

GERMANY AND BRAZIL: APPROACHES TO EUGENICS

Eugenics, thought to be the concept of human heredity, is the artificial, instead of natural selection of congenital traits. Largely manipulated by the Nazi Third Reich, Germany's eugenics believed in maintaining a wholesome Aryan race through the persecution of Jews and the euthanasia of a class of inferiors, allowing propagating to continue among pure Aryan females. Brazil's stance on preventive eugenics, particularly the concept of sanitation, allowed for the betterment of the environment and assistance with horticulture and puericulture, supporting the preservation of public health and the mestiços. Nazi controlled Germany stressed the importance of racial hygiene and sterilization, while Brazil's formidable economy was confronted with the principles of sanitation and the desire to make Latin America join in the international advancement and movement of eugenics; individuals aspiring to shape society were confronted with the idea of positive, preventive, or negative eugenics and whether pangenesis Darwinism, the soft style of neo-Lamarckism or hard Mendelism should be considered the philosophy of eugenics.

Germany commenced a eugenics movement under Hitler's Nazi state, which emphasized heinous acts, including racial hygiene, sterilization, and marriage restriction. Alfred Ploetz, a eugenicist, who believed in the possibility of a utopian German society, stated that "racial hygiene [aiming] at enhancing happiness and health," relates to "social hygiene...and hereditary fitness," supporting the Nazi party.¹ Although this idealism aimed for a better and healthier world, leading to progress for public health, Nazi ethics are questioned, restricting and inhibit individual choice, resulting in more of a dystopian society. Wilhelm Schallmayer, in agreeance with Ploetz, after working at a psychiatric clinic, concluded that the propaganda and the application of Darwin's Theory of Evolution, specifically descent with modification was the conclusive idea of hygiene.² This type of propaganda profoundly affected German public policy allowing for what was widely thought as legitimacy for sterilization. The 1905 establishment of the *Detusche Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene*, Germany's Race Hygiene Society by Ploetz, supported strengthening the number of children in healthy families, enforcing the military's purpose and capabilities, forceful separation between the disabled and protection for the upper class, aiding against the poisoning of the lower class, preferably by increasing their noticeability in society and welcoming better hygiene conditions, attributed to population growth.³ This policy contributed to the national movement and the systematic control of reproducing individuals with above average intelligence that are healthy, and limiting birth of those with below average intelligence and subpar health.

Eventually, leading to a rise in sterilization rates, scientists including Alfred Grotjhan, a physicist, believed this concept along with racial and social hygiene created a divide in the left and right wing party movements; these opposite movements later became interwoven.⁴ Through the Law for the Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring, strict sterilization was

¹ Jakob Tanner, "Eugenics before 1945," *Journal of Modern European History* 10, no. 4 (2012): 469.

² Shiela Faith Weiss, "The Race Hygiene Movement in Germany, 1904-1945," in *The Wellborn Science: Eugenics in Germany, France, Brazil, and Russia 1990*, ed. Mark B. Adams (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 18-20.

³ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴ Tanner, *Journal of Modern European History*, 470.

mandatorily enforced on those who were deemed by genetic traits, medically instable through inherited feeble-mindedness, alcoholism, and other impairments.⁵ As a result, 400,000 people were sterilized and therefore unable to conceive.⁶ The law relied inherently on biological applications, not social racism aspects. Further scientific sterilization experimentation was conducted at Auschwitz concentration camps of prisoners and in Germany's Rhineland of biracial children reproduced from German women and French black soldiers.⁷ These racially mixed children were perceived as a threat to the Aryan race; they were parasites, who were deemed only good for extermination. While this prevention law was extremely conservative, it eventually led to the gassing of Gypsies, euthanasia of "useless eaters" and the enforcement of the Nuremberg laws, leading to mass murders, state sanctioned killings, and the Holocaust.⁸

Lebensborn "the Fount of Life," allowed for pure Aryan women to give birth to an unlimited amount of children, furthering racial hygiene, although the circumstances of these births flagged many questions about relationships with Schutzstaffel (Nazi SS) members.⁹ This policy to purify the German race led to an increase in population and was coined positive eugenics; it forced German females to have multiple births, even out of wedlock, leaving many children up for adoption.

The further promotion of negative eugenics was aimed at controlling the "degenerate" Jews and Gypsy population, separately from the rich Anglo-Saxon protestants, optimizing elite individuals, a consideration of positive eugenics.¹⁰ Diane B. Paul's *Controlling Human Heredity* emphasizes eugenics' favorability towards the middle and upper class, but acknowledges that without perfect ancestral history it is hard to be the best candidate for breeding, even if one has reached the highest level of schooling and elitism. "After World War II Nazi eugenics was rightly condemned as a gross perversion of science and morality; the word itself was purged from the vocabulary of science and public debate."¹¹ The term *Rassenpflege* was utilized to control the racial characteristics of Germany's population and set economical and societal class boundaries. As Hitler's regime evolved to power and gasconade, many nonracist eugenics leaders were asked to reluctantly resign or retire, while membership of any Germany society during the Nazi era was only for the Aryan.¹² The association with the Nazi Third Reich is all society remembers about the adaptation of Germany's eugenics from the 1930s until World War II, specifically the Final Solution which culminated in the Holocaust. Therefore, industrialization, the indecisiveness of the medical community, and social Darwinism can be attributed to the examination of the German eugenics movement.¹³

⁵ Weiss, *The Wellborn Science*, 40.

⁶ Diane B. Paul, *Controlling Human Heredity* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1995), 89.

⁷ Laura Shaw, "Germany," *Eugenics Archives*, accessed May 25, 2016, <http://eugenicsarchive.ca/discover/world/51c2795697b8940a5400000f>.

⁸ Paul, *Controlling Human Heredity*, 90.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁰ Pamela Block, "Institutional Utopias, Eugenics, and Intellectual Disability in Brazil," *History and Anthropology* 18, no. 2 (2007): 182.

¹¹ Nancy Leys Stephan, *"The Hour of Eugenics": Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 4.

¹² Weiss, *The Wellborn Science*, 42.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 11.

The Brazil eugenics movement originated after the War of 1918 by the São Paulo Eugenics Society, leading to further outlining after the 1929 First Brazilian Eugenics Congress and the claim “to sanitize is to eugenize,” a Lamarckian soft belief.¹⁴ While opposed to the strict Nazi Germany regime, the Brazilian concept of eugenics is said to be modeled after the pre-Nazi Germany Race Hygiene Society and favor France’s eugenics policy. Brazil originally agreed with the French government, who took the advice of Adolphe Pinard and his belief of more reproduction for individuals with perfect genes, known commonly as positive eugenics versus Charles Darwin’s cousin, Francis Galton’s negative eugenics, which discourages pregnancy among those with gene defects.¹⁵ But later, “pathological” inheritance was a result of fragile environmental conditions and by improving Brazil’s environment, unreasonable eugenics would no longer exist.¹⁶ Sanitation was of vital importance to the Latin American region with the growth of infectious diseases in the tropical, inhabitable climate and ethnically mixed population.¹⁷

Dr. Renato Kehl, a founder of the São Paulo Society, believed in Lamarckism, the inheritance of acquired traits, later to narrow in focus to neo-Lamarckism, the foundation of French eugenics. Public health concerns around poverty occurred around the same time as the rise of eugenics lead medical experts to favor Lamarckism, rather than antagonize against mulatto ancestry.¹⁸ The Brazilian Mental Health Hygiene stressed the importance of physical health, furthering preventive or as others called it, constructive eugenics, which created more political, religious, and national controversy.¹⁹ Later Kehl’s movement towards negative eugenics, which avoided the concept of selection lead to further implementation of Germanys’ prenuptial, sterilization, and birth control ideologies, as well as strict immigration policies.²⁰ His appeal to this negative association led to his opinion of marriage prohibition, aligning with the view of many psychiatrists. Prevention formed a new category in eugenics, unifying public health and the interracial population, in hopes of creating an authentic Brazilian future. These varied interpretations of eugenics left Brazil seeking racial harmony and national unity.

Many of Kehl’s colleagues favored Mendelian, biological or genetic inheritance, drawn from the ideologies of the United States and Great Britain.²¹ Specifically, Mendel’s principles entail “a rediscovery that was a result of social and political, as well as intellectual and scientific factors.”²² By the time of the 1929 Congress, Lamarckian and Mendelian genetics were at fierce

¹⁴ Nancy Leys Stephan, “Eugenics in Brazil, 1917-1940,” in *The Wellborn Science: Eugenics in Germany, France, Brazil, and Russia 1990*, ed. Mark B. Adams (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 119.

¹⁵ Edivaldo Góis Junior, “Gymnastics, Hygiene and Eugenics in Brazil at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 31, no. 10 (2014): 1222.

¹⁶ Block, *History and Anthropology*, 185.

¹⁷ Gilberto Hochman, Nísia Trindad Lima, and Marcos Chor Maio, “The Path of Eugenics In Brazil: Dilemmas of Miscegenation,” in *The Oxford Handbook of The History of Eugenics 2010*, ed. Alison Bashord and Philippa Levine (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 494.

¹⁸ Anadelia Rondeo, “Brazil,” *Eugenics Archives*, accessed May 25, 2016.

<http://eugenicsarchive.ca/discover/world/530b92ae76f0db569b000002>.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 500.

²⁰ Stephan, *The Wellborn Science*, 133.

²¹ Stephan, “*The Hour of Eugenics*”, 8.

²² *Ibid.*, 199.

odds, if racial preference or educational restructuring was in the country's best interest.²³ Edgar Roquette-Pinto, the president of the congress, Kehl's adversary, and a believer of Mendelism strongly "refuted the inferiority of Brazilian mestiços, attributing the problems of the country, ... to social rather than biological causes."²⁴ Pinto's decision to define this cause and its effect as racial suicide, became an unwelcomed central axis of merging medical and political thought.²⁵ Brazil's positive, negative, and preventive eugenics measures well-documented by scientists achieved the goals of bettering mankind through education, sanitation, and proper prenatal care.

Modern eugenics is regulated by individuals who use genetic testing and therapy, family planning, cutting-edge medicine, and the change of genetic code to make their own choices, although various levels of government try to enact laws. While today, doctors and scientists may refuse to perform some eugenics-based procedures such as abortion, each woman has a pro-choice right and freedom of speech. Eugenics is not just human heredity, but is the separation between sanitation, racism, medical intuition, political contentions, life versus death, and scientific knowledge. Through Hitler's vicious attacks in his autobiography, *Mein Kampf* to "declare unfit for propagation all who are" less desirable, established the Nazi reign and an overwhelming support of sterilization.²⁶ The commotion over eugenics in Germany and Brazil, ended with the conquering of Mendelian genetic inheritance. Scientists of the twentieth century have experimented with the manipulation of intellectual, social, ethnical, religious, political, and cultural norms, in order to fathom eugenics and its evolution into human genetics.

²³ Rondeo, *Eugenics Archives*.

²⁴ Hochman, *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, 494.

²⁵ Stephan, *The Wellborn Science*, 138.

²⁶ Paul, *Controlling Human Heredity*, 86.

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