

A How did the Nazis treat 'outsiders'?

FOCUS ROUTE

- 1 Explain why the Nazis regarded each of the following groups as outsiders:
 - a) the mentally ill
 - b) ASOCIALS
 - c) homosexuals
 - d) members of religious sects
 - e) gypsies.
- 2 How was each of these groups treated by the Nazi regime?
- 3 Explain what the Nazi sterilisation and euthanasia programmes show about the regime and the way it operated.

The Nazis stressed the idea of *Volksgemeinschaft*, a people's community of healthy, vigorous Aryans working for the good of the nation. This concept was reinforced by its opposite: outsiders who did not belong (*gemeinschaftsunfähig*) and who had to be excluded from the people's community. These outsiders were classified on three main grounds:

- Ideological: those threatening the political unity of the nation, such as Communists
- Biological: those whose genes posed a threat to a healthy, pure German race, such as Jews and people with hereditary illnesses
- Social: those whose behaviour conflicted with the norms of the national community, such as the workshy. (Some Nazis would include some of these in the second category, arguing that such behaviour was genetically determined.)

From sterilisation to euthanasia

The mentally ill

SOURCE 18.1 A still from *Erbkrank* (Hereditary Illness), a 1935 film made by the Office for Racial Politics with the purpose of building up dislike and fear of the mentally ill. Such films were seen by 40 million people in 1939



SOURCE 18.2 Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring, July 1933

1 (ii) *Anyone is hereditarily ill within the meaning of this law who suffers from one of the following illnesses:*

- (a) *Congenital [hereditary] feeble-mindedness.*
- (b) *Schizophrenia.*
- (c) *Manic depression.*
- (d) *Hereditary epilepsy.*
- (e) *Huntington's chorea.*
- (f) *Hereditary blindness.*
- (g) *Hereditary deafness.*
- (h) *Serious physical deformities.*

(iii) *In addition, anyone who suffers from chronic alcoholism can be sterilised.*

12 *If the [Hereditary Health] Court has decided finally in favour of sterilisation, the sterilisation must be carried out even against the wishes of the person to be sterilised . . . In so far as other measures prove insufficient the use of force is permissible.*

For the Nazis, race, not class, was the key to history. A healthy, pure race would gain mastery in the struggle for survival in the world. Unhealthy genes weakened the race. The mentally ill were 'burdens on the community', 'life without life, worthless life' and 'unworthy of life'. Therefore, one of the first acts of the Nazi regime was a law allowing compulsory sterilisation of the hereditarily ill, to prevent bearers of such genes from passing them on to children. In the next twelve years about 350,000 people were sterilised, with about 100 dying as a result of the 'Hitler cut'. By 1939 the policy of reducing the numbers of the mentally ill by sterilisation developed into one of murder, described as 'mercy killing' or euthanasia.

This policy had been considered early on by Nazi leaders but was not at first adopted. However, in 1939 Hitler used a father's letter requesting that his deformed son be 'put to sleep' to initiate the policy of killing the incurably ill (see page 191). (This was typical of the random way policy decisions could be made in the Third Reich.) A special unit, T4, was established to kill disabled children. The government registered disabled children, and their records were examined by three doctors who marked the files '+' to die, '-' to survive. Children were killed by starvation, by lethal injection or by gas in mobile vans ('killer boxes') or 'shower' gas chambers. The policy was gradually extended to adults. By 1944, 200,000 people deemed mentally and physically disabled had been murdered. Relatives were informed by letter of the victims' sudden death from diseases such as measles or from 'general weakness', and were sent urns of ashes. Administrative errors, with urns of boys containing hair grips and diagnoses of appendicitis on those without an appendix, increased suspicion of what was occurring. The euthanasia programme contributed in several ways to the Holocaust. The T4 staff, and the techniques learnt, were later used in the Holocaust. Many would also argue that the moral degeneration that allowed such actions to occur eventually led to people permitting genocide.

Although the killings were kept secret, the government tried to prepare the German people for such policies by promoting the pro-euthanasia argument, especially through propaganda films. Some of these were aimed at the staff in the 'euthanasia institutions', others at the general public. The deaths of the disabled were justified mainly on the grounds of ending their misery, but this idea was reinforced by stressing the financial cost of keeping them alive (see Source 14.21, page 283) and the adverse effect such people had on the nation.

SOURCE 18.3 A scene from the film *I Accuse*, which was produced partly to counter Bishop Galen's 1941 protest against euthanasia (Source 18.5). The film centred around the decline of a musician suffering from multiple sclerosis who pleaded for her husband to kill her. When he did so, he was prosecuted. At his trial, he made an impassioned defence of his actions and accused the law of being outdated. The film was a great box-office success, being seen by 18 million people. The SS monitored audiences' reactions, finding that some seemed convinced but that others, especially Catholics, were ill at ease



SOURCE 18.4 From the commentary for the 1937 film *Victims of the Past*, ordered by Hitler to be shown in all 5,300 German cinemas before the main film

All life on this earth is a struggle for existence. Everything that is weak [in] life will inevitably be destroyed by nature. In the last few decades, mankind has sinned terribly against the laws of natural selection. We haven't just maintained life unworthy of life, we have allowed it to multiply . . . Whole clans are to be found in asylums. The costs of caring for the hereditarily ill siblings of this one family have so far been 154,000 RM. How many healthy people could have been housed for this sum?

Sterilisation is a simple surgical operation. In the last 70 years our people have increased by 50 per cent while in the same period the number of hereditarily ill has risen by 450 per cent. If this were to continue, there would be one hereditarily ill [person] to four healthy people. An endless column of horror would march into the nation.

SOURCE 18.5 In August 1941 Bishop Galen, in the most famous public criticism of the Nazi regime, preached a sermon, which was printed and widely circulated, protesting at the euthanasia policy

If you establish and apply the principle that you can kill unproductive fellow human beings then woe betide us all when we become old and frail! . . . Even if it only initially affects the poor defenceless mentally ill . . . as a matter of principle murder is permitted for all unproductive people, in other words for the incurably sick, the people who have become invalids through labour and war, for us all when we become old, frail and therefore unproductive.

. . . Then none of our lives will be safe any more. Some commission can put us on the list of the 'unproductive' who in their opinion have become worthless life . . . Woe to mankind, woe to our German nation if God's holy commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' . . . is not only broken, but if this transgression is actually tolerated and permitted to go unpunished.

SOURCE 18.6 SS officer Greifelt in January 1939

In view of the tight situation on the labour market, national labour discipline dictated that all persons who would not conform to the working life of the nation, and who were vegetating as work-shy and asocial, making the streets of our cities and countryside unsafe, had to be compulsorily registered and set to work . . . More than 10,000 of these asocial forces are currently undertaking a labour training cure in the concentration camps, which are admirably suited for this purpose.

Asocials

'Asocial' was a very broad term that could be applied to anyone who did not fit into the *Volksgemeinschaft*. In 1938 asocials were defined as vagabonds, gypsies, beggars, prostitutes, alcoholics, eccentrics, the workshy and juvenile delinquents. The most obvious manifestation of asocial behaviour was unwillingness to work, as this 'gives offence to the community'. In 1933 there was a round-up of half a million vagrants. They were divided into the orderly, who were given work, and the disorderly, who were imprisoned in camps where they were forced to wear black triangles. As unemployment disappeared, pressure on those not working increased. Thousands were sent to concentration camps, where many died. Increasingly, the unemployed were seen as a matter for the police not welfare agencies. The Nazis increasingly stressed the biological origins of asocial behaviour. Thus the asocial became, in the Nazi view, unworthy people who needed to be removed, via sterilisation and murder, in the interests of the community.

Homosexuals

Another group deemed to be asocial were homosexuals. Not only did their behaviour deeply offend traditionally minded Nazis, it was also believed to be against the laws of nature and to threaten Germany's position in the world by reducing the country's birth rate. In 1936 the Reich Central Office for the Combating of Homosexuality and Abortion was created and Himmler tried to establish a register of homosexuals. He was particularly concerned at the discovery of about ten cases a year of homosexuality even in 'the good blood' in the SS. In 1937 he ordered that homosexual SS officers should be sent to concentration camps 'where they will be shot while attempting to escape'. Eventually, between 10,000 and 15,000 homosexuals were arrested and sent to camps where they were forced to wear pink triangles. Some were castrated and became the object of medical experiments designed to correct their 'unnatural' feelings. Lesbians were not subject to formal persecution in the Third Reich since they were not seen as a threat to the nation.

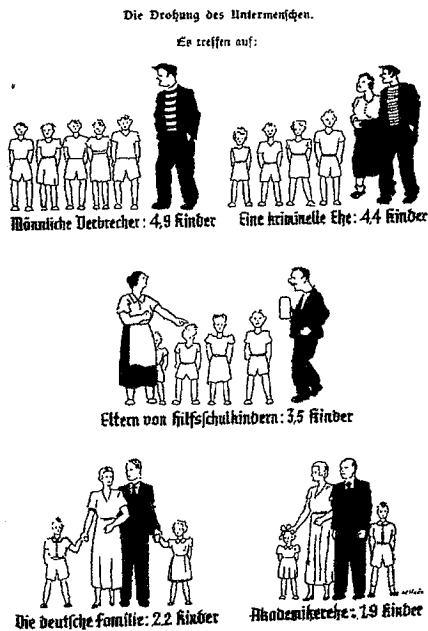
SOURCE 18.7 From a speech by Heinrich Himmler to the SS in February 1937

. . . There are those homosexuals who take the view: what I do is my business. However, all things which take place in the sexual sphere are not the private affair of the individual, but signify the life and death of the nation, signify world power or 'SWISSIFICATION'. The people which has many children has the candidature for world power and world domination. A people of good race which has too few children has a one-way ticket to the grave, for insignificance in fifty or a hundred years, for burial in two hundred and fifty years . . .

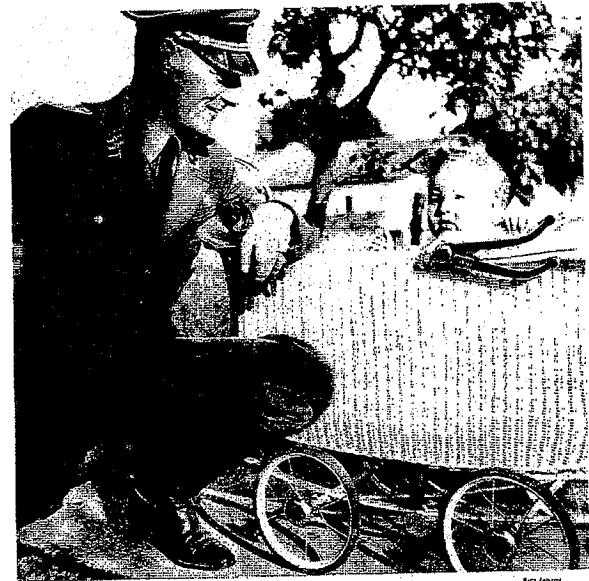
In olden times homosexuals were thrown in swamps . . . That wasn't a punishment, but simply the extinguishing of abnormal life. It has to be got rid of; just as we pull out weeds, throw them on a heap, and burn them. It was not a feeling of revenge, simply that those affected had to go.

Why do you think the Nazis could not accept that there are things that are entirely up to the individual?

SOURCE 18.8 An illustration from a book, *Nation in Danger*. The top row shows the families of criminals; the middle row families with children who need special education; the bottom row the German family with 2.2 children and the academic couple with 1.9 children



SOURCE 18.9 A picture from an SS calendar entitled: 'A nation stands or falls according to the greater or lesser worth of its blood-bound racial substance.' The Nazi regime believed it was vital to increase the number of children born to Aryan parents. In a speech in 1937 Himmler said: 'If you further take into account the facts I have not yet mentioned, namely that with a static number of women, we have two million men too few on account of those who fell in the war, then you can well imagine how this imbalance of two million homosexuals and two million war dead, or in other words a lack of about four million men capable of having sex, has upset the sexual balance sheet of Germany, and will result in a catastrophe'



Ein Volk steht und fällt mit dem Wert oder Unwert seiner blutgebundenen rassistischen Substanz.

Juni						Urschet
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Sonntag	Montag	Dienstag	Mittwoch	Donnerstag	Freitag	Sonntag

Verlag: "Der Tag" 1937
Vertriebsstelle: SS-Verlag in Potsdam, Preußen

Religious sects

Although the Nazis were fairly cautious in their dealings with the main Christian Churches (see Chapter 16), they acted fiercely against minority sects, especially Jehovah's Witnesses. These had refused to join the army and to swear allegiance. Whole families were arrested. About one-third of Germany's Jehovah's Witnesses died in concentration camps. Other groups, such as Christian Scientists and Seventh Day Adventists, suffered a similar fate.

Gypsies

The Nazis did not initiate hostility to gypsies. With their distinctive appearance and lifestyle, gypsies had long been objects of suspicion in many countries. As a numerically small group of 30,000, gypsies were not seen as a major threat, provided they did not contaminate the German blood pool; but in the late 1930s they became victims of the general radicalisation. In 1938 Himmler issued a 'Decree for the Struggle against the Gypsy Plague'. In 1939 they were sent to camps, before being expelled to Poland. In December 1942 Himmler ordered them to be transferred to Auschwitz, where there was a special gypsy camp. Eleven thousand of the 20,000 gypsies in Auschwitz were gassed. As German control extended throughout Europe, more gypsies became victims of Nazism, and it has been estimated that half a million gypsies were killed.

SOURCE 18.10 Letter to a Frankfurt newspaper from some citizens about the 'Gypsy nuisance'

... Right opposite properties ... Gypsies have settled themselves ... who represent a heavy burden on the community. The hygienic conditions in this area defy description ... We are worried about the spread of contagious diseases. Also, with regard to sexual conduct, these people, and even the children, have no sense of decency ... Almost daily there are fights and the neighbourhood has become so insecure that one has to worry about walking the streets alone after darkness. Because of the Gypsies our properties have greatly depreciated [fallen in value].

Are the attitudes in Sources 18.6, 18.7 and 18.10 still prevalent today?

Do you consider prejudice against people with different behaviour and lifestyles inevitable?

Nazi Sterilization and Euthanasia Programs

Eugenics: literally means "well born." It is the study of methods of improving genetic qualities by selective breeding (especially as applied to human mating).

1. What was Francis Galton's theory with respect to Eugenics? What was the impact of his theory in the early nineteen hundreds?
2. What was Hitler's interpretation of eugenics as discussed in his book Mein Kampf?
3. Identify the following Nazi laws and programs:
 - i. Law for the Prevention of Progeny with Hereditary Diseases
 - ii. Lebensborn Program
 - iii. Euthanasia/T4 Program
4. What was the impact of the Nazis sterilization and euthanasia programs between 1933 and 1945?
5. What happened at the Hadamar Centre? How can this case study help us better understand life in Nazi Germany for those who were not part of the "master race"?

Source: Vancouver
Holocaust Education
Centre

READING #1 (CHAPTER 1)

Eugenics

Although the first reference to eugenics dates back to Plato, the modern attempt to control human heredity comes from the work and ideas of the British scientist Francis Galton, who coined the term in 1883. Galton was fascinated by the frequency by which genius seemed to be passed down through generations. He investigated the possibility that talents and virtues were inherited just like the physical traits of height and eye colour. Galton believed that society would be improved if hereditarily favourable families had more children, while genetically inferior families were discouraged from reproducing.

The impact of Galton's theory was immediate. The Racial Hygiene Society was formed in Germany in 1905, the English Eugenics Education Association was founded in 1907 and the American Eugenics Office opened in 1910. In Canada, Alberta and British Columbia were the first provinces to introduce legislation for the sterilization of the 'feeble-minded' in 1928 and 1933 respectively. Between 1890 and 1920, eugenic ideas were advanced in nations as diverse as Norway, Brazil and the Soviet Union.

A popular eugenics movement captured the public's imagination. Eugenic organizations organized public exhibits that drew thousands of visitors and 'fitter families' competitions were mounted at American state fairs. Many professionals, academics, members of the upper and middle classes and political parties of both the left and right, embraced the new 'science'. Eugenicists believed that behavioural traits and talents were inherited, that the quality of the gene pool could be improved and that social problems had a biological basis and therefore a biological remedy. Many believed that social decay was caused by the lower classes or immigrants.

Forced sterilizations were carried out in Canada, the United States and Nazi Germany, although such practices were rare in Britain. However, no other nation's eugenic program matched the murder of thousands in the Nazi euthanasia program. After the Holocaust and the defeat of Germany, eugenicists in other countries were quick to distance themselves from German eugenicists and the movement fell into general disrepute.

READING #2 (CHAPTER 1)

T-4 / Sterilization and Euthanasia Programs

Adolf Hitler exploited the eugenic ideas prevalent in Germany and other nations at the turn of the 20th century. In his book *Mein Kampf*, Hitler argued that only people with 'hereditary valuable traits' should reproduce and that there should be no racial interbreeding. Between 1933 and 1945 the Nazis sterilized over 300,000 mentally ill or physically disabled people, most of them German citizens and murdered approximately 80,000 as part of the euthanasia program. These people were deemed to be 'life unworthy of life' and their murder was justified on the grounds of racial purity and economic necessity. Thousands of people were transferred to institutions where they were sterilized, experimented upon, starved and ultimately murdered by lethal medications or toxic gas.

The "Law for the Prevention of Progeny with Hereditary Diseases," decreed on July 14, 1933, forced the sterilization of those with mental illnesses such as schizophrenia and manic depression, retardation, physical deformities, epilepsy, blindness, deafness and severe alcoholism. Thousands died as a result of the sterilization operation.

In 1935, the Lebensborn program was established to breed Aryan children using women who were considered to be racially and biologically precious and who were expected to give birth to children of the same quality. These selected women were encouraged to become pregnant by SS men in order to improve the race. Over 7,000 children were born in Lebensborn homes. Those who were born sick or disabled were immediately 'selected' and killed.

In October 1939, Adolf Hitler issued a decree, which established the euthanasia program by empowering physicians to grant a 'mercy death' to patients considered incurable. The intent of the euthanasia program was to exterminate the mentally ill and physically disabled and to cleanse the Aryan race of those considered genetically defective and a financial burden to society. The program codenamed 'Aktion T-4' was headed by Reich leader Philip Bouler and Hitler's private physician Karl Brandt.

The euthanasia program enlisted the cooperation of many doctors to select patients and supervise their murder. Victims included those with mental illnesses, physical handicaps and other neurological conditions. Many were German children who were blind, deaf, physically disabled or mentally handicapped, epileptics, orphans, juvenile delinquents and non-conformist youth. Children with cerebral palsy and other neurological conditions or Down's Syndrome were targeted and used as subjects of scientific experiments. Those that did not possess German citizenship or were not of German or related blood, including Jews, Gypsies and Africans, were also targets of the euthanasia program.

Due to an increase in public awareness and pressure, Hitler 'officially' suspended the T-4 operation on December 10, 1941. In reality, the operation continued on under the code name 14 f 13 from 1941 to 1945. At the Nuremberg Medical Trials from 1946 to 1947, fifteen defendants, among them Karl Brandt, were sentenced to death by hanging and five were sentenced to life imprisonment for their involvement in the euthanasia program.

READING #3 (CHAPTER 1)

Hadamar Case Study

Six killing centres were established in Germany as part of the euthanasia program, including the well-known clinic at Hadamar, which was rented to the T-4 Operation as a euthanasia killing centre between 1941 and 1945. Deception and the destruction of many records makes it impossible to verify the exact number of victims but an estimated 11,000 people, including children were murdered by gas at Hadamar. The institution held a special celebration after the deaths of 10,000 patients.

The first transport of mentally ill and disabled persons arrived at Hadamar in January 1941. Patients were transported from other institutions on grey "Gekrat" buses, whose windows were painted black to prevent neighbouring townspeople from seeing those trapped inside. Upon arrival, victims were undressed, photographed and quickly checked by doctors who issued death certificates with false causes of death. Patients were gassed within a few hours of their arrival and their remains burned in the crematorium. The gas chamber was disguised as a shower room and fatal carbon monoxide entered the room through a pipe. Up to 60 people were crowded into the room, locked by steel doors. Through a control window in the wall, the doctors watched for several minutes as people died. Doctors removed gold-teeth and brains from selected corpses. The brains were sent to the medical centres of various universities for research purposes.

"I ... looked through the control window in the wall. I saw approximately 40 to 45 men crowded in the room next door who were slowly dying. This method of putting people to death was so distressing that one couldn't call it a humane killing, I watched the scene for approximately 2-3 minutes and then went away, because I couldn't stand watching it any longer and felt sick."

The Administrator of Hadamar, 1946

Murder by gas was discontinued in August 1941, but the euthanasia program continued by means of medical poisoning and malnutrition. The number of killing institutions increased and the categories of victims broadened to include the elderly, injured and traumatized soldiers, children cared for by the German social welfare system, forced labourers with tuberculosis and Jews.

After the war in October 1945, the prosecutor at the Nuremberg Trial described the program at Hadamar as disgusting, shameless, inhuman and cowardly. All defendants were found guilty. The head of administration, the senior male nurse and one male nurse were sentenced to death by hanging. The medical director was sentenced to life imprisonment. Others were sentenced for up to thirty years. Although some of the death sentences were carried out, many of the convictions were reprieved.