

The Nazi View of Disability: *Erbkrank* (1936)

Abstract

This “educational film on racial hygiene” shows the mentally and physically disabled with intermittent text describing what a waste of money it is to care for them. This was one of six films produced by Walter Gross’s Office for Racial Policy that warned of the biological dangers and financial costs of caring for the mentally and physically disabled. A trained physician, Gross was one of the leading advocates of “racial” purification within the Nazi government. His racial office published the journal *Neues Volk*, a seemingly highbrow alternative to cruder Nazi publications available in kiosks. It regularly featured articles on “race,” “racial purity,” antisemitism, and supposed degeneracy of all kinds. This particular film was part of a larger assault on those deemed “racially unfit” in the new *Volksgemeinschaft*. Note the title card that decries “Rhineland Bastards” (children of German women and Afro-French soldiers stationed in Germany at the end of World War I), indicating that the Nazis’ views of hereditary or mental illness was often and inextricably linked to racism.

Source

The title cards read: “The NSDAP Office for Racial Policy presents the educational film ‘Hereditary Disease.’ / “Where palaces are built for the descendants of drunkards, criminals and imbeciles while workers and farmers have to make do with a miserable hut, a nation is fast moving towards its downfall.” Dr. Gross/ What would perish in freedom according to the laws of nature is protected and cared for/ By far the greatest number of all lunatics acquired the predisposition to mental illness from parents carrying hereditary diseases in whom the predisposition was not outwardly apparent/ Those with hereditary diseases are blameless. They become guilty when they pass on their suffering to children/ An imbecilic negro bastard from the Rhineland. Just as physical features are hereditary, so are the mental ones. What one has inherited from one’s ancestors will be passed on further.”

Source: *Erbkrank*, 1936. Propaganda film, b/w, dir. Herbert Gerdes.

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