of the Republic's health, welfare, and social policy, and inaugurated an active role for medical experts and eugenacists in managing that policy. Weimar racial hygiene also laid some of the necessary foundations for later developments under National Socialism.\(^{12}\)
NATIONALISM AND NORDICISM
The major concerns of racial hygiene before the war—the degeneration of the national hereditary stock, population policy, and the alleged financial drain of maintaining the unfit in mental institutions, hospitals, and care homes—continued to preoccupy the postwar movement. Following military defeat and the loss of two million men, Weimar racial hygiene centered increasingly on restoring the health of the German nation, as biomedical professionals saw themselves as healers of the nation. Racial hygienists, aligning themselves with the fields of public welfare and social hygiene, aimed to save Germans from the scourges of crime, venereal disease, tuberculosis, alcoholism, the falling birthrate, and other social ills. Racial hygiene was also tied to the notion, prevalent during the 1920s, of reducing social tensions and social costs by rational state planning.

German racial hygienists never entirely lost their international orientation. Many continued to correspond with their counterparts worldwide and, after the early 1920s, participated in international eugenics conferences. Yet, most harbored resentment toward Allied policies, particularly toward the German “war-guilt” clause of the detested Versailles Treaty. They were especially angered at France for using colonial soldiers (including Arab and black African troops) to police the occupied and demilitarized Rhineland region. These events helped push some members of the Floetz circle more and more toward the political right. Both Fischer and Lenz, for instance, joined the extreme right-wing, nationalist, anti-Republic German National People’s Party (DNVP) during the Weimar period. Viewing their fatherland as engaged in a life-or-death geopolitical and economic struggle, and forced to suffer foreign
Brochure for the 1932 German Hygiene Museum exhibition: Healthy Woman, Healthy Nation. Eugenacists regarded maternal health as an important means of lowering infant mortality and birth defects and, therefore, of improving both the quantity and quality of the German population. Deutsches Hygiene-Museum, Dresden.
domination by people "culturally beneath them," as the renowned German geneticist and racial hygienist Erwin Baur put it, those in the vanguard of the first generation of the movement, as well as the growing number of new converts in the burgeoning Weimar health and welfare bureaucracy, became increasingly attracted to eugenic solutions.  

The larger group of welfare eugenicists, centered in Berlin, served as an important political counterweight to the conservative, nationalist circle based in Munich. This older group of nationalist racial hygienists was committed to promoting the "Nordic race" as the most biologically desirable of the so-called European races within the German population. They postulated the idea that Germany was populated by several so-called "European races" as well as "non-European races," such as the Jews—normally viewed as a mixture of non-European races. Almost all assumed that the Nord  

THE POPULARIZATION OF EUGENICS

Owing to the veritable army of medical experts within the left-leaning Prussian government's health and welfare bureaucracy, who found racial hygiene appealing as a means of dealing with a host of health-related issues, eugenics became increasingly more popular in the Weimar years. Race hygienists now reached a wider audience in a variety of ways, including traveling exhibitions, brochures, pamphlets, newsletters, and other teaching materials, as well as through the innovative use of public health
The Wittenau Psychiatric Clinic, in Berlin, was internationally known for its alcohol treatment programs. Many psychiatrists and proponents of eugenics viewed alcoholics as biologically "degenerate," like individuals afflicted with venereal disease or tuberculosis, and likely to pass on their physical defects to any offspring. Ca. 1920. Landesarchiv Berlin IA Rep. 003-04-04 Nr: 31

and eugenics propaganda films that dealt with such topics as infant care, tuberculosis and alcoholism prevention, and the risks of sexually transmitted diseases.

Seeking a wider audience for the eugenics message, in 1925 racial hygienists in Berlin formed the German League for National Regeneration and Heredity (Deutscher Bund für Volksaufartung und Ehrkunde), a eugenics education organization. The league dedicated itself to spreading eugenic ideas to all Germans, particularly the working class, a target of eugenicists as a source of social problems and illnesses. Its name, "national regeneration" (Volksaufartung), reflected the spirit of optimism and hope of national reconstruction of the mid-1920s, while its slogan, "Protect German Heredity and Thus the German Type," appealed to nationalism. The league was not antisemitic, yet its chairman, the physician, eugenicist, and high-ranking government official Karl von Behr-Pinnow, accepted the notion of racial hierarchy and regarded the Nordic race as spiritually and physically superior. It also endorsed both negative and positive eugenic measures, including sterilization of physical and mental degenerates. During the Weimar years, the league published three popular journals. Edited, in the late Weimar period, by the influential public health official with Social Democratic sympathies in the Prussian Ministry of Welfare, Arthur Ostermann, the journals and their contents had a strong influence in government circles. Many of the 1,500 members who belonged to the league also found their way to the German Society for Racial Hygiene.

The league's journals were politically distasteful to some supporters of the Nordic idea, and to many on the political right—the extreme nationalist publisher Julius Lehmann, for one. Lehmann, a supporter of Adolf Hitler, became an important
propagandist for the Nordic wing of racial hygiene. Although specializing in medical books and journals, Lehmann's firm also published many antisemitic and radically nationalist tracts, such as amateur anthropologist Hans F. K. Günther's popular Racial Study of the German People (Rassenkunde des deutschen Volkes).

During the Weimar years, proponents in cultural and political arenas further popularized eugenics. In the Catholic sphere, eugenics centered on Hermann Muckermann, a Jesuit biologist and steadfast eugenics advocate, whose ties to the Catholic Center Party gave him influence in some government circles. His tireless lecturing on eugenics won him a reputation as a leading propagandist for the cause. The Social Democratic Party was also attracted to eugenic ideas, which is not surprising considering the wide interest in scientific methodology shared by both socialists and eugenicists—a scientific approach that both embodied the utopian vision of transforming humankind and lent itself to various social engineering projects under way in Weimar Germany's health and welfare sectors. By the late Weimar years, eugenics also made its way into the German secondary-school biology curriculum, further encouraging the spread of the eugenics gospel beyond the confines of a narrow, intellectual band of advocates.

INSTITUTIONALIZING WEIMAR RACIAL HYGIENE

Along with its popularization, German racial hygiene experienced a high degree of professionalization and institutionalization in the Weimar period. One of the people who did most to help professionalize racial hygiene during the Republic, as well as
Family trees showing the manifestation of epilepsy across two generations, from Foundations of Human Genetics and Racial Hygiene. USHMM Collection

Fig. 101.

Epilepsie. Nach Hoffmann.

lend an air of international respectability to eugenics in Germany, was Fritz Lenz. He wrote more than six hundred articles and book reviews in his lifetime. Lenz, who was active in the Munich chapter of the society before the war, came to the attention of the international eugenics community in 1921, as coauthor of what became the discipline's standard work, Foundations of Human Genetics and Racial Hygiene. The treatise comprised two volumes and went through four editions in German; its third edition (the last to be published prior to the Third Reich) was translated into English in 1931.³⁰ It was the racial hygiene text Hitler said he had read during his stay in prison following his failed 1923 beer-hall putsch, in Munich. The Baur-Fischer-Lenz, as the Foundations was dubbed (for its authors, Erwin Baur, Eugen Fischer, and Fritz Lenz), was reviewed in more than 300 professional journals, including 27 in non-German-speaking countries.³¹

Like many anthropologists and geneticists of his day, Lenz believed that psychological and physical traits were racially determined. Along with many of his colleagues worldwide, he accepted a hierarchy that classified and ranked groups into races based on cultural achievement and physical appearance. His support of ideologies of Nordic racial supremacy and his scientific variety of antisemitism were both clearly evident in the Foundations. According to Lenz (and many Jewish anthropologists), Jews were a composite of two main races, the Near Eastern and the Oriental. He considered them a "mental race," a people preoccupied with making money or making revolution. But he also praised Jews as a highly intelligent people whose presence in the "world of knowledge," particularly in the sciences, was far greater "than might be expected from their numbers." "To deny that the Jewish race has produced persons of outstanding genius," Lenz asserted, "would be absurd."³²
Most Western anthropologists classified people into "races" based on such physical traits as head size and eye, hair, and skin color. This classification scheme by Eugen Fischer, published in the 1921 and 1923 editions of Foundations of Human Genetics and Racial Hygiene, identifies eight racial types.
Tafel 4.

Vorderasiatische Rasse.

Vorderasiatische Rasse. Aus Armenien.


Dinarische Rasse.

Orientalische Rasse mit vorderasiatischem Einfluss.

A Belgian Jewish woman (right bottom) is classified as a mixed type, with Oriental and Near Eastern traits. USHMM Collection.
Gift of Friedrich Riesling.
Lenz projected his obsession with cultural productivity as a standard for genetic fitness onto race. For him, the Nordic race was the pinnacle of cultural efficiency as well as physical beauty—the standard-bearer of his idealized version of Western culture. Yet, the bulk of his work was more concerned with medical genetics, the inheritance of talent, the methodology of genetic research, and practical suggestions for the implementation of racial hygiene. Lenz, therefore, is the best representative of the two faces of German racial hygiene—at once a supporter of Nordic supremacy as well as an advocate of social productivity as the main criterion for ascertaining the “value” of an individual. His discussion of human genetics and his work on statistics gave the German movement worldwide scientific respectability. The international reputation of German racial hygienists would be an extremely valuable resource for the Nazi state in the implementation of its racial policies.

The professionalization of Weimar racial hygiene coincided with substantial institutional expansion. In 1923, the University of Munich established a chair for the new discipline (held by Lenz), and by 1932, many German universities offered eugenics lecture courses—mostly in faculties of medicine. Perhaps most significant for the establishment of eugenics’ scientific respectability, both at home and abroad, was the creation of the prestigious Kaiser Wilhelm Society (KWS)—an umbrella organization encompassing, during the Weimar years, more than 30 research institutes in the natural and applied physical sciences.

Racial hygiene found its first home in the Kaiser Wilhelm Society in 1924, when it took over the German Research Institute for Psychiatry, originally founded, in Munich, in 1918. Ernst Rüdin, a conservative nationalist (although of Swiss origin) renowned for
his vanguard work in psychiatric genetics, headed the institute’s Department of Gene-
alogy and Demography. Rüdin’s long-standing connection to Ploetz, and his marriage
to Ploetz’s sister, strengthened his commitment to racial hygiene. In his pioneering
work on schizophrenia, published in 1916, Rüdin popularized his methodology of
hereditary prognosis—the collection and study of patients’ genealogical data—as
a way to document the genetic transmission of schizophrenia and other psychi-
atric disorders. Many of his future coworkers at the institute adopted this method-
ology during the Weimar years. The Kaiser Wilhelm Society’s willingness to fund
Rüdin’s research was probably not unrelated to Weimar health policy concerns, its
interest in data on genetic disorders in families and hereditary data banks, like the
kind established by Rüdin and his institute, was a way to screen large-scale popula-
tions. Before Rüdin became director of the German Research Institute for Psychiatry
in 1931, he had earned a national, even international, reputation in his field.

In 1927, the German government established a second eugenics-related Kaiser
Wilhelm Institute (KWI)—the KWI for Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics,
directed by the internationally respected anthropologist Eugen Fischer. KWS president
Adolf von Harnack convinced the Social Democratic–Center Party coalition government
in Prussia, an important source of funding, of the “great national task” of establishing
such an institute. He argued that the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology would
serve as a counterweight to the “inadequate and dilettantish” manner in which the
fields of anthropology (increasingly known as “racial science”), human heredity, and
eugenics were frequently treated. Offering his solemn pledge that “the Kaiser
Wilhelm Society [would take] full responsibility” in guaranteeing the objective
nature of the science pursued within the walls of the proposed new institute, he won the necessary financial backing from the Prussian state and the Reich. "True racial science," the aging KWS president argued, "will bring segments of the nation closer together, not divide them."  

Fischer himself headed the Department of Anthropology as well as serving as institute director until 1942, and simultaneously held a chair of anthropology at the University of Berlin. Fischer had always sympathized with the Nordic point of view, but was astute enough to realize that emphasizing this side of German racial hygiene would not be welcomed in the political climate of Berlin of the middle Weimar years. The use of the term eugenics rather than racial hygiene, as part of the institute's official title, was deliberate. Fischer instituted a clearly thought-out research program that focused on the inheritance of racial and pathological traits and on an analysis of the genetic foundations of a population. The first two research foci, he believed, found their culmination in the third, eugenics. He appointed Hermann Muckermann head of the division of eugenics. During the Weimar years, Muckermann delivered some 600 talks on eugenics. (He would be forcibly removed from his post when the Nazis assumed power in 1933.)

Fischer selected his medically trained former student, an extreme nationalist and racial hygiene enthusiast, and, later, close personal friend and confidant, Otmar von Verschuer, to head the Department of Human Heredity. Verschuer established the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology as one of the world centers for twin research, at the time the most innovative approach in the study of human genetics. Adept at finding ways to locate subjects for his research at hospitals, schools, and
During the Weimar period, anthropologists turned their focus inward to the study of local populations in Germany. Academics from the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics, in Berlin, selected 43 sites and collected family data and thousands of physical measurements. The photographs, taken in 1932, document a study conducted in Schleswig-Holstein by two Kiel University professors. Anthropological tools included hair color kits. (Ulstein Bild Berlin: Staatliche Naturwissenschaftliche Sammlungen Bayerns, Munich)
Eye chart. Gallon Collection, University College London

Verschuer, with identical twin subjects, at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute, 1928. Archiv zur Geschichte der Max-Planck-Gesellschaft, Berlin
Dr. Olmar von Verschuer examines the lung capacities of twins, 1930. Ethical questions surfacing from the deaths of 75 children in an unrelated tuberculosis vaccine experiment in Lübeck led to the adoption, in 1931, of strict national guidelines for human medical experimentation. ullstein bild, Berlin

through newspapers, Verschuer quickly filled his files with data from hundreds, and, later, thousands, of twins. His research focused on the heritability of criminality, feeblemindedness, tuberculosis, and cancer, and in 1927, he recommended the forced sterilization of the “mentally and morally subnormal.” Earlier, Verschuer had belonged to the ultranationalist organization of war veterans, the Freikorps, and typified those academics whose interest in Germany’s “national regeneration” provided motivation for their research. ⁵⁸

THE RADICALIZATION OF EUGENICS

Two years after the festive opening of the KWl for Anthropology, the effects of the Great Depression began to alter both German politics and the attitudes of German racial hygienists. Not only did the Depression eventually leave more than six million people unemployed, it also forced a reexamination of the Weimar welfare state. Political leaders sought ways to trim Germany’s welfare budget and to allocate Germany’s dwindling financial resources in the most cost-efficient manner. ⁵⁹ Racial hygienists and government officials looked for alternatives to pouring ever-increasing sums into asylums and prisons. They began formulating such ideas as “differential welfare,” a concept supported by eugenics like Hans Harmeun, a member of the Protestant Church’s charitable organization, the Inner Mission. In determining who should receive health care and material assistance, Harmeun urged that distinctions had to be made between the chronically useless and those “from whom full productivity could reasonably be expected.” ⁶⁰
Although German racial hygienists—of all political persuasions—had previously been fairly reticent about mandating "negative eugenic measures," mainly sterilization, during the last troubled years of the Republic qualms about the legal and ethical problems associated with such measures began to fade. By 1930, many racial hygienists supported compulsory sterilization of the unfit, and, to almost all professional German racial hygienists, at least voluntary sterilization seemed reasonable. After prolonged debate, in 1932 the Prussian Health Council drafted a sterilization law that permitted the voluntary sterilization of certain classes of hereditarily "defective" individuals—including those with hereditary mental illness, feeblemindedness, and epilepsy. It required proof that these traits were, in fact, genetic, with evidence such as genealogical records evaluated by two physicians. There was no mention of sterilization on either racial or social grounds. Owing to the political chaos following the ouster of Prussia's center-left coalition government by the Reich in July 1932, the sterilization draft never became law during the Weimar Republic.

It is important to note that the ever-increasing eugenics radicalism of German racial hygienists did not provoke any public criticism in the genetics community. Geneticists working in fields not related to human heredity were either sympathetic to racial hygiene—like the nationalist plant geneticist Erwin Baur, of the KWI for Breeding Research, and the Jewish geneticist Richard Goldschmidt, of the KWI for Biology—or were publicly silent on the topic. In fact, virtually all members of the German human genetics community were advocates of racial hygiene, and most human genetics research was informed by racial hygiene concerns. Nor was there a strong anti-eugenics movement within either of Germany's two main churches.
during the Weimar years. Muckermann used his ties to the Catholic Center Party to advance racial hygiene in Germany; he was even willing to negotiate with members of the Nazi Party, who sought his expert opinion on eugenic policy before 1933. Despite political differences, Muckermann saw eugenics and the Nazis “sharing the goal of overcoming national biological degeneration.”

With the coming of the Depression, many in the movement felt a sense of frustration that in bureaucratic, strife-ridden Weimar Germany relatively little in the way of practical eugenic policies could be implemented; some racial hygienists on the political right began to pin their hopes on Hitler and the Nazi Party. Lenz argued, as early as 1931, that the Nazi Party was the only party from which one might expect to see the type of racial hygiene measures commensurate with the genetic dangers facing Germany, although he regretted its one-sided antisemitism. Even those, like Fischer, who did not publicly support Hitler prior to 1933, resented the deep budget cuts their institutes experienced during the last years of the Republic. They were not disinclined, therefore, to adopt a “wait and see” attitude toward the Nazis.

Those racial hygienists willing to cooperate with the National Socialists believed that, as internationally respected scientific experts, they would be making the important decisions about future racial hygiene state policy. Once the Nazis were in power, many racial hygienists were ready to come to terms with Hitler’s regime. In so doing, they not only showed few qualms in working to validate Nazi racial theories but, ultimately, many participated directly in the implementation of the Nazis’ barbarous racial hygiene policies.
GERMAN EUGENICS, 1890–1933
4 Wilhelm Schallmayer, Vereinigung und Ausliebe im Lebensablauf der Volker einer staatswissenschaftliche Studie auf Grund der neueren Biologie (Gera: Gustav Fischer, 1903), 3.
5 Alfred Poesch, Die Täglichkeit unserer Rasse und der Schutz der Schwachen, Ein Versuch über Rassenhygiene und ihr Verhältnis zu den humanen Idealen, besonders zum Sozialismus (Berlin: Fischer, 1891), 5.
6 Weindling, Health, Race and German Politics, chap. 4.
7 Weiss, “Race Hygiene Movement,” 207.
10 Ibid., 211–13.
11 Weiss, Race Hygiene and National Efficiency, 50–59.
12 Weindling, Health, Race and German Politics, chap. 6.
13 Ibid., 404.
17 Ibid.
26 Weindling, Health, Race and German Politics, 384.
28 Weindling, Health, Race and German Politics, 309–10, 437, 554.