



Nazi Racism



Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Genetics, and Eugenics

For years before Adolf Hitler became chancellor of Germany, he was obsessed with ideas about race. In his speeches and writings, Hitler spread his beliefs in racial "purity" and in the superiority of the "Germanic race"—what he called an Aryan "master race." He pronounced that his race must remain pure in order to one day take over the world. For Hitler, the ideal "Aryan" was blond, blue-eyed, and tall.

When Hitler and the Nazis came to power, these beliefs became the government ideology and were spread in publicly displayed posters, on the radio, in movies, in classrooms, and in newspapers. The Nazis began to put their ideology into practice with the support of German scientists who believed that the human race could be improved by limiting the reproduction of people considered "inferior." Beginning in 1933, German physicians were allowed to perform forced sterilizations, operations making it impossible for the victims to have children. Among the targets of this public program were Roma (Gypsies), an ethnic minority numbering about 30,000 in Germany, and handicapped individuals, including the mentally ill and people born deaf and blind. Also victimized were about 500 African-German children, the offspring of German mothers and African colonial soldiers in the Allied armies that occupied the German Rhineland region after World War I.

Hitler and other Nazi leaders viewed the Jews not as a religious group, but as a poisonous "race," which "lived off" the other races and weakened them. After Hitler took power, Nazi teachers in school classrooms began to apply the "principles" of racial science. They measured skull size and nose length, and recorded the color of their pupils' hair and eyes to determine whether students belonged to the true "Aryan race." Jewish and Romani (Gypsy) students were often humiliated in the process.

Key Dates

February 24, 1920

Nazis outline political agenda

The first public meeting of the Nazi party, then called the German Workers' Party, takes place in Munich, Germany. Adolf Hitler issues a "25 Point Program" outlining the party's political agenda. The party platform embodies racism. It demands racial purity in Germany; proclaims Germany's destiny to rule over inferior races; and identifies Jews as racial enemies. Point 4 concludes that "No Jew, therefore, may be a member of the Nation."

July 18, 1925

The first volume of *Mein Kampf* appears

Adolf Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf* while in prison for treason following his failed attempt to seize power in 1923. In *Mein Kampf*, he outlined his racial ideas. Hitler saw history as the struggle between races for living space. He envisioned a war of conquest in the east, with the Slavic peoples enslaved to German interests. He believed the Jews to be an exceptional evil, working within the nation to subvert "racial purity." He urged the "removal" of Jews from Germany.

July 14, 1933

Nazi state enacts racial purity law

Believing that "racial purity" requires state regulation of human reproduction, Adolf Hitler issues the Law to Prevent Hereditarily Diseased Offspring. Among other provisions, the measure prohibits "undesirables" from having children and mandates forced sterilization of certain physically or mentally impaired individuals. The law will affect some 400,000 people over the next 18 months.

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