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DESTRUCTION OF “UNWORTHY LIVES”: EUGENICS AND MEDICAL  
DISCOURSE IN WEIMAR AND  
THIRD REICH CINEMA

by

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ABSTRACT

DESTRUCTION OF “UNWORTHY LIVES”: EUGENICS AND MEDICAL  
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University of Houston-Clear Lake, 2018

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This project tracks the eugenic discourse of the 1920s through the Nazi era, and analyzes the eugenic links within mainstream Weimar and Nazi films. This thesis argues that *M* (1931), *La Habanera* (1937), and *Ich Klage An* (I Accuse) (1941) depict the “invisible danger” of race and disease, thereby reflecting the eugenic concepts of the Weimar and Nazi periods. Through an analysis of the eugenic links within each film presented here, I demonstrate how exclusionary ideologies led to the destruction of “unworthy lives.” This thesis begins with a discussion of the historical context of eugenics, illuminating the historiography of eugenics, how it progressed, and how it connects to late Weimar and Nazi films. An exploration of Lang’s *M* provides an example of nature over nurture and how an identification of the “dangerous other” shapes a feeling of powerlessness in

Weimar, Germany. An analysis of *La Habanera* as a cautionary tale reveals a disease narrative that connects to laws protecting the “purity” of German blood. An examination of *Ich Klage An* illuminates a film that paves the way for the T-4 program, and later, mass murder under the guise of war. This thesis builds on the extensive secondary literature which documents the exclusionary measures and unprecedented scale of mass murder under the authority of the Nazis (The Final Solution). The power of film in Germany’s Weimar and Nazi eras surpassed a melodramatic escape. This thesis highlights this underemphasized aspect in the historiography of the Hitler and the Nazi regime: eugenic discourse and the power of film as propaganda to further Nazi goals.

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## INTRODUCTION

Our starting point is not the individual, and we do not subscribe to the view that one should feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, or clothe the naked ... Our objectives are entirely different. We must have a healthy people in order to prevail in the world.

-Joseph Goebbels, 1938 Nazi Party Rally<sup>1</sup>

Between 1933 and 1945, the Nazi regime, under Adolf Hitler, promoted German nationalism by focusing on a vision of health, strength, and ethnic homogeneity. According to Nazi ideology, Germans had to be cognizant of the purity<sup>2</sup> and sanctity of German blood. German blood, namely that of Aryan, non-Jewish citizens, was considered superior in Nazi thought and therefore, anyone outside of this “true” German ethnicity threatened the well-being of Germany. Not only did the Nazis promote their definition of pure health and German blood as necessary to a successful Germany, but they targeted those perceived as threats or who embodied anything less than ideal health. Joseph Goebbels, in his role as Propaganda Minister of the Nazi party, sharpened these philosophies of exclusion and caution. It was not enough to promote the health of the individual German, but to foster these notions on larger scales. At a 1938 Nazi party rally, Goebbels implied that Germans should ignore the plight of the suffering and instead focus on the bigger picture; citizens should subscribe to a larger objective that placed Germany on a more prominent stage. Goebbels’ precise words (above) concerning feeding and clothing the hungry, thirsty, and naked people shed light on an important

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Bachrach, “Introduction,” In *Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race*, edited by Dieter Kuntz, 8. U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> In this chapter and throughout this paper, words such as “pure, sanctity/sacred, and clean,” will be used in their historical context to describe German blood through the perspective of Nazi ideology. I, however, do not endorse Nazi or racist ideology or thought.



historical context that is often overlooked or underemphasized in the historiography of the Nazi regime, from Hitler's rise to power to the Final Solution: eugenic discourse.

The notion of nature versus nurture was at the center of Goebbels' message. Helping the weak survive was counterproductive. Instead, the Nazi party focused on a good health—as in the physically and mentally strong. Consequently, they identified, defined, and then excluded those not deemed appropriate for the picture of German purity and health. Blindness, deafness, epilepsy, physical deformations, and alcoholism did not fit the picture of physical and mental strength or good health. The demarcation between health and sickness came down to bloodlines for the Nazis.

Goebbels' focus on healthy, productive people planted a seed in the minds of citizens that grew into a culture of fear. In charge of propaganda, Goebbels utilized different media to nurture an awareness of the other. Film was an essential tool for broadcasting Nazi ideology and cultivating the fear of the other. As “audiovisual machinery,” film played a vital role in furthering Nazi policies and objectives.<sup>3</sup> As Rentschler notes, Hitler and Goebbels knew the power of film in “mobilizing emotions and immobilizing minds” with captivating images.<sup>4</sup> Words and images were used as vehicles to move racial ideology forward.

While the historiography of the Third Reich is well documented, there are certain aspects that remain underemphasized. One example is mainstream Weimar and Nazi eugenic cinema. This project analyzes the role of mainstream cinema as a window into the prevalent eugenic discourse of the late-Weimar and Nazi eras. The focus of this analysis will be dramatic films that functioned simultaneously as entertainment and propaganda for the German audience. With race and disease blended into melodramatic

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<sup>3</sup> Eric Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and Its Afterlife* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

narrative, the films are not outwardly propaganda pieces, but nonetheless each heightens a sense of the impending “dangers” of unchecked diseases. Consequently, eugenic policy is embedded into mainstream cinema of these eras: identification, classification, and elimination of tainted heredities in the name of racial hygiene as a social responsibility. Three films that illustrate this genetics discussion are *M* (1931), *La Habanera* (1937) and *Ich Klage An (I Accuse)*, 1941) as each echoes a different facet of the eugenic dialogue from psychosis to miscegenation to extermination. Fritz Lang’s *M* correlates with *Mein Kampf* as it underscores nature over nurture and defines “the other” in the late-Weimar period. *La Habanera* connects with the Marriage Law of 1935 and the “undesired” nature of miscegenation in Germany. Lastly, *Ich Klage An (I Accuse)* relates to the T-4 program and the decision to get rid of “undesirables” under the cover of World War II. Each narrative reflects and comments on an aspect of so-called disease that relates to socio-political issues (criminality, poverty, and disease) facing the public eye in Weimar and Nazi Germany. While socio-political initiatives were advocated throughout the Weimar and Nazi periods, eugenic policies were State mandated in Nazi Germany. Eugenic policy was defined by the concept of “Life Unworthy of Life,” as discussed by historian James M. Glass. In 1920, Karl Binding and Alfred Hoche argued this concept in *Permitting the Destruction of Unworthy Life*, with “unworthy life” defined as those who are mentally ill and terminally sick. Binding and Hoche maintained such lives were costly to the public and degraded society financially and genetically. Thus, “unworthy lives” should be destroyed and prevented from spreading further genetic harm.<sup>5</sup> This degraded perception set up a contrast between the self and the other in Nazi Germany.

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<sup>5</sup>James Glass, *Life Unworthy of Life: Racial Phobia and Mass Murder in Hitler’s Germany* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 5. As Glass notes, this degraded perception of the other in Nazi Germany begins with the exclusionary laws of the early thirties and ultimately ends in the Final Solution.

The difference between a worthy and unworthy life was defined in early Nazi Germany exclusionary policies. The policies enabled the labeling of others for political and social purposes. Sander L. Gilman notes that stereotypes are created as “we create images of things we fear or glorify. These images never remain abstractions: we understand them as real-world entities. We assign them labels that serve to set them apart from ourselves.”<sup>6</sup> The concept applied in Nazi Germany through identifying, excluding, and terminating those perceived as unworthy of living. In this process, health is visible and illness invisible. The on-screen image of “good” and bad”, health versus illness, emphasizes real-life fears of the other and shapes a positive attitude toward exclusion. I will argue that *M*, *La Habanera*, and *Ich Klage An* (I Accuse) depict the “invisible danger” of race and disease, thereby reflecting the eugenic ideas of the Weimar and Nazi periods. By tracking the eugenic dialogue of the 1920s through the Nazi era, and then analyzing the eugenic links within each film discussed here, I will demonstrate how exclusionary ideologies led to the destruction of “unworthy” lives.

This project begins with a discussion of the historical context of eugenics in chapter I, revealing the historiography of eugenics, how it gained traction, and how it relates to late-Weimar and Nazi films. This section will also discuss the views of Erwin Baur, Eugen Fischer, and Fritz Lenz on heredity and race, including *Human Heredity* (1931). Early discourse provides for government policy and social decisions in Weimar and Nazi Germany.

Chapter II explores Lang’s *M* as an example of nature over nurture within Weimar, Germany. This chapter will also discuss how a dangerous individual, like Beckert, the character in *M*, causes a feeling of “powerlessness” in Weimar.

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<sup>6</sup> Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 19.

Furthermore, this section will cover Schränker's reasoning for excluding Beckert from society; the criminal's exclusion works in conjunction with Hitler's race argument in *Mein Kampf* concerning the exclusion and eventual elimination of the other. This discourse analyzes how the science of eugenics, as well as the perception of the self and the other define who is to be excluded and why. The discussion will also include sources such as Ernst Simmel's "War Neuroses and 'Psychic Trauma'" (1918), the prominent work of Cesar Lombroso, including *Criminal Man* (1911), *Sexual Murder* (1922) by Otto Dix, and *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929) by Erich Maria Remarque. An examination of the topicality of the film in relation to social instability, economic hardships, and crime in the Weimar Republic, as well as the consequent emphasis on reproduction policy, underscores the nature over nurture argument.

Chapter III analyzes *La Habanera* and *Reichsgesetzblatt I (Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor, 15 September 1935)*. In the film, a Swedish woman, Astree, meets and quickly marries a suave Puerto Rican man (Don Pedro), and so begins a seemingly blissful tropical island life together. There is an attraction between the characters pulling Astree toward Don Pedro, and then away from her homeland to the island life. This attraction fades, however, as the characters' cultural differences come between them; more pressing, though, is the disease that infiltrates the island.<sup>7</sup> A disease narrative is one of several ways Detlef Sirk's film functions as a cautionary anecdote; the use of fever/disease as a metaphor for the danger of intermarriage brings to mind the lurking danger within the other. *La Habanera* thus serves as propaganda, emphasizing the importance of the 1935 Marriage Law reflecting the stark contrast of a Swedish woman, glowing with "purity", and her son, who may mirror her image, but shares the blood of

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<sup>7</sup> *La Habanera*, Directed by Douglas Sirk, (1937), DVD (Kino on Video, 2004).

Don Pedro.<sup>8</sup> The racial situation between Sirk's characters is a key subtext of the law; mixing of blood equates to purity lost and the film accentuates this theory, in part, by reflecting the unavoidable health consequences of a mixed marriage. Therefore, *La Habanera* (1937) works in tandem with the 1935 Marriage Law as a visually appealing companion to deliver the warning message to viewers of the Third Reich.

Finally, chapter IV covers the leap from Euthanasia to involuntary termination, or “life unworthy of life” as deemed fit by the state. *Ich Klage an* (I Accuse) introduces the idea of “mercy killing” as humane when a researcher seeks an end to his wife's agony, who suffers from multiple sclerosis, with a lethal dose of medicine.<sup>9</sup> The onscreen transformation of two doctors, one who “saves” his wife from further pain and suffering through over-medication, and the other who questions the morality of the situation, but later changes his position, underscores the acceptance of Euthanasia in the film. Unlike other propaganda films of the era that portray an evil “other”, such as Veit Harlan's *Jud Süß*, *Ich Klage an* presents a different context by which to rationalize murder. This discussion also examines how this film paves the way for the T-4 program, and later, mass murder under the guise of war. Aside from *Ich Klage an*, the primary sources for this chapter include Karl Binding, document “716,” in *Nazism 1919-1945, Volume 3*, as well as Binding and Alfred Hoche's *Permitting the Destruction of Unworthy Life*, 1920. Taken together, these sources illustrate the formulation of a Euthanasia policy that sprouted from ending suffering of terminally ill, to defining and destroying “life unworthy of life.”

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<sup>8</sup> *La Habanera*, 1937.

<sup>9</sup> *I Accuse (Ich Klage an)*, directed by Wolfgang Liebeneiner (1941), DVD (International Historic Films, 2008).

The exclusionary measures and unprecedented scale of mass murder at the hands of the Nazis (The Final Solution) is well documented in secondary literature. For example, Nazis were not the first to make “nature versus nurture” a priority in social and political policies. Goebbels’ stated objectives in 1938 were strikingly similar to eugenic goals in place in Western countries, like America, well before the Nazis took power. Human heredity, and its implications, was an integral part of the link between science and politics. Accordingly, scientists and politicians were able to work intricately, especially in the twentieth century, to further each other’s causes while pointing to the quality of human “stock” as something that either builds up or tears down society.<sup>10</sup> This collaboration was evident in governmental actions such as targeted reproduction and sterilization policies that preceded the Nazi regime.

Weimar and Nazi cinema were melodramatic distractions on the surface, but the narratives within *M* (1931), *La Habanera* (1937), and *Ich Klage An* (I Accuse) (1941) connected to shifting public perceptions on deeper social and political levels. Glass notes that Nazi cinema used the “power of phobia” and “psychological dynamics” to promote certain attitudes toward “an object regarded as a lethal source of racial poisoning.”<sup>11</sup> Likewise, historian Andrew G. Bonnell discusses how Nazi cinema, when viewed in light of Nazi gender roles, nationalism initiatives, and racial health policies, film acted as the ultimate publicity—propaganda in disguise.<sup>12</sup> The power of film was harnessed in Germany’s Weimar and Nazi eras—and that power went beyond a melodramatic escape.

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<sup>10</sup> Peter Weingart, “German Eugenics Between Science and Politics.” *Osiris* 5, (January 1989): 260-282. *Historical Abstracts with Full Text*, EBSCOhost (accessed July 29, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Glass, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew G. Bonnell, “Melodrama for the Master Race: Two Films by Detlef Sierck (Douglas Sirk),” *Film History* 10, no. 2 (1998): 213.

## CHAPTER I: THE ORIGINS AND PROGRESSION OF EUGENICS

“The history of Eugenics is one of a reciprocal involvement of science and politics. Simply put, that history can be characterized as beginning with two scientific theories, evolutionary theory and its complement, the theory of human heredity.”<sup>13</sup>

The timeline of eugenics reveals an enduring relationship between science and politics. Rooted in the idea of “improving” humanity, eugenics served the purpose of addressing a “decline” of humankind. The eugenic discourse highlighted physical and mental attributes among human beings in the process of creating and maintaining a superior lineage. This discussion focuses on how to replicate the best of humanity, which, by the Nazi period, transformed into creating a “master race.” How “the best” was defined will be explored later in this chapter. The eugenic discourse did not exist or develop on its own. This discourse was intricately involved with politics. As Peter Weingart notes, eugenic theories “helped to create or crystallize concerns about the hereditary quality of the human stock.”<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the relationship between eugenic movements and government was a mutual one. Weingart adds that “scientists used eugenics as a vehicle for their political convictions and social biases, just as politicians used its scientific framework, sketchy as it was, to advance their particular causes.”<sup>15</sup> The blurred line between science and politics resulted in a heightened awareness of human heredity, which led to a state focus on reproduction. With government authority, eugenics helped shape social policies, including ideas on reproduction.

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<sup>13</sup>Peter Weingart. 1989. “German Eugenics Between Science and Politics”. *Osiris* 5, (January 1989): 260-282. *Historical Abstracts with Full Text*, EBSCOhost (accessed July 29, 2014). Weingart is a German Professor emeritus of Sociology, Sociology of Science and Science Policy from the Bielefeld University. His research and publications focus on topics of science and the media, including public knowledge of science, and discourses of politics, science, and the media.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 260.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 260. While Weingart wrote specifically about German Eugenics, the reciprocal relationship between science and politics was present in other countries as well, including the United States.

While the concept of eugenics most notably emerged in the late nineteenth century, the idea of targeted reproduction was not new. As Calum MacKellar and Christopher Bechtel discuss, an awareness of careful reproduction dates back to at least the Greek philosopher, Plato (427 BCE-327 BCE).<sup>16</sup> Through the voice of Socrates, Plato likened humans and animals with concern to breeding; he observed that hunting dogs are bred with the goal of nobility in mind. If one wanted to continue the highest standard of animal, then the “best of the best” must be paired. Otherwise, a degradation of the hunter species would occur. This argument was essential to the eugenic philosophies that emerged in the late nineteenth century. MacKellar and Bechtel also point out another facet of eugenic movements that can be compared to ancient times: “Even prior to Plato, the ancient city of Sparta had, allegedly, developed radical eugenic policies. It reportedly practiced a form of physical selection by leaving babies outside city borders to test their strength. Those who were too weak then died of exposure.”<sup>17</sup> A governmental body, as in this example with Sparta, experimenting with its citizens’ strength is another important piece of the eugenic historiography. Eugenics movements and governments had a reciprocal relationship. One reason for such cooperation was to urge changes in social policies caused a “decline in civilization.” Social policies that were of concern to eugenic policies were those that perpetuated the survival of the weak. In this regard, eugenics emphasized weak links in society, like the sick, poor, or handicapped. Reproduction of

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<sup>16</sup> Calum MacKellar and Christopher Bechtel, *The Ethics of the New Eugenics* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014), 15. MacKellar, PhD, is Director of Research of the Scottish Council on Human Bioethics in Edinburgh UK, and visiting Professor of Bioethics at St Mary’s University College, London, UK. Bechtel is a Research Fellow with the Scottish Council on Human Bioethics, Edinburgh.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 15.



weaker people worked against the notion of improving humanity. Likewise, social policies that enabled the weak to survive (providing sustenance, medicine, and support) interfered with the evolutionary survival theory behind eugenics. As will be discussed in this chapter, the connection between government and science appeared in multiple countries, including the United States, Germany, and the United Kingdom. Through an analysis of the eugenic movements that began before the turn of the twentieth century, this chapter will cover a progression of eugenic theory and its central influencers, such as R.L. Dugdale, Francis Galton, Alfred Ploetz, and Charles Davenport.<sup>18</sup> Analyzing the origins and growth of eugenic science in this way will reveal a historical context for eugenics in Weimar and Nazi era governments. Consequently, this narrative will reflect the relationship between science and politics and the power wielded through this link.

When one thinks of a government aspiring to mold a population that embodies strength and health, Nazi Germany likely comes to mind. However, creating a master race was not purely a Nazi-era idea: “Eugenics targeted mankind, so of course its scope was global...forced sterilization laws and regimens took root on every continent.”<sup>19</sup> A mix of science and politics within twentieth century eugenic discourse provided an authoritative voice not only to Germany’s Race Hygiene movement, but other countries as well, including the United States. Sterilization laws and regimens existed in America long before Hitler took power: “Throughout the first six decades of the twentieth century, hundreds of thousands of Americans and untold others were not permitted to continue

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<sup>18</sup> Dugdale, Galton, Ploetz, and Davenport each contributed to and influenced eugenic thought in similar and yet distinct ways—from criminal research, to practicing medicine, working as biologists, leading eugenics groups, and coining eugenic terms such as “Race Hygiene.” Their specific influences will be further discussed in the coming chapters.

<sup>19</sup> Edwin Black, *War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America’s Campaign to Create a Master Race* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2003), xvi.

their families by reproducing.”<sup>20</sup> Targeting the “unfit” for forced sterilizations, and preventing their marriage, was the focus of the American eugenics movement. Identifying people unfit for reproduction meant analyzing genetics to determine a person’s inherent societal value or detriment; this effort took shape just before the turn of the century. As an industrialized society moved from rural to urban life, social and economic differences became more apparent and criminal activity amplified. It is at this point where science became notably linked with crime and class issues. In 1875, R. L. Dugdale issued a report to the Prison Association of New York that detailed links between heredity, environment and crime.<sup>21</sup> Dugdale’s study began with six people of a shared ancestry: “These six persons belonged to a long lineage, reaching back to the early colonists, and had intermarried so slightly with the emigrant population of the old world that they may be called a strictly American family.”<sup>22</sup> This family did not all share the same surname, but were collectively referred to as the Jukes. The Jukes’ reputation with the community was not favorable. Dugdale noted that of the “twenty-nine males...the immediate blood relations of these six persons, seventeen of them were criminals, or fifty-eight percent; while fifteen were convicted of some degree of offense, and received seventy-one years of sentence.” The crimes of this group varied and included theft, forgery, murder, animal cruelty, assault and battery, and rape.<sup>23</sup> Dugdale illustrates detailed statistics of the family’s crimes, with a comparison of Juke blood relations with

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., xv.

<sup>21</sup> “Controlling Heredity: The American Eugenics Crusade: 1870-1940: Robert Dugdale’s *The Jukes*,” University of Missouri, Special Collections, last modified March 16, 2012, accessed January 19, 2016, [https://library.missouri.edu/exhibits/eugenics/dugdale\\_jukes.htm](https://library.missouri.edu/exhibits/eugenics/dugdale_jukes.htm). Dugdale was a stenographer and a member of the Prison Association of New York. Note: Dugdale’s first name is listed as “Robert” on this site as well as in the fourth edition of *The Jukes*. It is listed as “Richard” or “R.L.” in the fifth edition.

<sup>22</sup> R. L. Dugdale, *The Jukes: A Study in Crime, Pauperism, Disease and Heredity* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, The Knickerbocker Press, 1895), 7-8.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 8.

that of those related by marriage or cohabitation.<sup>24</sup> In an introduction to Dugdale's book, Dr. Gerald W. Lynch, professor and former president of John Jay College of Criminal Justice, notes that the importance of this body of work "rests in its pioneering effort to gather sociological and demographic data objectively and to trace comprehensively...the effect of heredity and environment on the actions and lives of hundreds of individuals."<sup>25</sup> Thus, Dugdale's effort in collecting family history steeped in criminality was a significant point in the eugenics timeline—essentially, this information helped initiate a dialogue about race/class improvement. The origins and progression of eugenics therefore begins with acknowledging the influence of the American Eugenics Movement, including Dugdale's contribution. With that, there is an underlying structure that becomes visible when tracking the U.S. roots of the eugenics discourse. Viewing this juxtaposition of Western Eugenics and Race Hygiene in Germany is essential as an illustration of the importance of the eugenic connections between these two facets and the building of a scientific authority.

The notion that physical, mental, and moral qualities were inherited has existed for centuries; however, using that information as a measure of promoting race improvement was uncommon.<sup>26</sup> This concept of using genetics to improve the "health" of a nation was furthered by Francis Galton. In 1883, Galton, a British naturalist and cousin of Charles Darwin, coined the word "eugenics"—using the Greek root meaning "good in

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 9. See Table I. Dugdale detailed the crime statistics of the "Illegitimate Branch of Ada Juke" in which he compared the total number adults, females, males, male criminals, and male convicted criminals. He marked blood relations as "Juke blood" and marriage relations as "x blood".

<sup>25</sup> Dugdale, Introduction to the New Edition of *The Jukes*. The introduction was written by Dr. Gerald W. Lynch, former president of John Jay College of Criminal Justice. Before becoming president of this institution, Lynch was a professor as well as Dean of Students. Daniel E. Slotnik, "Gerald W. Lynch, Who Fought to Save John Jay College, Dies at 76," *The New York Times*, April 17, 2013, accessed December 27, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/18/nyregion/gerald-w-lynch-john-jay-college-administrator-dies-at-76.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Ruth Clifford Engs, *The Eugenics Movement: An Encyclopedia* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2005), xiii.

birth” or “noble heredity.”<sup>27</sup> He likened the cautious selection of marriage partners (over several generations) with the theory of evolution. Galton investigated the history of human ability and how it could affect future generations.<sup>28</sup> His studies were based on the premise that the reputation of a successful person was an indicator of hereditary superiority. Historian Daniel J. Kevles notes, however, that Galton’s theory was “seriously flawed” because it lacked consideration of social factors (negative or positive) that may have affected human ability. Nonetheless, Galton’s work was part of a growing body of eugenic concepts. Galton drew upon the work of his cousin (Darwin’s *Origin*) and, referring to evolution, proposed how eugenics was an accelerator that would “breed out the vestigial barbarism of the human race and manipulate evolution” in order to bring man and his “advanced moral ideals” together.<sup>29</sup> Though not experienced or trained as a mathematician or scientist, Galton was an amateur scientist with interests in geography, heredity, and psychology.<sup>30</sup> Stefan Kühl, Professor of Sociology at the University of Bielefeld, Germany, notes that amateur scientists like Galton were part of a “class-connected” style of life among British elite who conducted research in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>31</sup> Galton’s research accomplishments included the revelation of twin studies and the uniqueness of fingerprints. Ultimately, his vast array of interests resulted in a sharpened definition of heredity in the late nineteenth century by showing the quantifiable connections between generations.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Daniel J. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), Preface.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5. Kevles also comments on problems with Galton’s calculations and the rigor of his studies.

<sup>29</sup> Kevles, 12.

<sup>30</sup> Stefan Kühl, *For the Betterment of the Race: The Rise and Fall of the International Movement for Eugenics and Racial Hygiene* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 11.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 11. Kühl also notes that Galton was wealthy, and therefore financed his own work.

<sup>32</sup> Kevles, 18.

Though Galton initially wanted to keep the “activist circle of eugenics” in Great Britain, his work had a growing international influence. Agricultural-to-industrial shifts in society resulted in class tensions in Great Britain, Germany, and, as discussed previously, the United States. Eugenic societies developed rapidly by the beginning of the twentieth century and ideas flowed between the various eugenics circles.<sup>33</sup> Social Darwinism, the idea of industrial-related social problems as an evolutionary struggle for existence, was a common theme among the upper class. Kühl notes that industrial elites such as Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller used Darwin’s “evolutionary struggle” theory to “justify growing social problems in industrial societies” as nature’s way.<sup>34</sup> The simplistic solution of Social Darwinism was short lived, however, as the downtrodden only sunk lower into despair and economic situations worsened. At this point, Galton’s theories of an “accelerated evolution” of humanity gained influence. In light of the failed theory of Social Darwinism, a different philosophy emerged: the degeneration of humanity was enabled with the use of hygiene, medicine, and social policies that were not “blessings, but rather dangerous enemies of human progress.”<sup>35</sup> Progress was the approach of eugenics toward the end of the nineteenth century and therefore, this movement continued to act as an authoritative voice in social issues and government policies.

Progress, for the pre-Hitler German race hygiene movement, meant making the best use of “human resources.” In this way, Germany’s race hygiene program was not so

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<sup>33</sup> Kühl, 12.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 13.

different from other countries experimenting with eugenics. Weiss discusses the similarities between German and other Western eugenic movements and described how Germany promoted fitness as a class problem: social categories were emphasized over racial classifications. The goal was to eliminate “the army of the unfit— fitness being defined in terms of social and cultural productivity.”<sup>36</sup> Thus Social Darwinism was a common thread between the eugenic movements in the late nineteenth-century. The context in which German Social Darwinism existed differed somewhat from America’s perspective; Robert N. Proctor notes that Germany’s lack of foreign colonies after World War I, and a “polarizing” political struggle contributed to unstable circumstances, explaining Germany’s lack of faith in the “automatic or inevitable nature of evolution.”<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, as Germany transformed from a rural to urban nation, troubles arose between the middle and upper class societies: “The industrialization and urbanization process, expeditious and thorough as it was, produced profound changes in the social and economic structure of the young Reich, engendering a myriad of serious social tensions and problems.”<sup>38</sup> Although Germany faced the same type of “urbanization” struggles as other countries, there was a difference in perspective. Whereas American counterparts initially took a “hands-off” approach by waiting for “nature’s evolution” to propel elite groups of people toward a superior race, Germany adopted a somewhat interventionist attitude. German Social Darwinists consequently focused on “state intervention” to stop a

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<sup>36</sup> Sheila Faith Weiss, "The Race Hygiene Movement in Germany," *Osiris* 3, 195. *Historical Abstracts with Full Text*, EBSCOhost (accessed July 29, 2014).

<sup>37</sup> Robert N. Proctor, *Racial Hygiene: Medicine Under the Nazis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 14.

<sup>38</sup> Sheila Faith Weiss, "The Race Hygiene Movement in Germany," *Osiris* 3, 196. *Historical Abstracts with Full Text*, EBSCOhost (accessed July 29, 2014).

perceived degeneration of mankind.<sup>39</sup> Proctor discusses the fears behind this urgency: first, “medical care for the weak had begun to destroy the natural struggle for existence; second, the poor and misfits of the world were beginning to multiply faster than the talented and fit.” This notion of perpetuating a “weaker class” with medical care and unrestricted reproduction also surfaced in the wake of World War I, to be discussed later in this chapter.

With a fear of the “unfit” on the rise, the German eugenics movement began to take shape. Alfred Ploetz (1860-1940) played a major part of this movement, prioritizing the health of the race over the individual and creating the term *Rassenhygiene*, or “Race Hygiene.” In 1895, Ploetz cautioned against a social “counterselection” process that occurred in war and by providing for the ill or lesser classes.<sup>40</sup> Ultimately, Ploetz proposed an idealistic society—one immune from the negative pull of lower classes. As Weiss discusses, Ploetz emphasized how the state’s efforts to expand the social net risked the “overall biological fitness of its citizens” because it helped the weak to survive.<sup>41</sup> A focus on the biological health of humanity shaped his *Rassenhygiene* goal of achieving a “cultural race par excellence.”<sup>42</sup> The superior culture Ploetz imagined was tremendously Aryan in composition as noted by Weiss. Overall, racial hygiene, according to Ploetz,

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<sup>39</sup> Proctor, 14.

<sup>40</sup> Proctor, 15.

<sup>41</sup> Weiss, 201. His ideas were influenced, in part, by his experiences in the United States. Initially interested in economics and socialism, he went to Iowa to study a “utopian” community. Afterward, he moved into medical studies in Zurich, and then began a medical practice in Massachusetts. Ultimately, he was frustrated with the “limitations of therapeutic medicine,” as Weiss notes, and dedicated his time to eugenics.

<sup>42</sup> Weiss, 202. Weiss notes that Ploetz’ pro-Semitic writing in *Die Tüchtigkeit unsrer Rasse* was a response to an increasing anti-Semitic rhetoric. Ploetz also equated Jews and Aryans in terms of cultural value.

was not about one particular race, but about “the prevention and conquest of diseases afflicting the entire human race,” diseases from which all races might suffer similarly.<sup>43</sup>

Ploetz’s focus on racial hygiene eventually narrowed into a study of alcoholism as a disease. In “The Influence of Alcohol upon the Race,” Ploetz viewed alcohol “as a poison not only for the individual, but for the race.”<sup>44</sup> Ploetz warned of the “injuries” of alcohol that seep from one generation to the next. Specifically, he discussed how alcohol, whether in moderation or excess, plays a role in race degeneration. With race improvement as the subtext, Ploetz explained that consumption of alcohol resulted in a mix of genetic damages, covering the spectrum from physical ailments to mental weaknesses, and criminal tendencies. The injuries caused by alcoholism extend beyond the individual as a result of increased reproduction (higher number of births versus deaths among alcohol drinkers), but also because of “unproductive” spending and work habits.<sup>45</sup> Thus, alcohol use increased conflict between individuals and decreased the overall efficiency of society. Ploetz used Dugdale’s study of the Jukes as an example of a family adversely affected but not eliminated by alcohol, even after generations of “degeneracy.”<sup>46</sup> Consequently, he argued for an abolition of drinking in the name of race integrity. There was also another issue, eliminating and preventing the reproduction of those individuals deemed “unfit” (such as the Jukes). Ploetz recommended preventing those who are physically afflicted by alcohol from marrying or reproducing. By “simply

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<sup>43</sup> Proctor, 21.

<sup>44</sup> Alfred J. Ploetz, *The Influence of Alcohol Upon the Race*, (Westerville, Ohio: American Issue Publishing Company, 1907), 21.

<sup>45</sup> Ploetz, 14. Ploetz used Dugdale’s study of the Jukes as an example of a family that adversely affected by alcohol, but not eliminated by alcohol use, even after generations of “degeneracy.”

<sup>46</sup> Ploetz, 18. Ploetz noted that descendants of a “drunken fisher and hunter” amounted to over 1,200 people who were “shockingly degenerate, particularly in morals.”



withdrawing them from the racial process” one could improve the future of racial integrity. Identifying and suppressing the reproduction of “mentally defectives” was also a consideration of Ploetz. He mentioned the segregation of mental defectives, in part by preventing the marriage to criminals and mentally unsound people. Ploetz also urged women to be cautious and suggested a “sharpening of perception in sexual selection” in order to maintain and improve the racial stock.<sup>47</sup> In all, Ploetz’ racial hygiene goals were focused on fixing the ways in which society was harming itself (wars, welfare, and alcoholism) and, by extension, the human race.

As Ploetz’ *Rassenhygiene* was taking shape in Germany, the concept of eugenics also gained momentum in early twentieth-century America. American eugenics was influenced by Charles Davenport (1866-1944), a Harvard-educated biologist. He is credited with introducing biometrics (the use of statistics with biology) and science in the United States.<sup>48</sup> Davenport led the “anti-speculative” faction of biologists who called for genetic experimentation in America.<sup>49</sup> Davenport’s focus was on gathering family data (volunteered information), which he solicited from various institutions—medical, mental, and educational—using a “Family Records” form.<sup>50</sup> The mix of government funding and scientific research under the direction of Davenport represented a turning point in the

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<sup>47</sup> Ploetz, 20.

<sup>48</sup> Engs, 40. It is important to note this American aspect of eugenics because of the innovation in biology.

<sup>49</sup> Kevles, 44-45. Davenport convinced the Carnegie Institution of Washington to create “The Station for Experimental Evolution” in 1903, where he served as director until his retirement in 1934. See “Eugenics Seeks to Improve the Natural, Physical, Mental and Temperamental Qualities of the Human Family,” (1927) Eugenics Record Office, Eugenics Goals and Education, American Philosophical Society, in the Eugenics Archive, accessed January 24, 2016, <http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/html/eugenics/index2.html?tag=1073>.

<sup>50</sup> Kevles, 44-46. Kevles mentions that the Station’s budget in 1906 was twenty-one thousand dollars.

Western eugenics movement in the early twentieth century. This crossroads of government and science is significant because it represents the establishment of the field of biology as a “social weapon,”<sup>51</sup> and solidified a scientific base for eugenic concepts. Government involvement legitimized the scientific authority of eugenics, especially with the biological door opened by Davenport. Further, the mingling of science, government, and eugenics placed the Eugenics Movement on an international stage: The first International Eugenics Congress, held in London in 1912, stated that “its duty was to convince the public that the study of eugenics was one of the greatest and most pressing necessities of our day.”<sup>52</sup>

Building on the growing acceptance of eugenic ideas and strengthening the scientific authority of eugenics thus became a focal point of eugenicists at the start of the twentieth century. There was also an emphasis within the eugenic movement to unite Britain, France, Germany, and the United States in order to create a “universal peace” among the “purest and most gifted races.”<sup>53</sup> Discord in Europe, however, worked against the eugenic cause. To the dismay of eugenicists, the effects of World War I altered the dialogue of the eugenic movement. According to eugenicists, the people most suited to fight in the war were being sent off to do just that—and they were either being killed in battle or they returned home disabled or damaged in some way. To better understand how deeply this scenario influenced the eugenic movement, consider the goal of eugenics,

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<sup>51</sup> Proctor, 3. Proctor notes that “in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, biology continues to serve as a social weapon, providing a set of tools and arguments that allow either the direct control of populations” or “indirect control by reinforcing particular visions of the proper social order.”

<sup>52</sup> “First International Eugenics Congress.” *British Medical Journal* 2.2692 (1912): 254. Accessed February 6, 2016. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2334093/?page=2>

<sup>53</sup> Kevles, 31.

namely the desire to improve the “human family” by promoting the desirable qualities or “good stock” and eliminating undesirable qualities and conditions of humankind.<sup>54</sup> This objective was furthered from both positive and negative eugenics: positive eugenics promoted the marriage and reproduction of the most fit of human beings, while negative eugenics prevented “mentally defective, feeble-minded, hereditarily insane, and habitual criminals” from reproducing.<sup>55</sup> Either way, the focus was on educating people to encourage a consideration or responsibility for the “healthfulness of succeeding generations.”<sup>56</sup> Thus, World War I created an issue for the “health” of succeeding generations (and positive eugenics) because soldiers were dying or being disabled at high rates.

With the destructive effects of World War I in mind, an emphasis on the “unnatural” effect of war on the gene pool became part of the eugenic dialogue. Kühl discusses the war and how Vernon Kellogg, a Stanford University professor and leader among American eugenicists, argued that “modern wars are deep down ‘unnatural’” and “there could hardly be a greater obstacle to ‘progress in human evolution’ than wars.” Furthermore, Kühl mentions David Starr Jordan, Kellogg’s colleague, who noted that war meant an “unavoidable deterioration of heredity material.” As Kühl discusses, the strong individuals “would be killed or wounded” and thus not reproduce, whereas the “weak

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<sup>54</sup> “Eugenics Seeks to Improve the Natural, Physical, Mental and Temperamental Qualities of the Human Family,” (1927) Eugenics Record Office, Eugenics Goals and Education, American Philosophical Society, in the Eugenics Archive, accessed January 24, 2016, <http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/html/eugenics/index2.html?tag=1073>.

<sup>55</sup> “*State Criteria for Legal Eugenic Sterilization*,” (1935), in the Harry H. Laughlin Papers, Truman State University, accessed January 24, 2016, <http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/html/eugenics/static/images/948.html>.

<sup>56</sup> Kevles, 89.

survivors” stay behind and “visibly reproduce.”<sup>57</sup> While not all eugenicists were categorized as anti-war, there was clearly a shared notion about the contradiction of modern war and eugenic goals.<sup>58</sup> Thus, as defined by this eugenics dialogue, war disabled the reproduction of the strong, and indirectly promoted the reproduction of the weak. Consequently, World War I helped initiate a shift in eugenic thinking; to counteract the genetic imbalance caused by the Great War, negative eugenics gained more attention as a necessary part of the eugenic conversation.

The shift toward negative eugenics was not automatic because society, government, and eugenic responses varied. To start, German Eugenics and politics were not on the same page immediately following World War I. Similarly, public support for eugenic ideas was lacking due to infringement upon individual rights.<sup>59</sup> As the post-World War I disorder set in, and the Weimar Republic struggled to support its citizens, eugenic arguments garnered more public attention: medical and legal eugenic arguments were anchored in the turmoil of the 1920s. Faced with post-World War I financial burdens, euthanasia and forced sterilization were among eugenic measures publicly suggested in Germany. In 1920, Lawyer Karl Binding and psychiatrist Alfred Hoche published *Permitting the Destruction of Unworthy Life*, which detailed the public burdens of care for the mentally defective and the incurably ill. In this pamphlet, Binding asked the reader to consider how the “most valuable” of lives were wasted through war while the less valuable (mentally defective, disabled, or terminally ill) were safeguarded: on

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<sup>57</sup> Kühl, 31.

<sup>58</sup> See Kühl, chapter two, concerning World War I and its effect on the international eugenic movement.

<sup>59</sup> Weingart, 262.

one side, there is the “sacrifice of the finest flower of humanity” and on the other side a “meticulous care shown to existences which are not just absolutely worthless but even of negative value.”<sup>60</sup> Binding categorized two main groups fit for euthanasia: First, he discusses those who are “irretrievably lost” because of injury or illness and who are asking for mercy; second, the “incurable idiots” who have neither the “will to live or die” and serve no purpose to society. In between these categories, Binding mentions those who are competent but become unconscious after severe injury—this category is more fluid and he suggests a legal opening to enable unpunishable killing in these cases.<sup>61</sup> Alfred Hoche emphasized the medical implications of caring for the “incurable idiots...whose existence weighs most heavily on the community.”<sup>62</sup> Hoche argued that the nation must think about the financial burdens of caring for the unfit, as state money could go toward sustaining productive lives instead. Further, he argued that the return on the “investment” of skilled workers and facilities to care for the unfit was wasteful. At the center of Hoche’s argument was the point that times had changed. Germany was no longer in prosperous times and had to essentially make difficult decisions: “Our situation resembles that of participants in a difficult expedition: the greatest possible fitness of every one is the inescapable condition of the endeavor’s success and there is no room for half-strength, quarter-strength, or eighth-strength members.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Karl Binding, “Legal Explanation,” “Permitting the Destruction of Unworthy Life, 1920,” In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, edited by Stackelberg, Roderick and Sally A. Winkle, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 71.

<sup>61</sup> Binding, 72.

<sup>62</sup> Alfred Hoche, “Medical Explanation,” “Permitting the Destruction of Unworthy Life, 1920,” In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, edited by Stackelberg, Roderick and Sally A. Winkle, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 72.

<sup>63</sup> Hoche, 73.

The arguments of Binding and Hoche signaled a changing outlook in Weimar Germany. The lawyer and psychiatrist evaluation of the legal and medical reasons for eugenics tapped into public anguish and suggested placing differentiated values on human lives. Thus, the destruction of World War I on the human body, spirit, and the livelihood of a society contributed to a renewal of the German eugenic movement. Binding and Hoche applied eugenics as a tool that could fix a broken society.

Genetics took on a vital “problem solving” role in Germany’s post-World War I years as a result of social deviancy in Weimar. After World War I, Weimar leaders looked to eugenics to solve “intractable social problems.”<sup>64</sup> For instance, the creation of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics (KWIA) in 1927 was an example of a response of German society to the effects of war.<sup>65</sup> The historiography reflects the research of the KWIA as a precursor to Nazi objectives, however, as Weindling discusses, this institute was also a product of the Weimar Republic’s use of science as an answer to social problems.<sup>66</sup> Anthropologists conducted immense research for the KWIA at over 60 sites within Germany; data collected included photographs (headshots at different angles), various bodily measurements, hair samples,

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<sup>64</sup> Paul Weindling, “Weimar Eugenics: The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity and Eugenics in Social Context,” *Annals of Science*, 42 (1985): 303-318, *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed April 18, 2016).

<sup>65</sup> Sheila Faith Weiss, “German Eugenics,” In *Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race*, edited by Dieter Kuntz, 32-33. U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

The KWIA opened in Berlin in 1927 and was under the umbrella of the Kaiser Wilhelm Society, which was an organization encompassing over 30 research institutes in natural and applied sciences.

<sup>66</sup> Weindling, 305. Whether or not such an institute paved the way for sterilization, euthanasia, and genocide is a question of debate among historians, as Weindling also mentions.

eye charts, and studies on twins.<sup>67</sup> Eugen Fischer directed the research, from 1927-1942, in the name of solving social problems and improving public health. Positive eugenics was the prevalent idea through the Weimar years of the KWIA. Eugenics education, such as careful spouse selection, was the standard. For example, in the mid-1920s, a drawing in an educational pamphlet illustrated the ill-effects of going into marriage carelessly. In this image, a woman, with her arms outstretched, and man stand side-by-side, dressed somewhat formally, (a suit and conservative dress, respectively) with their eyes shielded by blindfolds, precariously stand on a cracked edge of the earth, not knowing the danger of the next step. The ad is carefully captioned with a call to action: “Don’t Go Blindly into Marriage!”<sup>68</sup>

The onset of the Great Depression in 1929 intensified Germany’s social problems and increased the German eugenics dialogue. As the Weimar Republic struggled to balance the rapidly deteriorating landscape (unemployment, lack of food and goods, criminality, social norms), desperation was rampant. With more than six million unemployed people in Germany, the Weimar Republic was forced to reexamine the continuation of a welfare state.<sup>69</sup> Thus, some researchers sought to pinpoint the human causes of the social problems that plagued Germany. Specifically, criminality was at the center of *Human Heredity*, a compilation of the research by Erwin Baur, Eugen Fischer, and Fritz Lenz.<sup>70</sup> The third edition (1931) coincided with this boiling point of

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<sup>67</sup> Weiss, “German Eugenics,” in *Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race*, 34-35.

<sup>68</sup> Weiss, “German Eugenics,” in *Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race*, 38. Interestingly, the illustration discussed on this page is also referenced as being first published in Louisiana’s Department of Health.

<sup>69</sup> Sheila Faith Weiss, 222.

<sup>70</sup> There were five editions of *Human Heredity* published between 1921 and 1940.

desperation in the Weimar Republic. At a time when criminality and social norms were changing in Germany, this textbook on the science of human heredity provided information about the “invisible” diseases and qualities that lurked within certain types of people. The authors touted the advances made since the previous publication in 1923: “Today, far more trustworthy information can be given regarding the hereditary transmission of many diseases and other qualities, than was possible four years ago.”<sup>71</sup> The trustworthiness of the research data put forth by Baur, Fischer, and Lenz was not equal in the eyes of all. As Weiss discusses, Baur’s contribution was thought to be “a clear and objective state-of-the-art summary” but the studies of Fischer and Lenz were viewed as skewed perspectives.<sup>72</sup> Baur’s contribution covered a general theory of heredity, while Fischer and Lenz highlighted racial groups and criminal links to race, respectively. Considering the work of Fischer, an anthropologist, and Lenz, a geneticist, demonstrates how class and racial perspectives were taken as a scientific authority.

Fischer’s portion of *Human Heredity* emphasized race differences. He did not leave any room for misunderstanding: “Technically speaking, there is no such generalized being as “man”; there are only men and women belonging to particular races or particular racial crossings.”<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, Fischer argued that “Negro blood” was of

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<sup>71</sup> Erwin Baur, Eugen Fischer, and Fritz Lenz, *Human Heredity* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931), 5. The notable changes, as discussed by the authors, were to Fischer’s section on “blood-groups” and the contributions by Lenz concerning specific links between heredity and criminality.

<sup>72</sup> Weiss, “The Race Hygiene Movement in Germany,” 215.

<sup>73</sup> Erwin Baur, Eugen Fischer, and Fritz Lenz, *Human Heredity* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931), 209.



lesser value than “white blood” and would bring about the demise of European culture.<sup>74</sup> He illustrated this perspective by detailing aspects like facial features, skin colors, and hair types. Fischer used these differences to further define and classify races: “Alpine, Nordic, Savages, and Negroid,” to name a few.<sup>75</sup> Fischer’s work connected Baur’s theory of hereditary principles to Lenz’s explanation of race and criminality: Fischer coupled heredity with these definitions and layers to give genetics a visible face. Fischer combined his perspective and these faces in order to emphasize how race mixing degrades racial integrity.

Protecting the racial integrity of German society was a notion borrowed from Ploetz. Fischer’s work closely connected to that of Ploetz, especially along the lines of racial degradation. Lenz brought connections to Ploetz into sharper focus. Lenz differentiated the value between women and men in the race paradigm, focusing primarily on the state of men and their influence on race. With race expectations in mind, he emphasized the importance of “cultural par excellence” that is needed in man, namely Nordics and Jews; Nordic women, however, had an “entirely different mission to fulfill in the life of race.”<sup>76</sup> Helped in part by the work of his colleague, Fischer, Lenz described a clear-cut vision of the differences that shape a culturally productive and vigorous race. While Fischer illustrated the physical differences of heredity, Lenz discussed the invisible differences that separate health and disease. The external differences, according to Lenz,

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<sup>74</sup> “Dr. Eugen Fischer Reading Heredity Journal,” In *Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race*, accessed June 30, 2016, <https://www.ushmm.org/information/press/press-kits/traveling-exhibitions/deadly-medicine/dr.-eugen-fischer-reading-heredity-journal>.

<sup>75</sup> Baur, Fischer, and Lenz, 209.

<sup>76</sup> Weiss, “The Race Hygiene Movement in Germany,” 216.

were not the problem. The physical characteristics were plainly visible, but the internal characteristics, on the other hand, were the invisible danger. Lenz felt the internal differences were of greatest importance when it came to race fitness and disease. Lenz discussed his understanding of the degree of difference between external and internal racial differences and noted the complexity of the race narrative: “If the only differences between the races of man were bodily, racial problems would be of very little moment; and it is precisely because the mental differences are so momentous that some people incline to exaggerate them and others incline to deny their existence.”<sup>77</sup>

Lenz further explained that the organs of each race hold different values, and specifically focused on the differences in mental capacities in a chapter on racial psychology. Understanding racial differences, according to Lenz, started with exploring mental capabilities. Therefore, Lenz focused on the differences in mental abilities of individuals.<sup>78</sup> Using this premise of mental racial differences, Lenz moved to a discussion of the relationship between race and crime. He detailed statistics on different racial groups, including the religions associated with the group. Lenz noted that when “offenders” are classified further by religion, socio-economic positions factor into the types of crime committed. For example, he categorized Jews as more likely to commit crimes of theft, whereas Christians ranked higher in cases of assault and bodily harm.<sup>79</sup> Through these rankings, Lenz painted a contrast between Jew and non-Jew in terms of

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<sup>77</sup> Erwin Baur, Eugen Fischer, and Fritz Lenz, *Human Heredity* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931), 624-625.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 625.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 680. Lenz explained that these crime numbers are from the years between 1892-1901 in the German Empire.

criminality. He illustrated the Jew as committing more menacing crimes: fraud, forgery, insulting language, and obscenity.<sup>80</sup> The differentiation in crimes is interesting because it speaks to a notion of invisible versus visible crimes—assault and murder are visible, there are witnesses, and clear victims, whereas, fraud, forgery, and obscenity are more elusive. Likewise, the underlying notion of Lenz’s (and Fischer’s) discussions in *Human Heredity* is the threat of contaminating a race with blood that carries these “elusive” characteristics.

In the context of the Weimar Republic in 1930-1931, Fischer and Lenz—and German eugenics—took on a more substantial role than the usual eugenic discourse. Germany came to a point of serious financial reevaluation in the Weimar Republic years. Resources were not sufficient to support all citizens, therefore the conversation focused on selecting the people most deserving of welfare. As Weiss discusses, the financial turmoil in the late Weimar years brought the core philosophy of eugenics to the forefront: it was a tool for national effectiveness intended to safeguard “political and cultural hegemony.”<sup>81</sup> The “selectionist” discourse expanded, in large part, by Fischer and Lenz, combined with rising Nazi ideology played a vital part in changing the course of German eugenics.<sup>82</sup> By 1931, the problem of the “Sozial politik” or welfare state was “too high an

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 681.

<sup>81</sup> Sheila Faith Weiss, "The Race Hygiene Movement in Germany," *Osiris* 3, 224. *Historical Abstracts with Full Text*, EBSCOhost (accessed July 29, 2014). Weiss discusses how the German Eugenic movement might have stayed parallel with its British counterpart, if not for the “drastic changes” of the Nazis.

<sup>82</sup> Sheila Faith Weiss, "The Race Hygiene Movement in Germany," *Osiris* 3, 222. *Historical Abstracts with Full Text*, EBSCOhost (accessed July 29, 2014). Weiss discusses how the German Eugenic movement might have stayed parallel with its British counterpart, if not for the “drastic changes” of the Nazis.

insurance premium against Bolshevism.”<sup>83</sup> Thus, the “nature versus nurture” argument became a social question that could not be ignored. The “selectionist perspective and language” of eugenicists such as Fischer and Lenz enabled the German Eugenics movement to change the social question into a scientific problem to be solved.<sup>84</sup>

The scientific problem was the “biologically and medically unfit” groups of people who were the result of industrialization, and who were perceived as draining the life out of the Weimar Republic.<sup>85</sup> Taken together, the work of Baur, Fischer, and Lenz was a layered framework for this social question turned scientific problem: Baur’s theory of heredity, Fischer’s outlines of race and blood groups, and then Lenz’s links between race and criminality--each of these layers pointed toward nature over nurture as an answer to Weimar’s social question. This collection of work by Fischer and Lenz, however, was not objective science. Weiss noted that “even discounting the current prevalence of typological thinking about race,” it is evident that Fischer’s and Lenz’s arguments were “largely a collection of personal and social prejudices masquerading as science.”<sup>86</sup> The nature over nurture argument that was prevalent Weimar Germany, and later Nazi Germany, relied heavily on this pseudo-scientific information.

The notion of turning to nature over nurture to answer Weimar’s social question and prejudices masquerading as science was also furthered by Nazi Socialist advocate, Alfred Rosenberg. Witnessing the Russian Revolution as young man of ethnic German descent in the Russian Empire, Rosenberg loathed Bolshevism and embraced

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<sup>83</sup> Weiss, “The Race Hygiene Movement in Germany,” 222.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>86</sup> Weiss, “The Race Hygiene Movement in Germany,” 215.

antisemitism.<sup>87</sup> His writings addressed the chaos of the Weimar Republic and provided a framework for a German future based on race, blood, and culture. His major work, *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* (*Mythus des XX. Jahrhunderts*, 1930), was a dense collection of chapters that covered a range of topics. In this work, he used his perspective on history and the future to explain subjects like values, race (and “race soul”), human instincts, culture conflicts, and religious issues, to name a few. Known as Hitler’s “philosopher and chief ideologue,” Rosenberg’s reflections on Germany’s disordered Weimar Republic were deeply intertwined with Hitler’s convictions.<sup>88</sup> Like Hitler, Rosenberg cited The Great War as a loss that plagued Germany. Similar to eugenic thought in the post-World War I period, Rosenberg defined the loss of “highly valued” German blood on the battlefield as catastrophic and central to the disintegration of the country. As such, Rosenberg crafted Germany’s losses and desperate times into a call to renew Germany by focusing on the blood of its people: “History and the task of the future no longer signify the struggle of class against class or the conflict between one church dogma and another, but the settlement between blood and blood, race and race, Folk and Folk.”<sup>89</sup> Rosenberg took a lead role in Nazi Germany’s use of eugenics to support ideological arguments. He wrote at length about how blood (genetics) affects everyday lives and how blood lines were, in his view, being weakened to the point that the German “volk” were suffering. Rosenberg’s sentiments resonated with certain groups concerned

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<sup>87</sup> Roger Moorhouse, “The lost musings of Hitler’s ‘philosopher,’” *Times, The (United Kingdom)*, April 2, 2016, *Newspaper Source*, EBSCOhost, accessed June 9, 2016.

<sup>88</sup> Roger Moorhouse, “The lost musings of Hitler’s ‘philosopher.’”

<sup>89</sup> Alfred Rosenberg, *The Myth of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: An Evaluation of the Spiritual-Intellectual Confrontations of Our Age*, translated by James Whisker. *Open Source: 1930*.

with answering social questions that plagued German life. Though he was not a “visionary thinker” he added intellectual substance to the Nazi party.<sup>90</sup> Rosenberg tapped into a defining moment in the Weimar Republic—one in which a “return to our nature” ideology was a welcomed message for a distressed Germany. According to Robert Pois, Rosenberg “was a synthesizer, a man of above average intelligence who was able to piece together bits and scraps from the darker side of European social and intellectual life.”<sup>91</sup>

While much of his writing contained ideas synthesized from European history, Rosenberg provided at least two foundational pieces that supported Nazi ideology: “Blood crime” and antisemitism. Again, these were not original ideas, but his compatibility with Hitler’s ideology and the imperative presentation of these ideas, made him a central figure in the Nazi party. Moreover, Rosenberg was an ultimate mixer of politics, ideology, and eugenics. *Race and Race History* provides evidence of this capability as he outlines the mixing of blood with the “enemy” as a crime that continually degrades the bloodline: “And it is in this blood crime which causes the death of personality, Volk, race and civilization. No one who despises the religion of blood is immune to its revenge.”<sup>92</sup>

Rosenberg further emphasized the “dangers” of blood crime by stressing anti-Semitic viewpoints. He connected blood crime with antisemitism in a radio speech (March 1941) when he addressed the “Jewish Question” as a world problem. In this

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<sup>90</sup> Moorhouse, Roger, "The lost musings of Hitler's 'philosopher.'"

<sup>91</sup> Alfred Rosenberg, *Race and Race History, And Other Essays*, ed. Edited Robert Pois (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 14. Rosenberg’s education and experience included attending a “technical high school,” and he was part of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party in 1920, which later became the Nazi Party.

<sup>92</sup> Alfred Rosenberg, *Race and Race History, And Other Essays*, ed. Edited Robert Pois (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 37.

speech, the Nazi ideologist sidelined the typical “carriers of communism” and “financial dictatorship” arguments.<sup>93</sup> Instead, he focused on creating an enemy that, without the proper protection and procedures in place, can infect a population. Thus, Rosenberg introduced race/blood as part of the dialogue in the Jewish Question and was prepared with a solution: “The war which is being waged today...is an immense reform.” He added: “it also exterminates directly all those racially infecting germs of Jewry and its bastards, which now for over a hundred years could develop” unchecked across Europe.<sup>94</sup> The language Rosenberg used implied physical removal of Jews from Europe, but he dismissed the conversations on a Jewish state, calling it “not the right solution” – a Jewish state was no longer a possibility in his view due, in part, to space; he called the “dream” of a Jewish state “finished.”<sup>95</sup> Instead, he called upon government leaders to think of a “settlement” for Jews where, “under experienced police supervision should then do useful work as they wanted to see done until now by non-Jews.”<sup>96</sup> Further, Rosenberg argued that all Jews must leave Europe and used key words that hinted at bigger plans. He outlined a “cleansing biological world revolution,” using words and phrases such as “exterminate, racially infecting germs, parasitism, and national purity.”<sup>97</sup> Ultimately, Rosenberg emphasized a common enemy of the world; one that goes beyond financial and political differences and “infects” the body. By tapping into eugenic

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<sup>93</sup> Alfred Rosenberg, “The Jewish Question as a World Problem,” In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, edited by Stackelberg, Roderick and Sally A. Winkle, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 337. As Stackelberg and Winkle note, this 1941 speech was given prior to “Operation Barbarossa” when the Nazi-Soviet Pact was still in place.

<sup>94</sup> Rosenberg, 337.

<sup>95</sup> Rosenberg, 337.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 338.

<sup>97</sup> Rosenberg, 337.

dialogue taking place across continents (genetics, criminality, and weak links in society) and framing it neatly within Nazi rhetoric, Rosenberg contributed significantly to the notion of race purification in Nazi Germany.

## **Conclusion**

Twentieth century eugenics was not limited to Germany. Understanding how eugenics reached the point that it did in Weimar and Nazi Germany requires taking an in-depth look at the origins and progression of eugenic dialogue as a whole, and evaluating its evolution. This evolution in eugenics involved the ideas and work of professionals who approached the subject from different perspectives and with varying goals, built upon the work of one another even across continents. From Dugdale's sociological data on the Jukes, to Galton's coining of the word "eugenics" in the name of national "health" to Ploetz's Race Hygiene, eugenic discourse moved along the timeline of the twentieth century.

World War I proved a catalyst for the eugenics movement, especially in Germany. In the post-World War I years some of the most notable changes in the eugenic discourse took place. At this point the most visible connections appear between government and eugenics. Eugenic discourse intertwined with conversations about solving social issues. The influences of the medical and legal eugenic arguments of Binding and Hoche surfaced as solutions for the societal turmoil of the 1920s. The notion of "worthless" lives and the "negative value" of some of these lives proved most important in the post-World



War I environment.<sup>98</sup> These arguments were tailor-made for a period of revolution, inflation, and depression; Binding and Hoche tapped into public despair and government frustration following World War I in Germany.

The eugenic discourse of the twentieth century served as an authoritative platform for the Nazi regime. Eugenic ideas and policies stemmed from the same contexts and aimed to solve societal problems (war, welfare state, unemployment, The Great Depression, changing societal norms) with the idea of “improving” humanity as a sub text. The timeline of eugenics revealed how it was part of an international dialogue. Whether in Germany, Britain, or America, the historiography of eugenics blurred the line between science and politics in the twentieth century. The work of Lenz and Fischer, and the rhetoric of Rosenberg, translated into this blurred line. In all, eugenics was a “malleable” science in the hands of its leaders, adaptable to different political and social agendas.

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<sup>98</sup> Binding, “Legal Explanation,” “Permitting the Destruction of Unworthy Life, 1920,” In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, edited by Stackelberg, Roderick and Sally A. Winkle, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 72.

## CHAPTER II: NATURE OVER NURTURE: WEIMAR EUGENICS AND FRITZ LANG'S *M* (1931)

Societal division is evident in post war Europe in the early twentieth century, where World War I is more aptly described as “the war that started it all.” Eric Dorn Brose links The Great War and the Great Depression when describing this period as moving “toward a cataclysm.”<sup>99</sup> As such, the death and destruction of World War I echoes into the 1920s in the form of societal issues that “explode,” leaving people feeling uncertain and fearful; this is indeed the case for the Weimar Republic. Ernst Simmel, in “War Neuroses and ‘Psychic Trauma,’” describes this war as “the cause of an illness.”<sup>100</sup> He points to the “devastating traces” that a “bloody war” leaves behind on the individual, but explains that it is the world transformed by this event that causes greater torment.<sup>101</sup> This post-war transformation includes a discontented Weimar Republic. Like a cancer spreading from one organ to other parts of the body, the post-war “illness” divides the citizens of a vulnerable Weimar Republic. Todd Herzog describes Weimar Germany as “a culture in crisis and a culture of crisis.”<sup>102</sup> This chapter will explore the “crisis culture” of the Weimar Republic by tracking the eugenic discourse through a social context (social instability, economic hardships, and crime). The eugenic discourse will reveal the “nature versus nurture” dialogue brought sharply into focus through analysis of Fritz

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<sup>99</sup> Eric Dorn Brose, *A History of Europe in the Twentieth Century*, (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2005), 177. Brose emphasizes an awakening concerning the societal division as he discusses an American college student who “stepped up and charged that the ten million dead crusaders in the ‘war to end all war’ looked from today’s perspective like ‘victims of an illusion when they fell to earth only a few years ago.’ His call for world peace was ‘not a petition, but an ultimatum.’

<sup>100</sup> Ernst Simmel, “War Neuroses and “Physic Trauma,”” In *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*,” edited by Kaes, Anton, Martin Jay, Edward Dimendberg, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1994), 7.

<sup>101</sup> Simmel, 7.

<sup>102</sup> Todd Herzog, *Crime Stories: Criminalistic Fantasy and the Culture of Crisis in Weimar Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books), 1.

Lang's film, *M* (1931). This chapter will illustrate how a distressed society fostered values suitable for eugenic policies and Nazi discourse.

Fritz Lang's film, *M* (1931), reflects the disorder of the Weimar Republic. Lang reveals Weimar's "culture crisis" with a narrative centered on a child murderer lurking about the city. The film echoes social instability, economic hardships, and criminality rampant in Weimar Germany.<sup>103</sup> Lang emphasizes these adversities with a focus on criminals, beggars, washerwomen, and children without fathers. Hans Beckert, played by Peter Lorre, is a serial killer who preys upon little girls. Beckert's ability to blend in on the city streets helps him elude the police. As the investigation intensifies, the criminal gang, led by Schränker, played by Gustaf Gründgens, finds their "business" being disrupted by the search. As such, the criminal element takes a different approach to separate themselves from the murderer. Beckert is identified and judged by the criminal underground. His "trial" reveals the invisible nature of his murderous actions as the criminal underground seeks to eliminate the threat he poses. Anton Kaes notes that the film reflects a "society at war with itself."<sup>104</sup> The narrative in *M* shed light on topics that divided Weimar society: the death penalty, the treatment of mentally ill criminals, and public safety.<sup>105</sup>

Crime further divided an unstable Weimar Germany. The topic of how to best deal with criminals drew a clear line between the left and right of Weimar's democracy. On one side, liberalism called for rehabilitation of the criminal, while conservatives

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<sup>103</sup> Rob White and Edward Buscombe, *British Film Institute Film Classics, Volume 1*. (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2003), 143. Speaking to the topicality of the film, Anton Kaes discusses how at *M*'s debut on 11 May 1931, an "unruly mob clashed with police, unwittingly reproducing scenes from the movie playing inside."

<sup>104</sup> Kaes, 143.

<sup>105</sup> Kaes, 144.

pushed for a harsher approach to law and order.<sup>106</sup> A scientific explanation for crime provided an argument against the “softer approach” to criminal activity in Weimar Germany. To better understand the nature of this argument, one must acknowledge the influence of Cesare Lombroso’s work. Born in Northern Italy in 1836, Lombroso was a physician, psychiatrist, and anthropologist. His most well-known book, *Criminal Man*, first published in 1876, went through several editions where he expanded upon his original ideas. His daughter, Gina Lombroso-Ferrero, published another edition of this book in 1911, two years after Lombroso’s death.<sup>107</sup> Lombroso was well-known as the creator of scientific criminology.<sup>108</sup> Despite this recognition, Lombroso’s credibility was not without controversy. He has been characterized as a “sloppy researcher” and a “racist.”<sup>109</sup> Nicole Rafter argues that his full body of work, written in Italian, was only partially translated and/or condensed, which contributed to the contentious descriptions. As Lombroso’s work became more accessible, his ideas became more noteworthy; the importance of his research, with respect to the growth of the field of criminology, revealed the significance of Lombroso’s thinking.<sup>110</sup> While others studied the outside

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<sup>106</sup> Nicole Rafter, *The Criminal Brain: Understanding Biological Theories of Crime*, (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 179.

<sup>107</sup> Gina Lombroso and Cesare Lombroso, *Criminal Man: According to the Classification of Cesare Lombroso* (Montclair, New Jersey: Patterson Smith Publishing), xxi. Cesare Lombroso gave his “personal attention” to the book prepared by his daughter, including an introduction. Lombroso’s introduction in this edition was the last of his written work before his death in 1909.

<sup>108</sup> David M. Horton and Katherine E. Rich in the Introduction to *The Criminal Anthropological Writings of Cesare Lombroso Published in the English Language Periodical Literature During the Late 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries: With Bibliographic Appendices of Books and Periodical Literature Pertaining to Lombroso and Criminal Anthropology*, (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2004), i. The preface is written by Nicole Rafter, Ph. D. Rafter, of St. John’s College, Oxford University, England, discusses how “the pendulum of scholarly opinion” is moving back to a more fair assessment of Lombroso as a “key figure in the history of criminology.”

<sup>109</sup> Horton, Rich, Preface.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., i. Lombroso’s ideas differentiated from the “free will” philosophy connected with figures such as Cesare Bonesana and Jeremy Bentham.

influences that triggered criminality, Lombroso focused on biological factors.<sup>111</sup> Rafter argues that “Lombroso’s work constituted the first true criminology, a theory comprehensive in scope (unlike moral insanity) and independent of other doctrine (unlike the phrenological explanation of crime).”<sup>112</sup> Richard F. Wetzell also discusses Lombroso as a prominent figure in the formation of criminological thinking and penal reform. He notes that Lombroso, with his application of anthropology to explain criminal behavior, initiated a new way of thinking about criminal behavior. Wetzell notes that the discussion of science-based research as an explanation for criminal behavior began with Lombroso’s “provocative theory” which created a deeper discourse between the medical and criminal justice fields.<sup>113</sup> Previously, the penal reform system was based upon social causes of crime and the punishment was focused on retribution to society. In contrast, the emerging medical-based research revealed a way to pinpoint criminal behavior as something to be anticipated. Lombroso’s “born criminal” theory, as Wetzell discusses, found an audience among the reformers. Addressing the crime issues of Germany in 1890s, the vast majority of medical books published on crime was considered reactions to Lombroso’s born criminal theory.<sup>114</sup> Thus, a scientific explanation of the criminal starts with Lombroso and

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<sup>111</sup> Leonard D. Savitz, *Introduction to the Reprint Edition, Lombroso’s Criminal Man, 1911* (Montclair, New Jersey: Patterson Smith Publishing Corporation, 1972), vi. A.M. Guerry is the author of *Essai sur la statistique morale de la France* (1835). Another notable in the origins of criminology, A.M. Guerry, marked the beginning of collecting criminal statistics with his measurements of the social, economic, and environmental aspects of crime.

<sup>112</sup> Nicole Rafter, *The Criminal Brain: Understanding Biological Theories of Crime*, (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 65.

<sup>113</sup> Wetzell, Richard F. 2009. "Psychiatry and criminal justice in modern Germany, 1880-1933." *Journal Of European Studies* 39, no. 3: 270-289. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 27, 2015). On the criminal justice side of the conversation, Wetzell mentions Franz von Liszt (1851–1919), as part of a “new generation” of law reformers who called for a different method to “better protect society against crime.”

<sup>114</sup> Wetzell, 270-289. On the criminal justice side of the conversation, Wetzell mentions Franz von Liszt (1851–1919), as part of a “new generation” of law reformers who called for a different method to “better protect society against crime.” Wetzell notes the works of the following in the responses to Lombroso: Adolf Baer (1834–1908), Hans Kurella (1858–1916), Paul Näcke (1851–1913), Julius Koch (1841–1908) and Eugen Bleuler (1857–1939)—he also mentions that of this group, Baer was the only one

the discussion of criminal biology. Lombroso's work, specifically the "born criminal" aspect, will shed light on similar theories that existed in Weimar Germany and, later, in Nazi Germany.

Lombroso explored science for an explanation for man's drive to commit crimes. In doing so, he categorized criminal types: the born criminal, the insane criminal, and 'criminaloids.'<sup>115</sup> Within these categorizations, Lombroso pinpointed physical anomalies and psychiatrics in identifying criminals. While his entire work of criminal anthropology was not accepted, his analysis of the biological elements of criminality was taken seriously.<sup>116</sup> Lombroso sought to prevent crime for each "type" of criminal. One such justification included capital punishment when dealing with the so-called born criminal:

When we realise that there exist beings, born criminals, who are organized for evil, who reproduce the instincts common to the wildest savages...destined by nature to injure others, our resentment becomes softened; but notwithstanding our sense of pity, we feel justified in demanding their extermination when they prove to be dangerous and absolutely irredeemable.<sup>117</sup>

It is the "born criminal" in Lombroso's theories that finds credence in German criminology in Weimar Germany. After WWI, there was a need in Germany to pinpoint the cause of society's troubles and identify the criminal. Lombroso's data on the make-up of a "born criminal" provided a more concrete analysis of the crime and criminals. While

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not critical of Lombroso's work. Each acknowledged Lombroso's theories and worked them into their own perspective on medical explanations for crime.

<sup>115</sup> Cesare Lombroso, *Criminal Man*, ed. Mary Gibson and Nicole Rafter (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 291. "Criminaloid" is Lombroso's term for a subgroup of criminal who acts out only when pushed into certain circumstances. Criminaloids, according to Lombroso, are opportunistic criminals. Lombroso also adds that the organization of prison systems promote crime by mixing together born criminals and criminaloids.

<sup>116</sup> Rafter, 180. Rafter notes that German criminologists did not swallow Italian criminal anthropology whole. Indeed, like...the United States, England, and France, German criminologists such as Gustav Aschaffenburg heavily criticized Lombroso, even while incorporating some of his central ideas."

<sup>117</sup> Gina Lombroso and Cesare Lombroso, 209.

the idea of the innate criminal logically leads to a racist ideology or rhetoric, Lombroso was politically liberal, according to Herzog: “In his writings he sought not to demonize certain types of people but rather to reform penal laws to make them more modern and effective.”<sup>118</sup> This particular purpose is evident in *Crime: Its Causes and Remedies* in which Lombroso lists a vast array of influencing factors for crime, including heredity. Lombroso’s studies included meticulous measurements of Italian prisoners. Through these measurements, he identified “criminal characteristics” in body parts as he analyzed physical anomalies of the body, such as skull shape/size, feet, ears, forehead, teeth, and lips. He also compared the types of wrinkles in men and women, criminal and noncriminal, categorized by age.<sup>119</sup> Although Lombroso was criticized for the “odd assortment of statistical data” on the criminal “features” of man, in this respect, his contribution to criminology is significant because of the sheer volume of data. It is Lombroso’s “school of thought”<sup>120</sup> on the born criminal that answered criminological questions in Weimar Germany.

On the subject of justice and punishment, Lombroso discussed how science complements law and order: “Scientific knowledge...is happily not at war but in alliance with social order...If crime is a necessary thing, so too is society’s resistance to crime, and, consequently the punishment of crime, which must be measured by the amount of

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<sup>118</sup> Todd Herzog, *Crime Stories: Criminalistic Fantasy and the Culture of Crisis in Weimar Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books), 92.

<sup>119</sup> Cesare Lombroso, *Criminal Man*, ed. Mary Gibson and Nicole Rafter (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 310.

<sup>120</sup> Todd Herzog, 92. Herzog mentions the “anthropological school of criminology” as being “responsible for two key developments in the process of identifying criminals...” and one of these developments is a shift in focus from the crime to the criminal.

apprehension with which it inspires the individual.”<sup>121</sup> More specifically, science coincided with a shift in attitude about how to deal with criminals who “plague” society. A broadened vision concerning criminology serves to “modify the behavior of the offender” and solidifies Lombroso’s theory of the born criminal.<sup>122</sup> Going beyond the idea of moral insanity, Lombroso’s theories provided a framework for criminal biology in Weimar, and later, Nazi Germany. The “born criminal” theory was not limited to men. Erich Wulffen commented on the framework of the born criminal as he profiled woman’s criminal psychology. He highlighted Lombroso’s anthropologic explanation for the woman as a sexual criminal. Wulffen emphasized the connection of the Italian Positivist School of Criminology regarding woman’s internal make-up with outward characteristics such as friendliness, truthfulness, and sincerity: “Woman’s insincerity is rooted in her very entrails, promoted by the event of menstruation which in our social structure must be kept secret.” The “concealment of defects” is the underlying cause of devious behavior. Hence, the woman is inherently deceptive and outwardly able to adapt more easily than man in various settings, thus further concealing her criminality.<sup>123</sup> Wulffen credited Lombroso as a trailblazer in the field criminal psychology. He noted that “his

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<sup>121</sup> Cesare Lombroso, 379.

<sup>122</sup> Richard Wetzell, *Inventing the Criminal: A History of German Criminology, 1880-1945* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press), 36-37.

<sup>123</sup> Erich Wulffen, *Psycho-Biological, Medico-legal and Criminological studies in Woman as a Sexual Criminal: Treating Hundreds of Authentic Medico-Legal Case Histories: An Illustrated Handbook for Judges, Police and Prison Officials, Educators, reformers and Clergyman, Sociologists, Social Workers, Physicians, Lawyers, Mental Hygienists* (New York: Falstaff Press Inc.), 25. “Mendacity, the concealment of defects by means of fashionable clothes, and perfumed cosmetics are also dictated by sexual selection.” “With the growth of civilization the vanity of the male decreases, that of woman increases.” Wulffen also noted that “woman’s intelligence is less creative and less original; consequently she shows a greater capacity for assimilation.”



research in the female criminal have smoothed a path for our criminal psychology for woman and is to this day of great significance.”<sup>124</sup>

Essentially, Lombroso’s thinking on the born criminal as the bearer of responsibility serves a dual purpose for Weimar’s philosophy on criminal behavior: provides an explanation for criminal behavior and a scientific platform for criminology as a basis in “cleaning up society” or getting rid of undesirables, which bolsters the aforementioned conservative argument for a tougher approach on crime. This scientific platform represents an important shift in criminal justice for the Weimar Republic. Criminal threat assessment in a volatile society found its way into everyday German life: “Among the signs of the epoch we have now entered belongs the increased intrusion of danger into daily life. There is no accident concealing itself behind this fact but a comprehensive change of the inner and outer world.”<sup>125</sup> This change sparks a debate about criminal justice, one that shapes a juxtaposition of nature and nurture.

The nature versus nurture narrative was evident in the late 1920s with dialogue concerning how to best judge the criminal. On the “nurture” side of the argument, analyzing and treating the criminal mind was a prime topic. In 1929, Franz Alexander, MD, and Hugh Staub added to this conversation with an article in the volume, *Der Verbrecher und seine Richter*. Reacting to a death penalty debate, they argued for a “deeper knowledge of the psychology of the criminal” to better judge the fate of the said

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<sup>124</sup> Wulffen, 31-32. Wulffen noted Lombroso’s significance “in spite of the fact that these teachings of Lombroso of a congenital, anatomically marked criminal type have been rightfully disputed.”

<sup>125</sup> Ernst Jünger, “On Danger,” (Berlin: Junker und Dünhaupt Verlag, 1931) in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. Anton Kaes, and Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 369.

criminal. Further, they noted that “it is not improbable that our treatment of the criminal will undergo a similar change in the future.”<sup>126</sup> This argument exposes discontent with the justice system in Weimar Germany. More specifically, it reveals dissatisfaction with the credibility of medical experts who judge criminal behavior. What is more, the shift from nurture to nature as a measure of protecting the public emerges as Alexander and Staub defended their focus on the mentality of the criminal: “We want to understand the criminal in order to be able to judge him correctly,” and to go “beyond question.”<sup>127</sup>

While it may appear to serve the criminal, the authors explain that gaining a deeper knowledge of the criminal is a necessary step in protecting the public.<sup>128</sup> There was public concern that rehabilitating the criminal was not a sufficient means to ensure order and protect people in an unstable period where criminal activity, from drugs to prostitution to murder, was flourishing. Consequently, a war-torn Weimar society became fixated on, and further divided by, prevalent crime (from petty crime to murder) that increased public instability and fear.

To gain a sense of the jarring effects of The Great War on society, one may look at the violence that artist Otto Dix illustrates in his painting, *Sexual Murder*. Dix illuminates the post-war angst that encapsulates a war torn society, where men from the front lines find themselves “replaced” by women in various roles. A disemboweled female body is sprawled on a bed, with the partially exposed torso left dangling off the

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<sup>126</sup> Alexander and Staub, “The Criminal and His Judges,” In *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*,” edited by Kaes, Anton, Martin Jay, Edward Dimendberg, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1994), 734.

<sup>127</sup> Alexander and Staub, *Ibid.*, 734.

<sup>128</sup> Alexander and Staub, *Ibid.*, 734.

side, next to a toppled chair. Blood is puddling and dripping on the wall, bed, coverings, and floor. There is a gash in the wall just above a rectangular mirror (barely hanging) that reflects the insides of a woman, resembling an abyss. Only a few things are untouched by the bloodiness of the scene, including a delicate hanging lamp at the top center of the painting. This room is at once conservative, with its clean lines and simple furnishings, and gruesome in its carnage. At the end of the room is a window with a desolate, lifeless street scene in view. The focal point, though, is the destroyed female body and what it represents. Maria Tatar notes that “woman is marked here as a figure of biological disorder and social disruption.”<sup>129</sup> The butchering of the female physique speaks to a larger narrative about the effects of a battle-scarred soldier mindset in this post-war era. Dix’s image illustrates a resentful mentality that is disturbed by the battlefield experience of World War I.<sup>130</sup> Revenge is taken upon the female body for her supposed lack of commitment to soldiers in the war. Rather than helping the soldier, she was perceived as enabling war and further endangering man. The female body symbolized a biological threat. Tatar discusses how the female body in Dix’s painting is connected with “the polluting world of biology.”<sup>131</sup> A woman’s reproductive capability was therefore equated with a corrosion of society.

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<sup>129</sup> Otto Dix, *Sexual Murder*, 1922, In *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany*, Tatar, Maria (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 14. (Tatar also discusses how Dix’s *Sexual Murder* of 1922 is a “copycat crime” of the murder of a prostitute in Hamburg in 1900. Additionally, she explores the representations of “an assault of this magnitude on the female body.”)

<sup>130</sup> Brose, 180. Brose discusses the replacement of men in society and how “resentful husbands oftentimes vented their depression, moreover, through wifebeating.”

<sup>131</sup> Maria Tatar, *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 17.

Violence is the underlying theme that extends beyond the end of a war. Mutilated bodies, a result of technological advances on the battlefield, reveal the theme of violence. The mutilation is a result of advanced warfare along with the “unpleasant” conditions of trench life. To live in the trenches as a soldier of World War I often meant sitting in mud and rainwater, sharing the earth with rats and lice, and, of course, the constant fear of death. Witnessing and fearing not only death, but mutilation, creates a distressed mental state. Erich Maria Remarque encapsulates this experience in his novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929): “We are no longer untroubled—we are indifferent. We might exist there; but should we really live there? We are forlorn like children, and experienced like old men, we are crude and sorrowful and superficial—I believe we are lost.”<sup>132</sup> These reflections point to a sentiment that collides with a human capacity for compassion and, on a smaller scale, with the soldier’s return to society, where the life of the community and the individual is changing. Life is essentially turning inside out, much like the image of the murdered female that Dix portrays. Thus, the “war to end all war”<sup>133</sup> sparks a “war within society” full of torment.

As evidenced by Dix’s violent artwork, Weimar was an angst-filled society obsessed with crime and criminal behavior. There is a need to physically identify the criminal in order to protect the public and ensure order. As such, ordinary citizens were on alert, seeking to find the criminal and thus eliminate the danger. Todd Herzog refers to this process as the “Cesare Lombroso method.” Whereas the usual method of detective

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<sup>132</sup> Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1982), 123.

<sup>133</sup> Brose, 177.

work was to spot the clues that lead to the criminal, the “Cesare Lombroso method” sought to protect the public by identifying the criminal before he or she committed a crime.<sup>134</sup> The new method fit well within the Weimar Republic where the trauma of World War I had trickled down into the post-war society. The physical and mental devastation of war led to an obliteration of a sense of security in a post-war setting. The Great Depression in 1930 added a layer of economic insecurity to an already fragile political foundation.<sup>135</sup>

In a 1922 speech, Paul Valéry remarks that “...doubt and disorder are in us and with us...”<sup>136</sup> This sentiment lingers still in 1931 when Fritz Lang’s film, *M*, was released. Thomas Mann notes in 1930, that “fanaticism turns into a means of salvation, enthusiasm into epileptic ecstasy, politics becomes an opiate for the masses...and reason veils her face.”<sup>137</sup> The “opiate for the masses” to which Mann referred was evident in Hitler’s 1927 race argument in *Mein Kampf*: Hitler notes: “Nature does not want a pairing of weaker individuals with stronger ones; it wants even less a mating of a higher race with a weaker one.”<sup>138</sup> Hitler thus shapes “race” as his reasoning for excluding the

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<sup>134</sup> Todd Herzog, 93.

<sup>135</sup> Herzog, 1. Herzog discusses Weimar Germany (1920s) as a period of “decadence and crisis” — a “hellish carnival” full of crime, poverty, divorce and clashes between police and citizens. The Weimar period represented a mix of political, economic, and social ideas. There was a culture of devastation and shock after losing World War I, which met with a burgeoning modern society. Crime was rampant, unemployment numbers were high, and class divisions sharpened.

<sup>136</sup> Paul Valéry, “Disillusionment,” In *Sources of European History Since 1900*,” Perry, Marvin, Matthew Berg, and James Krukones, (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2011), 77-78.

<sup>137</sup> Thomas Mann, “An Appeal to Reason,” In *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, edited by Kaes, Anton, Martin Jay, Edward Dimendberg, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1994), 154.

<sup>138</sup> Adolf Hitler, “Mein Kampf,” In *Sources of European History Since 1900*,” Perry, Marvin, Matthew Berg, and James Krukones, (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2011), 155.

“other.” This sentiment taps into the desperate outlook of a country crippled by World War I.

The topicality of Fritz Lang’s *M* is evident in the Weimar Republic’s social instability, economic hardships, and criminal activity. A pessimistic attitude pervades as Chancellor Franz Von Papen notes in 1932: “The artificial blossoms of an indifferent urban culture have never been the signs of renewal in a people but signs of the end and decay.”<sup>139</sup> Lang reflects clear social distinctions on the issue of family and the well-being of children. He reflects class differences with the juxtaposition of Mrs. Beckmann and other, more affluent, parents. Lang contrasts Mrs. Beckmann, a washerwoman, working from home, awaiting her daughter’s return from school, with other parents, well-dressed and seemingly “more concerned” about the welfare of their children, greeting their kids at the school doors. This contrast places an emphasis on how different classes of people care for their children differently. On one side, there are parents with the means to be well-dressed, ensuring the safety of their children by greeting them at the school doors, while on the other side, there is Mrs. Beckmann, seen as perhaps a single parent struggling to survive. In this way, Lang highlights the economic situation at hand.

The social instability of the Weimar period is reflected in *M* with Lang’s portrayal of working mothers and the absence of men (fathers). The absence of a traditional family structure in the film adds to a sense of danger; children, such as Elsie, are left susceptible to crime. Thus, economic hardships and social disorder perpetuate the cycle of crime on

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<sup>139</sup> Franz Von Papen, “German Cultural Policy” In *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*,” edited by Kaes, Anton, Martin Jay, Edward Dimendberg, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1994), 377.

the city streets. This line of thinking correlated with social policies of the Weimar Republic. One such idea was the subject of science as a means to stem crime in the streets. For instance, the Weimar Government looked to scientific measures, specifically reproduction laws, that it believed would help the situation. For example, critic Cornelia Osborne notes that “only in the wake of the devastation wreaked by the First World War and again by the economic depression at the end of the 1920s did the democratically elected Weimar governments attempt to ‘rationalise’ reproduction to suit the prevailing economic hardship as well as accord with the belief in modernity in industry and everyday life.”<sup>140</sup> While the Weimar Republic’s attempt at controlling reproduction (“fewer but better children”<sup>141</sup>) to alleviate economic hardships and thereby improve the stability of the community was not realized, it was an idea that germinated from population growth issues that occurred before the war. The underlying implication here was one of preserving certain hereditary lines and limiting or eliminating others, an idea stemming from eugenic theory featured in German thought at the turn-of-the-century. Osborne notes that eugenicists “asserted that the number of ‘incapable’ and ‘unfit’ people had dramatically increased during and after the First World War” and as such “welfare provisions were draining the public purse and the potential children ‘degenerates’ would undermine the genetic health of society.”<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Cornelia Osborne, “Social Body, Racial Body, Woman’s Body. Discourses, Policies, Practices from Wilhelmine to Nazi Germany, 1912-1945.” *Historical Social Research* 36, no. 2: 140-161. *Historical Abstracts with Full Text*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 29, 2015), 144.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 149-150. Osborne examines the arguments of eugenicists Max Hirsch and Agnes Bluhm.

As social policies changed to fit a downtrodden population, a greater emphasis was placed upon “the other” in Weimar Germany. A criminal was no longer just a criminal. There were varying shades of criminality. Lang shows a variance of criminality with a “regular” criminal versus a biologically comprised murderer. Anton Kaes notes that Lang illustrates the “deep structures of order and disorder which constitute a society in crisis.”<sup>143</sup> This challenge leads to the definition of the “other” given a societal awareness of physical differences. The fundamental dialogue in *M* turns to a question of what to do with “the other”. In the film, Lang enables the audience to track Elsie as she leaves school; bouncing a ball as she walks the city street, Elsie comes upon a poster warning of crimes committed by a potential serial murderer. The outlining of danger is presented with Beckert’s shadow against the poster. Beckert’s profile then comes into view, with his nose and lips defining his face while his hat and coat disguise the rest of his body. It is here where Beckert’s outline merges with the poster as if it is the missing piece of a puzzle.<sup>144</sup> Just as Beckert’s physiognomy shadows his murderous inclinations, the physical definition of a criminal in the film speaks to the notion of eugenics, prevalent in the 1920s. In this way, *M* establishes a connection to criminality, and a fear of “the other.”

Sander Gilman notes that “the yearning for rigidity is in us all” and that human beings naturally “long for hard lines and clear concepts.” Further, he argues that “when we have them we have either to face the fact that realities elude them, or else blind

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<sup>143</sup> Anton Kaes, *M*, (London: British Film Institute: British Film Classics, Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 9.

<sup>144</sup> *M*, 1931.



ourselves to the inadequacy of the concepts.”<sup>145</sup> This “yearning for rigidity” that Gilman discusses emerged in the Weimar Republic and is evident in *M* in the encounter between Elsie and Beckert through the street poster. The poster serves as a warning of something to be feared. Elsie did not perceive a threat, and thus becomes a victim.

The heightened awareness of the other within a German “culture of crisis”<sup>146</sup> leads to a discussion of not only the physical characteristics of others, but the invisible markers as well. Herzog discusses Curt Elwenspoek’s 1931 study of police work in which Elwenspoek critiques criminal anthropologists and the problem with their relying upon visible differences to pinpoint criminality: “You think that one must be able to read a murderer’s depravity in his face? Amateurish superstition! .... Just look at six, eight images of executed murderers and ask yourself conscientiously whether you wouldn’t consider most of them to be perhaps obtuse, but harmless (and many even good-natured) fellows!”<sup>147</sup> As Herzog further discusses, Germany’s infamous killers of the 1920s were brought to light because of “private citizens who acted on a chance observation and uncovered the criminal.”<sup>148</sup> Lang illustrates this point with Beckert, who is not physically marked as a murderer. While the audience is clued into the murderer’s identity, Elsie is not. Similar to Elwenspoek’s observation, the police in *M* beckon the help of the public. Posters are displayed in public view as a first step in identifying the criminal. There is also a combined effort of police work and private citizen observations in the search for a

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<sup>145</sup> Sander Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 19.

<sup>146</sup> Herzog, 1.

<sup>147</sup> Herzog, 103. Herzog discusses Curt Elwenspoek’s work: *Mord and Totschlag: Polizei greift ein!* (Murder and Manslaughter: The Police Take Action!)

<sup>148</sup> Herzog, 103-105. Herzog notes that Elwenspoek emphasized “exercise in observation” and realize that the criminal “is no more marked than the author of the book.”

murderer. Following clues from a letter, the police search a house. In response to residents who ask why he is searching their house, the detective responds: “any man in the street could be the guilty one.”<sup>149</sup> The image on screen then cuts to a little girl approaching a man to inquire about the time. This encounter immediately draws attention from passersby who confront the man, suspecting him of having criminal motives.

If “any man” could possibly be the “guilty one,” there is pressure for the “regular” criminal to define boundaries. To this point, Lang illustrates how an organized criminal element seeks to distinguish itself from the child murderer who is lurking in their city. The head criminal, Schränker, states: “Gentlemen, the cops are looking for the murderer in our ranks!”<sup>150</sup> The division between the tactics of the police and the criminals is outlined in this sequence as the criminals decide to seek out Beckert on their own, through the use of the public, as a “surveillance network.” The police underestimate the power of the public eye while the criminals, in an effort to protect themselves, realize that it will take an effort on the street level to identify what is out of place, thus shedding light on the shadow of “the normal appearance of the ‘man-next-door.’”<sup>151</sup>

The heightened awareness of crime and suspicion of the “man-next-door” in *M* echoed the serial murder culture of the 1920s. Interestingly, Kaes discusses this connection with the reality of the period leading up to 1931: “What struck most critics first was *M*’s topicality. Place and time were current—Berlin in the fall of 1930, with several newspapers showing clearly readable titles and dates.... The film’s focus on the

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<sup>149</sup> Lang, *M*.

<sup>150</sup> Lang, *M*.

<sup>151</sup> Herzog, 107.

downtrodden *lumpenproletariat*...dramatized the widespread unemployment and economic misery in the wake of the 1929 stockmarket crash.”<sup>152</sup> Kaes further describes the topicality as he discusses the “serial murder, serial culture” sentiment of the Weimar period.<sup>153</sup> Lang illustrates a serial culture with Mrs. Beckmann’s subscription to a crime serial, which, ironically, is delivered while she anxiously waits for Elsie to return from school; Mrs. Beckmann is unaware that the type of story within the latest installment of the serial is the fate that finds her daughter.<sup>154</sup>

The fascination with serial murder was not reflected through the daily newspapers alone. Leading up to the release of *M*, Weimar culture was affected by the crimes of individuals such as Peter Kürten, also known as “The Vampire of Düsseldorf,” or George Karl Grossmann, who, as Kaes discusses, was “a butcher who made a living selling human flesh.”<sup>155</sup> Lang uses reflections of such real-life cases including that of Fritz Haarmann, a serial killer whose crimes took place from 1918 to 1924. There is at least one commonality between Haarmann and Beckert, which is the claim of an inability to control one’s primitive actions. Kaes illustrates this as well in describing Haarmann’s plea in trial: “Often, after I had killed, I pleaded to be put away in a military asylum, but not in a madhouse... Oh, believe me, I’m not ill. It’s only that I occasionally have funny turns.”<sup>156</sup> Beckert argues a similar plea in the “trial” scene where, down on his knees, with his hands grasping his head, he faces Schränker who acts as judge and jury: “I can’t

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<sup>152</sup> Kaes, *M*, 13.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>154</sup> Kaes, 26.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

help what I do...But I...I can't help myself. I have no control over this evil thing inside of me, the fire, the voices, the torment!"<sup>157</sup>

The "Lombroso effect," seen through Weimar reaction to the above serial killers was described by Siegfried Kracauer in *Murder Trials and Society* (1931).<sup>158</sup> Kracauer discussed how social instability contributed to a loss of values and ethics in this period: "The exceptional degree of this insecurity is what characterizes the overwhelming process of social transformation."<sup>159</sup> Thus, the social reaction to crime changed in the Weimar period. Individual citizens became part of a "mobilized mass," when it came to serial murderers.<sup>160</sup> Mobilized citizens focused on identifying a person's criminal predisposition. This social change is evident in Lang's depiction of Beckert. In the criminal court scene Beckert explains his inability to control the "voices" and the focus shifts from the crime to the cause of the crime. The cause, in this case, involves the criminal and his biological proclivity towards criminal acts. Cesare Lombroso noted in 1895, that one should look toward "atavism" or the criminal's animal instinct within.<sup>161</sup> Furthermore, Lombroso's work explains crime as a matter of nature: "Modern science, here as in medicine, recognizes that crime also (like disease) has natural causes."<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> *M*, 1931.

<sup>158</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, "Murder Trials and Society," In *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, edited by Kaes, Anton, Martin Jay, Edward Dimendberg, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1994), 740-741.

<sup>159</sup> Kracauer, 741.

<sup>160</sup> Herzog, 127-128. Herzog discusses how *M* addresses the "crisis of criminal investigation in the Weimar Republic," and the connections between Peter Kürten and Franz Beckert.

<sup>161</sup> Lombroso, *Crime: Its Causes and Remedies*, 365.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, vi-vii. (The quote here is from the introduction, which is written by Maurice Parmelee, PhD.) On the other hand, Maria Tatar argues additional "causes" as she discusses the reference to serial murderers as "beasts," or "victims of the desperate postwar conditions" as well as "persons taunted by their heredity" and how "only the most vague references are made to the childhood" of men such as

Beckert's plea in the court scene affords the audience the ability to track the criminal visually while also addressing the audience in terms of new scientific evidence to track "born criminals." According to criminologist Erich Wulffen, Lombroso was "on the right path" with the "born criminal" theory, but "lost himself in superficial anthropological speculations."<sup>163</sup> Wulffen argued that relying solely on social explanations for crime was a mistake. He further noted:

It is not true that crime is conditioned by the imperfections and shortcomings of the social structure; for even in the most ideal human society, which the human reason can construct, even in a utopian "Paradise", man would still continue to commit acts which would have no purpose in a state of social bliss.<sup>164</sup>

Beckert's admission of his murderous compulsions fits with Wulffen's argument. Outwardly, Beckert blended in; he did not appear to be a threat to the casual bystander. Biologically, however, his murderous inclinations exist. He reveals this existence with his outbursts.

Adding to the context of the child murderer's existence, Anton Kaes notes that in *M*, "sound affirms presence and life, silence connotes absence and death."<sup>165</sup> This notion of sound and silence creates a narrative for the existence of the child murderer. Silence indicates that the murderer is extinguishing a life, whereas sound represents safety or existence. The children's voices in the opening scene affirm they are "still there" as Mrs. Beckmann explained. Just as the viewer hears the children singing against a black screen

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Kürten, who grew up with an abusive father. What Tatar seems to allude to is that there was not sufficient focus on the social and familial aspects of the murderer's life as an explanation after the fact or perhaps even as a way to track the criminal. See Maria Tatar, *Lustmord*, 44.

<sup>163</sup> Wulffen, 20.

<sup>164</sup> Wulffen, 19.

<sup>165</sup> Kaes, 22.

as the film starts, the audience knows that the children are present even without visual proof.

*M*'s visual runs parallel to the tracking of a child murderer and the physiognomy of Beckert. One such example occurs in the trial scene where Beckert's hands are presented so that his fingers appear curled and animal-like. Consequently, the child murderer is set apart, not just for his murderous actions in the film but visually separated by physical characteristics and mannerisms, thus revealing the criminal as beast-like and uncontrollable. This additional insight about the murderer reveals a connection to Lombroso's theory of the born criminal. It also connects to Wulffen's observation that the criminal always exists within. These animal-like characteristics draw a line of distinction between Beckert and the others. His "biological inferiority" makes it easier for the crowd to decide his fate.<sup>166</sup>

Beckert's inclinations also make him identifiable to the keen observer. He is identified by a blind panhandler who recognizes the melody that Beckert whistles and connects it to an earlier encounter with Elsie. The whistling connection leads to Becker being marked with the letter "M" on his back by a beggar within the "street organization." This marking then alerts Becker to the fact that he is under surveillance."<sup>167</sup> Thus, Beckert's inclinations are now visible—he is physically labeled as a murderer. The idea that the murderer is visually marked also harkens back to Lombroso where the criminal has discernable physical attributes.

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<sup>166</sup> *M*, 1931

<sup>167</sup> *M*, 1931.

The physical marking in *M* is necessary to identify and capture Beckert because otherwise he blends in with society. Herzog discusses this topic and analyzes the Düsseldorf case noting that "...the criminal must be spotted before committing his next crime, yet his physiognomy and gestures will not betray his murderous nature."<sup>168</sup> The discussion of a murderous nature" brings the context of social hygiene into perspective. As Gilman's "hard lines and clear concepts"<sup>169</sup> illustrate, criminals in the Weimar Republic are eugenically and biologically marked. Concentrating on the science underneath a "hygienic" society, the conversation of the self and the other goes beyond the physiognomy in order to understand what creates the physical presence. The focus turns to the composition of a being, and, consequently, science has long been utilized as a definitive explanation for the questions of man. Critic Robert Proctor adds that during the Enlightenment period, there were some who felt that "race was the product of climate or disease" but also that "races of men were equal to one another in dignity or character."<sup>170</sup> With this in mind, viewing science as an explanation for man's actions has a historical context.

As a subtext to the eugenics discussion and the direction of society, the topic of euthanasia appears in the early twentieth century. Euthanasia, also called "mercy killing," is the act of putting to death painlessly or allowing a person to die by withholding extreme medical intervention, especially for someone suffering from an incurable disease

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<sup>168</sup> Herzog, 115. Herzog analyses the conclusions of Ernst Gennat, the chief of the homicide division in Berlin, as he discusses Peter Kürten and the physical identification of the murderer, or "visual difference."

<sup>169</sup> Gilman, 19.

<sup>170</sup> Proctor, 10-11.

or painful condition, at the person's request or by that of his/her relatives. This term takes on new meaning, however, within the eugenics discourse of the 1920s. While the Nazis created their own definition for the "Euthansia Programme" between 1939 and 1945, the concept of a government body defining what constitutes a life worth living was not a purely Nazi idea. As discussed in Chapter I, this discourse appeared in 1920 through the work of Karl Binding and Alfred Hoche.<sup>171</sup> As with the discussion surrounding the prevention, or sterilization, of people deemed unworthy of procreation, and resulting from aforementioned post-war societal issues, a discourse of ending lives also arises. Binding and Hoche note: "Germany had become lumbered with 'living burdens' (*Ballastexistenzen*), who were absorbing a disproportionate amount of resources..."<sup>172</sup>

Binding and Hoche's destructionist theory links back to the feeling of an "exterminationist desire"<sup>173</sup> that is felt in *M. Schränker's* words about the child murderer also reveal this feeling. With Beckert's confessed inability to control himself, he is then categorized as ill and thus a lingering danger to the community. He is at once a criminal and mentally ill, which relegates his life into the "living burden" that, according to Binding's definition, should be extinguished. The cause for euthanasia, as it is termed by Binding and Hoche, is to exterminate what ails a society in order to alleviate the anxiety caused by the other. By this 1920 definition, those "unfit" for living are dragging society down. To further this argument, Binding poses the question: "Are there humans who

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<sup>171</sup> The 'Euthansia' Programme 1939-1945, The Weimar Background, in *Nazism 1919-1945, Volume 3: Foreign Policy, War and Racial Extermination*, edited by Jeremy Noakes, G. Pridham, Exeter, Devon UK: University of Exeter Press, 1998, 390.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 390.

<sup>173</sup> Horst Lange, "Nazis vs. the Rule of Law: Allegory and Narrative Structure in Fritz Lang's *M.*" *Monatshefte* 101, no. 2: *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 29, 2015), 174.



have lost their human characteristics to such an extent that their continued existence has lost all value both for themselves and for society?”<sup>174</sup> The notion of who defines the values of individuals and of society at large is a question that arises from Binding’s concept of euthanasia. It is a product of a post-war environment because when a society faces the worst of times, alternatives to that experience may appear as acceptable options. Thomas Mueller and Thomas Beddies discuss that “the changed social context following World War I was critical to the popularization of the concept of euthanasia” because without taking such measures it “would inevitably lead to the degeneration of the entire nation.”<sup>175</sup> By categorizing who is “worthy” of life, this particular concept of euthanasia widens an awareness of those who are different than the self, creating a view of the other.

Perceptions of the other perpetuate the existence of danger in Weimar Germany. Gilman addresses the notion of stereotypes and how they are intertwined into human life. In doing so, he explains that stereotypes “buffer us against our most urgent fears by extending them, making it possible for us to act as though their source were beyond our control.”<sup>176</sup> The existence of fear then creates a need to eliminate the cause of the fear. Gilman also suggests that “the complexity of the stereotype results from the social context in which it is to be found” which prompts an evaluation of the way that labels function within a society. Gilman describes the relation between disorder within a society and the differentiation of the people within that society: “Anxiety arises as much through

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<sup>174</sup> Professor Karl Binding, “716,” In *Nazism 1919-1945, Volume 3: Foreign Policy, War and Racial Extermination*, edited by Jeremy Noakes, G. Pridham, Exeter, Devon, UK: University of Exeter Press, 1998, 389.

<sup>175</sup> Thomas Mueller and Thomas Beddies, “The Destruction of Life Unworthy of Living” in *National Socialist Germany.* *International Journal of Mental Health* 35, no. 3: *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 17, 2014), 95.

<sup>176</sup> Gilman, 17.

any alteration of the sense of order (real or imagined) between the self and the Other (real or imagined) as through the strains of regulating repressed drives.”<sup>177</sup> In this way, his argument relates to the disorder and subsequent division of the Weimar Republic.

## **Conclusion**

Scientific data is expanded in Weimar discourse to include human biology: anatomy, genetics, physiognomy, anthropology, and sociocultural influences, to name a few. These factors are used to answer the question of what lies beneath the skin and how it shapes the character of an individual. This discourse also speaks to Lombroso’s theories on the crime and its causes. To gain a deeper understanding of the influence of science upon social power, Proctor advises that “the sciences of social and personal control (economic and behavioral sciences, management and police science, counterinsurgency technologies, and the like) help maintain that stability.”<sup>178</sup> The shaping of policy based upon scientific “answers” provides an explanation of how and why science and social control are interconnected:

Science becomes increasingly a metaphor for the explanation of why things are as they are: people look to science to explain the origin of human character and institutions; science becomes an important part of ideological argumentation and means of social control.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Gilman, 19.

<sup>178</sup> Proctor, 3.

<sup>179</sup> Proctor, 12-13.

This point is pertinent to the conversation that Hitler starts with his words in *Mein Kampf*, as it serves as a starting point for the creation and “success” of “Nazi Science.”<sup>180</sup>

One can see this line of argumentation highlighted by Lang at the end of *M*. The “nature” of the criminal is a topic that Lang illustrates as Beckert faces Schränker and others. It is at this point at which a contrast between the criminal underground (Schränker) and the “outsider” (Beckert) reveals two kinds of criminals: those who are deemed “acceptable” in society and those who are “beasts” without self-control, Lorre’s character being the latter. Schränker identifies Beckert as someone who is unable to control his urges to kill, and thus brings the topic of nature versus nurture in the forefront: “We must make you powerless. You must disappear.”<sup>181</sup> Schränker’s call for Beckert to “disappear”<sup>182</sup> is then symbolic of the consensus as science is used as a means to identify and exclude the “other”: “It is a tale of knowledge turned into power directed against society’s unwanted.”<sup>183</sup> Of course, Beckert is the “unwanted” because he is a child murderer, but the decisive words chosen by Schränker appear to serve a deeper purpose that goes beyond the crime alone. As Horst Lange explains, “Schränker’s vocabulary is eerily reminiscent of Nazi rhetoric,” and therefore “one cannot shake the feeling that all along a pent up exterminationist desire has been present.”<sup>184</sup>

The topicality of *M* reemerges here as the film represents itself as a product of a society in the midst of change, namely a society unconcerned with nurturing what ails it

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<sup>180</sup> Proctor, 3. Proctor’s *Racial Hygiene* discusses “Nazi Science” in terms of “how scientists themselves participated in the construction of Nazi racial policy.”

<sup>181</sup> Lang, *M*.

<sup>182</sup> *M*, directed by Fritz Lang (1931), DVD (Criterion Collection, 2004).

<sup>183</sup> Vyleta, 407.

<sup>184</sup> Horst Lange, “Nazis vs. the Rule of Law: Allegory and narrative Structure in Fritz Lang’s *M*.” *Monatshefte* 101, no. 2: *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed February 2, 2014), 174.

and instead driven toward eliminating the “problem” altogether. In Beckert’s trial, considerations of his familial background or childhood experiences are not a factor in deciding his fate. Instead, the jury, made up of common criminals, fears he will strike again and seeks to prevent him from doing so. As such, the welfare of their underground society takes priority over the needs or issues of someone like Beckert. Beckert’s criminality is innate, and therefore, as Schränker says, he must “disappear”<sup>185</sup> for the sake of society. This moment speaks to the idea put forth by Alfred Rosenberg of purifying society. In *The Myth of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (1930) Rosenberg addresses the post-war chaos context of the 1920s and intertwines this with the eugenics discourse. By ridding itself of a “criminal” element, Rosenberg adds that society will create a “purification of modern life.”<sup>186</sup> Rosenberg also argues: “With an upbreeding of the race, a Nordic ideal of beauty will emerge.”<sup>187</sup> As Schränker and the others rid themselves of Beckert, as depicted in *M*, they “purify” their community in much the same way that Rosenberg discussed.

In 1933, the situation shifted for Germany as Adolf Hitler came to power on January 30, and he assumes controls to provide him with “unlimited authority,” one that extended in all directions and embraced an entire society.<sup>188</sup> With Hitler’s rise to power

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<sup>185</sup> Lang, *M*.

<sup>186</sup> Rosenberg, 402.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 404.

<sup>188</sup> Ernst Huber, “The Authority of the Führer...All-inclusive and Unlimited,” In *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*,” edited by Kaes, Anton, Martin Jay, Edward Dimendberg, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1994), 162.

in 1933, he offers an answer for Germany's "uprooted"<sup>189</sup> people with a clear direction and purpose for a culture in crisis.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> The phrase is Jaspers'. See "The Spiritual Situation of the Age," In *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 373.

<sup>190</sup> Herzog, 1.

### CHAPTER III: BLOOD AND PURITY: THE DANGER OF MISCEGENATION IN NAZI GERMANY AND SIRK'S *LA HABANERA* (1937)

In a September 1934 speech to the National Socialist Women's Organization, Hitler addressed a "culture in crisis" outlining Nazi policies concerning women:<sup>191</sup>

If the spheres of activity in daily life have sometimes shifted between man and woman in a way not in accordance with nature, it was not because woman as woman was striving for power over man; rather it was because man was no longer in a position to completely fulfill his responsibilities. That is the wonderful thing about nature and providence: no conflict between the two sexes is possible as long as each party fulfills the task assigned to them by nature.<sup>192</sup>

Women's roles in Nazi Germany were at once restricted, revered, and vital.

Hitler's narrative in this speech illustrated a cooperative relationship between men and women: one "large world" for men's tasks and another "smaller world" for women's tasks.<sup>193</sup> He highlighted this coexistence of men and women by focusing on how the sexes complement one another; how their true nature is to procreate. In his speech, Hitler emphasized how this natural relationship of men and women would foster a strong future generation of Germans. Further, his words underscored a theme of minding the laws of nature and thus carrying out the "providential roles" (woman as mother) that act as a safety net for the future.<sup>194</sup> Hitler touted motherhood as an important, necessary, and

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<sup>191</sup> The phrase "culture in crisis" is Jaspers'. See "The Spiritual Situation of the Age," In *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 373.

<sup>192</sup> Adolf Hitler, "Hitler's Speech to the National Socialist Women's Organization, September 1934," In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, edited by Stackelberg, Roderick and Sally A. Winkle, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 182.

<sup>193</sup> Hitler, "Hitler's Speech to the National Socialist Women's Organization, September 1934," In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, 182.

<sup>194</sup> Hitler, "Hitler's Speech to the National Socialist Women's Organization, September 1934," In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, 182-183.

honorable duty, a role that trumped individual rights and “Jewish intellectualism” and ensured the “preservation of a people.”<sup>195</sup> This chapter will explore connections between the 1934 Genetically Diseased Offspring Law and the 1935 Marriage Law (Nuremberg Laws) and the role of women in Nazi Germany. Furthermore, this chapter will illustrate how Douglas Sirk’s film, *La Habanera* (1937), reinforced the Nuremberg Laws. Sirk’s film reveals a cautionary tale of a woman fulfilling individualistic needs versus honoring her country. As both entertainment and propaganda, *La Habanera* (1937) craftily connects to Hitler’s 1934 message of woman’s “providential role” within and “honorable duty” to her country.<sup>196</sup> This chapter will demonstrate the integral role of women in Nazi Germany by exploring the Nazi’s effective combination of film (*La Habanera*), a motherhood initiative, and the Nuremberg Laws.

The effective integration of women in a society committed to an ideology of male supremacy is “one of the puzzles of Nazi Germany.”<sup>197</sup> The Nazi view of women in traditional, domestic, motherly roles was not unlike that of other European cultures and countries. The difference in the Third Reich, however, was the approach to women, namely, stressing the power of femininity. More specifically, the influence of females (mothers) shaping a stronger Germany was the essence of the appeal. Hitler clearly outlined the separate, anti-feminist, spheres of responsibility for women and men while also soliciting female support. Emphasizing the important tasks within a “woman’s

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<sup>195</sup> Hitler, “Hitler’s Speech to the National Socialist Women’s Organization, September 1934,” In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, 182-183.

<sup>196</sup> Hitler, “Hitler’s Speech to the National Socialist Women’s Organization, September 1934,” In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, 182-183.

<sup>197</sup> “Women in the Third Reich,” In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, edited by Stackelberg, Roderick and Sally A. Winkle, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 181.

sphere of responsibility” was vital to successfully gaining female support in Nazi Germany.<sup>198</sup>

The Nazis employed strategic, multi-layered, efforts to gain female cooperation. The Third Reich coordinated laws to complement the large and small worlds of German men and women. Gathering female support and shifting culture in Germany (females going back to the household versus working outside of the home) was accomplished through a mix of propaganda efforts, legislation/financial enticements, and special recognitions. “Family-friendly” legislation focused on promoting “Aryan” families and helped the Nazi party’s appeal to women. To ensure that females fulfill the expected domestic roles for their country, education and work opportunities were restricted in Nazi Germany. The number of women in higher education was regulated, civil service jobs were only open to women of age 35 and older, and monetary incentives encouraged women to have children not jobs. Such laws and incentives brought the separation of spheres into sharper focus.<sup>199</sup> The laws, however, did not always directly promote an increase in the German birthrate. One such example was the “Law to Combat Unemployment” in 1933 provided affordable, condition-based, loans to couples. As a condition, the wife had to quit her job. The loans were also incentivized by the birth of a “pure” German child: the more “pure and healthy” children born, the less money had to be repaid.<sup>200</sup> Special “family” loans of this kind—totaling as much as one year’s pay—were offered to married men whose wives stopped working outside of the home.<sup>201</sup> The loans were an effective means in reaching a Nazi goal of “a natural and healthy tendency

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<sup>198</sup> “Women in the Third Reich,” In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, 181.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>200</sup> “Women in the Third Reich,” In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, edited by Stackelberg, Roderick and Sally A. Winkle, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 186-190. The Third Reich continually stressed the importance of racial purity alongside the focus on a woman’s role in German society.

<sup>201</sup> Robert N. Proctor, *Racial Hygiene: Medicine Under the Nazis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 120.



toward motherhood” in Germany. As Proctor outlines, “by February 1936 half a million loans valued at more than 300 million RM had been awarded, and by the end of 1940, 1,700,000 loans had been granted.”<sup>202</sup> While married men received monetary support for contributing to the “wealth of children” in Germany, the wives (mothers) were awarded with the Honor Cross of German Motherhood (*Ehrenkreuz der deutschen Mutter*—modeled on the Iron Cross). The Iron Cross was issued in gold, silver, and bronze: four children received bronze, six children got silver, and eight children earned gold.<sup>203</sup> The Family-focused laws and incentives thus promoted cooperation from the male and female spheres in Nazi Germany. The spheres were dependent on one another and yet through the types of incentives and benefits relegated to each (money to the married men and Honor Crosses to the mothers), the male sphere was deemed superior.

The success of Nazism was successful in large part due to women. Despite the superiority of the male sphere in Nazi society, National Socialism could not grow without females, namely as reproductive beings. Increasing the birthrate was a significant piece of a national spirit revival in Germany. Thus, as procreators, women were an essential part of Nazi strategy. Honor Crosses were but one way that the Nazi regime succeeded in winning the support of women while also containing them within their separate sphere. Women were also instrumental in solidifying fellow female support of Nazi rules and limitations in Germany. Nazi policies concerning women were promoted among women, namely within the National Socialist Women’s Organization. In 1936, Emilie Müller-Zadows, a member of the aforementioned group to whom Hitler’s speech was delivered, underscored the rationale of the “vocation of motherhood,” while also intertwining Nazi

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<sup>202</sup> Proctor, 120.

<sup>203</sup> Proctor, 120. Proctor notes that Rudolf Hess used the term “wealth of children” in conjunction with “practical National Socialism.” Thus, Nazi Germany’s wealth was tied to an abundance of healthy, pure German offspring. Proctor adds that Nazi statistics reflect 25 percent (3.6 million) German married women had four or more children.

racial health policy.<sup>204</sup> Müller-Zadows explained the motherly roles “assigned” by Hitler as being natural but overlooked for too long. Her explanation provided a reasoning that described women as boundary pushers (feminists) only because their roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers were not given due respect. Without this “respect” toward motherly duties, the female was compelled to be more masculine and gain respect elsewhere (outside of the home). Further, she described how women in Nazi Germany had the freedom to return to their natural occupation:

The value and sanctity of goals now being set for her have been unrecognized and forgotten for a long time; and due respect is now being offered to her vocation as mother of the people, in which she can and should develop her rich emotions and spiritual strengths according to eternal laws.<sup>205</sup>

Müller-Zadows also discussed how the natural role of motherhood did not come naturally to all women. Therefore, “motherhood training” was a necessary and invaluable educational experience that all “pure” German women should receive. Such training was not left to interpretation, though. Instead, it was focused on the goal of promoting the health of a nation, and followed clear values that aligned with Nazi ideology.<sup>206</sup> Müller-Zadows also discussed a specific way in which motherhood training and ideology was (and should be) interconnected: the care of newborns. The care of newborns introduced a notion of nature versus nature. Müller-Zadows referred to a “real mania” in the post-War World I period when clinics and institutions prolonged the lives of hereditarily diseased

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<sup>204</sup> “Emilie Müller-Zadows, ‘Mothers who give us the future,’ 1936” In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, edited by Stackelberg, Roderick and Sally A. Winkle, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 184-186.

<sup>205</sup> “Emilie Müller-Zadows, ‘Mothers who give us the future,’ 1936” In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, edited by Stackelberg, Roderick and Sally A. Winkle, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 186.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 184. Müller-Zadows used the term “motherhood training” and described this training as a long term “seed of hope” for Germany that should not be limited to any particular age or space of time.

babies with incubators and other scientific, “sophisticated measures.”<sup>207</sup> She compared the cost of such measures with that of unemployed Germans, whose “normal” children died as a result of insufficient necessities. This was part of her argument for motherhood training rooted in “firm guidelines and clear principles.”<sup>208</sup> Müller-Zadows’ narrative was a nod to the Nazi regime—“a state that examines and treats the individual according to his value.” In this way, her speech is an example of Nazi propaganda in that it speaks to an agenda with concern for the newborn baby. Hitler wanted women to return to their “natural” vocation (motherhood) but to focus on “pure” and healthy German babies. A newborn that was hereditarily diseased or not seen as racially healthy was not valuable. Müller-Zadows directly called upon women to maintain a sisterhood and pass on their training as part of a grassroots effort to further motherhood education—to pass along the coursework in the name of the nation’s health. The motherhood coursework, much like the family-friendly laws and incentives, was laden with language that described a value system based on Nazi ideology: taking part in the motherhood effort was not just worthy of respect, according to Müller-Zadows, but it also promoted a healthier, stronger race and nation. Hitler emphasized the “notoriety” of motherhood when he addressed the National Socialist Women’s Organization (September 1934) and in doing so paved the way for Nazi laws that defined citizenship, blood, and honor.

Hitler’s 1934 speech to the National Socialist Women’s Organization served an ulterior purpose, namely setting the stage for the Nuremberg Laws of 1935. The Nuremberg Laws sought to exclude Jews from German life, addressing three key areas:

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 184-185.

designating the swastika the official symbol of Germany, defining Reich citizenship, and protecting German blood and honor.<sup>209</sup> The third law decreed German blood as pure, so as to protect and preserve the “continued existence of the German people.”<sup>210</sup> “The Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor” addressed (and forbid) marriages between Jews and citizens of German blood, extra-marital sex between Jews and Germans, as well as forbidding employment of female Jews under 45 in households.<sup>211</sup> All of these measures aimed to prevent the procreation of mixed blood children, specifically miscegenation between German and Jewish blood.

The Nuremberg Laws added to the previously enacted Law for the Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring in July of 1933, outlining a wide spectrum of diseases for which people could be quarantined and/or sterilized. The list of diseases included blindness, deafness, epilepsy, physical deformations, and alcoholism.<sup>212</sup> Sterilization decisions were made on a “voluntary basis” as well as through legal representatives, and civil service physicians.<sup>213</sup> Residents of nursing homes, hospitals, and care facilities, as well as prison inmates were targets for sterilization. Both the Law for the Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring (1933) and the Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor (1935) underscored the Third Reich’s fixation with purifying Germany.

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<sup>209</sup> “The Nuremberg Laws,” In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, edited by Stackelberg, Roderick and Sally A. Winkle, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 186-190.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>212</sup> “Law for the Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring, 14 July 1933,” In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, edited by Stackelberg, Roderick and Sally A. Winkle, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 154. This law went into effect on 1 January 1934.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 155. The sterilization authorization procedures stated that a person “had the right” to voluntarily submit an application, or if that person was incapacitated in some way, a legal representative could present an application.

The Nazi party focused heavily on communicating prevention and protection laws that emphasized purifying Germany. Hitler's 1934 speech addressing women's roles in Germany was just one layer in a multifaceted push to reach Nazi goals. Rather than leaving Hitler's words to interpretation, the Nazis used film as a strategic tool, and an important cog in the propaganda machine. Cinema provided an emotional connection to German reality while also underscoring the exclusionary Third Reich laws enacted in 1933 and 1935. This chapter will explore how the 1934 Genetically Diseased Offspring Law and the 1935 Marriage Law were intricately woven into Douglas Sirk's film, *La Habanera* (1937). Furthermore, this section will illustrate how the danger of miscegenation was artfully expressed through a film that was at once entertainment and cautionary anecdote.

The Nazi party capitalized on the power of a film to serve a dual purpose: distract and persuade. As Sandberg notes, "Nazi cinema functioned in a subtle, unobtrusive manner," and, as such, served as a "vehicle of escapism."<sup>214</sup> *La Habanera* (1937) is one such example of melodramatic escapism; it was a visually appealing companion to the Nuremberg Laws. Set in Puerto Rico, Sirk's film is the story of Astree Sternhjelm, a Swedish woman mesmerized by an island song and a charming love interest, Don Pedro de Avila, an affluent bullfighter, in a tropical paradise. Astree, played by Zarah Leander, visits the island with her Aunt Ana. Longing for a different, more exciting life than her cold, traditional homeland can offer, Astree finds Puerto Rico and Don Pedro, played by

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<sup>214</sup> Claudia Sandberg, "Far from home? Functions of escapism and portrayal of the tropics in *La Habanera* (1937)," *Studies In European Cinema* 6, no. 1 (March 2009): 63-76. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed August 1, 2014).

Ferdinand Marian, irresistible. She makes an impulsive decision to stay, despite her Aunt's disappointment. Astree's decision later catches up with her, as the attraction to the island and Don Pedro fades. Cultural differences become burdensome and eventually replace the attraction between the two.<sup>215</sup> Feeling trapped, the only comfort she finds is in time spent with their son, Juan, and privately reminiscing about Sweden. Astree's captive situation highlights an important underlying message in the film: a female fulfilling individual impulses as opposed to honoring one's duties, as outlined in Hitler's 1934 speech to German women, is unnatural and leads to misery.<sup>216</sup> In this way, Astree's narrative demonstrates the trap of falling for the exotic, the danger of acting impulsively and subjecting oneself to the unfamiliar. As Astree's story unfolds, Sirk's film reveals connections to the Nuremberg Laws that function like a subplot, planting subtle seeds of doubt in German minds about race, marriage, and miscegenation. Thus, the 1935 Marriage Law and the 1933 Law for the Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring were brought to life through Astree's choices.<sup>217</sup>

From the start, *La Habanera* sets up a contrast between wise and foolish, dark and light, barbaric and civilized. The film opens with Astrée and her Aunt Ana visiting Puerto Rico as the two see the island quite differently. While her Aunt Ana finds the island life unbearable, and its people primitive, Astrée speaks of "happiness too beautiful to

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<sup>215</sup> *La Habanera*. Directed by Douglas Sirk. 1937.

<sup>216</sup> Adolf Hitler, "Hitler's Speech to the National Socialist Women's Organization, September 1934," In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, edited by Stackelberg, Roderick and Sally A. Winkle, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 182.

<sup>217</sup> Andrew G. Bonnell discusses Sirk's intentions and influences for *La Habanera* (1937). See "Melodrama for the Master Race: Two Films by Detlef Sierck (Douglas Sirk)," *Film History* 10, no. 2 (1998): 209.

describe.”<sup>218</sup> Astrée is enchanted by the tropical breeze, traditions of song and dance, and the thrill of the bullfight, where Don Pedro de Avila (Ferdinand Marian) displays his heroics by jumping into the match. Later, she praises the natural beauty of the island, calling it paradise. In response, Aunt Ana tells Astrée she is “acting like a savage,” to which Astrée gleefully responds: “That’s right, a savage.”<sup>219</sup> Astrée and Ana’s conflicting perceptions reflect the difference in age and “wisdom” of the two women: one older and thus wise enough to know better than to fall “prey” to island savagery, and the other, Astrée, excited by the unfamiliar and throwing caution to the wind. Ana’s watchfulness with Astrée is not enough, however, as Astrée leaves the ship just before it departs for Sweden and quickly finds herself in the arms of a lingering Don Pedro. As they kiss, the screen changes to the choppy waves against the ship.<sup>220</sup> The dark, shifting waters foreshadow trouble ahead for Astrée, who follows her heart instead of an elder’s advice.

Sirk also uses contrasts of dark and light to highlight a chain of resentments that follow Astrée’s choice to stay with Don Pedro. In one such scene, there is a glimpse of Pedro’s previous caretaker, an older woman, tossing the gift of a ring out of the window. The tossing of this trinket, given by Astrée, is an initial sign of the hostility that Astrée faces as an outsider to Puerto Rico.<sup>221</sup> Next, Sirk cuts to a window with falling snow. This transition reveals a scene of life in Sweden, ten years later, where Aunt Ana is meeting with other sophisticated types of people. Among those in attendance is Dr. Sven

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<sup>218</sup> *La Habanera*. Directed by Douglas Sirk. 1937.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>220</sup> *La Habanera*. Directed by Douglas Sirk. 1937.

<sup>221</sup> Andrew G. Bonnell, "Melodrama for the Master Race: Two Films by Detlef Sierck (Douglas Sirk)," *Film History* 10, no. 2 (1998): 213.

Nagel, a well-dressed, clean-cut, young physician. Dr. Nagel is tasked with tracking germs to stem a deadly fever plaguing the island. Ana, calling Dr. Nagel to a private conversation, requests that he also check on Astrée. (Ana sees Nagel, once an admirer of Astrée's, as a lifeline for her niece.) In this scene, Ana acknowledges a stubborn nature and resentment—one that kept her and Astrée from communicating after Astrée's decision to marry a Puerto Rican.<sup>222</sup>

The juxtaposition of snow and tropics signals racial distinctions between Astrée (and her son) and Puerto Ricans, such as her husband, Don Pedro. Moving to the snowy view outside, Sirk once again uses a window to transition back to the island: White clouds and falling snow shift to light puffs of clouds against a tropical landscape.<sup>223</sup> As Bonnell notes, the contrasting climates “parallel the racial contrast between Astrée and her son on the one hand, and the Puerto Ricans on the other.”<sup>224</sup> It is this contrast in climates that exemplifies Astrée's own bitterness toward Pedro and the island she once viewed as paradise. Likewise, it is this stark contrast between her homeland and the island that Astrée now finds unbearable, just as Aunt Ana did ten years earlier. More so, though, it is a distinction between dark and light, between snow and tropics, which begins to reveal what is beneath the skin's surface: the genetic makeup that separates Astrée and her son from Pedro. Once her infatuation with the island life wore off, the difference in climates, lifestyle, and traditions became clear. These contrasts were marked by visible differences in the film: Juan's fair skin and hair, as well as the awkward fit of a

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<sup>222</sup> *La Habanera*. Directed by Douglas Sirk. 1937.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Andrew G. Bonnell, "Melodrama for the Master Race: Two Films by Detlef Sierck (Douglas Sirk)," *Film History* 10, no. 2 (1998): 213.



bullfighting costume are two such instances. Juan looks and acts like Astrée, despite having a Puerto Rican father (Don Pedro). Thus, Juan and Astrée look and feel like misfits on the island. Juan's close connection with his Swedish mother goes deeper than their shared appearances. There seems to be a beacon inside him that guides him toward his rightful place, as Juan yearns for more information about Sweden and revels in his mother's songs about the "angel tears" of snow.<sup>225</sup> Bonnell refers to Juan's "longing" for Sweden, a place he has only heard about, as an "object lesson in the triumph of (Nordic) genes over environment."<sup>226</sup> The instinct-like preference that Juan shows for his mother's native land accentuates what separates them from Don Pedro—Astrée's Nordic blood. Thus, rather than serving as a reminder of her mistakes, Juan is a reminder of home and heritage for Astrée—a source of strength that keeps her going.

Saving Astrée and Juan from their suffering takes the heroic actions of Dr. Nagel—a man of Nordic stock who appears in stark contrast to Don Pedro: Nagel is "self-sacrificing" as Bonnell discusses, while Don Pedro is vindictive.<sup>227</sup> Astrée suffers but is ultimately saved from the depravity of Don Pedro and tropical paradise-turned-prison. Dr. Nagel's successful effort to save Astrée thus serves an underlying message of cautiousness in the film. Astrée is saved, but her "carelessness" has been dangerous, and nearly deadly.

Astrée's narrative highlights Sirk's film as a cautionary anecdote and provided an emphasis for The Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor (15 September

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<sup>225</sup> *La Habanera*. Directed by Douglas Sirk. 1937.

<sup>226</sup> Andrew G. Bonnell, "Melodrama for the Master Race: Two Films by Detlef Sierck (Douglas Sirk)," *Film History* 10, no. 2 (1998): 213.

<sup>227</sup> Bonnell, 213.

1935). The marriage law outlined, in part, that “marriages between Jews and citizens of German or kindred blood are forbidden,” even if said marriages were conducted abroad.<sup>228</sup> Astrée’s marriage was, of course, conducted abroad, but there is a deeper message that parallels what becomes her unbearable home life on the island: fever/disease as a metaphor for the danger of intermarriage. There is a deadly fever spreading throughout the island and the natives, even the dominant Don Pedro, are unable to stop it. Swedish doctors (Gomez and Nagel) are sent to “hunt germs,” but they are met with resistance and denial of the deadly fever. Don Pedro even goes so far as to sabotage the doctors’ work, which proves to be a lethal mistake as the fever claims Pedro’s life.<sup>229</sup> The resistance of the natives to acknowledge the deadly disease symbolizes hidden agenda and deceptive nature. Sandberg notes “the existence of mortal danger caused by a feverish wind brings out the delusion of tropical beauty and along with it, reveals the deceptive nature of its inhabitants.”<sup>230</sup> The island is at once a beautiful and dangerous place. Similarly, Don Pedro was deceptively irresistible to Astrée. The underlying message of the fever-ridden island fearful of quarantine is one of caution: do not be fooled by the external charms—there is danger within.

As a cautionary anecdote, Sirk’s film is also a reflection of the unavoidable health consequences of a mixed marriage. The audience witnesses the way Astrée’s fascination with the island and Don Pedro results in misery and regret. Although she is ultimately

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<sup>228</sup> “Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor,” In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, ed. Roderick Stackelberg and Sally A. Winkle (New York: Routledge, 2007), 190.

<sup>229</sup> *La Habanera*. Directed by Douglas Sirk. 1937.

<sup>230</sup> Claudia Sandberg, “Far from home? Functions of escapism and portrayal of the tropics in *La Habanera* (1937),” *Studies In European Cinema* 6, no. 1 (March 2009): 72. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed August 1, 2014).

saved and forgiven, along with her son, Juan, who favors his mother's heritage, the viewer can see that the circumstances could have been worse, namely, many people die of the fever—it could have been Astrée's son's fate. This anecdote is especially geared for the female viewer. Astrée's journey from fascination to regret reflects the negative side of intermarriage that connects with the 1935 Marriage Law—presenting a “this is what happens” scenario when one does not follow the law. Sandberg discusses how this scenario highlights the Nazi view of women as “vulnerable and weak, in need of protection from a robust male” emphasizing that women are naive and not in control of their actions.<sup>231</sup> Astrée's realization of her mistakes and subsequent regret is the key to her returning home.

Despite being saved and returning to the safe, contaminant-free homeland that is Sweden, Astrée is not a completely changed woman. As Sandberg notes, Astrée's regretful nature and return home does not mean she is “healed from her yearning.”<sup>232</sup> There is still a longing within her—a wandering mind and heart that is never satisfied. Astrée displays these mixed emotions in the final scene. As she stands on the ship, awaiting departure, the vibrant mood that initially attracted her to the island resurfaces. She overlooks the island, taking in the sounds and sights of just as in the opening scene. Although she could not wait to escape the island, a look of desire is once again on Astrée's face. Astrée's longing expression in this moment indicates resolution and uncertainty at the same time.”<sup>233</sup> Consistent with a melodramatic narrative, Sirk shows a

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<sup>231</sup> Sandberg, 74.

<sup>232</sup> Sandberg, 74.

<sup>233</sup> Sandberg, 74.

complexity in Astrée's character; wiser as she may be, she is never completely satisfied. Sandberg adds that this idea of a "problematic picture of the female gender" further complicates Astrée's story.<sup>234</sup> This complex gender image also speaks to the "providential roles" that Hitler spoke of in his 1934 speech to women where he addressed the importance of fulfilling traditional, motherly roles to ensure a healthy future.<sup>235</sup> Astrée sought her independence from the natural role of motherhood and loyalty to her homeland, but it turned out badly. Once she is "rescued" from the consequences of her hasty choices, she still feels that yearning to escape, but is now wiser and knows that she must remain loyal to her homeland and focus on her son's future.<sup>236</sup>

Motherhood was not the only role for women of the Third Reich. The demand for manpower increased as the war advanced: "By 1935, Germany had introduced compulsory work registration, together with military draft registration."<sup>237</sup> Although women were supposed to achieve roles in the domestic sphere in 1937 when *La Habanera* was made, they were also called upon to step into the public sphere in 1939. Compulsory work registration thus included women, young and old. The war essentially compelled married women to contribute in both public and private spheres, in and out of the home. Married women experienced "freedom" from the restrictive expectations of fulfilling the traditional, wholesome role of wife and mother. The public roles women filled were spaces traditionally reserved for men: factories and agricultural jobs. As

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<sup>234</sup> Sandberg, 74.

<sup>235</sup> Adolf Hitler, "Hitler's Speech to the National Socialist Women's Organization, September 1934," In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, edited by Stackelberg, Roderick and Sally A. Winkle, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 182.

<sup>236</sup> *La Habanera*. Directed by Douglas Sirk. 1937.

<sup>237</sup> Brandt, Karl. 1942. "Is Germany Exhausting Her Man Power?" *Foreign Affairs* 21, no. 1: 30.

historian Hester Vaizey notes, women, particularly working-class women, were pulled into vital, male-dominated, areas of the “war economy.”<sup>238</sup> For example, women were expected to operate large weaponry in service of the state. Female employment in the war economy observed class lines. Lower/working-class women were consigned to more of the “back-breaking war work in factories” than were middle and upper class women.<sup>239</sup> Middle and upper-class were better able to avoid war-time labor whereas women who had previously worked outside of the home were not as fortunate. The working-class was targeted and called back into the public sphere when as the war economy required. Historian Elizabeth D. Heinemann discusses this aspect. She notes that working-class women with previous employment papers were “drafted” to work even if they had children.<sup>240</sup> Conversely, middle-class women, who had no previous public work experience, and whether mothers or not, eluded recruitment.

The enlistment of female war-time labor clashed with the sacredness of motherhood within Nazi ideology. Women were at once expected to renew Germany with pure, healthy offspring and provide labor in the war efforts. Confining women to their separate, private sphere thus revealed a liability for Nazi Germany. Women were needed to keep the war economy moving forward. The need for labor took priority, at least for working-class women who were required to work at least a six month term. By 1942, four years into World War II and feeling economic pressure, terms were extended:

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<sup>238</sup> Hester Vaizey, "Empowerment or Endurance? War Wives' Experiences of Independence During and After the Second World War in Germany, 1939–1948," *German History* 29, no. 1 (March 2011): 59.

<sup>239</sup> Vaizey, 59.

<sup>240</sup> Elizabeth D. Heinemann, "Whose mothers? Generational difference, war, and the Nazi cult of motherhood," *Journal Of Women's History* 12, no. 4: 143.

“Young girls, as well as all boys, must do compulsory labor service; the original period of six months for girls has been extended to one year.”<sup>241</sup> Just as the Nazi regime appealed to women in the early 1930s with the notion of German motherhood first, the state once again requested female support. In the face of increasing shortages and as the gloom of impending defeat increased, the Nazis needed female “cooperation and complicity” to “sustain morale” on the home front.<sup>242</sup> The Nazis again used propaganda, including pamphlets, to elicit the support of women. German women were encouraged to be a “pillars” of their communities and demonstrate the “necessary calm” needed in such difficult circumstances. As an added measure, women party members were responsible for shaping public opinion.<sup>243</sup> By sharing “spoken propaganda,” little by little, females could, according to the Nazi regime, promote a sense of calm in the face of anger and uncertainty. Essentially, the woman had a new responsibility bestowed upon her in the name of her country—she must “obey without protest” for the greater good of Germany.<sup>244</sup> Women were desperately needed by the Nazis and yet women, in general, were not decision makers; women were still in a separate sphere from German men. While calling upon women to act as needed, be it through bearing children to revive Germany’s spirit, or to work in factories to keep the war economy going, the Nazis crafted a message that accomplished its goal. A 1943 pamphlet reflected a major point of the Nazi message to women: “The current war has presented us with a completely new

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<sup>241</sup> Brandt, 30.

<sup>242</sup> “Women in the Second World War,” In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, edited by Stackelberg, Roderick and Sally A. Winkle, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 308.

<sup>243</sup> “The Women’s Front and the Woman in the Party, 1943,” In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, edited by Stackelberg, Roderick and Sally A. Winkle, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 309-310.

<sup>244</sup> “The Women’s Front and the Woman in the Party, 1943,” In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, edited by Stackelberg, Roderick and Sally A. Winkle, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 309-310.

situation, it has created a front of women. That was not our intention, but rather the design of the enemy.”<sup>245</sup> The Nazi’s message was essentially “blame the enemy, not us” for all women have to do in this war--nonetheless, woman has her responsibility and “she is a leader.”<sup>246</sup> Individually, German women may not have had powerful roles within the Nazi regime, but their support of Nazism through the motherhood initiative and through the war-time workforce was significant. The success of Nazism was intricately tied to women.

### Conclusion

*La Habanera* served as entertainment and cautionary tale. The film at once gave audiences an outlet from real world troubles while also subtly bringing messages of race, marriage, and miscegenation to life. In this way, Sirk’s melodrama acts as a window into social topics of the Third Reich period. Sandberg argues this notion as well, and notes:

*La Habanera* is a Nazi genre film that supports a self-referential, propagandistic statement in which escapism is exploited as the ‘educational’ subject. The teaching process happens via the same medium that finds condemnation: the world of cinema.<sup>247</sup>

Film was the ultimate visual for Nazi ideology—creating captivating images capable of tapping into emotions and subtly influencing thinking. Sirk’s film was an especially powerful medium for its target audience—women. Using the power of film, and the genre of melodrama, *La Habanera* was able to communicate what the Third Reich viewed as a necessity: women fulfilling the role of mother, upholding the purity of

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<sup>245</sup> “The Women’s Front and the Woman in the Party, 1943,” In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, 309.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 309.

<sup>247</sup> Sandberg, 74.

German blood, and being loyal to one's homeland/heritage. This film reflected the danger and consequences of intermarriage and miscegenation through Astrée's yearnings, choices, and regrets. *La Habanera* acted as visually appealing companion to the Nuremberg Laws, tying together words and images in a way that only a well-crafted film can achieve, connecting Astrée's on-screen troubles with that of the audience, thereby providing a sort of resolution for a "culture in crisis."<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> The phrase "culture in crisis" is Jaspers'. See "The Spiritual Situation of the Age," In *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 373.



## CHAPTER IV: THE RATIONALIZATION OF MURDER: THE LEAP FROM MERCY

### KILLING TO INVOLUNTARY TERMINATION OF LIFE AND LIEBENEINER'S

#### *ICH KLAGE AN (I ACCUSE) (1941)*

New Liebeneiner film, *I Accuse*. In favour of euthanasia. A film that will really arouse discussion. Magnificently made and absolutely National Socialist. It will stir up tremendous controversy. And that is its purpose.

-Joseph Goebbels, 21 June 1941<sup>249</sup>

Soon after World War II started, Hitler issued a decree, backdated to September 1, 1939, authorizing the killing of the “incurably sick.” Specifically, the law sanctioned the organized killing of mentally and physically handicapped people, regardless of age. The program’s authorization, written on Hitler’s personal letterhead, expanded the authority to kill people deemed incurable. Hitler’s order charged Reichsleiter (Phillip) Bouhler and Dr. (Karl) Brandt, M.D. with increasing the number of physicians with the authority to decide who should live and who should die. Though Hitler signed an order enabling this program, it was covert, or at least intended to be so. The operation was code-named “Aktion T-4.”<sup>250</sup> “Upon a most careful diagnosis of their condition,” doctors decided who should be given a “mercy death.”<sup>251</sup> This chapter will explore the shift from Euthanasia to involuntary termination, or “life unworthy of life” as deemed fit by the state.<sup>252</sup> The “life unworthy of life” discussion also examines how *Ich Klage an (I Accuse) (1941)*

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<sup>249</sup> Joseph Goebbels and Fred Taylor, *The Goebbels Diaries: 1939-1941* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1984), 421.

<sup>250</sup> “The Killing of the Handicapped,” In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, edited by Stackelberg, Roderick and Sally A. Winkle, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 331. The killing of physically handicapped or deformed children was already taking place before the war. Hitler’s September 1, 1939 order expanded the killing to adults.

<sup>251</sup> “Hitler’s authorization of the killing of the incurably ill,” 6.1a In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, edited by Stackelberg, Roderick and Sally A. Winkle, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 332.

<sup>252</sup> *I Accuse (Ich Klage an)*, directed by Wolfgang Liebeneiner (1941), DVD (International Historic Films, 2008).

paves the way for the T-4 program, and later, mass murder under the guise of war—“mercy deaths” to “mercy killings”—by tracking Nazi actions from the T-4 program to the Final Solution. This chapter will illustrate how the Nazis initiated mercy deaths discreetly (T-4), and later shaped perceptions of unworthy life in order to rationalize mass murder (Final Solution).

Children were the first targets of T-4. Proctor refers to a case of a father by the name of Knauer who, in late 1938, appealed to Hitler on behalf of his mentally and physically disabled child. Knauer’s child was “born blind, retarded, and without an arm and a leg,” and the father requested that Hitler grant a “mercy death.” In response, Hitler’s personal physician, Karl Brandt, consulted with the child’s doctors to verify the situation. Upon confirmation of the child’s condition, Brandt had the authority to grant the father’s request. The head doctor, Werner Catel, consequently agreed to “allow the child to die a “merciful death,” via euthanasia. This case set a precedent for other euthanasia arguments and actions.<sup>253</sup>

In August of 1939—prior to the official above-mentioned authorization of “mercy deaths”—children born with physical and mental abnormalities, deformities, and diseases were registered. As Glass discusses, registrations were carried out with the assistance of doctors, midwives, and other medical officials. The registration process was bureaucratically organized with offices scattered throughout the Third Reich and specific

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<sup>253</sup> Robert N. Proctor, *Racial Hygiene: Medicine Under the Nazis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 185-186. Proctor adds that in the spring of 1939, under the direction of Brandt, an advisory committee was set up to oversee the killing of physically and mentally disabled children. In order to maintain secrecy, the group operated under the cover name of “Committee for the Scientific Treatment of Severe, Genetically Determined Illness (Reichsausschuss zur wissenschaftlichen Erfassung von erb- und anlagebedingter schwerer Leiden).

instructions dispersed for the “identification, isolation, and ultimately killing of all such children.”<sup>254</sup> The ideology behind the T-4 program was that of “purifying” and “protecting” the nation. As historian David Welch mentions, the incurably sick were, from the Nazi perspective, a burden on the overall health of Germany—a veritable threat to the “law of natural selection and order.” The Nazis also promoted the program as valuable because it would “provide much-needed hospital space for the wounded.”<sup>255</sup> Hitler had previously considered the idea of enforced euthanasia but, as Welch discusses, he (Hitler) “held back” because of anticipated oppositions from the Catholic Church.<sup>256</sup> With the start of war in 1939, Hitler seized the moment and started the initial phase of T-4.

When one thinks of euthanasia, the image of a humane, pain-free, hospital-type setting may come to mind. The implementation of the Third Reich’s eugenic program was in stark contrast to any type of compassionate notion. The program first targeted children under the age of three and later expanded to all children with clear disabilities. Glass outlines the euphemisms under which the killings took place: “special treatment,” “disinfection,” “cleansing,” or “therapy.”<sup>257</sup> The first victims of Nazi Germany’s “mercy killings” were shot. Later, “unworthy lives” were gassed in rooms set up like showers,

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<sup>254</sup> Glass, *Life Unworthy of Life: Racial Phobia and Mass Murder in Hitler’s Germany*, 61.

<sup>255</sup> David Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema: 1933-1945* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 101.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 101. Welch notes that Dr. Karl Brandt, the Reichskommissar for Health, testified in the Nuremberg doctors’ trial and explained Hitler’s idea of seizing war-time to implement a euthanasia program: “In 1935 Hitler told the Reich Medical Leader, Wagner, that, if war came, he would take up and carry out this question of euthanasia because it was easier to do so in wartime when the church would not be able to put up the expected resistance.”

<sup>257</sup> Glass, *Life Unworthy of Life: Racial Phobia and Mass Murder in Hitler’s Germany*, 61.

while lethal injections were administered to others.<sup>258</sup> These victims were not few in number. Welch notes that between 1939 and 1941 over 50,000 people were murdered as part of Hitler's "mercy death" authorization.<sup>259</sup> Just as the program itself operated under a code name (T-4), its logistics were also covert. "Institutions" for the incurably ill were organized under made up names such as "The Charitable Foundation for the Transportation of the Sick" and the "Charitable Foundation for Institutional Care."<sup>260</sup> Glass points out that these bogus organizations each had different responsibilities, be it correspondence, operations, financial matters, or transportation.<sup>261</sup> Operating under fake names that implied a degree of charity or compassion enabled the Third Reich to carry out mass killings of the physically and/or mentally ill. The supposed institutions were serving as systematic places of horrific death.<sup>262</sup>

With the dead numbering in the thousands the Nazis "charitable" operations gained attention. After transporting these children to the aforementioned facilities, families later received death certificates citing "ordinary" or natural causes. Proctor notes that at Idstein, Kantenhof, Görden, and Eichberg injections were used as a means to a slow death: "poisons were commonly administered slowly, over several days or even weeks, so that the cause of death could be disguised as pneumonia, bronchitis, or some

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 61. As Glass discusses, "treatment included injections of morphine, cyanide gassing, the use of chemical warfare agents, and occasionally the direct injection of phenol into the heart."

<sup>259</sup> Welch, 102.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>261</sup> Glass, *Life Unworthy of Life: Racial Phobia and Mass Murder in Hitler's Germany*, 62.

<sup>262</sup> "Letter from the Bishop of Limburg to the Reich Minister of Justice, 13 August 1941," 6.1b In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, edited by Stackelberg, Roderick and Sally A. Winkle, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 332.

other complication induced by the injections.”<sup>263</sup> Death by starvation was also utilized and documented as “natural causes” on death certificates. Proctor adds that Hermann Pfannmüller of Egling-Haar “boasted” that the starvation method was “least likely to incur criticism from the foreign press” or from the Red Cross. Hospital officials such as Pfannmüller argued that withholding care, and in some cases heat (exposing patients to the elements), until they died of ‘natural causes’ was “technically not murder.”<sup>264</sup> Thus, the Nazis implemented tortuous practices vis-à-vis the euthanasia program, and used a nature versus nurture argument to support their actions.

Pfannmüller advocated the eradication of asylum inmates through a tortuous regimen of “special diets.”<sup>265</sup> By 1941, when mass gassings had been partially stopped, killing proceeded in more “primitive” ways as asylum directors decided to take action in order to continue “processing” inmates.<sup>266</sup> Pfannmüller, along with Faltlhauser (clinic medical director/psychiatrist), recommended two diets for two categories of people: workers and non-workers. The non-working inmates received little to no sustenance. “Meals” consisted of items like root vegetables boiled in plain water.<sup>267</sup> Fats, breads, and/or carbohydrates were not allowed in order for nature to “take its course” on the

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<sup>263</sup> Proctor, 187.

<sup>264</sup> Proctor, 187.

<sup>265</sup> Michael Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance: Euthanasia in Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 240. Burleigh mentions the importance of noting that starvation methods of killing were in effect “years before” being introduced at this point. He discusses how starvation “policies did not materialise out of thin air in response to unforeseeable wartime circumstances.”

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 240. Burleigh notes that “on 17 November 1942, the directors of Bavarian asylums gathered for a conference in the Ministry of the Interior, chaired by Walter ‘Bubi’ Schultze,” where they decided “it was time ‘for the asylums to do something themselves.’” The topic of discussion was utilizing “special diets” for “certain categories of patient.”

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 240. The “special diets” foreshadowed the treatment of concentration camp prisoners that would follow.

human body.<sup>268</sup> Burleigh discusses how cooks and nurses tried subverting the starvation measures by adding fats or proteins to cooking pots after inspections. He also mentions that patients resorted to “survival strategies” of mentally preparing more satisfying recipes and imagining various foods.<sup>269</sup> Some patients desperately wrote family members asking for more food; however, concerned families were brushed off by explanations of mental instability—patients were unstable, and “feeling perpetually hungry was inherent to their condition even in normal times.”<sup>270</sup> Meanwhile, Pfannmüller (among others) continued operating houses of starvation and experimentation on the most vulnerable—those deemed unworthy of life in the eyes of the Nazis. Death occurred daily. “According to the priest who had to conduct burial ceremonies,” as Burleigh mentions, “the rapidly rising death rate led the asylum authorities to prohibit the ringing of church bells, lest this alert people in the vicinity of the asylum” to the frequency of death.<sup>271</sup> As an extra measure of secrecy, asylums where the “unworthy” were killed were fenced off and clearly marked with signs warning of the “danger of disease.”<sup>272</sup> Patients were often transferred to killing asylums unbeknownst to their relatives. Transfer notices and death notices frequently coincided.<sup>273</sup> To further shroud the program in secrecy, bodies were not returned and families were told their loved ones were cremated.

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<sup>268</sup> “Nature” is referred to here as it was defined by the Nazis, Euthanasia Programme, and in eugenic circles for the purpose of advocating the “nature versus nurture” argument as it relates to “unworthy life.”

<sup>269</sup> Burleigh, 242.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 242.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 242.

<sup>272</sup> Michael Burleigh, “Nazi Euthanasia Programs,” in *Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race*, 139.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 148.

Despite Nazi efforts to maintain secrecy and avoid criticism, the unexpected deaths and cremations sparked public outcry. An “elaborate system of deceit” eventually revealed inconsistencies. Burleigh discusses examples of human error that raised public questions in Germany: “Families with one relative in an asylum received two urns of ashes. People died of appendicitis even though that organ had been removed years earlier. Brooches and hairpins turned up in the ashes of males.”<sup>274</sup> Troubled by these occurrences, families looked to legal professionals and religious leaders for help. Pursuing legal authorities was not particularly helpful since the Nazi government was in charge. Since “euthanasia” was not an official program, courts were unsure of how to respond. Dr. Lothar Kreyssig of Brandenburg, with one asylum in his jurisdiction, was the only judge courageous enough to take an official complaint to the Reich Justice Ministry. Kreyssig was advised of the Führer’s authorization, but refused to accept the authorization as “legally binding.” Nonetheless, Judge Kreyssig’s complaint was fruitless.<sup>275</sup> Conversely, religious leaders were somewhat more successful in denouncing euthanasia policies. On August 3, 1941, in Münster, Bishop August von Galen denounced the killings, and declared: “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!”<sup>276</sup> He also filed a criminal complaint with the Reich Ministry of Justice, which was unanswered. Nazi leaders were angered by the bishop’s sermon and contemplated

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>275</sup> The ‘Euthansia’ Programme 1939-1945, The Weimar Background, in *Nazism 1919-1945, Volume 3: Foreign Policy, War and Racial Extermination*, edited by Jeremy Noakes, G. Pridham, Exeter, Devon UK: University of Exeter Press, 1998, 423-424. Burleigh (“Nazi Euthanasia Programs, 148), mentions that Kreyssig was forced into retirement after he “threatened to prosecute T-4 personnel.”

<sup>276</sup> Burleigh, “Nazi Euthanasia Programs,” in *Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race*, 149.

punishing and even executing Galen, but no action was taken.<sup>277</sup> On August 13, 1941, the Catholic Bishop of Limburg, Antonius Hilfrich, sent a letter to the Reich Minister of Justice, with copies to the Reich Minister of the Interior and the Reich Minister for Church Affairs, calling it his “duty to present the following concrete illustration of destruction of so-called “useless life”:

Several times a week buses arrive in Hadamar with a considerable number of such victims. School children of the vicinity know this vehicle and say: “There comes the murder-box again.” After the arrival of the vehicle, the citizens of Hadamar watch the smoke rise out of the chimney and are tortured with the ever-present thought of the miserable victims, especially when repulsive odors annoy them, depending on the direction of the wind.<sup>278</sup>

The Bishop also expressed concern for the morality of Germany: “And if anybody says that Germany cannot win the war, if there is a just God, these expressions are not the result of a lack of love of fatherland but of a deep concern for our people.”<sup>279</sup> His letter denounced the Third Reich for sending fake death notices, threatening citizens and quashing discussion of the circumstances surrounding the institution. The Bishop voiced citizen outrage over a government committing murder and not being held accountable. Bishop Clemens von Galen (1878-1946) of Münster also spoke out against the killings in July and August of 1941 and received “wide publicity.” On August 24, 1941, Hitler halted the initial phase of the euthanasia program. By this time, more than 70,000 patients had

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<sup>277</sup> Burleigh, “Nazi Euthanasia Programs,” in *Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race*, 150. Interestingly, as Burleigh mentions, “Galen’s sermon coincided with the first attempt to sell eugenic euthanasia to the general population,” which was the release of *Ich Klage An (I Accuse)* in 1941.

<sup>278</sup> “Letter from the Bishop of Limburg to the Reich Minister of Justice, 13 August 1941,” In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, 332.

<sup>279</sup> “Letter from the Bishop of Limburg to the Reich Minister of Justice, 13 August 1941,” In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, 333.



been killed.<sup>280</sup> Despite the official halt in the first phase, the killings continued and expanded discreetly. In response to public criticism of the euthanasia program, the Third Reich focused on a campaign of information—educating the public about the “burdens” of the incurably ill—with “mercy killing” in focus.

Film was an integral piece of the mercy killing “education” effort. As such, *Ich Klage an* (I Accuse) (1941) was the first attempt to “sell” the public on the idea of eugenic euthanasia.<sup>281</sup> The film cleverly provides the German audience with a different context by which to rationalize murder. Unlike other propaganda films portraying an evil “other,” such as Veit Harlan’s *Jud Süß* (1940), *Ich Klage an* presents a more humane perspective for mercy killing. Burleigh argues that the film “skillfully blended the issue of voluntary euthanasia—telling the story of a young woman who wants to die because she has multiple sclerosis—with the entirely separate issue of whether or not to kill seriously handicapped children...” represented by a deformed (yet not seen) “saved” child.<sup>282</sup> The film was used to legitimate the physician’s authority over Germany’s genetic (racial) health. *Ich Klage an*, according to Party leadership across various regions, “made a deep impression, sparking off considerable debate.”<sup>283</sup> The onscreen transformation of

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<sup>280</sup> The Killing of the Handicapped,” In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, 332. It should also be noted here that “except for isolated clerical leaders, such as the Berlin Catholic priest Bernhard Lichtenberg (1875-1943), there were no church protest against the killing of the Jews” in the Final Solution. Lichtenberg was arrested by the Nazis in 1941 and died in 1943 during a transport to Dachau concentration camp.

<sup>281</sup> Burleigh, “Nazi Euthanasia Programs,” in *Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race*, 150.

<sup>282</sup> Burleigh, “Nazi Euthanasia Programs,” in *Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race*, 150.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 218. Burleigh’s discussion on the audience responses reflects a divide between what was reported by Nazi leadership and what church leaders expressed. In a Nazi Cinema report dated 15 January 1942, Party leadership noted that “the film has been favorably received” and sparked “lively discussion.”

two doctors, one who “saves” his wife from further pain and suffering through over-medication, and the other who questions the morality of the situation, but later changes his position, accentuates the message of embracing euthanasia in the film.

*Ich Klage an* begins on a positive note with Hanna (Heidemarie Hatheyer) excitedly receiving a letter from the postman. The letter is good news for her husband, Thomas Heyt (Paul Hartmann). Heyt is lecturing on diseases of the central nervous system when his wife, Hanna, calls to inform him of the news that he has been accepted as Professor at a Munich University. Hanna’s next call is to Dr. Bernhard Lang (Mathias Wieman) a close friend. On screen, Dr. Lang is out working at the clinic, caring for a newborn baby boy and the infant’s mother, so she cannot immediately share the exciting news. An overjoyed Hanna continues to carry on with Berta in the kitchen as they prepare food for cooking. She bounces around the house, seemingly in perfect health and full of happiness and decides on having a celebration to share the announcement.

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While it may have sparked discussion, it was not necessarily favorable to the film’s euthanasia message. As Burleigh notes, “the hostility of sections of the Roman Catholic Church was reflected in a pastoral letter from the bishop Konrad of Passau” who made “explicit connection between the film and the ‘reprehensible efforts’ actually to implement ‘euthanasia’ which he had recently heard rumors of.” The bishop felt “duty bound” to emphasize the moral teachings of Christianity and appealed to the “universal conviction of civilised peoples, regarding the sanctity of human life.” Opinions on the film, and its euthanasia message in particular, also differed among age, class, education, and occupation. As Burleigh describes, “Young people in particular seemed to favor euthanasia in cases of chronic illness,” and a “civil servant thought that such measures would release productive forces, tied down in care for sick.” Conversely, (218) “a lawyer though it impossible to devise a procedure which would be free of error or abuse, and “educated middle-class women were deemed to be infected by an outmoded liberalism based upon respect for individual rights, or by religious sentiment.”

The scene cuts to Dr. Lang again as he consults with a couple and their infant, who look fearfully at the crib; the doctor informs the parents of a fatal diagnosis: meningitis. The mother, moving closer to Dr. Lang, desperately asks for the baby girl (who remains unseen and unheard) to stay home for care. The juxtaposition of a healthy baby and sick baby in these two scenes with Dr. Lang symbolizes an important difference in the type of life each will presumably lead. The healthy baby appears on screen and cries as newborns do, while the sick baby is not heard or seen. While both are in need of care as newborns, one is going to require more intensive care in the long run. One is going to lead a “normal” life and the other a sickly life, eventually succumbing to the disease that resides in her body.

Liebeneiner also demonstrates how a valuable, healthy life can be negatively affected by disease. Hanna is the primary focus for this demonstration. After contrasting the healthy and sickly babies, Liebeneiner then cuts back to Hanna and Berta in the kitchen, who are cooking for the party. Hanna decides to run down to the cellar to check for wine and as soon as she is off camera, a scream and stumbling commotion is heard. Berta calls to her and runs out to find Hanna, who had tripped over a basket on the stairs, and has seemingly hurt her hand and foot. Hanna gathers herself as Berta comments that it happened because “she takes three steps at a time.”<sup>284</sup> Throughout these opening scenes, Hanna appears on screen as a picture of good health, energetic, and bursting with life. Later, at the dinner party, Hanna is revered by her friends for being Thomas’ “good fortune and life itself.”<sup>285</sup> “That’s how it is. One complements the other,” adds Professor Schlüter (a friend of the Heyt’s), who toasts the couple’s success. He describes how Hanna and Thomas “complement” each other—he with his “arsenal” of scientific

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<sup>284</sup> *I Accuse (Ich Klage an)*, directed by Wolfgang Liebeneiner (1941), DVD (International Historic Films, 2008).

<sup>285</sup> *I Accuse (Ich Klage an)*, 1941.

equipment in the lab, and she with her “arsenal of life” in the home. Thus, the couple fits perfectly together.<sup>286</sup> Professor Schlüter’s sentiment is representative of eugenic thinking—“careful spouse selection” lends itself to healthier reproduction, and thus a healthier (“racially fit”) population.<sup>287</sup>

Hanna’s vibrancy and contributions to the household also fit into this facet of eugenic thinking (life worthy of life) in that she adds value to the lives of those around her, namely, her husband, the researcher. The pain she experiences after her fall, however, hints at a problem coming into their seemingly healthy and vibrant lives. This problem is further foreshadowed as Hanna is playing the piano. In the middle of the piece, she begins to have trouble playing the keys, which she shrugs off and continues on. The trouble gets worse, however, and the camera focuses only on her hands for a moment. The audience sees her left hand stiffly atop the keys, unable to move and play the notes like the other hand. All are puzzled by the abrupt ending of the recital and Hanna’s hand trouble. The next morning, Thomas and Hanna discuss her hand issue, and Thomas urges her to have it checked out by Bernhard. Thomas says Bernhard can diagnose her—something he (Thomas) cannot do in the lab.<sup>288</sup> In this scene, the audience sees the differences between the two doctors established: one who researches diseases, and another who diagnoses and treats diseases. Establishing the roles of these two doctors

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<sup>286</sup> *I Accuse (Ich Klage an)*, 1941.

<sup>287</sup> “Careful spouse selection” is discussed on page 22 of this paper. Early on, Liebeneiner illustrates a complex, yet loving and respectful, relationship between Dr. Lang, Hanna, and Thomas. Dr. Lang has a stronger bond with Berta, and Hanna’s brother, Eduard Stretter, which the audience also sees in the beginning of the film. Berta implies that he should have married Hanna instead of Thomas, however, Dr. Lang comes across as fully supportive of his friends. There is an implication in these early scenes that Hanna and Thomas are a better fit for each other, which is emphasized in the speech by Professor Schlüter. Dr. Lang, a level-headed, caring doctor, shows his respect and understanding of the “complementary” couple by not interfering.

<sup>288</sup> *I Accuse (Ich Klage an)*, 1941.

is an important, yet elusive, way that Liebeneiner reflects the political context concerning the role of doctors in the Nazi era.

Opinions on euthanasia (particularly in response to *Ich Klage an*) differed among Nazi-era doctors. A divide existed between younger and older physicians when it came to the T-4 program.<sup>289</sup> Burleigh discusses how younger doctors were more inclined to support the program. Older doctors pointed out issues with diagnoses, “the powers of recovery of apparently incurable patients, and to the erratic judgement and mood swings evident among seriously ill or elderly people.”<sup>290</sup> Burleigh adds that “younger doctors, particularly those devoid of religious beliefs, were generally in favour” of euthanasia. Burleigh indicates the “doctor divide” was also evident among those in favor: “Confusing the film with the T-4 assessors, some doctors felt that the institution of commissions of doctors,” each one responsible for examining every patient, “would put these doctors under an immense psychological burden.”<sup>291</sup> Instead, “many doctors” leaned toward leaving “die without suffering” decisions to individual physicians and their respective patients, as Burleigh describes.<sup>292</sup> Enacting euthanasia laws worried lawyers as well. Attorneys acknowledged the potential issues of making clear-cut decisions on euthanasia “given the immense variety of individual cases,” as it would be a “labour of Sisyphus.”<sup>293</sup> Among the mixed reviews of the film, and the consequent discussions, one theme carried through—physician authority was clear. Doctors had the expertise and ability to make life and death decisions.

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<sup>289</sup> The differing opinions among Nazi-era doctors were also part of Burleigh’s discussion on the audience responses and the film’s implications. (See footnote 284.)

<sup>290</sup> Burleigh, 218.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

Liebeneiner illuminates the importance of Bernhard's position as a doctor. Bernhard's role becomes increasingly critical—from diagnosing diseases, to making a controversial decision regarding Hanna's life. Liebeneiner shows the audience how a general practitioner is both qualified and capable of diagnosing and treating diseases, even when death is deemed the “appropriate” treatment.<sup>294</sup> In the first twenty minutes of the film, before presenting the audience with Hanna's predicament, Liebeneiner carefully illustrates the roles of the doctors in order to establish their authority and expertise in life, disease, and death. Liebeneiner's creates a unique style of propaganda through his use of ordinary characters, and a melodramatic narrative that captures the audience. Burleigh discusses how *I Accuse* is unlike earlier documentary films. He notes the absence of any political references—no nods to National Socialism, and “no columns of behelmed SS men.”<sup>295</sup> The mild, and yet effective, way that Liebeneiner addresses a controversial issue of euthanasia, or “mercy killing,” is significant: “perhaps it is the film's very ordinariness – it has the feel of any competent melodrama – that makes it so insidious.”<sup>296</sup> There is no pointing to a dangerous “other” or any attempt to dehumanize the sick, other than from Hanna herself, for example, who sees herself as a burden, and without value.<sup>297</sup> The film seeks to normalize death as the best answer to (or treatment of) “disease.” As Burleigh describes it, “death becomes an aesthetic event.” “I Accuse” is about the “incapacity to tolerate disease and imperfection, or to accommodate and value anyone outside a narrowly defined norm based upon racial purity, physical fitness, social conformism and

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<sup>294</sup> The definition of “disease” was, of course, subjective in the Third Reich, as mentioned in earlier chapters. Diseases included a wide spectrum of issues, including alcoholism, “feeble-mindedness” and other conditions considered dangerous to German “racial health.”

<sup>295</sup> Michael Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance: Euthanasia in Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 215.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

productive performance.”<sup>298</sup> Liebeneiner communicates these messages of intolerance and narrow norms through Hanna’s eyes, or the eyes of the “suffering.” As Hanna’s story unfolds, the audience sees her predicament from her perspective, and, by extension, sees “mercy killing” in a different light.

### **Conclusion**

Hanna’s perspective puts the role of the doctor squarely in view. Specifically, two doctors are faced with an ethical dilemma as both face Hanna’s request for “release” from a disease that traps her in a deteriorating body. This scenario reveals a particularly unsettling aspect of the Nazi era: Nazi doctors who betrayed the Hippocratic Oath in order to justify the killing of those deemed worthless. The ethical code in the Hippocratic Oath directs doctors against giving “...a deadly drug to anybody if asked for it, nor...make a suggestion to this effect.”<sup>299</sup> “Mercy killings,” also against the Hippocratic Oath, add a dangerous dimension to the healing responsibility of a doctor. There is this aspect of healing by death—“mercy” death. “Mercy” death comes into play when the disease is beyond the reach of modern medicine. Even when the patient requests such a scenario, as is demonstrated in “I Accuse,” the ethical implication exists for the doctor. In Hanna’s case, she wants to avoid living a “less than” life riddled with handicaps and pain. As Edelstein discusses, this request is not unusual, as “throughout antiquity many people preferred voluntary death to agony,” and “this form of ‘euthanasia’ was an everyday reality.”<sup>300</sup> This notion of a release from one’s pain is twisted, however, with the Nazi application of what constitutes agony, and who deserves to be “released by death.”

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<sup>298</sup> Burleigh, 216.

<sup>299</sup> Ludwig Edelstein, “The Hippocratic Oath: Text, Translation and Interpretation,” (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1943), 6.

<sup>300</sup> Edelstein, 10. Edelstein explores the ethical implications of physicians “giving a helping hand” to patients who wanted to end their own life and to those seeking abortions.

“I Accuse” (*Ich Klage An*), by demonstrating “death as anesthetic,”<sup>301</sup> as Burleigh explains, uses melodrama to legitimize the work of Karl Binding in *Permitting the Destruction of Unworthy Live* (1920).<sup>302</sup> Binding’s “Legal Explanation” addresses the “problem” of lives that have lost value—to the individual, the family, and society as a whole. Binding describes how a life without value may also move into the territory of “negative value” in that such lives become a financial burden. Time and energy are also wasted, according to Binding, to prolong “unworthy” lives.<sup>303</sup> As previously discussed, Binding categorizes “unworthy” lives into two main groups, with a third related group: the “irretrievably lost,” the “incurable idiots,” and those who are “mentally sound” but have been fatally wounded, and are unconscious.<sup>304</sup> While Liebeneiner does not refer directly to this concept of life value, Hanna’s situation places her in Binding’s first group. Hanna fully understands her situation and expresses her wish to be “released” from the body that fails her and the consequential suffering. She also does not want to be a burden on her loved ones.<sup>305</sup> Seeing Hanna’s situation through her “suffering” eyes provides a more accepting view of Binding’s argument. Hanna’s perspective, though fictional, lessens the “uneasy feeling” of “assessing the value of individual life for the bearer and for the social whole,” as Binding notes.<sup>306</sup> Thus, Liebeneiner’s film effectively reflects on the question of euthanasia, and the conversation of “mercy killing.”

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<sup>301</sup> Burleigh, 216.

<sup>302</sup> Karl Binding, “Legal Explanation,” “Permitting the Destruction of Unworthy Life, 1920,” In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, edited by Stackelberg, Roderick and Sally A. Winkle, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 71.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>304</sup> See the introduction of this paper, page 21.

<sup>305</sup> *I Accuse (Ich Klage An)*, 1941.

<sup>306</sup> Binding, “Legal Explanation,” “Permitting the Destruction of Unworthy Life, 1920,” In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, edited by Stackelberg, Roderick and Sally A. Winkle, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 71.



A dialogue on “mercy killing” comes to the forefront in the trial scene. Charged with the murder of Hanna, Dr. Thomas Heyt faces a criminal court where he is urged by the judge/panel to end his silence and defend himself. Heyt stands up and declares: “I loved my wife very much,” to which the judge responds, “And?” (The camera sharply pans the room in silence, and reflects the captivation of everyone in attendance as they wait to hear what Heyt will say next.) Without saying anything further, Heyt sits down. The judge calls for witnesses, with Stretter, Hanna’s brother, first. Before the camera focuses on Stretter, there is a close up of a small group of four men and one woman leaning near one another as they sit in the courtroom. Two of the men whisper their speculations. One of the men turns around and says to another: “I bet he gave her some medicine he invented to try it out...and he does not want to admit it.” Disagreeing, the other man shakes his head, calling that idea “highly unlikely.” The camera quickly jumps to Stretter being introduced. Stretter discusses how Thomas and his sister (Hanna) knew each other since childhood. He also points out that Heyt “lost his practice because of his medical views,” thus portraying Heyt as a shady, mediocre doctor who harms more than he heals. Stretter is cross-examined by the counsel and Heyt’s defense attorney. When asked about Heyt’s dedication to his wife’s health, specifically Heyt’s numerous hours in the lab trying to find a cure, Stretter acknowledges those efforts. He (Stretter) questioned Heyt’s motives, suggesting that the doctor also spent these hours at the lab to be close to his female assistant, Dr. Burkhardt. Heyt’s lawyer asks Stretter whether or not it is possible that Hanna asked Heyt to help her die. Stretter, in his final testimony, acknowledges, yes, it is possible—Hanna could have asked this of her husband.<sup>307</sup> Heyt’s silence, combined with the spectator’s whispers, and Stretter’s antagonistic testimony, leaves the counsel perplexed. By creating uncertainty in the courtroom, Leibeneiner

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<sup>307</sup> *I Accuse (Ich Klage An)*, 1941.

emphasizes a need to know Hanna's thoughts and feelings about her debilitating disease and the circumstances of her death. The film audience sees the interactions between Hanna, her husband, and Dr. Lang: Liebeneiner uses this dramatic love triangle technique to covertly pull the viewer closer to the underlying message of the story: "mercy death" (euthanasia) is, according to Nazism, an act of love. He frames the case in such a way that Hanna's death request vindicates Heyt; Liebeneiner also represents Lang as the absolute authoritative voice on the subject—both in terms of exonerating Heyt and as granting acceptance to the mercy death concept.

Lang's transformation from a doctor who despises the idea of "mercy death" to one who embraces euthanasia is central to the film's purpose. Liebeneiner shapes Dr. Lang as the voice of reason and morality; Lang is the "good guy" who did not win the love of Hanna, but stays near and remains trustworthy. When Hanna's health falters, Heyt sends her to Lang for his expert opinion and care. Hanna also seeks his "help" for a release from the disease that will, as she states, make her useless.<sup>308</sup> Thus, as the designated voice of morality, Lang plays a pivotal role in *Ich Klage An* (I Accuse). His dramatic portrayal of a trusted doctor changing his opinion on how to best treat patients, even when healing means death, speaks to the main message of the film and turns a sense of right and wrong on its head. C. Ben Mitchell discusses the efficiency of Nazi propaganda, especially in film, as being "highly effective in perverting public opinion and public conscience, in a remarkably short period of time."<sup>309</sup> Lang represents the

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<sup>308</sup> *I Accuse (Ich Klage An)*, 1941. Lang does not honor this death request, and so Hanna turns to her husband for this task.

<sup>309</sup> C. Ben Mitchell, "Of Euphemisms and Euthanasia: The Language Games of the Nazi Doctors and Some Implications for the Modern Euthanasia Movement," in *Right to Die Versus Sacredness of Life*, ed. Kalman J. Kaplan (Amityville, New York: Baywood Publishing Company, 2000), 257. Mitchell discusses Leo Alexander's arguments concerning Nazi propaganda; Alexander was a "physician-consultant on duty with the Chief Counsel for War Crimes," who wrote a "devastating critique" of "Medical Science Under Dictatorship" in July 1949.

“conscience” in this melodrama as the viewer sees him slowly embrace the supposed righteousness of euthanasia. Liebeneiner uses the character of Lang to communicate the idea of embracing medicalized “mercy” death—Lang is essentially a frame of reference for how to think about euthanasia. Instead of using a strict sense of right or wrong, he has a change of heart; his oath as a doctor is perverted to fit the Nazi idea of “helping” those who cannot help themselves.

Euphemisms play a part in Lang’s transformation as well. Euphemisms are integral to this on screen perversion of public conscience. Mitchell states that “euphemisms are place-holders for important concepts. They may disguise a practice which one might abhor if it were given another name.”<sup>310</sup> “Help” is one such euphemism that Liebeneiner utilizes in the film. Lang’s definition of help changes at the film’s end: the mother of the never seen disabled child tearfully tells Lang that she expected him to come back to “help” her daughter; Lang later realizes what she really meant by help—acknowledging that help meant a mercy death. On screen, Lang’s face communicates his shock at this mother’s words- the crease in his forehead showing concern for the situation, as if to say “what went wrong?” It is not until he visits the child in the institution that he has a definitive change of heart, suddenly showing disgust for what he witnesses, though the children in the institution are never shown on screen. As he exits with the children’s ward doctor, Lang asks: “How can the nurse take that?”<sup>311</sup> Lang’s “mercy death” metamorphosis, complete with euphemisms like “help” and “release” from pain and suffering, is an explicit example for the audience to follow.

Lang’s experience at the children’s ward is the tipping point for his “mercy death” perspective. His visit at the children’s ward provides a visual connection to the Nazi’s T-

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<sup>310</sup> Mitchell, 255.

<sup>311</sup> *I Accuse (Ich Klage An)*, 1941.

4 program. Lang's reaction to the sick child that he visits contributes to a shaping of public perception, which is to believe that the institution is a grotesque place. After just a few moments, behind the closed door of the ward, beyond the sight of the audience, the doctor's priorities change. Lang's sympathy is now with the nurse who has to deal with "that" every day, which contributes to the idea that some lives go beyond being unworthy—some lives, like that of this sick child, have a negative value. Therefore, this visit compels him to testify in Heyt's trial. Explaining this change of perspective, Lang says that Hanna was not afraid of death, but rather the dying process. He also states that Hanna asked for his help with ending her life. (This detail draws gasps from the people in the courtroom.) Lang admits that complying with Hanna's request was "not compatible with my oath," so she sought assistance from her husband instead. The experience of the children's ward, seeing what incurable "disease" does to a person, propels a change of heart and a new perspective for Lang; likewise, he no longer considers Heyt a murderer.<sup>312</sup>

Dr. Lang wrestles with the incompatibility of his oath and euthanasia. This struggle is at the heart of his difficulty with Hanna's "mercy" request. Leibenheimer casually includes this aspect of a doctor's oath, but the issue of the Hippocratic Oath was a serious topic addressed among doctors of the Nazi era. The melodramatic nature of the film shows a doctor transforming his ideas about how to best treat a terminally ill patient. Dr. Lang's changed perspective connects to Third Reich doctors who transformed the oath to fit a twisted interpretation. Medical ethics, like the aforementioned public conscience, were perverted. Euphemisms played a large role in warped Nazi interpretations of the oath. Lifton discusses Joachim Mrugowsky's role as an author of Nazi medical ethics. Mrugowsky was a "high-ranking SS doctor who became head of the Hygienic Institute,

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which was responsible for maintaining and distributing the Zyklon-B gas used at Auschwitz.”<sup>313</sup> Before being put to death for his complex participation in deadly medical experimentations Mrugowsky reintroduced a century-old book written by Christoph Wilhelm Hufeland, a renowned German physician. Using the book as an authority piece, Mrugowsky twisted Hufeland’s work and the definition of healing by focusing on certain language such as “art of healing” and “divine mission.”<sup>314</sup> Instead of the oath acting as a higher moral authority that served the purpose of healing in the name of saving lives, the moral authority was relegated to the purpose of serving the *Volk*—to benefit the German people as a whole versus the individual life.<sup>315</sup> A Lifton notes, a Nuremberg Medical Trial witness “referred to the Nazi embrace of Hippocratic principles as ‘an ironical joke of world history,’”<sup>316</sup> The oath itself became a euphemism when its meaning was turned inside out to fit Nazi logic.

With the main focus on the doctor’s narrative and the subsequent euphemisms in play, euthanasia is not directly discussed. Rather, the central emphasis of the film is whether the doctor was right or wrong in his actions. As Welch mentions, “the wider problems with euthanasia are subjugated and personalized in the form of this particular doctor, and in deciding whether his actions were morally justified.”<sup>317</sup> Obscuring the topic of euthanasia is intentional. The discussion surrounding the film was orchestrated: “A secret press directive issued by the *Reichspropagandaamt* shortly after the film was released” instructed the press “not to debate euthanasia, but instead to concentrate on the fate of the fictional doctor.”<sup>318</sup> The narrative on the doctor’s fate was also carefully

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<sup>313</sup> Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York, Basic Books, 1986), 32.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>316</sup> Lifton, 32.

<sup>317</sup> Welch, 104-105.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

arranged in the film. After several witnesses testified in the trial, but before Lang appeared in the courtroom, the judges and jurors recessed and debated the complications raised in this case. Welch also discusses this debate and the people involved as representing a “wide cross-section of the country” (“a teacher, a farmer, a soldier, a pharmacist, a doctor,” and more) so as to address all possible objections the Nazis might face on the topic of euthanasia.<sup>319</sup> The dialogue includes everything from reasoning that the Greeks and Romans utilized euthanasia, to God’s will, to the state regulating such a practice. The gamekeeper uses an example of giving the “mercy shot” to a dog:

REHEFELD (gamekeeper): When gamekeepers shoot an animal and it’s still suffering, we put it out its misery. Not to do so would be brutal.  
ROLFS (locksmith): But you are talking about animals!  
REHEFELD: Yes, but sometimes man is no different from an injured animal in pain.<sup>320</sup>

The judge offers that it is “not that simple” as these decisions “should be left to the state” and not be left to doctors alone. The group’s discussion centers on making laws that would enable mercy deaths to take place. Consequently, the debate also creates an impetus to act quickly before others suffer.<sup>321</sup>

The final scene of *Ich Klage An* shows Professor Heyt abruptly interrupting Lang’s testimony to defend himself. Once Lang “frees” Heyt of the murder accusation, Heyt speaks out on the law hindering “doctors and judges from serving the public.”<sup>322</sup> Against his attorney’s advice, Heyt puts his acquittal at risk. He demands a verdict in order to “serve as a signal, a change,” and adds that his life and all of the lives “who may

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<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>320</sup> *I Accuse (Ich Klage An)*, 1941.

<sup>321</sup> *I Accuse (Ich Klage An)*, 1941. Before Lang enters, as the judges and jurors settle back into the courtroom, the camera catches their right arms falling down at their sides, as if they just finishing a salute to Hitler. Just as the film avoids directly discussing euthanasia, it also stays clear of overt references to the Nazi regime.

<sup>322</sup> *I Accuse (Ich Klage An)*, 1941.

come to share Hanna's fate rests on such a verdict." Heyt (the accused) makes the accusations at this point. He accuses "a section of the law that prevents doctors and judges from serving the public."<sup>323</sup> The film ends with Heyt's pleas for a verdict, leaving the audience responsible: "Now, pass your judgement."<sup>324</sup>

To better understand how this ending serves the film's overall purpose, one should look to how the film came about: *Ich Klage an* materialized after Karl Brandt's suggestion; Brandt wanted a film to persuade German public opinion on the topic of euthanasia.<sup>325</sup> In addition to influencing public opinion, the film tested public opinion about whether there was sufficient support to legalize the (euthanasia) program and bring it out into the open."<sup>326</sup> The dramatic narrative enables the subtle "test" of public opinion via film. Lifton discusses this as well, noting that "'I Accuse' is of respectable artistic quality...I could understand why doctors I interviewed still felt its impact and remembered the extensive discussion it stimulated...about the morality of a doctor's aiding incurable patients the death they long for."<sup>327</sup> In this way, "I Accuse" is a unique piece of propaganda—it focuses on the narrative as a means of convincing the audience that euthanasia is acceptable. Within the narrative there is a false definition of what "mercy killing" is all about, but it is blended intricately, personalized, so as to subtly shape public opinion. The falsehood in the narrative is that euthanasia is completely voluntary, like Hanna's plea to Dr. Lang and Professor Heyt. The idea presented in the film is one of doctors (like Lang) carefully thinking through moral objections and

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<sup>323</sup> *I Accuse (Ich Klage An)*, 1941. Historical background in the film's slideshow written by R. Dixon Smith explains how Heyt flips the responsibility to the audience (on screen and to those watching the film). He becomes the one to accuse and demands to be an example to spark debate on the euthanasia topic.

<sup>324</sup> *I Accuse (Ich Klage An)*, 1941.

<sup>325</sup> Lifton, 49.

<sup>326</sup> Lifton, 49.

<sup>327</sup> Lifton, 49.

weighing a sense of right and wrong against what will best serve the patient. The dramatic ending, where the professor pleads to spare others from the “plight” that Hanna suffered, is also part of the film’s hollow message of humanity. Support for Heyt means support for the Nazis to define who “deserves” a mercy death.

*Ich Klage An* echoes the sentiment of earlier propaganda efforts in Nazi Germany. The film reinforces a notion of the hereditarily ill as costly burdens. Dr. Heyt’s argument in the trial, and Hanna’s pleas for mercy as she faces a debilitating disease both point to the 1935 propaganda poster, “You Are Sharing the Load! A Genetically Ill Individual Costs Approximately 50,000 Reichsmarks by the Age of Sixty.”<sup>328</sup> The purpose of the poster was to illustrate the “burden of the mentally ill” on the health of German society.”<sup>329</sup> The illustration features the title, “You Are Sharing the Load!” in a large, bold-type print, with the subtitle beneath, slightly smaller. Open space fills most of the background, with the exception of a sprawling compound (building) resembling a hospital or institution of some kind. The hospital/institution is positioned at the bottom of the background. A larger-than-life white man, resembling the ideal German example, obscures the buildings in the background, making the building appear miniscule. The German man is front and center in the foreground, with light-colored hair, an athletic build, and wearing a light-colored, collared shirt that opens slightly in the front. Across the back of his neck and over his shoulders, the man is holding a bar with two smaller

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<sup>328</sup> “You Are Sharing the Load! A Genetically Ill Individual Costs Approximately 50,000 Reichsmarks by the Age of Sixty.” In *Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race*, accessed September 16, 2017, <https://www.ushmm.org/information/press/press-kits/traveling-exhibitions/deadly-medicine/you-are-sharing-the-load>.

<sup>329</sup> Proctor, 182-183. The Reichsnährstand, a Nazi government agency, regulated agriculture and produced posters emphasizing the “costly” problem of the socially unfit and the hereditarily ill. “You Are Sharing the Load” was featured in a racial hygiene exhibit in 1935. As Proctor discusses, prominent medical and racial hygiene publications featured charts and images representing the “costs of maintaining the sick at the expense of the healthy” and school textbooks prompted students to calculate the costs for “maintaining the frail and invalid.”



men balanced on the either end. The men, adorned in darker clothing, are slightly hunched over and each has a hand pressed against the bar. The man on the German's left side appears less human-like in his facial features, with larger ears, and an animal gaze. The other person has a black fedora style hat and a dark shadow in and around his eyes. Both men are hunched over as they sit atop the bar on the German's shoulders. The German's body language- head down, legs planted firmly apart, bent at the knee for support; his arms are bent and hands are tightly clasping the bar as if lifting heavy weights or doing hard labor. The image of a strong and healthy German man physically carrying two "genetically inferior" individuals creates a stark contrast. First, the differences in appearance stand out, as already mentioned—size, dark/light contrast, facial features, and clothing. The German man, despite his strength and physical advantages, reflects exhaustion as he carries this "load." The physical burden reflected in the image speaks to the presumed social burden of supporting the hereditarily ill, or those reliant upon government for sustenance.<sup>330</sup> An implicit message in this image is that the extra, "backbreaking" effort is unnecessary because the lives of the terminally ill, genetically ill, and socially unfit are not worth the cost. Such lives, as illustrated in this propaganda piece, are exhausting German society. Thus, "sharing the load" of people who do not add value to the greater good is futile.

"Sharing the Load," and its message of futility, fits within the euthanasia campaign's "economic peril" narrative. The question (or problem) demonstrated in the poster is direct as the cost of the ill (and genetically inferior) is placed in clear focus in order to show the "savings" gained through the euthanasia program.<sup>331</sup> Rather than build

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<sup>330</sup> "You Are Sharing the Load! A Genetically Ill Individual Costs Approximately 50,000 Reichsmarks by the Age of Sixty." In *Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race*, accessed September 16, 2017, <https://www.ushmm.org/information/press/press-kits/traveling-exhibitions/deadly-medicine/you-are-sharing-the-load>.

<sup>331</sup> Proctor, 184.

“palaces for the mentally ill” or “wonderful parks and gardens for the least productive” members of society, the Nazis framed the issue of “load sharing” as an economic one crippling the nation’s health.<sup>332</sup> Taken together, the poster and the film provide a complete picture of the euthanasia message: “Sharing the Load” warns against the procreation of the “unfit” and the film cautions against prolonging the lives of the “ill” and helpless; each point out the burden, and detriment, on German society and health.

The idea of “cost-worthiness” and load-sharing speaks to the arguments built into *I Accuse*. One can see the connection between Hanna’s pleas not to be a burden on her husband and the burdensome load depicted in the propaganda poster. In Hanna’s perspective, the physical and emotional toll that her family would incur is greater than the value she can add with deteriorated health. Thus, she chooses to spare herself additional pain by asking for a “mercy death” while she is capable. This aspect of a diseased or unfit individual suffering in pain is also vital to the Nazi-euthanasia argument; the film explores this insidious angle with Hanna as well as with the children’s ward visit. With the “trusted” doctor visiting the children’s hospital at the film’s end, the viewer is given a different perspective; though the audience cannot see past the outside of the hospital door, it views a close up of the doctor’s face that fills with empathy for the caretakers—the doctors and nurses.<sup>333</sup> The message is that of a problem for the sick and the well; prolonging unfit lives is not only an economic burden for society at large, but an excruciating experience for the sick individual. The conclusion to be drawn then is that euthanasia is a merciful way to relieve the load shared, not just for the ill, but for the healthy.

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<sup>332</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>333</sup> *I Accuse (Ich Klage An)*, 1941.

## CONCLUSION

If societies fail to construct barriers inhibiting the pursuit of savagery, the lust for killing finds willing partners with modern technologies and belief systems.”

-James M. Glass<sup>334</sup>

While the Nazis were not the first to advocate mercy killings and euthanasia, they took it further than any other governmental body.<sup>335</sup> The Nazi regime used the idea of “nature versus nurture” as a premise to fulfill their tasks—and focus on the bigger picture of Nazism: what is best for the “pure” German society, versus the individual. Making their nature versus nurture vision a reality took strategic, individual efforts. Among the individuals who contributed were doctors, nurses, and scientists—educated people. A collaboration of science, politics, and culture propelled the systematic persecution and murder of people deemed unworthy of life: six million Jews, and other groups including the “racially inferior,” the disabled, and the terminally ill, to name a few, with children as the first targets. As evidenced in this thesis, eugenics “science” was not new by the time the Nazis took power, but its fundamentals and philosophies gained a unique purpose and validity within the race narrative and race fears perpetuated by the Nazi regime.

After the decimation of World War I, “rebuilding a genetically fit race” was a main objective for the Nazis.<sup>336</sup> Reeling from the loss, the notion of eugenic measures, specifically negative eugenics, as a cost-savings for financially devastated Germany was a selling point. Nature over nurture ideology promised a strengthened Weimar; killing

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<sup>334</sup> Glass, 171.

<sup>335</sup> *I Accuse (Ich Klage An)*, 1941. This idea is also discussed by R. Dixon in the slide show at the film’s end.

<sup>336</sup> Glass, 31.

was healing for Nazi Germany. To achieve this promise of strength through nature, and healing through killing, doctors, nurses, scientists, and politicians played their respective roles. As Glass notes, this intricate synchronization of politics, government, and science is one aspect that conveys the “uniqueness” of the Holocaust: “Civilization did not have the moral strength to protect individuals from the technology it created and the power of that technology to turn life into death.”<sup>337</sup> Glass points out that protecting the essence of humanity—“empathy, care, and restraint” was not of interest. Rather, the “free flow of violence” was fortified by the collaboration of science, technology, professionals and political securities.<sup>338</sup>

Weimar and Nazi films played a subtle, yet significant, role in the fortification of violence. Eugenic policy is subtly embedded into mainstream cinema of these eras: identification, classification, and elimination of tainted heredities for the sake of racial hygiene as a social responsibility. *M* (1931), *La Habanera* (1937) and *Ich Klage an* (I Accuse, 1941) each reflects a different facet of the eugenic dialogue from psychosis to miscegenation to extermination. Whether it is the similarities between Goebbels’ objectives on the nation’s health versus the individual and the eugenics dialogue leading up to Hitler’s rise to power, or Hitler’s “race shaping” (pairing of strong individuals versus “weak” ones) foregrounded in *Mein Kampf*, these narratives underscored the respective films of these eras.<sup>339</sup> Filling the spaces around these Weimar and Nazi films were contexts of health versus illness, nature versus nurture embedded into government and social thinking, biological criminality, war trauma, and a cost-analysis of lives worthy of life. Each film mirrors pieces of these historical contexts.

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<sup>337</sup> Glass, 129.

<sup>338</sup> Glass, 129.

<sup>339</sup> Susan Bachrach, “Introduction,” In *Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race*, edited by Dieter Kuntz, 8. U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

As a window into Weimar and later Nazi Germany, mainstream cinema provided a perspective on Weimar and Nazi culture: In *M* (1931), the identification of the “dangerous other” was a reflection of various fears in Weimar society: post-war malaise, economic chaos, and political dysfunction. *La Habanera* (1937) underscored purity laws protecting the sanctity of German blood; *Ich Klage An* (I Accuse) (1941) highlighted mercy killing arguments. Each of these films served as vital pieces of propaganda that mobilized emotions and immobilized minds.

Through Schränker’s exclusion argument against Beckert (the dangerous criminal “other”), *M* (1931) connects to the nature over nurture thread in *Mein Kampf*. Beckert, as an elusive criminal element lurking the streets, encapsulates the “powerlessness” of the late-Weimar period. Schränker’s exclusion of Beckert fits with Hitler’s race argument that outlines the identification and exclusion of the other in society. *M* (1931) mirrors the post-war trauma that manifested through social instability, financial hardships, and rampant crime. Reactions to this post-war trauma are built into *M* (1931). These reactions link to the “Lombroso effect,” where individual citizens became part of a “mobilized mass” focused on identifying criminal dispositions.<sup>340</sup> *M* typifies what Rentschler notes as the potency and destructive powers of mass fascination with fantasy and mass murder; the narrative reflects a country faced with hardships and spiritual emptiness.<sup>341</sup>

*La Habanera* (1937) links to the Marriage Law (1935), adding the next piece of the propaganda force—disease as a cautionary tale—and accentuates a narrative of the dangerous “other.” With the criminal type already identified in *M* (1931), the danger of intermarriage takes exclusion a step further. Sirk’s film uses the fever/disease narrative to deepen the contrast between what constitutes health versus illness. An emphasis on the

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<sup>340</sup> Lombroso, *Crime: Its Causes and Remedies*, 365.

<sup>341</sup> Eric Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and Its Afterlife* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002), 222.

stark physical and cultural differences of the couple helps the Nazi subtext emerge: mixing blood equates to lost purity, and intermarriage seemingly translates to unavoidable health consequences. Hitler's idea of women in "providential roles" is emphasized within the film's Nazi subtext.<sup>342</sup> Sirk's cautionary tale on disease and miscegenation is also a warning against a woman satisfying individualistic needs instead of honoring her country. As evidenced, *La Habanera* (1937) crafts a connection to Hitler's 1934 message of woman's "destined role" to her country.<sup>343</sup> *La Habanera* epitomized what the Third Reich viewed as a necessary image: women as mothers, safeguarding German purity (blood), and maintaining loyalty to one's country.

*Ich Klage An* (I Accuse) illustrates the final significant piece of film as Nazi propaganda. Liebeneiner introduces "mercy killing" through the narrative of a woman diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, who is also married to a researcher, and close friends with a medical doctor. The scenario of these three characters sets the scene for a doctor transforming his beliefs (and ethics) to fit an idea of death as healing.<sup>344</sup> Whereas *M* (1931) portrays the dangers of criminality through the lens of a community terrorized by a child murderer that needs to be excluded from society, and *La Habanera* (1935) emphasizes a warning of mixing bloodlines with the dangerous "other," *Ich Klage An* (I Accuse) presents a context of rationalizing murder. More so, the film underscores how some lives were valued over others. In this way, this film served the Nazi's euthanasia argument through an insidious aspect of "cost-worthiness" and the "burden" that befalls a society, which chooses to perpetuate the "unfit" through care of the sick and

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<sup>342</sup> Hitler, "Hitler's Speech to the National Socialist Women's Organization, September 1934," In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, 182-183.

<sup>343</sup> Hitler, "Hitler's Speech to the National Socialist Women's Organization, September 1934," In *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, 182-183

<sup>344</sup> *I Accuse (Ich Klage an)*, 1941.

handicapped. *Ich Klage An* thus demonstrates Burleigh's "death as anesthetic" idea.<sup>345</sup> The narrative exemplifies how the barrier of the Hippocratic Oath fails to inhibit using medicine to aid death instead of to support well-being, and, ultimately fails to prevent unethical choices by Nazi-era doctors.

The Hippocratic Oath was twisted to fit a perverted set of medical ethics. The physicians in *Ich Klage An* warped their medical ethics to suit the cases at hand. Euphemisms were at the center of the oath twisting. The film's focus on a public appeal for euthanasia acceptance without a mention of the word itself makes *Ich Klage An* (I Accuse) unique; the film acted as propaganda that tested public support for euthanasia and did so without overtly addressing the euthanasia program. Dr. Lang's on-screen scenario (a doctor allowing "merciful deaths") connects to Werner Catel, the doctor who agreed to "grant" a disabled child a "mercy death" based upon a diagnosis from Karl Brandt during the T-4 program.<sup>346</sup>

Ultimately, *Ich Klage An* (I Accuse) was propaganda packaged as an entertaining and endearing film—it was propaganda at its peak for the Nazis. The film reflects one doctor's thought process of "saving" his wife from the pain and suffering of a degenerative disease. At the same time, another physician is working through his own questioning of the Hippocratic Oath, eventually accepting the idea that euthanasia is a necessary component of "compassion." Leibenheimer's film comments on the eugenic dialogue of the Nazi era and provides a window through which to view a fluctuating public perception in Nazi Germany: a narrative shift from euthanasia to involuntary termination of life.

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<sup>345</sup> Burleigh, 216.

<sup>346</sup> See page 79.

Weimar and Nazi cinema enabled a targeted focus on a film as propaganda for Nazi Germany. The “secret formula” for Goebbels and Hitler, as Rentschler notes, was the power of “entertainment, spectacle, and diversions” as political tools.<sup>347</sup> Hitler’s Nazi regime, with Goebbels at the helm of propaganda, ruthlessly abused words and images in a never-before-seen fashion; Nazi cinema is an “infamous and abject entity” that systematically corrupted film’s constructive power.<sup>348</sup> The captivating images connected to shifting public perceptions of the Weimar and Nazi periods in a way that other propaganda did not—film was a vital visual for Nazi ideology. Tapping into fears of the day, film paved the way for exclusionary measures by shaping views of “unworthy” lives.

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<sup>347</sup> Rentschler, 222.

<sup>348</sup> Rentschler, 2.



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