

Nazi and American Eugenicians (1937)

Abstract

Although Nazi racial policy represented the most extreme form of eugenics legislation, the particular brand of eugenics that took place in Germany was only one element of a much broader, international embrace of eugenics research and policies. In particular, the researchers, politicians and activists who crafted eugenics legislation and gave it the force of science were primarily based in the U.S., and the Nazis referred often to the pioneering work of the U.S. group. A good deal of cooperation and collaboration took place between American and German eugenicians as well, including the exchange of ideas. Marie E. Kopp was an American proponent of eugenics and travelled to Germany in 1932 and 1935, conducting studies on the application of German eugenics policy between those years. Kopp proved influential in American eugenics circles, advocating on behalf of Nazi race policy. At the 25th meeting of the Eugenics Research Association in NYC in 1937, she told the assembly that she was convinced not only that Germany's race laws were implemented "in entire fairness" and that discrimination played no role, but that Nazi policies were set to ensure the health of the nation by encouraging racially pure, healthier and superior human beings. She praised Germany's policy of removing women from the labor force to ensure young men could achieve employment and marry early, and that women could raise children in "proper" conditions.

Another prominent eugenicist, Charles M. Goethe, helped found the Eugenics Society of Northern California and the Immigration Study Commission, and was president of the American Eugenics Research Association. Goethe wanted to severely restrict immigration from Latin America and especially Mexico. He was also president of the Goethe Bank, which necessitated frequent travel to Germany, where he studied Nazi eugenics policies in action. In letters home, Goethe reflected on the extent to which American eugenics thinking had influenced Germany's policies – particularly the work of eugenicist Eugene S. Gosney, and called for America to adopt similar policies.

Source

I. From an article by Marie Kopp:

[...]

Sterilization law is accepted as beneficial legislation, designated to minimize the difficulties of the afflicted. All possible safeguards are taken to forestall miscarriages of justice in whatever form they may occur . . . I am convinced that the law is administered in entire fairness and that discrimination of class, race, creed, political, or religious belief does not enter into the matter. I say this with confidence because I had the rare opportunity to examine case histories in large number in various sections of the country and to familiarize myself with the proceedings of the Hereditary Health Courts.

[...]

II. From a letter by Charles Goethe:

[...]

You will be interested to know that your work has played a powerful part in shaping the opinions of the group of intellectuals who are behind Hitler in this epoch-making program. Everywhere I sensed that their opinions have been tremendously stimulated by American thought, and particularly by the work of

the Human Betterment Foundation. I want you, my dear friend, to carry this thought with you for the rest of your life, that you have really jolted into action a great government of 60,000,000 people.

[...]

Source: Stefan Kühl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994, p. 56;58.

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