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MEDIA WITHIN A MOVEMENT:
THE VOSSISCHE ZEITUNG'S COVERAGE OF THE EUGENICS MOVEMENT IN
WEIMAR GERMANY, 1919-1933

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ABSTRACT

During the Weimar Republic era (1919-1933), the German eugenics movement began as the damages of World War One grew increasingly worse. The German government feared the aftermath of the war, especially quantitative and qualitative population decline. Many members of the middle-class believed that the population of the hereditarily unfit continued to grow, while the population of the healthy steadily declined, creating a weak country that lacked political or economic power. For many Germans, the solution to this increasingly desperate problem became the eugenics movement, which hoped to eliminate the unfit society. But, before this exploitation occurred, popular support for the movement first needed to exist; thus creating gradual eugenics movement, unlike what existed abroad. The growing movement was well presented by the *Vossische Zeitung*, a German newspaper that helped popularize the movement in many ways. From 1919 until 1923, the paper first presented the movement from the viewpoint of different professionals, resulting in a movement that remained rather limited in its appeal since the articles were written in technical language. After this, the newspaper moved into an era of education from 1924 until 1929, where it focused on presenting the movement in laymen's terms, a method that allowed eugenics to expand its popularity. By 1930, the movement grew into a confident, tempered movement, which resulted in the implementation of the country's first eugenic measure. The passage of a eugenic law demonstrates how far the eugenics movement grew throughout the Weimar Republic, from a movement supported by only the middle-class to one that gained enough traction to pass a sweeping sterilization bill, yet one that remained gradual and incremental in its implementation, a part of the eugenics movement that is often overlooked.

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Introduction

In his piece “Eugenics in the New Germany,” Erwin Baur, a well-known German geneticist, wrote about the climate of desperation that permeated German society after the disastrous end of World War One:

“Now, after the War, everything is worse than ever before... Against their own will and in contravention of the promises made by the Armistice, over ten million Germans in closed settlements have come under foreign dominion of people culturally beneath them. Present-day Germany is totally incapable of nourishing its people. If the repressive Versailles Treaty¹ remains in force, either twenty million Germans must emigrate or they must starve and kill themselves off in civil wars.”²

The feelings of fear and desperation Baur expressed throughout this piece, but specifically this quote, embodied the emotions that much of the German public felt during the aftermath of the war. In 1918, Germany stood in a disastrous situation: a government in shambles, a pitiful defeat, and the loss of more than two million healthy German citizens.³ The First World War was fought on a scale, and at a cost in human suffering, unparalleled to anything else in the history of mankind, meaning that the loss of the war could possibly result in adversity unlike anything experienced before.

Many considered Germany a proud and nationalistic people, thus resulting in deep fears surrounding what would happen if the German people continued to suffer due to a loss both

¹The Versailles Treaty was one of the peace treaties at the end of World War One, which ended the state of war between Germany and the Allied Powers. It contained many controversial provisions that negatively affected Germany.

² Article written by Erwin Baur. Bentley Glass, “A Hidden Chapter of German Eugenics between the Two World Wars,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 125, no. 5 (1981): 393.

³ Estimates show German casualties being somewhere between 1,773,700 to 2,037,000 deaths.

of resources and people after the humiliating defeat of World War One. Most of all though, many feared that Germany would lose the political and economic power the country worked so hard to achieve. With so many sectors of the population depending on governmental assistance in order to survive, it grew clear, especially to members of the middle-class that the welfare state needed to be curbed. With an increasing fear over population decline due to the war and the growing economic problems at the onset of the Weimar Republic, a method to combat this issue became necessary. To many in the middle-class, the answer to this crisis grew evident: the newly developing eugenics movement.

For the purposes of thesis, a single definition of eugenics should be used when reading the following discussion. Eugenics is defined as the popular science and political movement for the use of state-controlled reproduction. This science dealt with the improvement of hereditary qualities of a certain group of people, by specifically looking at certain undesirable traits or qualities and attempting to eliminate them from the gene pool, usually through the sterilization of ‘unfit’ members of German society. Those considered ‘unfit’ typically suffered from a disease that eugenicists considered genetic or were people who did not productively contribute to society, such as institutionalized patients or criminals. Eugenicists also believed in so-called “positive” eugenic measures—measures supporting the healthy, such as tax incentives for larger families and encouraging the healthy to reproduce, which would in turn create a healthier society, as these Germans were presumed to have inheritable or desirable traits. Eugenics included both racial and non-racial elements, as the movement itself was extremely heterogeneous in its range of beliefs, meaning its support existed throughout many political affiliations. While eugenicists typically acknowledged the influence of environmental factors,

they persisted in attributing the major differences between ethnic groups and social class, in intellectual, personality, and physical traits, to heredity.⁴

Today, eugenics is often considered a pejorative term and is typically erroneously equated with National Socialist doctrines, but in Weimar Germany, proto-National Socialist organizations branded eugenics as a kind of “leftist deviation.”⁵ Though eugenics became most exploited during the time of the NSDAP, it is important to note that it existed long before that particular usage. In the 1930s, the Germans used eugenics in such a horrifying way that the entire concept grew discredited, even in countries where both the prevailing value goals and particular theories of heredity contrasted sharply with the goals and theory of the Germans.⁶ Eugenics always contained a racial component, especially as much of the German population believed that eastern Europeans represented a weaker, less-successful part of society that lacked culture; thus, making them less desirable than the Germans. Yet, this racial idea remained less important than the other aspects of the German movement until the rise of the NSDAP. Focus mostly remained on social class, as most eugenicists felt that the lower-classes did not contribute enough to society due to their social and economic woes. Though racist eugenicists always existed, these beliefs were not at the forefront of the movement’s focus during the Weimar Republic and remained relatively undiscussed until the Nazis took control. Weimar eugenics remained dedicated to the idea of class differences and improving society as a whole, supporting both positive and negative eugenics during this era.⁷ Overall, German eugenics was far more varied in its politics and ideology than generally assumed. Until Hitler’s seizure of power in the early

⁴ Bentley Glass, “A Hidden Chapter of German Eugenics.”

⁵ Loren Graham, “Science and Values: The Eugenics Movement in Germany and Russia in the 1920s.”

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Positive eugenics encourages the well-born and healthy parts of the population to reproduce at higher rates, whereas negative eugenics refers to discouraging reproduction by the ‘unfit,’ unhealthy parts of society.

1930s, when political divisions became impossible, German eugenics captured the interest of individuals whose allegiance spanned the breadth of the Wilhelmine and Weimar political spectrum.⁸

Popular support of eugenics began in the 1900s in most other countries, while in Germany eugenics did not gain popular support until the late 1920s; though the peak of both movements occurred in the late 1920s and early 1930s. In comparison to its America counterpart, the German eugenics movement appeared rather reserved. Implementation of eugenics within the Weimar Republic grew very gradually and mirrored the slow increase of public opinion, thus creating an incremental movement that hoped to capture public support as it expanded. Early German eugenicists were extremely careful of their actions and discussion about the movement, ensuring that they had, to their liking, satisfactory knowledge on the subject before rushing to make policy decisions. As seen in Wilhelmine eugenics, the support for the movement remained very limited at the beginning, with hardly any popular support outside that of the *Bildungsbürgertum* (intellectual middle-classes), a pattern that remained during the first few years of Weimar Germany.

The Wilhelmine eugenics movement, which lasted from 1904 until 1918, began with the foundation of some of the first journals and societies dedicated to eugenics, although these did not rise in popularity until the mid to late 1920s. Most discussions and writings on eugenics during the period fell into five categories: technical articles dealing with genetics and evolution, entries concerned with so-called degenerative phenomena (insanity, alcoholism, homosexuality), articles preoccupied with the alleged dysgenic effects of certain social institutions and practices (medicine, welfare) and the social and economic costs of protecting the weak, studies pertaining

⁸ Sheila Faith Weiss, 194.

to the need for population increase, and a collection of anthropological contributions.⁹ The primary intellectual preoccupation of the early movement focused on collecting and analyzing data on degeneration, a theme that remained vital during the entirety of the German eugenics movement.

Like eugenicists in the United States and Great Britain, their German counterparts also analyzed the cost of maintaining the army of the unfit. Eugenicists believed that the *Minderwertigen*, a term that means “the less valuable,” drained the welfare system, leaving little money or help for those outside of this sector of the population. The idea that the *Minderwertigen* were a financial burden to the state who “despite the expenditure paid out on their behalf, [were] almost never in the position during their working lives to repay the money spent on them,” resonated with many Germans, who felt that Germany needed to spend their money in a more responsible way that could help reverse the damage of the war, rather than adding to it through the protection of the weak.¹⁰ As the war ended, and the population of Wilhelmine Germany dropped drastically,¹¹ thus creating a sense of desperation, a call to reduce the budget, and a fear that the ‘unfit’ would overcome the healthy sectors of society, resulting in the loss of a superior German race, along with a huge loss of political and economic power. It is with this fear that Germany founded the Weimar Republic in 1919.

Abroad the eugenics movement flourished much earlier than it did in Germany. America, Great Britain, and a plethora of other western countries practiced eugenics during the early 1900s—and in more radical ways than what occurred in the Weimar Republic during the first few years. The movement in the United States profoundly affected the German movement, as

⁹ Weiss, 207.

¹⁰ Ignaz Kaup, “Was kosten die minderwertigen Elemente dem Staat und der Gesellschaft,” *Archiv für Rassen- und Gesellschafts-Biologie* 7, (1910): 723.

¹¹ Between 1902 until 1914, there was a decrease of 8.3 per thousand drop in the number of births. Weiss, 211.

many well-known eugenicists discussed how greatly the American movement inspired the German movement. This inspiration likely developed due to the fact that American eugenics was one of the first movements to implement eugenic policy in their states, setting an important precedent that other countries compared the eugenic movement within their borders to. Though inspired by their practices, many eugenicists felt that the German people “were not ready to accept American-style sterilization methods as a means of alleviating the problem,” instead relying on a way of physically separating the ‘unfit’ from the rest of society through institutionalization, or as some proposed, work-colonies. Even so, the sterilization tactics in America eventually helped frame the laws passed in Germany in the 1930s.

In 1907, Indiana became the first state to enact sterilization laws in the United States, though it was not the first state to propose this kind of legislation. Soon after the passage of the Indiana law, California voted into law a provision for “the sterilization of the mentally retarded in state hospitals and of prison inmates, who demonstrated behavior deemed immoral or sexually perverse.”¹² Over the next twenty-five years, an additional thirty states in the U.S. and thirty countries abroad passed sterilization laws based upon the idea that eugenics was a ‘science of better breeding.’ California led the nation in sterilizations and by 1929, the state performed 6,255 operations—almost twice as many as those of all other states combined.¹³ By the end of World War Two, when eugenics fell out of favor throughout the world, the national sterilization total reached over 64,000.¹⁴ In 1927, in the Supreme Court case *Buck v. Bell*, provided legal sanction for the forced sterilization of persons deemed unfit to reproduce by state officials. The ruling

¹² David Cullen, “Back to the Future—A Bibliographic Essay,” *The Public Historian* 29, no. 3 (2007), 163.

¹³ Daniel Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, INC.: 1985, 114.

¹⁴ Kevles, 116.

applied mostly to the inmates of state mental institutions, whose disabilities were judged to be hereditary.¹⁵

American eugenics drew upon diverse support that went far beyond just medical professionals in the middle-class, a vastly different set of support than the German eugenics movement first garnered. American supporters ranged from “college professors to elementary school principals, from clubwomen to mental-health records,” among many others.¹⁶ Although many of the legislative actions in America, such as involuntary sterilization, remained too radical to pass during the Weimar Republic eugenics movement, the American eugenics movement, as mentioned earlier, provided German eugenicists with the inspiration necessary to help popularize eugenics within Germany. The eugenics movement in Germany mirrored that of the United States eugenics movement in many ways, but especially in its background, as both countries experienced extreme turmoil throughout their country due to a changing society, though the German version of the movement, at least during the Weimar era, stayed much more gradual than the same movement in America.

Current literature on eugenic focuses on the movement either through the lens of the well-known professional eugenicists of Germany from the early 1900s until the 1930s when Hitler came to power or the movement during the Nazi era. This list usually includes: Alfred Ploetz, Wilhelm Schallmayer, Fritz Lenz, and Hermann Muckermann, all of whom were responsible for writing important books and were greatly involved in the creation of many scientific journals about eugenics or with a specific focus on Nazi eugenics. Instead of pursuing this typical path and tracing the eugenics movement through the lives and beliefs of this list of

¹⁵ Buck v. Bell was not repealed until 1974, even though forced sterilization was thought to be a violation of human rights.

¹⁶ Kelves, 115.

men or through a focus on Nazi policies, I chose to look at a specific newspaper from 1919 until 1933, researching how the presentation of the eugenics movement changed throughout the publication of the paper. Though Germany printed many newspapers at this time, very few were as reputable and well-respected as the *Vossische Zeitung* (1918-1934). During the First World War, popular press developed into a major influence on the formation of public opinion.¹⁷ Thus, readers looked to newspaper publications for information about important events and to journalists for their opinions before forming their own; therefore, the stories that the *Vossische Zeitung* chose to publish could have a profound effect on the general public since this was where the public learned most of its information.

Though the paper did have a political agenda, like that of most newspapers of the time, it provided a good overview of economic and scientific developments, and rarely included an obvious bias. The *Vossische Zeitung*'s articles sought to inform the public more than sway their opinion towards one side of a debate over another—even with its existing political agenda. Closer towards the end of the Weimar Era, many began to worry about the radicalizing influences of communism and Nazi press, resulting in a decrease of in publication for many papers. Even with this fear, circulation of the *Vossische Zeitung* increased from 1925 until 1930 by 30%.¹⁸ During this time, the *Vossische Zeitung* remained the only newspaper that resisted the downward trend of political newspapers, meaning that more people looked to the paper for its opinion on important events, especially since other papers ceased to exist.¹⁹ These facts made the *Vossische Zeitung* an excellent choice for this particular discussion on eugenics, since it gained

¹⁷ Ruth Hedig, “Versailles and After, 1919-1933.”

¹⁸ Bernhard Fulda, “Press and Politics in the Weimar Republic.”

¹⁹ Ibid.

support and readers as time went on, rather than a decrease in numbers like other newspapers experienced.

Along with these important factors, the newspaper also existed in an online-database, making research less time consuming. In order to find articles discussing the eugenics movement or the topic of eugenics in general, I chose keywords that would narrow my search. Using the words, “Erbkunde,” “Erbkranken,” “Erbpflege,” “Eugenik,” and “Rassenhygiene,”²⁰ I found a list of possible articles, each of which included at least one of these keywords, and then chose which to translate based off of the title of the article and if it applied to my discussion.

Overall, this thesis, as mentioned above, traces the eugenics movement during the Weimar Republic from 1919 until 1933. My *Vossische Zeitung* research described the Weimar Republic in a state of desperation, grounded in an ever-increasing fear over both a qualitative and quantitative population decline after the wartime defeat. To the *Bildungsbürgertum*, especially the doctors, scientific professionals, and eugenicists, the answer to the problem was the newly founded German eugenics movement—although not all agreed with this method, fearing that it would limit individual rights and be rejected by much of society. Even with most Germans wishing to curb this population decline, as they believed it would lead to a weaker society full of ‘unfit’ individuals with undesirable traits, eugenicists refused to implement the goals of the movement until a larger portion of the population supported them. In turn, this led to the German eugenics movement to follow a more gradual, slow-paced path towards legislative implementation of eugenics, when compared with eugenics movements in other Western countries.

²⁰ These search terms translate into: hereditarily ill person, hereditarily ill, care of the hereditarily ill, eugenics, and race-hygiene, respectively.

Chapter one, “Eugenics Imagined,” looks at the professional aspect of the eugenics movement, specifically from the outlook of medical and scientific professionals, along with eugenicists from 1919 until 1923. Within the *Vossische Zeitung*, articles revolving around the discussions of the professional medical and eugenic communities mostly appeared, supplemented by a few articles that were even written by members of the *Bildungsbürgertum*, which resulted in articles using technical language accessible almost exclusively to the intellectual middle-class. In turn, this meant that support for the movement was not wide-spread throughout these few years, where it only remained within this specific group. During this time, the articles were mostly “inquiry-minded,” as they discussed the movement overall, rather than any concrete specifics. Doctors discussed the need for more research, more experiments, and more information overall before they could be sure that the measures they called for could actually result in what they considered scientific fact, thus relating to the idea of German eugenics as a gradual movement. These eugenicists also wanted the movement to gain further support before exploiting the methods of eugenics.

Chapter two, “Eugenics Popularized,” looked more closely at discussing various symposiums, international congresses, scientific journals, and eugenic societies that started to occur and form from 1924 until 1929. Rather than having articles written by or from the viewpoint of doctors and specialists appear throughout its publications, the *Vossische Zeitung*’s coverage of the eugenics movement focused on journalists writing pieces about their experiences at these events, meaning that the resulting articles were written mostly in laymen’s terms, thus allowing members of lower-class society to gain knowledge on the subject of eugenics. These articles also explained the exact definition of eugenics, dating back to the foundation of the concept in the 1800s, which gave readers a complete background of eugenics as a whole, along

with the current events of the movement. Using these measures, the general public, rather than just the intellectual middle-class, received an education on the eugenics movement, thus allowing the movement to gain more followers, along with broad popularization. By educating the masses about eugenics, the movement gained momentum unlike ever before, allowing the implementation of eugenics legislation to finally be discussed in Weimar Germany, as the fears about the breadth of the movement's support no longer existed.

The third and final chapter, "Eugenics Implemented," covering the years 1930-1933, combined both earlier methods of reporting by having both doctors and journalists write pieces for the *Vossische Zeitung*, as well as articles from the perspective of an "average" German and of a "professional" German, exposing the public to many different perspectives on the movement. The paper spoke of eugenics as if it was a "household name" and appeared less concerned with explaining each specific detail of eugenics, as these journalists and professionals assumed that by 1930, that the general public was extremely well-versed on the subject. Here, the main discussion was over the need to implement voluntary sterilization, which is sterilization done only with the consent of the individual or his or her guardian. The *Vossische Zeitung* openly discussed the passage of the first piece of eugenic legislation, *Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses* (Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring), and explained in great detail each provision of the law, ensuring that the *Vossische Zeitung*'s readers understood the legislation debated and eventually passed by their government.

Fears over lingering population problems caused by the defeat of World War One created a sense of desperation among German citizens, as the unknown consequences of a declining population—both quantitative and qualitative—resulted in 'fit' Germans demanding that something be done to combat the negative effects of the 'unfit' on the German nation. German

eugenics during this time—though not after the Nazi party took power—remained more cautious and incremental than most eugenics abroad, most especially as being practiced in America. The gradual movement focused on gaining public support, having enough research, and a basis in what these eugenicists considered scientific fact, before actually moving on to types of formal eugenic practices and implementation. Though the movement does go as far as to eventually support sterilization, this is largely because it was apparently supported by popular opinion and, in a related manner, no longer widely viewed as a limitation on individual rights. It is important to note that even with this law, German eugenics was relatively reserved, as it only legalized voluntary sterilization—not compulsory sterilization as occurred in other countries. The movement remained dedicated to class more so than race, making the legacy of German eugenics incomplete, as it typically glosses over the non-racial portions of the movement prior to 1933. By tracing the path of German eugenics from 1919 until 1933, through the chronological publications of the *Vossische Zeitung*, the Weimar eugenics movement appeared as a gradual movement concerned with the effects of the ‘unfit’ parts of society due to genetic disease or illness that due to both quantitative and qualitative population decline, created support from various parts of German society, rather than an overtly racial movement supported by a homogenous group as many assume today.

Chapter 1

Eugenics Imagined, 1919-1923

At the end of World War One in 1918, an article in the *Vossische Zeitung* posed an important question about the future of the soon-to-be Weimar Republic and the German people: “Will we inherit the war damage?” Published only a few days before the official end to the war on November 11, 1918, the article—written by Adolph Koelsch—focused on how the war devastation would affect the German population and the West as a whole.²¹ The war years resulted in marked German depopulation, a development at odds with pre-War demographics. Wilhelmine Germany witnessed a substantial population increase of twenty-four million between 1871 and 1910, making it the second most populous country in Europe.²² World War I dramatically altered this demographic picture—turning robust increases into sharp decline.

This population reversal troubled Koelsch and other middle class German intellectuals of the day, especially medical professionals and eugenicists. Such immense wartime “damage of the bodies and souls of many,” he remarked, led to a deeper concern about both the quality and quantity of the people that German society could produce.²³ Koelsch, along with other professionals, questioned how the war damage might compromise the hereditary quality of the German people. Cognizant of the turbulent circumstances brought on by the war, combined

²¹ Adolf Koelsch, “Regeneration oder Degeneration?” *Vossische Zeitung*, November 4, 1918, p. 2-3, Evening edition.

²² Sheila Faith Weiss, “The Race Hygiene Movement in Germany,” *Osiris* 2, no. 3 (1987): 211.

²³ Koelsch.

with the collapse of the Imperial government, the *Vossische Zeitung* took the position that the war would likely result in an increase of the number of individuals “who [were] an unwelcome contribution to the population statistics.”²⁴ To the medical profession, this “unwelcome” contribution to the population referred to the ‘unfit,’ meaning those individuals suffering from a genetic disease, a mental disorder, or an institutionalized mental patient. Since the war injured, and in many cases, took the lives of the fittest and best men in Germany, there was an increasing fear about the influence of direct or indirect physical and psychological war damage on the coming generation. Due to this damage, the question became if this could affect the quality of offspring, thus creating a larger population of the ‘unfit,’ an economic burden that Germany could not afford at the time.

For the intellectual middle class, especially medical professionals and scientists, the solution to this problem was eugenics, a concept that grew in appeal during this time. Although relatively popular abroad, especially in the United States and Great Britain, eugenics remained unpopular in Germany. In fact, before the war, eugenics was outright rejected by the Imperial administration as a “violation of prevailing ethnical codes and personal liberty.”²⁵ But, by 1918, with war damage in mind, eugenics started to slowly grow in popularity, although only throughout a very limited sector of society. To this small number, the obvious way to save Germany was to limit reproduction among the members of German society who represented the growing ‘unfit’ population. With population decline at the forefront of post-war discussion, the *Bildungsbürgertum*’s attentions turned to a discussion on ways to resolve this issue. For many, the answer to this pertinent question was to implement eugenics, thus changing the attitude once

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Paul Weindling, “Weimar Eugenics: The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics in Social Context,” *Annals of Science* 42, no. 3 (1985): 305.

held by the Imperial government. Weimar administrators shared this hope that eugenics could solve intractable social problems with its “promising combination of genetic, medical, and demographic expertise.”²⁶

Realizing the increasing popularity of eugenics, the *Vossische Zeitung* started to publish many articles on the topic and the many debates within the movement. From 1919 until 1923, the *Vossische Zeitung*'s discussion on eugenics mainly looked at a discussion on the best way to implement eugenics into German society and struggled to decisively decide what ideals and goals the German eugenics movement hoped to achieve. During this time, the vast majority of the articles published within the pages of the *Vossische Zeitung* were written from the viewpoint of doctors, scientists, geneticists, and eugenicists, who attempted to answer the many questions surrounding eugenics and the discoveries thus far. Since these men knew the most about eugenics, these professionals mostly wrote and spoke about the movement using highly advanced, scientific terms, meaning that only a small portion of society understood of the articles. As a result, the popularity of the movement grew extremely slowly, mainly remaining within the small intellectual middle-class.

These professionals hoped to see eugenics eventually exploited, but realized that in order for this to happen, the movement needed to first expand its research and experimentation before eugenics could be used in order to combat the quantitative and qualitative population decline. By addressing the fact that the movement first needed greater scientific legitimacy through more thorough research and experimentation, the eugenics movement set itself up as a gradual movement, which differed greatly from many other countries, where eugenics had already achieved great popularity. Thus, the *Vossische Zeitung* presented a professional debate on how to

²⁶ Weindling, 304.

create a better researched, more ‘scientific,’ and more popular movement, mostly focused on the post-war problem of population decline. These articles looked mostly at the fear of the ‘unfit’ population overtaking the healthy portions of Germany and what genes truly caused these people to be ‘unfit’ and therefore unproductive.

In its October 12, 1919 issue, the *Vossische Zeitung* published “Ausgaben der Sexualforschung (Issues on Sexual-research),” written by L.I., which discussed possible answers to questions about these unwanted genes. This article highlighted the perils of ‘undesirable’ traits of those ‘unproductive’ members of society. Some members of the *Bildungsbürgertum* held the opinion that the ‘unfit’ would cause the nation irreparable harm and therefore, framed much of the discussion regarding Weimar’s economic, social, and political life largely in terms of eugenics and the improvement of the population.²⁷ Specifically, the article discussed a recent meeting of the International Society for Sexual Research, in which the topic of eugenics earned a place at the forefront of the Society’s debate. Though open about the fact that not enough definitive research on eugenics existed, it strongly believed that “eugenics [had] the ability to achieve great things,” especially in regard to population control.²⁸ Eugenics seemed to provide the best method for solving the ever-growing fear about the decline of the quality and quantity of the German population. Considered even more dangerous than quantitative population decline throughout Germany at the time, the article explained, was the “relative increase of the unfit, which the middle-class believed would create a weaker society.”²⁹ If the ‘unfit’ members of society continued reproducing, Germany would be plagued by a weaker race. The International Society for Sexual Research determined that reproduction and the fate of future generations

²⁷ Li, “Ausgaben der Sexualforschung,” *Vossische Zeitung*, October 12, 1919, Sechste Beilage zur Vossischen Zeitung, Sunday Edition.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Max von Gruber and Ernst Rüden, *Fortflanzung, Vererbung, Rassenhygiene* (Munich: J.F. Lehmann, 1911), 158.

remained of most vital importance. Author, L.I., went on to explain that “an elevation of children, in particular, cannot be expected without the help of far-reaching reforms of social relations,” meaning a type of eugenic measure that could either stop the unfit from procreating or encourage the healthy to reproduce in greater quantities, thus improving the quality of offspring and the German population as a whole.³⁰ With this in mind, the Society determined that reproduction and the fate of future generations were vitally important to society. For those involved in the discussion, eugenics appeared to be the social program that could solve this ongoing crisis. Though the Society, and the author of the article, admitted that eugenics needed to be further expanded in regard to both research and experiments before it could be “exploited,” and that scientists did not exactly understand how to remove the unwanted genes or how they occurred in offspring, the notion that eugenics could help create a more powerful society ended some of the palpable fear that many had regarding population policy.

This article faced many of the problems haunting the eugenics movement head-on, specifically the lack of educated research and experimentation, something that the movement desperately needed before it could grow. The International Society for Sexual Research was mainly comprised of professionals, meaning that the stance they took on eugenics appeared rather technical, as these professionals approached this discussion as they would any other advanced topic. The language within the article proved to be extremely difficult, lacking any laymen’s terms that made reading easier for the average German citizen. “Ausgaben der Sexualforschung” pushed the idea of population decline to the front of debate, as this idea led many to support eugenics, since it constituted such a large problem for Germany. The gradual nature of the movement also became increasingly obvious throughout this piece. Instead of

³⁰ L.I., “Ausgaben der Sexualforschung.”

jumping to conclusions or trying to inflate its argument through false information, the Society openly admitted the movement's shortcomings and insisted that more research occur before eugenics was further explored. Leaders of the German eugenics movement wanted to be sure that the movement first saw itself grounded in fact before preaching false beliefs, and thus false solutions, to the German people. This dedication to research kept the movement gradual, especially since these professionals and experts hoped to find a cure to the problem of population decline.

As time went on and it seemed that the problem worsened, eugenicists at the time came to the realization that Germany's biological and national efficiency was not just of interest for the intellectual class, but rather in the interest of every German, who wished to see Germany remain one of the strongest and most powerful societies in the world.³¹ As a result, the newspaper articles printed in the *Vossische Zeitung* during this time became more radical and focused on the elimination of the unfit. Although no eugenic laws had seriously been discussed before, the idea presented in the June 3, 1921 article "Ehe-Auslese (Before Selection)" posed the question of whether or not the government needed to require engaged couples to go through intensive medical screening before receiving a marriage license, a move that professionals believed would eliminate the unfit from passing their genes on through their offspring, as they would not get approval for marriage.³²

Discussed at a meeting between the Society for Sexual Science and the Forensic Medical Association, many attendees agreed that this method would be the best way to proceed due to current societal problems, but still rejected any sort of outright 'marriage ban,' since it lacked support for the majority of the public, as well as the fact that the public remained uninformed

³¹ Weiss, 214.

³² "Ehe-Auslese," *Vossische Zeitung*, June 3, 1921, Erste Beilage zur Vossischen Zeitung, Morning Edition.

about this idea and eugenics in general.³³ The doctors who spoke at the meeting, stressed the need for these medical examinations if the German population wanted to protect and improve the future offspring of the country. Most agreed that marriage should be denied to anyone who did not receive prior medical examination, while others chose instead to defend the principle of free will, believing that restricting marriage removed an individual's right to choose their own partner.

This led to a discussion about the "laws of morality," believing that moral beliefs needed greater emphasis than the needs of the country. If the elimination of unfit offspring appeared to reject the moral ideals of the country, then the proposal needed to be outright rejected, although most disagreed that such measures contradicted moral code.³⁴ Confusion also existed about the inconveniences of these medical examinations, especially in regards to the female, as this examination would be incredibly difficult due to the female anatomy. But, in order to achieve the greatest amount of success, both parties had to partake in medical searches, especially since the expected benefits from this license outweighed any disadvantages, as it would result in the elimination of a part of the unfit population of Germany.³⁵ In addition to this license, the risk of families could only be detected and avoided through a comparison of the family trees given by both members, as this allowed the German government to trace specific ills or see certain patterns within the genetic makeup of both sides of a couple.

Even though it was obvious throughout the discussion that this idea would not actually pass into law, the fact that the *Vossische Zeitung* even published such a debate showed that extremely eugenic ideals and proposals became more avidly discussed amongst the middle-class.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

Though this did not necessarily mean an increase in popularity, especially since the article used technical language, the inclusion of the article only helped further lay out the eugenics movement as a whole, allowing eugenicists, doctors, scientists and other professionals attempt to develop the movement into a one with core themes, developed goals, and particular ideals. “Ehe-Auslese” once again focused on the ‘unfit’ population, especially since by 1921 the economic problems in Germany only further expanded, meaning that supporting this unproductive sector of society appeared even more impossible. The discussion held by Society for Sexual Science and the Forensic Medical Association kept with the pattern of discussions in solely scientific terms, yet broke away from pushing for more research. Similar to this though, the Society acknowledged that providing these marriage licenses would be inconvenient. By acknowledging both the advancements and drawbacks, the movement’s middle-class supporters received the best overview of eugenics, as the inclusion of all information on eugenics meant they understood each part of the movement—not just the ‘positive’ advantages.

Throughout these first few years, the social welfare policies of the Weimar Republic, which initially appeared extremely liberal and beneficial, quickly became considered problematic and unfair. With unemployment rates soaring, the number of those using the welfare state drastically increased. To many in the middle-class it appeared that rather than these benefits helping the fit, they instead helped the lower-class and the unfit, who appeared to reap the benefits of a system that the upper-classes were forced to finance. Even more importantly though, remained the fact that even when on welfare, these lower-classes continued reproducing at higher rates than the fit population.³⁶ For the *Bildungsbürgertum*, this fear heightened both the urgency to halt population growth among the unfit lower-classes and to enhance population

³⁶ Richard Bessel. “The Aftermath of the First World War.” (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1993), 220.

growth among the upper and middle classes. From the point of view of the German eugenicists, the threat from what they considered the ‘weaker,’ and thus ‘unfit,’ people, would expand so rapidly that they would eventually grow more powerful than not only Germany, but the West as a whole.³⁷ This new and unhealthy state of affairs required not only that Germany and western Europe produce more people, but also that they produce the right kind of people.³⁸

As a result, Germany’s most important eugenicists, men like Fritz Lenz, Max von Gruber, and Wilhelm Schallmayer, sought to devise a series of reform plans and programs to offset the further anticipated quantitative and qualitative population loss. Proposals such as an inner colonization (back-to-the-farm) movement with privileges for large families; economic assistance to large families and consideration of the size of employees’ families in determining wages; obligatory exchange of health certificates before marriage; and attempts to awaken a sense of duty toward the coming generation, all fell under the branch of eugenics and race-hygiene.

As discussion over the importance of population policy grew, it became a public issue, thus warranting greater discussion throughout mass media. On December 23, 1921, the *Vossische Zeitung* published the article “Nachkommenschutz und Sozialpolitik (Offspring Protection and Social Policy),” which discussed this issue in greater detail. In particular, the article focused on the ways in which social hygiene, meaning eugenic proposals, could strengthen the individual and how the government could improve environmental conditions to help the ‘fit’ members of the German population and their offspring. Like the other *Vossische Zeitung*, this article was written from the discussions of der Berliner Gesellschaft für öffentliche Gesundheitspflege (Berlin Society for Public Health). The Society strongly believed that “every

³⁷ Weiss, 212.

³⁸Ibid.

living creature [was] a product of its investment and the external influences,” showing its dedication to protecting future offspring from the environmental factors that may affect their disposition, along with the genetic influences.³⁹

Grounded in the idea that “strong individuals make a strong world,” the article extolled the protection of the public health of individuals as one of the highest and most valuable assets of a nation, especially to a once powerful and nationalistic country like Germany.⁴⁰ At this time, many assumptions still existed about inherited qualities, such as what diseases one could inherit or how greatly a parent’s genotype effect that of their offspring, but the wealth of evidence from the use of ‘survival of the fittest’ in both plants and animals provided eugenicists with guidance about how selecting the strongest members of a group resulted in an overall stronger species. Thus, this persuaded to the Berliner Gesellschaft für öffentliche Gesundheitspflege that a way to control and change heredity existed, reinforcing among these professionals that their longtime belief in “clearly defined laws of inheritance” were unequivocally correct.⁴¹

Furthermore, the article explained, such eugenics-minded doctors, scientists, and other educated intellectuals maintained that a type of parental insurance and tax privileges that favored rich, large families, may be an appropriate way to improve the quality of the offspring throughout the Weimar Republic. If given an incentive to reproduce, these intellectuals hoped that the upper-classes with the ‘fitter’ genes would start to reproduce at higher rates, thus offsetting the higher numbers of children reproduced by the ‘unfit’ that currently existed throughout the Weimar Republic. The practice of eugenics, then, could effectively fight against the “threat of decay” that the inheritable qualities that ‘unproductive’ members of society passed

³⁹ Li, “Nachkommenschutz und Sozialpolitik,” Vossische Zeitung, December 23, 1921, Erste Beilage zur Vossischen Zeitung, Morning Edition.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

onto their offspring. By eliminating these genes or discouraging the ‘unproductive’ parts of society from reproducing, the stock of the German people could easily be improved, especially since “the accuracy of the presented ideas had been widely recognized.”⁴² Thus, eugenics grew as an accepted official policy, not just as a way to eliminate parasitic racial inferiors, but a strategy of national survival.

In order to achieve such measures, eugenicists first needed to pass certain legal measures. First, they needed to develop methods by which one could distinguish the carrier of the harmful genes—so who caused the offspring to inherit unwanted genes. This would allow eugenicists to definitively agree on who belonged to the ‘unfit’ sector of society and should be kept from reproducing, thus fixing at least a part of the growing population problem. Second, eugenicists needed to seek out the laws and ways by which these traits were inherited.⁴³ For eugenics to work as a solution to quantitative and qualitative population decline, eugenicists needed scientific findings as to the nature of how these traits were actually inherited, something that was not known at the time, as genetics still remained a developing medical field. Advancements in this idea would then allow eugenics to gather more support and become a more legitimate science. But, more importantly than both of these discussions remained the idea that public health protection of the individual was the highest and most valuable asset of a nation.⁴⁴ Without this protection, German society could continue to decline—both quantitatively and qualitatively—resulting in an extremely unfit, weak society that no longer enjoyed a place of power among the countries of the world. With this idea in mind, eugenics and social hygiene stood as one of the few options equipped to fight the growing problem of population decline.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Even with its highly professional tone, this *Vossische Zeitung* article still managed to make the desperation of the growing population decline evident. Though eugenics appeared to be the one of the only options to combat this decline, like other debates among professionals, questions about if this type of legislation would constitute an “embarrassing interference in personal freedom” still existed.⁴⁵ Among these intellectual professionals, while certainly predisposed to view eugenics as the obvious answer to the problem, some still refused to support legislation of any kind because it appeared to limit individual rights. This discernible attention to individual rights distinguished the nascent German eugenics movement from eugenics as practiced in other Western nations at the time (most notably, the United States).

Keeping with the pattern of *Vossische Zeitung* articles from 1919 until 1923, the doctors quoted throughout the article remained “inquiry-minded” about the movement, as they desperately wanted more evidence before choosing to follow or believe certain ideals. Even without the answers they craved, these eugenicists still believed—perhaps a bit too strenuously—that eugenic strategy would overcome population decline.

Since a clear answer did not exist, the discussion of how to save the people and increase the productive part of the population grew within the newspapers. 1922 saw unprecedented attention to the topic of eugenics within the pages of the *Vossische Zeitung*. Discussions on how to fix the growing problem of quantitative and qualitative population loss grew even more expansive. One representative article titled “Arzt und Geburtenrückgang (Doctors and Declining Birthrate),” written by Professor Rudolf Lennhoff, was published on March 28, 1922. At its core, Lennhoff’s article addressed the question of how Germany as a whole should respond to the clear population decline that occurred throughout the past century, but especially during and

⁴⁵ Ibid.

immediately after World War One. In a related manner, he described a meeting of the Ärztlichen Gesellschaft für Sexualwissenschaft und Eugenik (Medical Society for Sexology and Eugenics), which was a part of the Zentralinstitut für Erziehung (Central Institute for Education).⁴⁶

Unlike the previous articles that appeared in the *Vossische Zeitung*, “Arzt und Geburtenrückgang” was extremely deliberate in presenting the necessary conditions for Germany to regain its place as a competitive country. Instead of focusing on medical reasons for creating a stronger society through the elimination of the unfit, this article focused on the cultural and economic concerns. The doctors, Dr. Grotjahn, Dr. Teilnaber, and Dr. Voll, believed that the ‘unfit’ population had a devastating effect on the economy by draining the government of money it needed to support the healthy. Along with this, they held that the ‘unfit’ population culturally weakened German society, as they did not productively benefit Germany.⁴⁷ In order to lessen this damage, an increase in birthrate became necessary, but parents with a disability needed to first stop procreating as they “[were] not wanted and [were] undesirable.”⁴⁸ These doctors believed if the Weimar government continued to allow the ‘unfit’ population reproduction rights that the steady decline of German society, both quantitatively and qualitatively, would only continue.

At this time, those involved in the eugenic movement generally viewed human breeding as irresponsible, unless hygiene facilities were put into place as a method of controlling who was reproducing. Genetics needed to be used in order to ensure the highest quality offspring possible. If the strongest and healthiest families reproduced, the German population could be drastically improved; but, just promoting reproduction among the fittest families was not enough to sustain the country long-term. Along with promoting birth, the government also needed to

⁴⁶ Rudolf Lennhoff, “Arzt und Geburtenrückgang,” *Vossische Zeitung*, March 28, 1922, Erste Beilage zur *Vossischen Zeitung*, Morning Edition.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

prohibit those with unfit genetics from reproducing. Voiced by Grotjahn, social benefits needed to advantage the rich and healthy in order to facilitate the raising of children, such as increased incentives to those who are characterized as having strong genes and should be reproducing more often, instead of giving them to the unproductive members of society who did not work or were mentally ill, as welfare benefits were doing at the time. With these conditions in mind, Grotjahn believed that that in order to reverse the worsening population decline, every healthy wife needed to bear three children on average, thus resolving the problem of the fit reproducing less than the unfit, especially since social benefits would be put in place, which would encourage the fit to reproduce even more than three children each.⁴⁹ Though these doctors recognized that just promoting higher reproduction rates may not seriously advantage Germany, they still remained hopeful that the country would improve with the strongest and healthiest families reproducing.

With the harsh conditions of the Treaty of Versailles, they argued that limiting reproduction only to those who could help create a stronger society was absolutely necessary, especially due to the economic burden that the ‘unfit’ imposed on the rest of the population.⁵⁰

Like many of the other articles published in the *Vossische Zeitung*, “Arzt und Geburtenrückgang” still questioned what effect selective breeding would pose on the natural cycle of human development. The doctors feared that limitations on reproduction not only represented an abuse of individual rights, but also that it may not achieve the specific outcome they hoped for since there first needed to be more scientific experimentation and research conducted before they could make definitive claims. The tone of this article was more technical than many of the other publications in the *Vossische Zeitung*, as it mostly included debates between multiple doctors with differing levels of knowledge. Using such language, though, only

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

further alienated the lower-classes, keeping eugenics as a middle-class intellectual movement. These professionals, posed questions and suggestions that helped define the movement and showed what eugenics needed to accomplish prior to being used as a solution to the population problem.

Unlike many of the articles prior, this publication looked much more specifically into how to reverse the situation in Germany with direct focus on using so-called “positive eugenic” methods to improve society. Rather than a central focus on eliminating the unfit, the doctors meeting as part of the *Aerztlichen Gesellschaft für Sexualwissenschaft und Eugenik* sought to enact legislation that would encourage the fit to reproduce in larger quantities, thus creating a fitter society. The fact that the healthy, productive members of German society, especially those in the upper and middle classes, chose not to reproduce became an increasing fear among eugenicists, as they believed this would hurt Germany’s position as a powerful nation. “*Arzt und Geburtenrückgang*” used the discussions of these doctors to further the discussion over eugenics, looking specifically at what measures the movement should and needed to support, but still remained unable to answer any questions or make definite decisions about the movement due to the lack of available research and knowledge on the subject.

As doctors began to focus more heavily on the genetic aspects of eugenics through the idea of reproduction, the articles throughout the *Vossische Zeitung* turned more to a strict discussion on the topic of what genes caused an ‘unfit’ person to be unproductive and weaker than the rest of German society. Though this idea was previously discussed in 1921, especially throughout “*Arzt und Geburtenrückgang*,” the *Vossische Zeitung* never published any article discussing this topic in great depth. But, on September 20, 1922, this pattern changed through the publication of the special report for the *Vossische Zeitung* titled “*Die Vererbungslehre*

(genetics).”⁵¹ This special report focused almost solely on genetics, discussing what it entailed, its history, and how it affected the eugenics movement, allowing the newspaper to help citizens become increasingly aware of what ‘eugenics’ actually stood for.

Thus, the *Vossische Zeitung* aimed to educate the public and underscore the case for eugenics as the most viable option available to remedy German economic and social problems. With discussion on this topic growing, the timing of “Die Vererbungslehre” coincided with the movement perfectly. Starting with a clear picture of genetic research from the past 100 years, the article described each discovery of genetics until 1922, taking time to explicitly explain how this related to eugenics. The special report clearly explained the implications of genetics on eugenics through discussing the founding of eugenics, along with the different proposals, goals, and ideals it included. The author of this piece, whose name is unlisted, emphasized that actual genetic research did not exist prior to the last 100 years; therefore, genetics, and by relation, eugenics, were relatively new areas of study and investigation.⁵²

In 1828, the first idea of inheritance was created, allowing genetics to be further researched and discussed.⁵³ This article also included the first mention of Francis Galton, the founder of eugenics, which gave the article a much more educational basis than anything that appeared in the *Vossische Zeitung* prior to this article. By 1901, these experiments in genetics began, which resulted in the passage of eugenic legislation in many countries within a few years of these discoveries.⁵⁴

This special report recognized that even with all of the scientific achievement made throughout the past 100 years, that eugenicists needed further research to truly understand

⁵¹ “Die Vererbungslehre.” *Vossische Zeitung*, September 20, 1922, Page 4, Morning Edition.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

genetics—and thus how to understand the ‘science’ behind eugenics.⁵⁵ As a whole, the doctors, scientists, and eugenicists understood that some characteristics that offspring acquired were not inherited, but they did not know what caused this difference. This example was just one of many answers eugenicists lacked, but felt they needed to know before eugenics could become a nationally multi-class based movement. Many eugenicists also advocated an extensive medical-anthropological registration, meaning that a study looking at humans from the past to present needed to occur in order to truly understand these innate differences in humans, who inherited certain genes, and what diseases or ills appeared most acquirable.⁵⁶ These discussions resulted in a focus on the qualitative decline of the German population as fact, noting that eugenic measures were the best way to fix the problems within German society.

With this special report on genetics, the presentation of articles throughout the *Vossische Zeitung* appeared to change. Instead of including information coming from discussions of a scientific society or from specific doctors or professionals, this article broke down the information that these societies constantly discussed into laymen’s terms. As a result, more people could understand the proposals these societies preached, since the special report did not include the scientific language that only intellectuals understood. This change in presentation set an example for other articles, especially those that appeared within the newspaper from 1924 until 1929. Such a change foreshadowed the next step for the movement, in which the focus turned from the events and discussions of doctors to larger groups that looked to educate the masses and create more support for the movement outside of the intellectual middle-class. Similar to those before it, this article mentioned, once again, the need for an increased amount of research and experimentation before any definite conclusions about eugenics could be made. By

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

taking such a stand on the movement, even those who supported it the most fully proved that their deepest concern was creating what they believed was a scientifically accurate movement based in facts, research, and that gradually implemented ideals as popularity grew. Though, as this article explains, genetic research existed for 100 years and had been implemented elsewhere, German eugenicists still feared either limiting individual free will or enacting a measure that did not gain popular support.

By this time, discussions involving eugenics became common in an increasing amount of social groups and causes. During the first years of the Weimar Republic, eugenics gathered most of its support from the middle-class, but by the end of 1923, eugenic reform was mentioned in the discussions of legislation for “midwifery reform, alcoholism, tuberculosis, venereal disease, the so-called psychopathic conditions, and school health.”⁵⁷ Within each of these reforms, supporters believed that degenerate qualities could be isolated, resulting in an improvement of conditions for the ‘*vollwertigen*,’ the members of society that were considered of ‘full-value.’ Areas of social policy such as the prediction of potential criminals and other types of social deviancy started to rely on eugenic rationales as well, since the idea of eliminating the unfit related perfectly to the idea of limiting the criminal population. Each of these reasons made it necessary for newspapers, the main source of information at the time, to include facts about a subject once limited to those involved in medical or scientific fields.

Fear of both quantitative and qualitative population decline was a topic that defined the eugenics movement from its beginnings in Germany after the defeat of WWI. With no end to this decline in sight and increased concern over the welfare state, the idea of eliminating those harming the society—harming society either through crime, genetic problems,

⁵⁷ Weindling, 331.

or unproductivity due to mental illness or disease—grew popular among the intellectual middle class, “as it blended modern scientific explanations of poverty and techniques of enforcing orderly behavior with nationalist ideology of a fit and efficient body politic and devotion to future generations.”⁵⁸ Eugenics made the elimination of the ‘unfit’ seem like a real possibility to many, even though the doctors themselves admitted that not enough information existed quite yet to exploit eugenics for this purpose.

With an increasing interest in eugenics, from 1919 until 1923, the articles involving the topic of eugenics focused mostly on the presentation of the movement from the viewpoint of doctors, scientists, eugenicists, and other middle-class intellectuals. The resulting *Vossische Zeitung* articles contained scientific, technical language that isolated many readers, since this language could only be understood by the other intellectuals reading the newspaper. Thus, it is likely that the lower-class was incapable of understanding the tough language of the articles, in turn alienating them from the movement. The fact that only professionals discussed the movement during their meetings and did not involve the public in any of these talks, meant that the movement remained relatively limited throughout this time, albeit not solely due to this particular cause. As became obvious throughout the writings of the *Vossische Zeitung*, even those who knew the most information about the cause still had many questions about the true science behind eugenics and the want to eliminate the unfit. Throughout the articles, the professionals frequently articulated their hesitancy to put forth goals that contradicted the wants of the population or devalued individual freedom. Emphasis on these factors showed the rest of society that eugenics would be a gradual movement that searched for their version of scientific legitimacy and gradual implementation of policies and goals contingent on their popularity

⁵⁸ Paul Weindling, “Eugenics and the Welfare State during the Weimar Republic,” in *The State and Social Change in Germany, 1880-1980*, ed. W.R. Lee and Eve Rosenhaft (New York, NY: Berg, 1990), 132.

throughout German society. By following this set of beliefs, the professionals within this article dedicated to implementing eugenics through incremental steps.

Along with these ideas, eugenicists knew that along with more research, greater popularity of the movement was also necessary before eugenics could be exploited, but in order to put eugenics in motion, proponents had to reach some agreement on who was to blame for the decline of society. Though obvious to most advocates, the group that took the most blame for the decline was those with mental deficiencies, since many in the upper and middle classes resented the ‘unfit’ for hurting society, eugenic supporters blamed others as well. Industrialists blamed workers laziness and burdensome social coats, while workers blamed the businessmen. City dwellers attacked country people, who supposedly “gorged themselves [on food] while those in the city starved.”⁵⁹ Even though many were blamed, the ultimate problem always related back to the unfit, a group that consistently remained under scrutiny throughout the Weimar Republic, and especially during 1924 until 1929.

⁵⁹ Weitz, 139.

Chapter 2

Eugenics Popularized, 1924-1929

In comparison to the years of 1919 until 1923, the presentation of eugenics throughout the *Vossische Zeitung* from 1924 until 1929 drastically changed. Instead of following the pattern of presenting eugenics and related ideas, such as race-hygiene, genetics, heredity, and population decline, through a medical lens, the popular newspaper began to describe eugenics in laymen terms, focusing on reporting facts that people besides the *Bildungsbürgertum* could understand. Whereas prominent professors and other professionals of eugenics, genetics, or other predominantly scientific fields wrote or provided the perspective for many of the articles published from 1919 until 1923, during this period, journalists attended symposiums, lectures, spoke with leaders of the movement, looked at the progression of the movement abroad, discussed how the popularity of eugenics could increase, and all of the new research uncovered about eugenics and related subjects. As a result, journalists became the main writers of the *Vossische Zeitung's* articles on eugenics and heredity—a change that did not appear planned. Eugenicians hoped that using more education, and as an unintended consequence, the laymen terms used in newspapers, could help spread the message of eugenics and show the upper and lower classes that eugenics benefitted all ends of society, not just the middle-class. This change in journalism style and tactics also mirrored the changing eugenic movement in Germany and the growing popularity of the movement abroad, especially in the United States.

This new strategy of eugenics occurred at roughly the same time as the social and economic problems of Weimar also started to improve. Currency stabilization, thanks to a new currency and the Dawes Plan of 1924⁶⁰, allowed people to worry less about the degeneration of German society. The Weimar government was more prepared than years prior to support the ‘unfit’ population, since their existence no longer constituted as great of an economic burden during the mid to late 1920s as in previous years. With fear and desperation about population decline no longer afflicting society as severely as it did from 1919 until 1923, eugenicists began focusing on popularizing the movement in order to gain supporters outside of the educated middle-class. In order to popularize the movement, as existed in America, eugenicists soon realized that they needed support for eugenics among the masses—meaning support from both the upper and lower classes in addition to the middle-class—a drastic change from the policies that doctors and other medical professionals preached from 1919 until 1923.

With the advent of stabilization within the Weimar Republic, the way in which eugenicists presented the movement to the German people changed as well. Instead of a focus on what actions were necessary in order stop the population from further declining, eugenicists and geneticists turned to a new method, which presented eugenics using a different approach that would cross both class and race boundaries. Eugenics during 1924-1929 looked at education of the masses as the best way to endorse eugenics and elicit support from a broader audience. In order to do this, promotion of eugenics was necessary, and soon eugenicists found their platform through the creation of different societies on eugenics, race-hygiene, genetics, and heredity and by making eugenics part of college curriculum, although many called for the inclusion of this in high schools. Also vastly important were the international congresses held on eugenics and other

⁶⁰ The Dawes Plan, developed by Charles G. Dawes, delineated a reasonable schedule of payments for the war reparations and an 800 million mark loan from the United States. Weitz, 143.

related topics. These congresses were typically the largest meeting held on the topic, where leaders of the eugenics movement from countries across the globe would discuss the progression of eugenics within their country and what could be done worldwide to further improve the movement, spread ideas, and gather more support.

Equally important in the field of German eugenics was the growing popularity of eugenics abroad, especially in America, where eugenic laws gained large amounts of support and popularity from various groups of people. Eugenicists and geneticists, especially Erwin Baur, were “deeply impressed by the United States funding of eugenic record-keeping and applied genetics.”⁶¹ Thus far, the eugenics movement in the Weimar Republic had not reached the same level of popularity as in its American counterpart, but the amount of support the movement achieved in America became extremely important in the eyes of many eugenicists, especially since the eugenics movement in America reflected many of the same goals as German eugenics. During this time period, prominent eugenicists looked at the progress of eugenics in America as an inspiration, something they hoped to achieve within the Weimar Republic at some point in the future.

This new revamped version of German eugenics quickly took over. Although organizations promoting eugenics existed prior to 1924, such as the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene (Society for Race-Hygiene), the world’s first professional eugenics organization, which Alfred Ploetz founded in 1905, none gained much attention until the 1920s.⁶² Ploetz, a prominent eugenicist, whose interest in eugenics grew from his obsession with improving the race, led him to believe that the solution to the eugenic concerns was “the substitution of a

⁶¹ Paul Weindling, “Weimar Eugenics: The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics in Social Context,” *Annals of Science* 42, no. 3 (1985): 308.

⁶² Weiss, 207.

humane and scientific policy of rational selection for the *inhumane process of natural selection*.⁶³ Ploetz coined the term *Rassenhygiene*, which he believed encompassed a much broader scope than that of the term eugenics, “as it embraced both the measures designed to improve the hereditary quality of a population, but also those aimed at achieving its so-called optimal size.”⁶⁴ Keeping this in mind, he founded the Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene, with the aim of “[studying the] relationship of selection and elimination among individuals as well as the inheritance and variability of physical and mental traits.”⁶⁵ Like many of the proposals given by the medical professionals who supported eugenics, Ploetz and the rest of the society members enthusiastically encouraged marriages among members of the upper classes—healthy, productive Germans—who would create large families consisting of many children. As a eugenicist Ploetz embodied racial tendencies, but the society lacked a consensus on what constituted the ‘best race,’ instead believing that it was most appropriate to “rely on fitness as a guide...because fitness—both individual and social—[was] the true guiding star.”⁶⁶ Though the society wished to spread eugenic ideals and to serve as a model for what rational selection could accomplish, total membership remained small, but grew steadily, mirroring the class backgrounds of the members of the society’s founders and leaders, which relates to the fact that membership was only offered to white individuals who were ethically, intellectually, and physically fit.

Eventually, in 1924, the society gained some prominence. Published on April 1, 1924 under the title “Ehe und Gesunde Nachkommenschaft (Marriage and Healthy Offspring),”

⁶³ Weiss, 201.

⁶⁴ Alfred Ploetz, “Die Begriffe Rasse und Gesellschaft und die davon abgeleiteten Disziplinen,” *Archiv für Rassen- und Gesellschafts-Biologie* 26, no. 2 (1904): 11.

⁶⁵ Alfred Ploetz, “Denkschrift über die Gründung der Internationale Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene,” 1907, Ploetz family archives, Herrsching, West Germany, 3. Found in Weiss.

⁶⁶ Alfred Ploetz, “Ziele und Aufgaben der Rassenhygiene,” *Vierteljahresschrift für öffentliche Gesundheitspflege* 43 (1911): 165.

journalist R.L. wrote a piece on the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene.⁶⁷ At this meeting, the discussion turned to precautions that would make future offspring of high quality and durable, a subject that took top priority. Erwin Baur spoke on this topic, along with providing information on scientific knowledge of inheritance. The fear that “declining birth rate caused the downfall of civilization,” Baur opined, was still a matter of vital importance among Germans⁶⁸; because of this fact, eugenicists marked the mental and physical efficiency in mate selection a necessary factor to consider before marrying, especially because biologically, heritage proved much more important than the economic condition of a person. Baur listed what he believed constituted severe hereditary effects: “idiocy, imbecility, up to hysteria, or predisposition to specific diseases, such as tuberculosis, alcoholism, and syphilis.”⁶⁹ By mentioning these specific disorders, Baur explicitly told the public what diseases distinguished the unfit population—by connection, then, making anyone with one of these diseases a member of the unfit German population. By explaining what diseases qualified as a genetic ill, eugenicists espoused more concrete criteria. Before this time, the reasoning behind eugenics appeared intangible since eugenicists seemed unsure of what ills one could actually inherit. Since the society formed on the notion of scientific proof, the facts Baur stated gave the impression of legitimacy, a necessity if the movement was to gain traction throughout Germany.

The society also briefly discussed the idea of contraception, particularly birth control. With the feminist movement gaining momentum in the West, the use of birth control also grew in tandem. Baur quickly addressed the fact that the countries with the best mental and physical properties—nations such as the United States, Great Britain, and Germany—produced the fewest

⁶⁷ R.L., “Deutsche Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene,” *Vossische Zeitung*, April 1, 1924, Erste Beilage zur Vossischen Zeitung, 1, Morning Edition.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

children, “which could quickly bring down a people.”⁷⁰ A reduction in fertility due to birth control use among the upper-classes, as only the wealthy could afford it, meant higher breeding was impossible. Reduction in children, at least among the fit, hurt the country. Baur believed that limitation of births created a great misfortune for the country, and that oral contraceptive use needed to end, which related back to one of the original goals of the society: encouragement of large families among the wealthy and fit.

R.L. ended the article by briefly mentioning that people seemed extremely pleased with the society’s eugenic principles and its ideas on marriage and efficient progeny.⁷¹ This made the movement appear more popular and widespread, as the writer noted that the group in attendance belonged to no singular class or racial group. The meeting of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene was open to the public, and as the writer mentioned “probably about 1,000 people from all walks of life accepted” the invitation to attend the meeting.⁷² Instead of the limited medical, scientific, and intellectual crowd eugenicists typically spoke to, ample representation of people from all classes and “races” meant that more people heard the ideals and goals of the eugenics movement, further allowing the popularization of German eugenics. R.L. also mentioned Francis Galton, the founder and creator of the theory of eugenics. Through his mention of Galton, readers, who may not have been as attentive to the movement, had the opportunity to gain some background information on the movement. The inclusion of this information provided a backstory to the discussion of this specific event, creating a better-rounded article, since it looked to include additional information about the movement. Providing additional tidbits of information allowed for the layman to learn more than just information about

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

a specific society, which could possibly result in yet another supporter, especially if it appeared that the movement sought the inclusion of the upper and lower classes.

Journalists and eugenicists alike remained focused on improving the population, especially through marriage and guaranteeing these marriages only reproduced ‘fit’ offspring. In “Operative Verhütung des Verbrechertums (Surgical Prevention of Crime),” published on January 21, 1925, the ärztlichen Standesvereine der Luisenstadt (Professional Medical Associations of Luisenstadt⁷³) discussed the current issue of Bevölkerungspolitik (population policy) and the sterilization of the mentally disabled. Under this heading stood the article “Lebensunwertes Leben? (Life Unworthy of Life),” written by L.I. Unlike other articles, the speeches given by many of the doctors at the meeting of the Professional Medical Associations of Luisenstadt, especially Dr. Böster’s speech, discussed the steps to take if a child inherited a hereditary illness, a topic rarely discussed before since discussions typically focused on adults suffering from genetic ills.

Böster, a district doctor in Zwickau, Germany, believed that legalized sterilization could cure many of the genetic diseases plaguing German society. He believed that children who were born blind, deaf, or dumb, needed to undergo sterilization surgery once these children proved they could not attend a normal primary education.⁷⁴ Infants with such maladies needed the sterilization operation performed before even discharged from the hospital. Böster believed this same strategy needed to be pursued with imbeciles, epileptics, and the mentally ill in accommodated local institutions.

⁷³ Luisenstadt was a former quarter of central Berlin that is now divided between two present localities.

⁷⁴ L.I., “Lebensunwertes Leben?,” Vossische Zeitung, January 21, 1925, Das Unterhaltungsblatt, 1, Morning Edition.

While German eugenicists disagreed over the appropriateness of the sterilization of children, infants, and adults suffering from hereditary diseases, the 1925 article maintained that a clear consensus emerged among Germans favoring the sterilization of sex offenders (a group of people Böster's considered part of the *Minderwertigen*).⁷⁵ Though these ideas seemed radical, in America, such ideas had already been foundational to numerous state eugenics laws.

The author of the piece, L.I., explained that it was not always easy to determine if some of the diseases eugenicists and doctors wanted to treat were innate. Through mentioning this fact, L.I proves himself unbiased, as he is willing to point out some of the flaws of the scientific research of the movement and question the "facts" that eugenicists discussed, showing he did not blindly accept the facts provided by the professionals, especially since this was one of the major debates in eugenics at the time. Though some diseases were not innate, the regeneration of families could only occur by supplying "appropriate new blood."⁷⁶

In an effort to garner support for the controversial practice of sterilizing unfit children, a physician-advocate cited the American example, since sterilization used on the mentally inferior and criminals existed for some time throughout many American states.⁷⁷ Though Böster and the other doctors believed American sterilization laws set a prime example for Germany, they did not go as far as to support involuntary sterilization as many of the laws in America did. These doctors felt that before sterilization of 'demented' children occurred, the parents or guardians first needed to give consent to the operation.⁷⁸ On the whole, sterilization still remained relatively under-discussed because many saw it as a limitation on individual rights and free will.

⁷⁵ Weiss, 210.

⁷⁶ L.I., 1.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

This more radical approach to eugenics did not receive support from all eugenic and race-hygiene societies. During a meeting for the Deutsche Bund für Volksaufartung und Erbkunde (German Association for National Regeneration and Hereditary Information) and des Reichsbundes der Standesbeamten Deutschland (Federal Society of Registrars of Germany), where the new goals and practices eugenics led the discussion, the idea of “radical reforms, like sterilization, castration, or destruction of the ‘unfit’” appeared too radical and unnecessary to these societies.⁷⁹ Der Deutscher Bund für Volksaufartung und Erbkunde founded under the dedication to spreading eugenic ideas to all Germans, including the working class, a group of people that typically did not support eugenics. The civil servants that formed the Bund wanted to bring the problem of national degeneration and the possibility of national regeneration awareness to the largest number of citizens possible.⁸⁰ The Bund published two journals *die Zeitschrift für Volksaufartung und Erbkunde* and its successor, *Volksaufartung, Erblehre, Eheberatung*. These journals lacked the technical and scientific articles that scholarly journals typically included, instead focusing on simpler articles that the general masses found interest in. Both publications continued to warn about the dangers of birthrate decline and the tendency of the fitter class to have fewer children, which the society saw as the most vital part of eugenics.⁸¹

Under the title “Volksaufartung,” an article published on September 8, 1925 written by E.F.P. discussed the objectives of the two societies, both of which believed that eugenics needed put into practice. The current trend of the population movement, declining birthrate limited by economic and social considerations, was detrimental to German society. Dr. Baur, one of the speakers at the event, presented eight theses dealing with population degeneration and what

⁷⁹ E.F.P, “Volksaufartung,” Vossische Zeitung, September 8, 1925, Das Unterhaltungsblatt, 3, Morning Edition.

⁸⁰ Weiss, 220.

⁸¹ Ibid.

caused the problem.⁸² Of particular concern to the society was the fact that the government currently had no laws and practices in place to control “adverse” selection among men and women before marriage.⁸³ Most importantly though, this article was the first to make explicit mention of the ‘Aryan’ idea, though only in passing and relatively unimportant to the understanding of the article.

In this piece, the writing remained relatively unbiased and detached, and rarely referenced any personal thoughts or feelings on the matters discussed at the meeting. The writer left it to the reader to decide how he or she felt about the growing eugenics movement. The Bund appeared more conservative than many of the other groups at the time, since it lacked the same level support as similar groups for the use of sterilization. Though the society obviously felt that the ‘unfit’ caused a problem for the German population, the society, “was not ready to accept American-style sterilization methods as a means of alleviating the problem.”⁸⁴

Almost a year later, an article published on September 3, 1926 about the Internationaler Kongress für Sexualforschung (International Congress for Sexual-Research) released the aims and organization of the future conference, which planned to hold its meeting the following month. The article “Internationaler Kongress für Sexualforschung,” referenced Dr. Albert Moll, a German psychiatrist and founder of modern sexology, who invited representatives of the foreign and national press to hear him speak in order to discuss and educate them on the character of the Congress and its program.⁸⁵ Sexual research directly affected the ideals of the eugenics movement, as this research provided ideas on how to combat the declining birthrate through the

⁸² E.F.P., “Volksaufartung.” These theses can be found within this article.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Weiss, 210.

⁸⁵ “Internationaler Kongress für Sexualforschung,” Vossische Zeitung, September 6, 1926, Das Unterhaltungsblatt, 2, Morning Edition.

elimination of those with genetic diseases or sexually devious morals. Moll carefully explained that the sexual research discussed at the meeting was a purely scientific point of view and contained no speculation. He began by explaining that for the past 100 years, educators called for the sexual education of the youth in order to instill certain ideas in school-children about who they should marry—thus attempting to guarantee they picked healthy, rather than genetically unwanted, Germans.⁸⁶ As part of the fight against venereal diseases, plus an increasing discussion about eugenics, the Youth and Women’s Movement facilitated conversations about sexual research and education in the public sphere, a topic of great important for eugenicists. These 1920s calls for sexual education, the article maintained, would better educate the German public about the side-effects of marrying or reproducing with a person suffering from a hereditary ill. Boll stressed that nations using “social hygiene” and eugenic practices saw a drop in venereal diseases, and therefore, a decrease in the ‘unfit’ portion of the population.

The author of the piece mentioned that doctors and professors from all over the world, who specialized in the fields of sexology, eugenics, and race-hygiene planned to speak at the Congress, meaning that the German public had the opportunity to read about the views of eugenics in other countries, an important event for proponents of eugenics. By publishing the article a few weeks before the Congress occurred, the public had an opportunity to attend the Congress or look for more information in the *Vossische Zeitung* after the event took place. Timing publicizing of such events allowed eugenics to further permeate Germany society and continue to help popularize the movement, since every mention of the movement meant more citizens hearing about the cause.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

During this time, journalists wrote most of the pieces in the *Vossische Zeitung*, but some of the articles written about the eugenics movement defied this theme, such as “Ausstellung für Erbkunde (Exhibition for Heredity),” published on April 24, 1927 and written by Rudolf Lennhoff. Though his partiality towards eugenics was apparent, Lennhoff attempted to remove as much of his own personal opinion from the article as possible, except for mentioning that eugenics “[would soon be shown] with compelling clarity, that the greatest prospect for efficient progeny existed with men and women that [were] physically and mentally capable to reproduce.”⁸⁷

The article provided the public with important information about the Exhibition for Erbkunde und Eugenik held in Berlin in April and May of 1927, headed by the Director of the Medical Department of the People’s Welfare Ministry and the Society for Racial Hygiene. This symposium held discussions, exhibits, and guided tours each night. Along with this, the symposium invited scholars and population-politicians to speak about eugenics, hereditary, and the declining birthrate.⁸⁸ Many of the exhibitions dealt with issues regarding the effect of toxins, especially tobacco, alcohol, and syphilis, on reproduction. The exhibition also highlighted how World War I horribly impaired population aggregates and cultural advance. Pointing to the “change of the structure of the population over the course of industrialization,” which resulted in an increase of social misfits, loss of valuable working people, and a large decrease overall, eugenicists still believed this post-war problem remained solvable.⁸⁹ The way to fix the problem was to facilitate reproduction with much care in order to prevent propagation of the inferior.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Rudolf Lennhoff, “Ausstellung für Erbkunde,” *Vossische Zeitung*, April 24, 1927, Erste Beilage zur Vossischen Zeitung, 1, Sunday Edition.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

It is important to note that the entrance fee for the exhibition was affordable, with a discount for unions, schools, clubs, and other organized groups. This meant that the largest amount of people could attend the exhibition and gain exposure to the scholarly teachings, exhibitions, and research held within the exhibition. In turn, both lower and upper class individuals could afford to visit the summit, helping to create more discussion about the movement, and for eugenicists, hopefully more support. Unlike many other previous articles that just provided a quick review of a eugenic event occurring within Germany, “Ausstellung für Erbkunde und Eugenik” described the event in great detail, explaining what the exhibition planned to present, ticket prices, times, and daily events. Including this much detail then meant that *Vossische Zeitung* reader’s had enough information about the event to attend, thus furthering the popularity of the movement.

The following year, the Internationaler Kongreß für Vererbungswissenschaft (International Congress on the Science of Heredity), took place during the first week of September 1927. Written a few days before the start of the conference, Erwin Baur, chairman of the Institut für Vererbungsforschung (Institute for Genetics Research), invited member of the press to the Institute to present the results of heredity in a special lecture.⁹⁰ As with other events, the *Vossische Zeitung* published its take on the lecture in an article entitled “Professor Baur berichtet über sein Institut.” Though the scientific study of heredity was in its infancy, Western nations had carried out experiments in such for twenty years leading to a variety of apparently suggestive findings and conclusions. In order to further the research, the Institute set itself up for experiments with plants and animals, in hopes that it could continue providing new research in the area. Equally important, were the practical consequences of the composite science for

⁹⁰ L.I., “Professor Baur berichtet über sein Institut,” *Vossische Zeitung*, August 25, 1927, *Das Unterhaltungsblatt*, 4, Morning Edition.

population policy, eugenics, and medicine.⁹¹ Baur believed after more experimentation, eugenicists could produce any desired combination of characteristics, thus alleviating the problem of the ‘unfit.’ For these reasons, Baur set up the Institute to conduct research and experiments that could greatly improve Germany and its citizens.

The author also provided an interesting account of his own opinions over the Institute. After receiving a tour, he pointed out that “you get an idea of the variety of work done [at the Institute], which [had] a great deal of practical importance.”⁹² He also stated with certainty that it was regrettable that Germany only contained one of these national institutes, but expressed hope that Kaiser-Wilhelm Gesellschaft planned to add another institute in Germany. Once again, the German eugenics movement was compared to its counterpart in America: “In America, there are over a hundred of these institutions, so there is a great danger of failing behind [in Germany] and thereby suffering economic loss.”⁹³ Both Baur and the author of the article remained hopeful that through the spread of knowledge and research—facilitated by the conferences such as this one—the government would act by promoting the establishment of new institutions throughout the country.

Like the previous articles focusing in on conferences and large meetings, this one prominently headlined in the *Vossische Zeitung* helped further the cause. Since this article suggested that Internationaler Kongreß für Vererbungswissenschaft supported research institutions solely looking to advance the knowledge of science, it likely appeared extremely reputable to the average person, as it cited facts and exploited the prevalent fears of Germans,

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

such as the ‘unfit’ population and the idea of falling behind other countries both socially and economically.

As the years of the Weimar Republic went on, certain aspects of the eugenics movement appeared to gain more popular acceptance and even resulted in some governmental action, as seen in a full-page report in the *Vossische Zeitung* on “Sterilisation gemeingefährlicher Verbrecher (Sterilization of Dangerous Criminals),” and the dangers of inheritance.⁹⁴ Published on October 31, 1928, the article referenced a speech from Erich Koch-Weser, the Minister of Justice from 1928-1929, given to the Criminal Law Committee, in which he took a definitive position on the question of the sterilization of dangerous or habitual criminals. Though the government officials discussed all of these issues, the attention that the proposal garnered within media and the movement made it an important issue for both the government and the public.⁹⁵ Through the discussion, the author made it clear that the Committee and Minister of Justice supported sterilization of criminals and held the meeting to figure out the details of how the sterilizations would occur. The Minister and Committee members believed that this cause was only feasible if the country constructed two large institutions—one in the north and one in the south. The Committee decided that sterilization could occur in a select part of prisons, in order to preserve and maintain order, and only after the prisoner entered into special custody, but decisions about the design of the operation rested with the chairman.⁹⁶ Koch-Weser also offered the idea that in particular situations, criminals should only be sterilized under permission of the courts.

⁹⁴ “Die Gefahr der Vererbung,” *Vossische Zeitung*, October 31, 1928, Finanz- und Handelsblatt der Vossischen Zeitung, 4, Morning Edition.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

The government, although supportive of sterilization, made sure that this type of action only occurred for certain individuals, still believing that forced sterilization violated individual rights. After establishing how institutional sterilization could occur, the Committee discussed who should qualify for sterilization. Koch-Weser noted that the perpetrator, was the most important factor to discuss in deciding whether or not the criminal should undergo sterilization. Whether a criminal deserved to be sterilized relied on if the perpetrator was a danger to society or if the crime itself was dangerous. Only in situations when the criminal him or herself proved to be a danger to society could sterilization be a justified action; if a criminal was considered harmless, preventive sterilization was inappropriate.⁹⁷

Koch-Weser and his colleagues then compared the eugenics movement in Germany to the movements occurring in Sweden and the United States, countries where the eugenics movement—in terms of legislation—was more extensive and political influential. In 1928, 28 states in America had legislated sterilization regulations that prevented the “propagation of people who are harmful to society,” Koch-Weser emphasized.⁹⁸ For eugenic and race-hygiene supporters, questions over sterilization of criminals remained vitally important, as they believed that the sterilization of criminals could help decrease the population of the unfit, since many people with hereditarily weak genes would be kept from reproducing. Supporters still worried these actions were too radical to implement in Germany. At this time, many Germans did not see sterilization as a necessary action, since “someone who [was] sterilized could be as harmless or harmful as someone who [was] not,” relating back to the idea that sterilization could not stop a criminal from breaking the law.⁹⁹ Though perhaps not as useful in criminals, sterilization

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

could—and should be—utilized, the article maintained, in principal part because sterilization could guarantee a healthier, fitter society.

However, in the next section of the article—dealing with the risk of inheritance—the authored shied away from the idea of sterilizing criminals. The author believed that the sterilization operation needed to be completely safe before the state could be a party in carrying out this procedure. Most competent experts in Germany remained against the idea of forced sterilization, as there were too many gaps in existing understanding of hereditary traits, but the operation was deemed safe, especially for men.¹⁰⁰ Many thought voluntary sterilization should be considered though, as people with hereditary ills may see themselves as a risk and choose to take part in such an operation, thereby avoiding any fears of encroaching on individual rights. Though the belief in voluntary sterilization appeared much more acceptable and popular than that of forced sterilization, different beliefs existed for sex offenders, a group of people that most eugenicists agreed needed sterilized.

Like many of the other articles published in the *Vossische Zeitung* during the years of 1924 until 1929, “Sterilisation gemeingefährlicher Verbrecher” focused on sterilization and its presumed German population effects. This article in a matter-of-fact fashion actually began to plan out how institutionalized sterilization could nation-wide. The use of a neutral tone—similar to that of Koch-Weser—along with the *Vossische Zeitung*’s deference to experts on the matters of eugenics, which was especially obvious from 1919 until 1923, helped make this article appear more legitimate.

One of the last articles published during the 1924-1929 period helped define the next generation of eugenics and changed the tone that the *Vossische Zeitung* typically used when

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

discussing the growing movement. Written by author L.I. and published on November 1, 1928, “Unser Volk wächst nicht mehr (Our People are No Longer Growing)” faced the problem of population decline head-on, showing how necessary sterilization of the unfit was for both Germany society and the economy. The sense of desperation and fear of the author was palpable throughout the article, making it one of the most important publications in the *Vossische Zeitung* during this time.

The subtitle of the article, “Geburten Rückgang und Familie-Entartung,” perfectly captured the tone of the article, as it mainly focused on birth decline and family degeneration. Though a journalist wrote the article, the information contained within the writing was mostly scientific, putting the focus on how ‘fit’ families could combat the “frightening extent of the declining birth rate in recent decades.”¹⁰¹ In 1900, there were two million births a year; in 1928, there were only 1.6 million.¹⁰² For the author, the problem for Germany remained that the healthy part of the population continued to have the smallest number of children, while the unfit continued to reproduce at a much higher rate, thus causing Germany to no longer be a ‘growing people.’ Höheren Beamten (Senior Officials), who constituted part of the fit segment of society, had on average only one child, a number that needed to increase in order to keep Germany growing.

Another issue resulting from the higher number of ‘unfit’ related to the public expenditures spent in order to institutionalize this growing population. In 1928, there were 138,000 beds in 383 German mental institutions, a number that only continued to grow.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ L.I., “Unser Volk wächst nicht mehr,” *Vossische Zeitung*, November 1, 1928, *Das Unterhaltungsblatt*, 2, Morning Edition.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

Medical and nursing care required an annual public expenditure of 250 million marks.¹⁰⁴ To many, it appeared that this money could be better spent if not wasted on the ‘unfit,’ who just took up space at hospitals and did not provide anything useful to Germany society. Due to the incurred costs, the author bluntly stated that the important problems of housing and employment for the healthy remained unsolvable. With this in mind, the author believed that only one remedy to the situation existed: the popular support of eugenics. If the aim of the government and masses was to support the German future, then heredity and selection needed more governmental attention in order to combat the growing problems of Germany. In the current situation, “[Germans] decimated the carrier of culture, but supported the inferior,” a situation that needed reversed in order for Germany to regain their prewar power.¹⁰⁵

Drawing on the speeches and writings of Hermann Muckermann, a well-known eugenicist of the time, the author opined that the easiest way to fix the problem was instituting policies regulating marriages. Prior to betrothal, there needed to be an exchange of health certificates and a full disclosure of family history, with a particular focus on illness and cause of death for each deceased family member. Only once a couple completed this step could they receive a marriage license. The author believed without enacting this type of legislation, great harm to the population may occur. Thus, the promotion of family research became vital, as this would allow doctors, eugenicists, and the general public to complete their knowledge on inheritance with respect to the family.¹⁰⁶ The training of professionals, primarily of physicians in genetic research, was viewed as a necessary complement. Once this subject received attention at

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

all universities would doctors be properly experienced in the topic of inheritance; only then could eugenic measures truly be placed into legislation and governmental policy.

Focusing on the growing problem of the declining society, “Unser Volk wächst nicht mehr,” backed up this fear with actual statistics and solutions. The popularity of the eugenics movement, the article confidently predicted, would necessarily grow when “most people [were] familiar with eugenic thought,” it is likely that more people would react to an article such as this. Even the title alone was enough to spark fear in many and the harsh statistics throughout the article make it appear more legitimate. Unlike previous articles that set the pattern of using a neutral tone throughout the writings, the *Vossische Zeitung* presents much more radical conclusion than other writings, expressing an obvious bias about the eugenics movement and the need for preventative action in order to stop quantitative and qualitative population decline. This article resorted to using the worsening conditions of the country to create an aura of fear among the German people in hopes of creating more support for a eugenics movement. This writing helped show Germans just how horrible the situation throughout the country became, further educating the general masses about the true need for eugenics. This type of education allowed and promoted people to actually do something about the growing problem, as it gave examples of what must be done in order to combat the problem. The use of statistics, especially in terms of cost, showed Germans the huge amount of money that went into protecting the ‘unfit.’

Fear about the declining birthrate and the degeneracy of the population existed throughout large elements of German society, but even so, the radical beliefs of eugenics and components of the movement, such as sterilization, abortion, and birth control, remained of marginal popularity, relative to a number of Western nations. Instead of attempting to radicalize the movement, eugenicists remained largely focused on educating the general public about the

goals and ideals of eugenics as a way to drum up more support. The *Vossische Zeitung's* consistent publication of articles discussing eugenics, race-hygiene, sterilization, and population decline only helped make eugenics a better-known topic. Publications involving the work of eugenicists greatly increased during the period of 1924-1929, with the exception of 1929, when discussion on the economy and social problems of both home and abroad became the main focus of life due to the crippling effects of the Great Depression.

Even without any pertinent articles on eugenics published in 1929, the years of 1924-1928 saw a spike in of new forms of education through both the newspaper and the institutes and societies founded on eugenics. Education became vital to the movement, as this showed that more than just the middle-class should support the eugenic ideas and proposals. By having journalists write editorials, articles, and reports on the movement, instead of simply having a doctor or eugenicist write for the paper, the movement became more mass-oriented. This made the articles less technical and elitist as a whole, allowing the working-class to envision themselves as part of the movement, unlike before when they were blatantly excluded. The goals of the movement remained unchanged and even strengthened as time went on. Eugenics, it seemed, was finally becoming a movement with support from a larger percent of the population, not just a small group of intellectuals who appeared disconnected from the rest of society.

Chapter 3

Eugenics Implemented, 1930-1933

By 1930, the consequences of the Great Depression became increasingly palpable throughout Germany. Such devastation greatly impacted the lives of Germans—and it also greatly energized the nation's eugenics movement. The Depression resulted in the unemployment of more than six million Germans, which forced a reexamination of the continuing expansion of the welfare state, which supplied money to support institutionalized mental patients, criminals, and many other parts of society. During the mid to late twenties, the German welfare state saw further development, something that the country could not afford in a time of depression.¹⁰⁷ Throughout the Weimar Republic, citizens grew worrisome about the worsening conditions of the country and heard calls from industrial circles to trim Germany's welfare budget, believing that the money spent on the welfare state must be limited by the productivity of the economy. German eugenicists felt they had the answer to this growing problem in the form of eugenics, as it would eliminate the 'unfit' problem; therefore eliminating the excesses of the welfare state. Germany's hereditary defectives, who supposedly accounted for between eight to ten percent of the total population, constituted a heavy burden on expenditures.

¹⁰⁷ Weiss, 222.

In an article written by Hermann Muckermann, he noted that in order to support one institutionalized mental defective, it cost 3.45 marks per day, which resulted in a financial cost of over 185 million marks per year.¹⁰⁸ This cost seemed unreasonable, especially at a time when the country barely had enough money to keep healthy and fit individuals from starving. In Muckermann's opinion, the government needed to focus on reducing the number of hereditarily diseased individuals, a goal that could only be achieved through eugenic measures. More and more Germans, who once saw eugenics as an unnecessary and inappropriate measure, grew to see eugenics as one of the only ways to save the worsening country from losing the rest of its already declining healthy sector. During this crisis, eugenics seemed an increasingly appealing solution to the growing problem of the institutional costs of the welfare system. While the financial situation worsened to the point of effecting the private life of citizens, eugenicists offered the state positive reasons for the dismantling of welfare institutions, and the eventual drafting of sterilization legislation in 1932.¹⁰⁹

With the German people focused on the complete and utter destruction of the economy and social structure of the country collapsing, eugenics became less discussed during the first few years of this period, 1930 and 1931.¹¹⁰ Both the government and the people occupied their time thinking about how to save themselves and stay employed, and naturally the tone of the *Vossische Zeitung* followed this pattern. Instead of looking at the growing eugenics movement, as the paper did during the immediately previous years, most of the articles published during 1930 and 1931 looked almost solely at the progression of the Depression, the economy, social structure, and all other side effects of the Depression.

¹⁰⁸ Weiss, 223.

¹⁰⁹ Weindling, 135.

¹¹⁰ Only one article of interest was written during 1931 that included anything about eugenics, which proved to be irrelevant to this thesis.

By 1932, the *Vossische Zeitung* returned to a consistent focus on eugenics, but in a different light than before. Unlike 1919 until 1923, which concentrated on the opinions of those in the medical and scientific fields, and 1924 until 1929, which looked at education of the masses and the discussion of the movement in laymen's terms, the years of 1930-1933 combined both of these tactics, providing examples of both scientific discussion and the popular opinions of journalists. Along with the presentation of the articles changing during this time, the way the movement was presented to the public changed as well. From 1930 until 1933, there was a greater confidence in the movement, which was reflected in the articles throughout the *Vossische Zeitung*, but also due to the placement of the articles involving eugenics. During the first eleven years of the Weimar Republic, articles on eugenics mainly appeared towards the back of the paper in either supplemental sections, or the entertainment pages, but after the Great Depression hit, this layout changed drastically. Although some articles on the eugenics movement appeared in the back pages of the *Vossische Zeitung*, these articles were mostly printed within the first few pages of the newspaper, giving them a place of prominence. Since newspapers tend to focus on publishing stories that are important to their readers or have the largest impact within the first few pages of the paper, the inclusion of eugenics within these pages showed how vital the movement became for many parts of the German population, even among the vast destruction of the Depression.

With a growing prominence, eugenics blossomed into a much more confident, specific, and definitive movement. In previous years, journalists, doctors, scientists, and even the general public, engaged in debates, asked questions, and discussed what the true meaning of eugenics was; by 1932, these beliefs became concrete and questions about what constituted an 'unfit' member of society presumably had been answered. Late Weimar eugenics expressed even more

clearly a managerial logic implicit in German eugenics from its earliest days: “population could and should be scientifically manipulated” in the interest of maintaining power, protecting the people, and lowering the unfit population.¹¹¹ Instead of debating what eugenics actually encompassed, politicians, medical professionals, and journalists focused on implementing eugenic measures, rather than discussing the terms of the movement. During this four year time period, there were more articles published about eugenics than in either of the previous eras, another sign of the vital importance of eugenics. Along with this, more support also meant that eugenic ideas, once believed to be too radical to find support in Germany, gained traction among various parts of society—not just with the eugenics community.

In Weimar Germany, the most telling example of this development was the issue of sterilization. An idea once outright rejected, due to the fact that it lacked support, became the main focus of the eugenics movement during 1930 through 1933, which saw the first eugenic law passed. Each example of experimentation or advancement of knowledge involving the movement seemed to lead to the idea that after careful and detailed research, the idea of sterilization had finally proved to be a key possibility to help rejuvenate German society. Thus, at the turn of the decade, it appeared that the eugenics movement “had been institutionalized both in the organization of basic research in the country and in the medical and public welfare administration and was ready to take on tasks deemed important in the area of population policy and public hygiene.”¹¹²

Though international congresses and symposiums continued occurring throughout the Weimar Republic during this time, most of the publications remained focused on future goals, forms of implementation, and the best way to approach eliminating the growing unfit population.

¹¹¹ Weiss, 225.

¹¹² Weingart, 265.

Discussions that appeared throughout the *Vossische Zeitung* proved how confident the movement became. Unlike previous discussions held by eugenicists, where they debated what diseases constituted as hereditarily ill, during the 1930s, this debate no longer existed. Throughout its articles, the *Vossische Zeitung* listed the diseases considered a genetic condition, thus giving more reason for sterilization. Experimentation during this time helped Germans gain a better sense of understanding of why sterilization grew into a necessary part of the eugenics movement, as no other possible alternative could apparently so effectively fix the population decline. This sense of confidence permeated each part of the movement, especially throughout the articles of the *Vossische Zeitung*. The method in which many of the articles appeared changed drastically. During 1924 until 1929, articles looked at discussing different events, speakers, and symposiums in an attempt to popularize the movement, a tactic no longer used from 1930 until 1933. This era of eugenics focused on giving definitive answers to the problem of population decline, such as explaining what diseases qualified as a genetic ill or the need for legalized sterilization, demonstrating the greater confidence the movement developed during this time.

Though the eugenics movement looked to eliminate the unfit population, German eugenicists generally remained against birth control and abortion. Birth control advocates argued that access to birth control would allow poor women, usually those seen as unfit, to voluntarily limit their births, but the fear that the upper and middle classes would also take advantage of contraception worried eugenicists, as they believed that it would result in the fitter classes having fewer children.¹¹³

For the same reasons, disapproval of legalized abortion still existed widely throughout the movement. Eugenicists wanted to take action that would only result in a change in the unfit

¹¹³ Weiss, 220.

population—not something that could adversely affect fit German citizens as well. As Professor Rudolf Lennhoff wrote in a piece of the *Vossische Zeitung* in 1933, sterilization was better suited for the needs of Germany, as it was less risky than abortion.¹¹⁴ An article in the *Vossische Zeitung* from 1932 written by Max Grünhut, a Professor of Law, who looked at the idea of human depletion due to population decline, stated “it would be a fatal depletion of human power, a complete defenselessness of the woman to the man when the brutal means of abortion was used as a legitimate measure of birth control.”¹¹⁵

By the end of 1930, the articles printed in the *Vossische Zeitung* appeared confident about the idea that genetics played a huge role in determining the fate of the people and its level of ‘fitness.’ On December 28, 1930, the *Vossische Zeitung* ran an article titled “Wo hält die Forschung?” by Arthur Koestler, a well-known author and journalist of the time. This article spanned four different subsections that covered different strands of eugenic thought and the movement as a whole. These sections, “Erbgut und Schicksal” (Genotype and Destiny), “Rattenköpfe und Zwillingsanlagen” (Rat-heads and Twin Systems), “Der Mensch als Fotoplatte” (Man as a Photographic Plate), and “Geburtenrückgang und Eugenik,” referenced important matters involving the eugenics movement. “Erbgut und Schicksal” discussed the Kaiser Wilhelm Institut für Anthropologie and looked at its methods of research and the types of experiments. With the Institute divided into the departments of human genetics, eugenics, and anthropology, the core of these experiments and research was the “common threads that pulled [the departments] together: heritage and destiny.”¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Rudolf Lennhoff, “Freiwillige Sterilisierung” *Vossische Zeitung*, December 2, 1932, Das Unterhaltungsblatt, 2-3, Evening Edition.

¹¹⁵ Max Grünhart, “Eugenik und Strafrechtsreform,” *Vossische Zeitung*, September 8, 1932, Recht und Leben, 1, Morning Edition.

¹¹⁶ Arthur Koestler, “Wo hält die Forschung?” *Vossische Zeitung*, December 28, 1930, Erste Beilage zur Vossischen Zeitung, 1, Sunday Edition.

In the subsection “Rattenköpfe und Zwillingsanlagen,” Koestler discussed actual experiments occurring at the Institute, something that previous articles in the *Vossische Zeitung* did not cover in depth. Eugen Fischer, the director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Anthropology, led an experiment involving a comparison of rats and the genetic systems of twins. The experiment explored the influence of the environment on genetics and how this effected the fate of the individual. In this case, the rats were fed in various ways, in different amounts and differing levels of vitamins. It also used 16 year old twin sisters with the same genotype that the rats were given. Unlike the rats, Professor Fischer looked at the hereditary factor in the twins. The author explains that to examine the role of genetic material in the fate of an individual, it only takes an easy formula that produces almost mathematically tangible results.¹¹⁷ Though the exact results of the experiment were not given, the focus appeared to be on the idea that hereditary factors present the greatest influence on a genotype of a person, meaning that those factors need to be protected through the reproduction of the “right” individuals.

Koestler explained that this experiment represented how people resemble a ‘photographic plate,’ in that the environment around us, so nurture rather than nature, would affect the fate of the individual. Studies completed throughout the Weimar Republic resulted in a presumably clear picture of the relationship between the individual’s genotype and the environment. Hereditary factors were obviously the most important part of a developed genotype, but the environment created modifications of these inherited traits. At birth, medical professionals only understood a general range of certain factors, such as height, but the exact amount of influence the environment would have on each individual could only be known once the influence of

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

environmental factors, like diet, lifestyle, and family structure, developed.¹¹⁸ This experiment looked to prove that hereditary issues affect an individual more than anything else, meaning that his or her mental capacity exists at birth. Because hereditary issues were so vital, it then became necessary to eliminate the negative ills from the gene pool, which could only occur through genetics.

The final section of the piece, “Geburtenrückgang und Eugenik,” described what genotype and the environmental factors actually meant for the German population. Koestler argued that if these two factors solely determined the fate of the people, in order to make the German population more ‘fit,’ the efforts of eugenicists should focus on genotype and improving the gene pool as a whole, instead of confining their efforts to environmental factors. In Koestler’s view, it was obvious that quantitative decline in births posed an actual threat to the nation, especially since the population groups with “physically, intellectually, and ethnically valuable gene pools [were] a much rarer breed than those with inferior heredity.”¹¹⁹ The only viable way to achieve this end goal, Koestler concluded, was the practice of eugenics. These ideas would culminate in the sterilization of those with proven harmful heredity, meaning the insane and hereditarily predisposed criminals—or, as Koestler called these people, ‘freaks of nature,’ and moral regulation of the population in terms of quality by eugenic marriage counseling centers. Koestler ended his scientific discussion explaining that given the rapid development of science during the previous decade, the progression of eugenics was well within reach bringing him to remark: “the utopia of today is tomorrow’s reality.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

“Wo hält die Forschung?” discussed both scientific and non-scientific aspects of the eugenic movement. The presentation of the experiment, though complicated and probably confusing for most German citizens, remained an important part of public knowledge. Using both Fischer and Koestler’s explanations, the lay German, who had little scientific knowledge, could understand a vital part of the eugenic movement. Research and eugenic experiments made the movement appear more scientifically grounded, thus giving the movement more legitimacy and bringing the movement closer to the implementation of sterilization laws. The discussion of experimentation during the thirties also showed how far the movement progressed since the early twenties, as experimentation meant the movement had crafted concrete proposals and measures, rather than just an imagined set of ideals.

Many of the other articles that appeared within the *Vossische Zeitung* during 1930 followed the same pattern of discussing research and ways to implement eugenic measures based on experiments, research, or current population problems. The articles discussed the best way to implement eugenics and how to learn more about the genetic issues that caused an unfit population to form. Such articles debated “nature vs. nurture,” and came to the conclusion that both effected the genetics of a particular person. Eugenacists no longer discussed whether or not genetic ills existed, but rather the best way to eradicate the cause of the ills and diseases in general. As in previous years, these articles still looked at how population decline damaged the country, but also gave quantitative references about how to change this problem through legislative implementation, rather than merely airing debates over the best ways to remedy the situation. Articles from 1930 until 1933 discussed experimentation of eugenics more than the previous years of the Weimar Republic.

In January of 1932, with the need to cut welfare costs in mind, and persistent pressure from Muckermann and other eugenicists, the government took action. On January 20, the government approved a resolution by one of its representative, Dr. Struve, to “recognize eugenics and popularize it in every way possible and to decrease immediately the amount of money given out for the care of the defective.”¹²¹ On July 2, 1932, this resolution became reality when the Committee for Population Policy and Eugenics of the Prussian Health Council heard talks by experts on ‘Eugenics in the Service of National Welfare,’ which led to the adoption of several eugenic proposals, including a draft for a sterilization law.¹²² The Health Council only agreed to consider the law after a prolonged debate among members of the Deutsche Gesellschaft and the larger medical community.

This law only supported *voluntary* sterilization of certain hereditarily defective individuals and required verification that the defective traits were in fact genetic.¹²³ The law included no mention of sterilization on either racial or social grounds, only focusing on hereditarily diseased individuals. In addition, the Committee outright rejected the use of euthanasia for eugenic purposes. Several medical organizations inside and outside of Germany embraced these proposals; the only group to outright condemn the use of sterilization was the Catholic Church.¹²⁴ However, due to the political chaos following the deposition of the Prussian government by the Reich in July 1932, the sterilization law never became law under the Republic, though it later served as the basis for the Nazi sterilization law in July of 1933.

¹²¹ Weiss, 224.

¹²² Ibid. More information about the proposal and measures adopted can be found in *Eugenik*.

¹²³ Weiss, 225.

¹²⁴ Gerhard Baader, “Das Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses—Versuch einer kritischen Deutung,” *Zusammenhang: Festschrift für Marielene Putscher*. (Cologne: Weinand, 1984), 869.

Even though it did not pass into law, the fact that a sterilization bill reached the stage of serious government consideration points to a likely increase in support for sterilization. During the last few troubled years of the Republic, more people of varied political persuasions turned to this movement, and therefore the idea of sterilization, as one of the few effective ways of reducing the welfare budget and ensuring that Germany maintained its rightful position among the “cultured” nations.¹²⁵ By and large, mandatory sterilization was rejected by the eugenics movement in Germany, but the idea of voluntary sterilization resonated with most supporters of the movement. However, eugenicists that emphasized institutionalization and work colonies as a means of preventing the unfit from reproducing still existed.¹²⁶

Debates over legislation, along with fear of the growing ‘unfit’ population, dominated much of the eugenic discussion in the *Voissische Zeitung*. As the economic problems in Germany expanded, desperation did as well, which brought the topic of sterilization of the ‘unfit’ back into the center of debate. Though it seemed as if most eugenicists supported the idea of sterilization, the concern was that the general population did not.

In an article from July 5, 1932 titled “Eugenik und Sterilisation (Eugenics and Sterilization),” the requirements of state health (Forderungen des Landesgesundheitsamtes) authorities came under discussion. This article laid the groundwork for relevant penal reform. Within the topic of sterilization, the state authorities at this talk agreed that eugenics in regard to public welfare was an important debate, due to the social and economic costs of the welfare state at a time when Germany lacked the economic resources to support such an expansive

¹²⁵ Weiss, 225.

¹²⁶ Weiss, 224.

program.¹²⁷ They agreed that when the offspring of the genetically healthy steadily declined, while the inferior segment remained large, the growing unfit population endangered the nation. These discussions furthered the idea of what types of legislation or economic measures needed to be passed in order to create a better German society. Many of these ideas looked at legalized sterilization as the answer, but also noted how important the strengthening of the fit was for the population. State authorities felt that “the blossoming of healthy families must be sought through economic measures, such as compensation funds between poor and rich children, along with job creation and development” for the productive segments of society.¹²⁸ As one eugenic supporter succinctly wrote in regards to the German population problem:

[We] must ensure a high level of culture for our people only through a wise human economy (*weise Menschenökonomie*). Its goal must be an increase in those capabilities of the people who create a larger living space—that is, we must strengthen with respect to procreation, education, and employment all those who achieve high manual and intellectual work...At the same time it is absolutely essential...to limit the number of those who consume more than they produce, who make the struggle for survival of our people difficult, and who depress [the people’s] standard of living.¹²⁹

With this supporter’s comments in mind, the tone of the discussion shifted towards the question of how inferior progeny could be prevented with certainty. For authorities, there was only one solution to this problem: sterilization, since this would eventually cause the inferior parts of society to die out.¹³⁰ Like the other articles of the 1930s, “Eugenik und Sterilisation” followed the pattern of presenting a tangible set of ideas and definitions about the eugenics movement, which contributed to the aura of confidence the eugenics movement began to develop. Author, R.L., who wrote many articles for the *Vossische Zeitung*, treated the policies and ideas of the

¹²⁷ R.L., “Eugenik und Sterilisation” *Vossische Zeitung*, July 5, 1932, Erste Beilage zur Vossischen Zeitung, 2, Morning Edition.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ W.F. Winkler, “Bevölkerungspolitische Zukunftsfragen Europas.” *Volksaufartung, Erblehre, Eheberatung*, no. 3 (1928): 173.

¹³⁰ R.L., 2.

eugenics movement as if they were fact, rather than questioning their supposed scientific validity, as he did in many of his previous pieces.

Two months later, Max Grünhart, wrote an article for the *Vossische Zeitung* on the topic of “Eugenik und Strafrechtsreform (Eugenics and Penal Reform).” This article dealt with eugenics and the unfit population, specifically discussing the idea of the heredity traits of the criminal. Grünhart argued that the scientific work of penal reform should not stop due to the difficulties of legislation.¹³¹ He also considered the fate of the criminal reform movement in Germany of utmost importance, since modern crime policy revealed that the only effective way to overcome and prevent crime was to consider a wide range of social issues that shape crime. Whereas experiments involving other parts of the ‘unfit,’ such as the mentally ill, fixed in on hereditary qualities, Grünhart argued that for criminals, environmental effects on an individual were just as vital as hereditary factors.

Grünhart believed that if it eugenicists could figure out the exact proportion of inferior biological offspring existing throughout Germany, that a significant number of these individuals would qualify as having social difficulties. Therefore it became of utmost practical importance to discover if current research on genetics could specify symptoms of a biological inferiority in disabled offspring.¹³² He believed that once eugenicists discovered the symptoms of genetic inferiority that most criminals would qualify as biologically inferior and should be restricted from reproducing. With this in mind, Grünhart noted though that surgical infertility would be a crime-prevention measure that only affected the next generation, but do nothing about the current problem in Germany, since the ‘unfit’ would still continue to exist and take money from the government.

¹³¹ Max Grünhart, “Eugenik und Strafrechtsreform.”

¹³² Ibid.

Relating this back to sterilization, Grünhart believed that sterilization should only be allowed in situations where the patient gives consent. Forced sterilization laws, such as the ones in America, should be rejected—“not least for the reasons of professional ethics.”¹³³ Grünhart believed that forced sterilization would result in a fatal depletion of human power. With this, the legislature and its scientific advisors required the assistance of the medical profession, since the medical field had the greatest knowledge about the eugenics movement. To Grünhart, the fate of criminal law reform, relied on the continuation of reform in Germany.¹³⁴

The opinions in Germany mostly aligned with those of Grünhart, meaning that most only agreed with and supported the idea of voluntary sterilization, but abroad opinions on sterilization differed greatly. Many other Western countries who passed eugenic legislation, supported involuntary sterilization, as in America, something that Weimar Germany rejected as being too radical. Conversely, in places like the United States, involuntary sterilization found support from the majority of its citizens, as seen through public polls at the time. A *Fortune* magazine poll revealed that sixty-three percent of Americans endorsed compulsory sterilization of habitual criminals, along with sixty-six percent favored sterilizing mental defectives.¹³⁵

The next section of the article, written by Sanitätsrat¹³⁶ Dr. Friedrich Leppmann, looked at the agenda of die Deutsche Landesgruppe der Internationalen Kriminalistischen Vereinigung (German National Group of the International Association of Forensics), whose business dealt with abortion and sterilization. The group viewed sterilization as a medical problem and maintained that the topic needed to be discussed openly. The article continued with the topic of sterilization, listing multiple reasons in support, along with a discussion over sterilization

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Kevles, 114.

¹³⁶ This roughly translates to Medical Consultant

practices in the United States. Unlike in previous years, which discussed if sterilization should be legalized, this article (and the ones after this) viewed sterilization as a legislative necessity. Due to the events at the time, Leppmann argued that the reasons for authorizing the operation seemed immediately convincing. He also mentions the fact that preserving the fertility of the fit group of individuals only ensured the existence of a people, but does not stop new generations from breeding an unhealthy state.¹³⁷

Even if most agreed with the idea of enacting sterilization laws, Leppmann admitted that the formulation and implementation of such legal permission would be hard. Thus, three requirements must be met in order to make this passage easier: one, the health and life of the people sterilized must not be jeopardized; two, the risk that arose from the hereditary health of the progeny must be so great that it justified intervention; and, three, that sterilization for eugenic reasons needed authorization from the person undergoing the surgery.¹³⁸ With incapacitated patients (idiots, lunatics, incapacitated drinkers, for example), the relevant guardian or authority must decide whether to approve the operation on the basis of patient personal well-being, while non-incapacitated individuals cannot voluntarily agree to sterilization; in these cases the operation could only be arranged for by a special law.

Leppmann believed that this measure did not necessarily protect society from all of the unfit population from reproducing since “the typical drunkard, the socially sensitive and serious psychopath, the habitual criminal, and the congenital idiot or imbecile” all may have biological diseases, but that none of these people would make suitable parents, but since sterilization was

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

voluntary, they still would have the option to reproduce.¹³⁹ Thus, a need for a sterilization law existed.

The article then turned to a focus on the events in America. Leppmann tracked the eugenic movement in America, explaining how it began and the discoveries made that proved the connection between mental weakness and criminal tendencies.¹⁴⁰ As a result of these discoveries, Leppmann opined, sterilization in the United States had gained ground. In the United States, participating state governments, in terms of protocols, controlled sterilization extremely carefully, as a committee of physicians selected the people who would be prevented from procreation, along with the Welfare Department mandating its authorization on sterilization operations in the cases that involved inheritance of a mental inferiority. In practice, the laws were mainly used for sterilization of the weak or individuals with mental illnesses—but very rarely in criminals—and were usually carried out against the will of the patient. The article ended by stating facts about sterilization throughout America, further exemplifying why sterilization needed enacted in Germany as well.

German sterilization took inspiration from the America sterilization law, but what existed in America differed from the German law in one extremely important way: advocacy of involuntary sterilization over voluntary sterilization. In the United States, state-mandated involuntary sterilization was affirmed by the Supreme Court in the 1927 *Buck v. Bell* ruling, which declared that sterilization on eugenic grounds “was well within the police power of the state, that it provided due process of law, and that it did not constitute cruel or unusual punishment.”¹⁴¹ The Court’s opinion, written by Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, even stated that

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Kevles, 111.

a compulsory sterilization law such as this helped prevent the United States from being swamped with incompetence. This law instated compulsory and involuntary sterilization, meaning that once an institution determined that a mentally defective patient should be sterilized, that this patient nor his or her guardian had any little functional say on the matter.

The German law passed in 1933 did not contain any provision supporting involuntary sterilization. In order for an institutionalized patient to undergo sterilization in Germany, either the patient or the guardian needed to first give consent. Along with this, it had to be proved beyond a reasonable doubt that the patient suffered from a hereditary problem that could be passed on to the next generation. If doctors could not pinpoint genetic concern or the patient or his or her guardian did not approve the sterilization, then the operation could not take place. In comparison to the United States, what Germany chose to implement was a less state-invasive measure, since it only allowed sterilization with express consent of the patient. Weimar-era Germany focused on a gradual implementation of law, whereas the United States instituted more state-invasive laws that sanctioned involuntary sterilization.

Though the sterilization methods in the United States were more extreme than what German eugenicists lobbied for, using the currently-in-operation American state-based sterilization laws served as a valuable point of reference for German eugenicists. It is again important to note that the vast majority of Germans at this time did not support the idea of involuntary sterilization. What early 1930s eugenicists highlighted in the *Vossische Zeitung* generally advocated was a moderate version of the laws and actions carried out by a number of other nations in the early 1900s. Implementation of sterilization laws and even eugenic measures,

in Germany appeared much later than in these other comparison nations, although there were debates about this dating back to 1907.¹⁴²

Most of the articles of 1932 focused on the idea of sterilization and if this should be implemented into state law. “Freiwillige Sterilisierung (Voluntary Eugenics),” written by Rudolf Lennhoff, presented the German Doctors’ Associations request for the adoption of a sterilization law, which they addressed to the Ministry of the Interior.¹⁴³ At a meeting of the State Health Council, the Doctors’ Association debated the issues of eugenics and sterilization. At the end of its discussion, it contained a draft of a sterilization law, which the Welfare Minister forwarded to the Minister of the Interior. Under the existing laws in Germany, eugenic sterilization was considered a criminal assault, meaning that a new law needed to be created in order to repeal the existing law and create a legalized system of sterilization that the government could regulate.¹⁴⁴ Lennhoff mentioned that at this meeting, many involved in the discussion requested the inclusion of forced sterilization in the draft, but that he personally believed the law should only be concerned with the consent of those involved in the operation, meaning that only the person, who was to undergo the operation, or their legal guardian/caregiver were the only necessary components to grant authority.

The draft created by the State Health Council included provisions for how the sterilization operation and processes leading up to the operation would function. A committee, consisting of a guardianship judge and two physicians held responsibility for deciding if a certain person should undergo the sterilization surgery.¹⁴⁵ At least one of the two physicians needed to have experience and training in human genetics as well. Within the decision that the doctors and

¹⁴² Weiss, 225.

¹⁴³ Lennhoff, “Freiwillige Sterilisierung.”

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

judge issued, they had to include the reasons for either approval or rejection of the request for sterilization. Along with these provisions, only a registered medical doctor in Germany could perform the sterilization and the work of the committee nor the operation itself should be of any cost to the individual under question; all monetary cost would be the responsibility of the Welfare Association. The German law provided many provisions that guaranteed the process of sterilization would remain consistent with each patient, which would help create a strict system of sterilization.

In order to gain eligibility for eugenic sterilization, persons must suffer from hereditary insanity, mental deficiency, hereditary epilepsy, or any other hereditary disease or carrier of morbid heredity, if according to the teachings of medical research that their offspring would have a high likelihood of a physical or mental hereditary problem.¹⁴⁶ The legislation draft also argued that an economic burden was apparent without sterilization: the expanding number of the hereditarily diseased would increase both welfare system expenses and burdens on the prison system. If the inferior class continued to reproduce at that current rate, more than 100 million marks, if not twice that amount, would be necessary to maintain institutions and welfare for the mentally disabled annually, making sterilization an absolute necessity in order to sustain German society.¹⁴⁷ Those drafting the legislation argued that though there may be other options to help decrease the inferior population's reproductive rate, such as abortion, eugenic sterilization better suited their need than abortion since it was less risky.

Lenhoff outlined the exact terms of the drafted sterilization law, which when compared to other laws abroad, was more cautious in nature. The bill focused on economic reasons for sterilization and felt that operation should only occur when it was clear that the hereditary ill of

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

an individual effected their ability to live each day like a normal citizen. Also, the fact that this was the first eugenic law discussed in the public sphere made it extremely important. German eugenicists finally gathered sufficient political support to pass a law that eugenicists developed ideas for back in the early 1900s. The fact that Lennhoff wrote the article is important as well, since he was well-known throughout the general public for his work with eugenics, making him a presumably credible source on the topic.

The discussion over the problem of the diseased, especially ill offspring, continued through 1933. Published on June 28, 1933, “Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses (Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring),” discussed how Wilhelm Frick, Minister of the Interior and a leader of the Nazi Party, planned to submit a new law to the *Rasserrat* (race council). This new law was the work of the recently appointed Expert Advisory Board for Population and Racial Policies from its first meeting, which wrestled with many of the problems plaguing Germany, especially the problem of qualitative and quantitative population decline and the burden of the welfare state. The Advisory Board believed its most difficult task was ending the ethnic and cultural decline of Germany, something the Board blamed on the constant decline of births.¹⁴⁸ Eugenicists, and the German population alike, feared the “Verfall der Familie,” decline of the family, a problem that many felt needed reversed, but that they did not have an answer to.

For Dr. Frick, the cause of this problem, which he qualified as a racial problem, was the large number of unemployed Germans. He argued that the nation remained under the impression that everything would be fine once everyone got back to work, but that this was in fact, not the case.¹⁴⁹ This false belief rang especially true for the educated classes, who assumed once the

¹⁴⁸“Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses.” Vossische Zeitung, June 28, 1933, 1, Evening Edition.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

economy improved, then the “rest [of society] would take care of itself.”¹⁵⁰ But, as Frick explained, this action alone could not save the German people, since a restoration of both the economic and nutritional foundation of the state became necessary. In order to create meaningful change throughout German society, Frick argued that the German government needed to first completely reconstruct the legislation system and reduce the burden of the *Minderwertigen*.

With this in mind, Frick reasoned that this type of “modern humanity and social care for the sick, weak, and inferior individuals, [would] by and large, have the largest impact on the people, and eventually lead to [humanity’s] downfall.”¹⁵¹ In order to avert impending doom, as Frick bluntly explained, a conversion of the entire public health system and a transformation of the tasks of “race-hygiene” in terms of population and racial politics became a growing necessity. Therefore, the government needed sweeping change within the healthcare system, which could only occur once the government and healthcare professionals performed the core of their duties. To increase the number of healthy descendants throughout the country, the government first had the duty to reduce expenditures for anti-social elements, the hopelessly inferior hereditary illnesses, and reproduction of difficult hereditary predispositions.¹⁵² With the increasingly accurate amount of scientific research over the past decade, which gave Germany the opportunity to see the connections of heredity and its effect on the people, Germans had a right and moral duty to eliminate the difficulty of genetically diseased persons from reproduction. Keeping this thought in mind, Frick introduced the bill for the *Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses*.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

The second part of the article, “Rassenhygiene und Rassenpolitik (Race-Hygiene and Race-Politics),” focused on *Familienfreundliche Gesetzgebung* (family-friendly legislation). This looked at how eugenic legislation would affect the healthy and superior parts of society. Frick believed this could achieve success through so-called “positive” population policies, family formation, and the sufficient propagation of valuable genetically healthy Germans.¹⁵³ Weimar Germany’s laws and practices favored the poor children and the childless, rather than the wealthy and larger families. With the conditions that Weimar Germany created, only with an extreme restriction in diet, recreation, education, personal care, clothing, and shelter could large families actually survive. Instead of destroying large families, the German government needed to do everything in their power to support them. In order to fix this worsening pattern, the German government needed to create a more differentiated tax rebate balance. Likewise, the remuneration of officials needed to graduated more effectively by marital status and number of children, since “the salary of civil servants [was] not just a reward,” but rather to give them sufficient funds to support their family.¹⁵⁴ Frick argued that each state official needed to have at least three or four children in order to help German society reverse the obvious decline of the family. Tax-rebates would thus be based on each family’s income and the number of children they reproduced. Looking at the difficult financial situation of Germany, the states, municipalities, and industry required implementation of family-promoting measures that would result in relief, which could only occur by standardizing the social security system, as this would allow the country to focus on conserving genetically healthy families.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ “Rassenhygiene und Rassenpolitik,” *Vossische Zeitung*, June 28, 1933, 3, Evening Edition.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Part of this problem could easily be solved by banning mixed marriages and keeping woman at home and out of the work force. Frick felt that Germany required a return to traditional familial values. He stressed that the situation in Germany necessitated greater education on racial hygiene within schools, since this would instill eugenic values in children while still easily influenced, and even more broadly throughout the country. Though education remained important, the root of the problem stemmed from infertility, illness, and wayward husbands, since these matters put women most at risk for producing unfit children.¹⁵⁶ Mixed marriages “with a foreign race” must be avoided, as this only created further degeneracy and destroyed healthy hereditary by mixing a healthy, fit German, with inferior mental and physical traits. Thus, Frick believed the greatest task and duty of the National Socialist Worker’s Party (NSDAP) was to ensure that degeneracy of the population ended and to maintain the superior hereditary of all fit Germans.¹⁵⁷

It is important to note that by this time, National Socialist leaders controlled parts of the government, meaning that Nazi legislation and ideas were often discussed throughout Germany and enacted by the newly formed radicalized government. This transition of power from the Weimar Republic to the Third Reich started to take place in March of 1933, when the Enabling Act passed, giving Hitler the power to pass laws without approval of the Reichstag, which is often considered the collapse of the Weimar Republic and the beginning of the Third Reich Era. Frick’s provisions about banning mixed marriages were not publicly aired during the Weimar Republic, but logically they related to the fear of population decline and decay that the German society feared. The ideas behind the arguments against mixed marriages related to these eugenic

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ The NSDAP came to power in March of 1933, with the adoption of the Enabling Act, which was the cornerstone of Hitler’s seizure of power.

proposals, as Frick claimed the banning of mixed marriages with foreign races would help protect the German population from creating larger ‘unfit’ population, since, in Frick’s opinion, ‘foreign races’ constituted part of the unfit population that caused the German people to degenerate.

On July 14, 1933, the *Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses*) passed into law. Unlike the failed proposal in 1932, the Nazi law allowed mandatory sterilization of those who, in the opinion of the *Erbgesundheitsgericht* (genetics health court), were afflicted with “congenital feeble-mindedness, schizophrenia, manic depressive insanity, genetic epilepsy, Huntington’s chorea, genetic blindness, and genetic deafness.”¹⁵⁸ Those suffering from serious alcoholism could also be sterilized. Importantly though, the *Gesetz* contained nothing about race or any provisions for sterilization based on racial grounds. The legislation called for the establishment of genetic health courts and supreme courts to adjudicate the law, which were presided over by a lawyer and two doctors, with at least one expert in the field of heredity and the other employed by the state.¹⁵⁹

A few days later on July 26, 1933, the *Vossische Zeitung* published an article focused on explaining the new law passed by the government. “Kampf den Erbkranken (War on Hereditary Diseases),” explained to the newspaper’s readers exactly what the *Gesetz* legalized by addressing each provision of the law, extracting its true meaning, and putting it into laymen’s terms, which allowed each German citizen to read and understand what the law actually approved.¹⁶⁰ The article first listed each illness that could result in mandatory sterilization, explaining that these diseases were important demographic issues that produced disabled and biologically inferior

¹⁵⁸ Weiss, 229.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ “Kampf den Erbkrankheiten,” *Vossische Zeitung*, July 26, 1933, 1, Evening Edition.

genetics.¹⁶¹ Eligible applicants for sterilization needed to have a caregiver, guardian, a tenured doctor, or a head of the institution where the individual resided to approve the surgery, though it could be mandated without approval. In most cases, a second doctor, who was extremely familiar with eugenics, consulted the individual for assessment, as they checked the so-called “inheritance probability” on a case-by-case basis. From this information, the doctors needed to prove with great probability that the offspring of a particular individual would suffer from severe mental and physical hereditary problems.¹⁶² Only after these steps, would doctors give their consent to the procedure.

Along with these provisions, a seat at each district court was held for the *Erbgesundheitsgericht*. The law explicitly stated that anyone involved in the application for sterilization process must be excluded from attending the court’s proceedings. It also maintained that no part of the process could be public and that the highest court made the final decision on the sterilization, which was completed through a simple surgical procedure performed at a hospital. The doctors that performed the operation were selected according to the principles of “special scientific training,” though the publication did not provided many details on this method.¹⁶³ If the court decided to perform the operation, it had the power to do it against the will of the patient, though usually chose not to. The synopsis of the law provided within the article would be put into effect starting January 1, 1934.

The article indeed discussed the law in great detail, which created a level of transparency within the government that many countries did not have. Therefore, the general population was provided with specific knowledge on the newly-created legal system and the way that

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

sterilization would be performed. “Kampf den Erbkrankheiten” appeared on the front page of the morning paper, meaning that even if one glanced at the paper he or she would see the headline. This article used both education and medical knowledge to help explain the law, since it used both lengthy explanations of each provision section of the law and talked about the medical parts of the law by explaining the inherent logic behind the legislation.

Whereas in past years this law would have been viewed as extremely radical, apparently a good number of Germans, who supported eugenics, viewed the law as an acceptable piece of legislation. Certainly the unnamed author of the *Vossische Zeitung* article accepted the new law without challenge. The author did not explain the topics discussed within the article, as would have been necessary during previous years of the Weimar Republic. Names, ideas, and actions were noted with certainty, as if all Germans familiarized themselves with these different topics, meaning they no longer needed an explanation, showing just how prominent eugenics became in society.

The last few years of the Weimar Republic, 1930-1933, adapted to a new method of discussion over the eugenics movement. Realizing that both the use of medical knowledge and scientific fact presented by professionals and unbiased work by journalists using laymen’s term, with a focus on educating the masses, helped gain support for the blossoming eugenic movement, the *Vossische Zeitung* combined these techniques to create the most well-rounded eugenic supporters, who understood all aspects of the movement. These supporters understood the ideas, the experiments, the legislation, the names, and the needs of the movement, in turn, creating an extremely well-informed movement. Even though during 1930 and 1931 publications on the subject of eugenics decreased drastically, the blame for this seemed to be the worsening conditions of the Depression—something that eugenicists eventually used to their advantage. By

fixating on the burgeoning public expenses of protecting and supporting the unfit and hereditarily diseased, coupled with the fact that the healthy members of society were growing destitute, eugenicists convinced wider numbers of Germans of the benefits of eugenic measures. Desperation created a society that could not care for both the sick and the healthy, thus the belief that sterilization could control the unfit population grew in popularity.

During the mid to late twenties, the promotion of eugenics through mass education of the German people meant that most of the population grew familiar with eugenics and the principles of the eugenics movement in the Weimar Republic. By 1932, the *Vossische Zeitung*'s presentation of the movement proved that the actions by journalists and eugenicists from 1924-1929 worked. The articles during the early 1930s presented ideas, people, and positions as if everyone understood what they meant without any explanation. Many of these articles, especially those published in 1933, appeared in the first few pages of the *Vossische Zeitung*, rather than in much later pages that likely did not have as many readers. This was also a testament to how far the eugenics movement grew within a little over a decade, from a movement supported by the middle class and medical professionals, to one with well-rounded support that graced the front pages of a trusted newspaper.

The passage of the *Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses* ushered in a new era of eugenics, which finally placed the fit and productive members of society above those who depended on government support in order to survive. But, this law occurred under a new, extremely radical, and volatile government. The passage of this law, along with the Enabling Act of 1933 four months earlier, finally proved that the Weimar Republic ceased to exist, ushering in a new era of Nazi politics.

Conclusion

The sterilization law of 1933, which went into effect in 1934, gave eugenicists their first large-scale state recognition; it furthermore expanded their activities much along the lines they fought for throughout the years of the Weimar Republic.¹⁶⁴ Subsequent years under the Nazi regime brought more recognition and state affirmation for the growing eugenics movement. By 1935, the Nazi party passed two more eugenic laws during the Nuremberg convention. *Zum Schutze des deutschen Blutes und der deutschen Ehre* (the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor) focused on protecting the purity of the race and made intercourse and marriage between German citizens and Jews illegal.¹⁶⁵ This law fulfilled the demands of the older, more radical, and extremely racist side of the eugenics movement, which the Nazi party—and some non-Nazi eugenicists as well—supported even before their rise to power. The passage of this law appeared as a turning point in Germany, as the eugenics movement during the Weimar Republic did not directly focus on supporting an overtly racial cause, which was rarely discussed throughout the pages of the *Vossische Zeitung*. Though racial eugenicists existed throughout the Weimar Republic, these racial aspects of the movement were evidently understated, as fears about the growing quantitative and qualitative population decline became the main focus during this time, resulting in discussions on the elimination of these genetically unfit Germans or an higher reproduction rate of the healthy Germans, rather than an attempt to

¹⁶⁴ Weingart, 274.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

eliminate a certain race. Although racist aspects of the movement always existed, this radical side of eugenics typically garnered much less support than the brand of eugenics that wanted to create a more fit population.

In comparison to the *Gesetz, Zum Schutze des deutschen Blutes und der deutschen Ehre* confirmed that the movement started to change under the newly formed government. Instead of looking at increasing the fit population of Germany and building more powerful society by merely disallowing the ‘unfit’ to reproduce or through encouragement of higher reproductive rates among the healthy, the NSDAP developed an overtly racist movement that focused on ridding Germany of, or at least lessening the amount of, people that the Nazis did not consider “German,” by using of both negative and positive eugenic measures. The Jewish population, who eugenicists once considered superior, became a poisonous group of outsiders that did not belong in Germany or German society, thus these people needed to stop reproducing and spreading their undesirable qualities, especially with “healthy” Germans.

The second law passed by the Nazi party as part of the Nuremberg laws¹⁶⁶ was *Staatsangehörige deutschen oder artverwandten Blutes* (the Law for the Protection of Hereditary Health of the German People), which required mandatory marriage counseling and stipulated that marriage permits only be granted after the government issued a health certificate for both marital parties. Unlike *das „zum Schutze des deutschen Blutes und der deutschen Ehre,”* the second law reflected demands of eugenicists dating back to Wilhelmine Germany.¹⁶⁷ The topic of marriage licenses often saw discussion throughout Weimar Germany as a way to make sure that people, who hoped to reproduce, did not have any hereditarily-ill traits that children could

¹⁶⁶ The Nuremberg Laws were anti-Jewish statutes enacted by Germany in September of 1935, marking a major step in solidifying racial policy and Aryan society.

¹⁶⁷ Weingart, 274.

inherit, and as a result, causing a further decline in German society. Unlike this Nazi law, though, what Weimar eugenicists hoped to see legalized dealt less with race and dealt much more with essentially economic definitions of class. Weimar eugenicists, then, opted for a movement where the focus was the poor, as they typically were the members of German society (the eugenicists claimed) that were burdened by these genetic diseases and hereditary-ills.

Beyond these two laws, many other measures that eugenicists supported prior to the Nazi rise to power became law during the first few years of the new regime: a law providing for the inheritance of farms and settlements (1933), the standardization of the public health system (1934), and the provision of financial support for young couples that paralleled how many children they had. These laws, together with the help of various governmental organizations, created an all-encompassing system of “efforts to keep the race pure and for the convalescences of [their] people.”¹⁶⁸ With this goal in mind, Nazi eugenics looked to include eugenics in as many facets of life as possible. The “systematized” knowledge of eugenics earned its place in textbooks, recruitment and educational curriculum became formalized, which made eugenics more prevalent in everyday society.

As society became more entangled with Nazi policy, the movement that the *Vossische Zeitung* discussed and supported during the Weimar Republic almost ceased to exist, as the focus of the movement greatly shifted from class and genetic ills to race. Though the research conducted during the Nazi era generally resembled the experiments during the Weimar Republic, the implementation of eugenics drastically differed. Five years after the first eugenic piece of legislation passed, an estimated 200,000 to 400,000 people were sterilized under the *Gesetz*.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Max Fischer, “Adolf Hitler und die Rassenhygiene,” *Psychiatrisch-neurologische Zeitschrift*, 1939, 41: 176-178, 178.

¹⁶⁹ Weiss, 230.

All of these passed through the genetic court system, but most were sterilized against their will, contradicting the original provisions of the *Gesetz*. Estimates believe that slightly more than half of all operations were performed on the feeble-minded, an action that Weimar eugenicists wanted to see occur during the Weimar Republic as well. During the first three years of the *Gesetz*, at least 367 women and 70 men died due to complications following the sterilization procedure, something that the government guaranteed was extremely safe.¹⁷⁰

As it appeared during the Weimar Republic, the eugenic movement that was supported by parts of the general public and discussed by medical professionals, journalists, the scientific community, and eugenicists alike, based itself on the idea of creating a more powerful German nation and improving the population as a whole, as the German population continued to decline both quantitatively and qualitatively during the aftermath of World War One. Throughout the first period of the Weimar Republic from 1919 until 1923, journalists mostly wrote about eugenics from a medical standpoint, meaning they used very few laymen's terms, as discovered in the *Vossische Zeitung*. Since the terminology used by these medical professionals generally exceeded the knowledge that laymen Germans had, the movement remained relatively limited to support within the intellectual middle-class. At this time, eugenics appeared as more of an "imagined" movement, where those in charge of the movement discussed the advancements that were first necessary before eugenics could gain a popular beyond just the middle-class intellectuals. More or less, this period focused on the need for research in order to find the evidence behind the need for the implementation of eugenic measures. Professional eugenicists at this time specifically feared the effects of World War One on both the economic and social spheres of Germany, which made the need for eugenics extremely vital in their minds.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

Soon, eugenicists realized that they needed to focus on popularizing the movement for the masses, rather than just preaching the need for eugenic measures to those who already supported its beliefs. By 1924, this change in methodology grew obvious in the *Vossische Zeitung*, as many of the articles were written from the viewpoint of journalists, rather than just that of doctors or scientists, who understood advanced knowledge on the topic. In order to popularize the movement, Germany held many different international congresses, talks, symposiums, and events in order to attempt to create a more educated German population, especially focused on reaching those outside of the middle-class. These actions, along with the creation of more scientific journals on the topic of eugenics, meant more publications on eugenics throughout the *Vossische Zeitung*. During this time, journalists, who knew only slightly more about the eugenics movement than the average German citizen, wrote a much larger percentage of *Vossische Zeitung* articles. By having journalists author these articles, a more simplistic, non-scientific discussion on eugenics occurred, since these writers did not have specialized knowledge or training in any scientific or medical field. Thus, the writing became less technical and more reader-friendly as these articles contained less complex terminology. These publications focused on using laymen's terms to create a larger following—a successful methodology, as it created more public discussion about the research, experiments, and desired applications of eugenics as a whole, in turn creating more supporters. But in 1929, the Great Depression created a breakdown of Germany society, ushering in a new era of eugenics.

In 1930, with attentions turned to the Great Depression, publications on eugenics throughout the *Vossische Zeitung* declined greatly from 1930-1931, but by 1932 more articles discussing eugenics appeared in the *Vossische Zeitung* than ever before. With both the economic and social parts of Germany drastically impaired by the Depression, eugenicists, and journalists

alike, chose to once again change the way they presented the cause. The *Vossische Zeitung* appeared to combine the methods from both 1919-1923 and 1924-1929, publishing almost an even amount of articles written by or from the perspective of journalists and doctors. Instead of questioning its popularity, looking at the need for more research, or discussing its goals, the eugenics movement finally focused on actual experimentation and legislative implementation, which finally occurred in 1933. Unlike previous years, the movement focused almost purely on the need for the sterilization of the unfit as a surefire way to eliminate the growing unfit population and increase the healthy members of society. Though sterilization saw discussion during even the earliest years of the Weimar Republic, it was constantly met with too much resistance to actually receive legislative approval. By 1930, the movement developed a much greater confidence in both its beliefs and 'scientific' knowledge, which allowed such measures to gain public support. This confidence, coupled with the devastating effects of the Depression, created a more radical German eugenics movement than ever seen before, although still reserved when compared to other movements, which ultimately culminated in a sterilization bill.

Eugenics achieved plenty of success during the period of the Weimar Republic, something that could not have been predicted at the end of World War One. The movement became an enduring and vital part of Weimar and Nazi German life, as it appeared as one of the few options that had the ability to save the German people from the ever-increasing quantitative and qualitative population decline. The *Vossische Zeitung* provided detail and conversation that journals and medical professionals could not, which provided a different perspective on the movement. Tracing the eugenics movement through the lens of the *Vossische Zeitung* proved how much eugenicists achieved from 1919-1933. A movement that originally sought support solely from one small segment of society, blossomed into a movement supported by a sizeable

amount of Germans, regardless of their social background or class. This change seemingly occurred through the use of educational articles written in laymen's terms, discussions over the ideals, goals, and possible legislation of eugenic ideals, along with a detailed explanation of the research, experiments, and legislation. Through these methods, the movement was able to advance, since the articles became accessible to a growing number *Vossische Zeitung* readers, due to their use of laymen's terms and more detailed explanation. The differing methods of writing throughout the newspaper allowed eugenicists to gather support from many different classes and political orientations, resulting in a well-rounded and well-informed movement. Thus, leading to "eugenics changing from being the creed of an introverted nationalist grouping to becoming an integral part of a social medicine."¹⁷¹

By the end of World War Two, eugenics developed a dark legacy that revolved almost solely around the events during the Nazi regime, disregarding the years eugenics existed prior to the rule of Hitler. Despite the fact that euthanasia was not widely supported in the Weimar-era eugenics movement, it is obvious that the beliefs of German eugenics impacted—and were tragically exploited by—many of the actions during the Third Reich. Eugenics became a vital part of Hitler's plan to eliminate the Jewish population, along with anyone he believed did not qualify as "German-enough" due to a race, sexuality, or political belief, in order to create an Aryan society. With this in mind, German eugenicists obviously bore some degree of responsibility for the euthanasia actions that occurred during World War Two. Throughout the Weimar Republic eugenics movement, some undeniably anti-Semitic eugenicists existed, on the whole, the brand of Anti-Semitism they supported was "socially acceptable" and typical of

¹⁷¹ Weindling, 307.

German conservative academics.¹⁷² Though Anti-Semitism was not at the forefront of the Weimar eugenics movement, a group of relatively well-known Weimar eugenicists helped create many of the racial eugenic measures developed throughout the Third Reich.

In the minds of the many Weimar Republic eugenic supporters, the eugenics movement dedicated itself to gradual implementation, slow changing policy, and only advocated for what leaders believed a majority of German society could grow to support—three concepts that were virtually discarded during the rule of the Third Reich. Though different in a number of respects, Weimar eugenics had an obvious effect on Nazi racial and eugenic policy. But, with these differences, it is important that Weimar Republic eugenics be recognized in addition to the events during the Third Reich in order to advance the most accurate history of German eugenics. Thus, in order to fully comprehend the rise and fall of Nazi eugenics, and the movement in general, it is first vital for one to understand all aspects of the eugenics movement, as the measures supported during the Third Reich differed greatly from those of the Weimar Republic—something that becomes increasingly obvious throughout the publications of the *Vossische Zeitung*.

The discussion within the *Vossische Zeitung* shows eugenics in a different light, describing Weimar Republic eugenics as more than just a racial movement; instead, it described a movement that focused mostly on economic class, population decline, and the theory of the hereditarily unfit. Though each of these ideas contained some discussion on race, this topic did not become the main focus of eugenics until Hitler's rise to power in 1933. By largely ignoring the ideas and discussions on eugenics during the Weimar Republic, especially the gradual nature

¹⁷² Ibid.

of the movement, the legacy of eugenics lacks comprehensive representation of the movement that existed from 1919 until 1933.

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ACADEMIC VITA

Keirstyn Marcucci
576 Oxford Blvd. Pittsburgh, PA 15243•kmarcucci4@gmail.com

Education

The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA
Schreyer Honors College & College of Liberal Arts
Bachelor of Arts in History
Minors: German, Political Science
Graduating May 2015

Work Experience

Allegheny County Juvenile Court Project, Parent Advocate May 2014-August 2014
Juvenile Court Project Intern

- Helped staff attorneys prep for upcoming court dates by calling clients, reading and briefing files, writing motions and editing appeals and briefs
- Observed dependency and delinquency court cases in front of five different Judges and Hearing Officers

HUB-Robeson Center Dining Services August 2013-Present
Part-Time Associate

- Demonstrated strong work ethic and utilized interpersonal skills to serve patrons and maintain dining standards

Primanti Brothers June 2012-Present
Full-Time Waitress

- Demonstrated the ability to multitask, deal with customer complaints, and maintain a positive attitude in a stressful setting, through successful communication and teamwork skills

Activities and Leadership

Penn State IFC PanHellenic Dance Marathon September 2011-Present
Communications Committee Member

- Helped students from Penn State's Commonwealth campuses get involved through specific events planned and run by communications committee members

Hospitality Committee Member

- Worked to fuel the Dance Marathon's dancers, families, and volunteers through exceptional support and service, while maintaining the Dance Marathon's standards of enthusiasm, commitment, and integrity

Rules and Regulations Committee Member

- Helped maintain and ensure safety of the families, volunteers, dancers, and spectators during the Dance Marathon weekend

Operations Committee Member

- Responsible for setting up and tearing down events, maintaining cleanliness and healthy environment at Dance Marathon events for the benefit of the other volunteers and spectators

No Refund Theatre September 2011-Present
Alumni Liaison

- Served as a resource for alumni, sending out weekly emails detailing the club's events
- Served as the main planner and resource for the club's 21st Anniversary Formal and Alumni Reunion

Delta Phi Alpha March 2014-Present

National Honors German Society

- Recognized as a scholar of the German language, through intensive study and academic excellence

Phi Alpha Theta March 2014-Present

National Honors History Society

- Recognized as a scholar of History, through committed study and academic excellence