

***From Racism to Genocide: Anthropology in the Third Reich***

**Gretchen E. Schafft**

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*From Racism to Genocide: Anthropology in the Third Reich* is a fascinating and provocative analysis of archival materials by Gretchen E. Schafft, many of which were recently discovered, that demonstrate the complicity of German anthropologists in creating, disseminating, and realizing the Nazi worldview as outlined by Adolf Hitler. As an applied anthropologist, Schafft was able to provide critical insight into the social-anthropological worldview that the Nazis, in keeping with the Führer Principle, were striving to realize. German social scientists became perpetrators of genocide when they allowed their scientific study to mesh with the radical and deadly racial ideals and policies of the Third Reich. The support of the scientific community legitimized the Nazi worldview and facilitated the efforts to achieve it. Seduced by the ability to conduct research without restraint, the anthropologists became leaders, collaborators, and perpetrators in developing and implementing racial policy in Hitler's Germany.

The author starts her investigation by examining the efforts of German anthropologists to hurriedly conduct their research on the Jews of the Tarnów Ghetto. It addresses the efforts by anthropologists to collect as much information as possible about the Jews before the ghetto is liquidated. The "scientists" were concerned that the "research" needed to be done quickly since the subject materials (the Jews) would soon be gone and they would no longer be able to study them. There was still discussion within the German anthropological community as to what was the result of biology and what was the result of the environment. Thus, the anthropological studies were viewed as key to resolving this conflict as well as critical to providing information on a people/race that was about to disappear. For some, Jews because of their mixed breeding developed many positive traits. For others, the racial mixing resulted in the weakening of a "victim" race and the elevation of the Jews above the weaker, dying race they inter-mixed with. For this latter group, survival rested on the scientists' ability to develop techniques that would facilitate the visual identification of Jews at all times. The scientists were seduced by their own desire to freely do what they wanted. Thus, they often said what they had to in order to get government permission to conduct their vital research. The Nazis were only all too willing to certify their work in order to politicize it for their needs.

Next, Schafft looks at anthropology in Germany prior to WWII and it takes a hard look at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute (KWI) and the development of the evolution of anthropological theory. Founded in 1912, the KWI was a collection of laboratories representing the natural, physical, and social sciences. Businesses, industries and private persons initially financed it. The chapter then examines the key ideas elucidated by Charles Darwin in his *On the Origins of the Species* and the ideas transposition by Sir Francis Galton into Social Darwinism are examined. At the heart of this theory was the belief that "genetic characteristics determined the social and economic place one found in one's life, one's social value" (41). Since social class was considered to be genetically determined and it was uninfluenced by environmental factors, the eugenics movement was born in the hopes of selecting and encouraging the reproduction of the best individuals. Thus the eugenics movement "encouraged goal-directed procreation" while

positing a “hierarchical valuation of human groups,” and it “suggested guidelines on how to improve the human species by using the principles of Mendelian genetics” (41).

Next, a description of Alfred Ploetz’s theory on “racial hygiene” is offered in which the improvement of the race by selective breeding and sterilization is advocated. He created the German Society for Racial Hygiene, which was supported by both the Kaiser’s government and various key German industrial giants. His ideas for creating a new society revolved around the need to promote “health, beauty, and boundless earthly happiness.” The end result would be the elevation of the Nordic race to the level of purity it had lost due to degenerative mixing with other races (Jews). This 1905 society proved to be the first eugenics society in the world and it went on to influence similar movements in other nations including the United States. The university academic world aggressively supported this cutting-edge movement. With the advent of WW I, efforts were made by both industry and the military to capitalize on this new “science” both economically and nationally. This “applied” science eventually found itself in bed with radical political parties and eventually with the Nazi government, which was all too willing to support anthropological research and agendas that were in synergy with the Party’s national goals. This integration of university, industry and government resulted in the development of “racial experts”.

These new experts in Germany were then “collected” into a new organization, the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute (KWI). The KWI was located in Berlin-Dahlem and served as a national institute for science. The KWI collected the experts and freed them from the restraints of academia and thus allowed them the freedom to do vital, uninhibited research. Within a short period of time, KWI experts like Albert Einstein were receiving worldwide recognition as Nobel Prize winners. With the stinging defeat in WW I, Germany was looking for much needed improvement in the physical and moral conditions of its people and the “survival” of its race. Thus, the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Genetics, and Eugenics (KWIA) was born in 1927 as one of the 31 institutes within the KWI.

It is at this time that Eugene Fischer rises to prominence with his study of race between South Africans, particularly mixed-race people. His published work on the “Rehobath Bastards” found an audience at the time. (Because of this work, the government to later approach him to help with a problem, the “Rhineland Bastards.” As we know, the solution to that problem was their sterilization.) As early as 1929, Fischer’s ideas were being presented as a research plan to the director of Social Science at the Rockefeller Foundation (RF) in New York City in hopes of securing funding for a far-reaching research project. In essence, “the research was to be a comprehensive study of the anthropological makeup of the German population” (49). Since WW I reparations were creating an untold burden on the funding of scientific research, RF funding was vital. The RF funded this project (for \$125,000 over a 5 year period from 1930 - 1934) and many other KWIA projects in the belief that this and similar projects would create a “cultural atlas of the German people” and a model for other nations to emulate (51).

The field of anthropology was evolving to where it was believed that social problems could be solved (and there were many in Germany after WW I) using physical and social anthropology to alter population traits. This idea was attractive both in Germany and in the United States. Anthropology became the search into the laws of societal life, and thus the “art of racial hygiene” (52).

Fischer and the KWIA had other projects in the mix, which included twin research and the study of the effects on the germ plasma of things such as x-rays, lead, and mercury to determine if they caused a deterioration of the racial stock. The KWIA petitioned the RF to fund this research, which it did. (Dr. Mengele's twin research started at this time.) In all of these studies, Jews were getting "special or veiled" attention. Thus Fischer and a man by the name of Hans Günther provided Germans with the early messages about "Volk" and "Race."

In Chapter Three, the author addresses the rise of Hitler and his embracement of anthropology. In a key 1920's German anthropology textbook, publisher J. F. Lehmann dedicates the book to Hitler as the "primary fighter for the meaningful recognition of the race question" (62). The chapter traces Hitler's rise to power and the creation of the totalitarian state. The role of Leader Principle (Führer Princip) and the efforts to "bring everything and everyone into line" (Gleichschaltung) with his ideas is examined. Goebbels, Streicher, and Göring stumped the anti-Semitic rhetoric that Hitler first espoused in *Mein Kampf*. In the effort to purify the race, eliminate the destructive elements and to create a new society headed by a revived, thriving, and growing master Aryan race, a series of laws were past over time to eventually identify and marginalize Jews in German society. By making race the center of his ideological treatise, Hitler found common ground with the German and international anthropological and eugenics communities. Hitler and his policies were well received and published in key scientific journals such as *Volk und Rasse*. Soon, the scientists and the state were collaborating in the development of official policy and racial laws such as the Nuremberg Laws, which proved to be the defining moment in terms of the future demise of the Jews in Germany and Europe. By 1935, the KWIA had committed itself to the Nazis to draw funds from the government in order to continue its work.

This collaboration in thinking between the KWIA and the Nazi government resulted in the creation of some of the first German eugenics laws that focused on the use of sterilization on criminals and social defects. With state control of health care in Germany, German doctors willingly jumped on the Nazi bandwagon. As Germany passed through the 1930s, negative eugenics (euthanasia) became increasingly popular and was winning state support. This was particularly relevant in the efforts to answer the question of what to do with the "useless eaters" and those with lives "unworthy of living." German anthropologists referenced the widespread use of sterilization in the United States to validate their call for its use in Germany. With the distraction of WW II, the T-4 campaign began and eventually the final solution to the Jewish question was implemented. In spite of RF reservations about the Nazi treatment of Jews, the RF continued to fund the racial study research of the KWIA until the start of WW II in 1939. Despite the conclusion of RF funding of twin research (the grant ran out in 1934) and concerns over the treatment of research subjects (Jews) at that time, the philanthropist, James Loeb, bequeathed \$1 million to the institute to continue its research after his death in 1933.

In the next chapter, Schafft addresses the discovery she made in the course of her research at the Smithsonian. In her efforts to ascertain what American anthropologists knew about the work of anthropologists in Germany, she came across a collection of materials from the Institute for German Work in the East (Institut Deutsche Ostarbeit or IDO). The crates containing the materials were delivered at the end of WW II (February 1947) and were never shelved or even looked at. When the author was given permission to open the collection and catalogue it, she jumped at the opportunity. In the crates she found hair samples, body outlines, fingerprints, crude drawings, and questionnaires detailing family history. There were also

snapshots of faces and file cards carrying genealogies. Essentially, the author had sitting before her a treasure-trove of information that had been collected by the SRV (Section on Race and Volkstrum) of the IDO.

With the start of WW II and the occupation of Poland, the Germans created a series of institutes at various locations in the occupied territories. The purpose was to put a scientific façade on the exploitation and rape of Poland. The institutes would also satisfy the ideological fantasies of the German leaders. Thus, the IDO was created with the mission of “laying out all fundamental issues of the Eastern [occupied] lands as far as they affect the Generalgouvernement and to provide scientific findings, as well as publicize and disseminate [these findings]” (94). Institutes with missions similar to that of the IDO included several “quasi-academic and scientific institutions, the police and security agencies, the racial bureau, and finally the extermination apparatus of the state” (94). In essence, the IDO was to create a “university” specializing in racial science. In reality, this “university” was created to disguise and facilitate the exploitation of Polish resources and cultural heritage in the occupied territories. It was Alfred Rosenberg who linked the IDO, the Nazi Party, and the military. As the one most responsible for the philosophical preparation of Party members, he became the natural leader of the Institute for Research on the Jewish Question. To that end, he spearheaded the looting of art and literature from the eastern occupied lands.

The SRV section of the IDO had as its mission the application of racial theory in the field. The long range and long sought goal was the creation of a new world dominated by a purified, master Aryan (Nordic) race. Since a major ideological concern of the Germans was “blood and land (Blut und Boden), a massive social experiment was envisioned in which ethnic Germans were to be moved back onto German soil and undesirable elements were to be moved out. Thus the SRV had to investigate and identify the various groups in the occupied lands. Ultimately, the SRV became the source of certificates of race. As such the anthropologists within the IDO’s SRV section were given input into laws that regulated Jewish life. Over time until the tide of the war turned against Germany, the power and influence of the IDO grew and it added untold legitimacy to Nazi racial policy both in Germany and in the occupied lands.

Schafft subsequently reviews the implementation of the great social experiment within Poland in terms of population selection and relocation during the war. The Nazis intended to relocate desirable population groups closer to the Fatherland and remove or eliminate the undesirable groups. Desirable or undesirable was determined by the Nazi racial worldview. This reordering of population groups that took place simultaneously with the commencement of WW II was referred to as the “General Plan East” (Generalplan Ost). Millions of people were to be moved, enslaved, exterminated, or welcomed home depending upon their racial stock. Slavs were on the way out. Ethnic Germans were coming home. At this time, the Einsatzgruppen were used to facilitate this process. Jews were already selected for another fate to be determined at a later date. However, Fritz Arlt, from the IDO, set in motion the thinking and processes that resulted in the creation of Auschwitz as early as the beginning of 1941.

The Germans set in motion a process in which the best were selected to breed (Auslese) and the undesirables were to be slaughtered (Ausmerzen). Therefore, the anthropologists began the examination of the people of Poland. Between census records, Polish collaboration, and records expropriated from synagogues, Jews were separated out of Polish society and ghettoized until a final solution could be organized and events would allow it to be realized. With the

concentration of the Jews and the removal of the inferior Slavs, space was created for the Volksdeutsche. The Lebensborn program was also set in motion to facilitate the desired growth of the German population and the resettlement of the “reclaimed” German lands (Altreich). In retrospect, each of these movements was based more on cultural choice or inculcation as opposed to genetic criteria.

The remainder of the chapter examines the economic impact of this massive social experiment. In effect, the author’s position is that the Germans effectively undermined what they were hoping to do in terms of insuring the purification of the race because of the severe labor shortage at home. Consequently, foreign laborers of inferior racial stock were being brought back to Germany and to the Generalgouvernement to do forced labor, which in effect undermined the efforts to prevent inter-breeding. Within the Generalgouvernement, there were over 300 forced labor camps. Interestingly, Hitler did not encounter a single organized opposition group to the Nazi forced labor policies. Aryanized businesses were made extremely profitable due to the use of slave labor. This profitability brought business and industry within the Nazi fold. Since the SS oversaw all slave labor and charged for “their workers”, the SS administered a program that provide it with a huge financial windfall. Even though the slave laborer’s life expectancy was 3 – 9 months, the Nazis had plenty of them at their disposal.

After discussing the great social experiment, the author examines the influence of anthropology on medicine in the Third Reich. The KWIA committed itself to the Nazi ideals since its inception and it played a key role in the development of curricula and training of SS doctors and other health care professionals. It effectively laid the groundwork for the development of law and policy to begin “racial cleansing” (153). Between the anthropologist and the medical and health care community, those who should breed and those who should not were identified and “controlled.” Encouraged by the actions taken in countries such as the United States (which had sterilization laws and emigration restrictions), Germany set on a course to create a racial state based on eugenic principles. In 1934, the Institute for Hereditary Biology and Racial Hygiene was created. Otmar von Verschuer became its director in 1935. It was under his auspices that the “Rhineland Bastards” were sterilized and in 1937 he took on Dr. Josef Mengele as his assistant for twin research. Using RF funding, Fischer, the director of KWIA, reported on the testing of the reaction of twins to substances like atropine, pilocarpine, denononline, and histomine. This was obvious abuse of twins and children. To further this uninhibited research, twin camps were established as early as 1936.

The remainder of the chapter addresses the T-4 campaign (the German euthanasia program for the mentally ill and the handicapped), Action 14f13 (the authorization to kill Jews and other “defectives” in German concentration camps), and the medical experiments at Auschwitz. It was from Auschwitz that Dr. Mengele secured and provided body parts of children for further research at the KWIA in Berlin until the camp’s liberation in January 1945.

Schafft’s next chapter provides the reader with an overview of what happened at the end of the war and the aftermath. The chapter points out that even after the war, Jews were still victimized. Following a similar fate of the Jews was the Roma who were widely persecuted as a “biological group.” Anthropologist investigated them based on their “exotic” physical characteristics and their “asocial” cultural patterns. Central to the persecution of the Roma was Robert Ritter.

How is it possible that so many Germans claimed that they did not know what was going on? Were they all perpetrators or collaborators? Were they simply unmotivated bystanders? How could they not know about the anti-Semitic laws? How could they not know about the concentration camps in Germany when 750,000 people were liberated from those camps in Germany alone? How do you miss 8 million slave laborers in Germany at the end of the war? Is it at all possible given the fact that most Jews have testified that they arrived at the death camps in Poland with no knowledge of what they were getting into that Germans back in Germany also had no knowledge of these camps? These are but a few of the key questions also raised in this chapter.

The chapter goes on to discuss the demise of the IDO and the KWIA after the war. The Doctors Trials in Nuremberg in December 1946 brought a scathing condemnation of the German medical community. Several doctors were executed but most, unbelievably, went on living their lives and practicing medicine as if nothing had happened. In fact, some of these doctors were brought to the United States as part of Operation Paperclip to assist the US in the development of its biological warfare capabilities. After completing the de-nazification program, several of the prominent German anthropologists who actively contributed to the demise of the Jews were allowed to continue their work with their past forgotten.

A reflective look at the development of the concept of race and racism in Germany follows. Initially, the observable differences among Homo sapiens were described as races. Race was viewed as a social construct and not a biological fact. What this effort to describe the differences between peoples resulted in was the polarization of those differences in terms of “us” and “them.” These differences tended to convey negative images causing Hitler and Germans to view their existence as threatened. Therefore, the Nazis used race to justify their policies to further their economic and political goals. Since the Jews were highly assimilated in Germany, “identifying” and “cutting out the bad” was difficult but absolutely necessary for the survival of Germans, the German cultural, and the German nation. Hence, the academic world of the anthropologist and the professional world of physicians were called upon to help the state purify itself and legitimize its efforts to do so. Consequently, anti-Semitism was cultivated and propagandized to portray Jews as dangerous enemies, vermin, or bacteria that needed to be eliminated at all costs for the health, wealth and survival of Germans.

A short discussion of race and race policies in the United States follows and parallels between the US and Germany are examined. What is truly frightening is the fact that Germany felt that it was in a terrible state of decline and, in terms of “racial hygiene,” it felt that it was behind the commendable efforts of the United States. Germany hoped to one day emulate those efforts. Even after the war, the US continued to have biased, restrictive immigration policies that were based upon the belief of “superior and inferior” groups.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of the Nazi construction of race. Nazi anthropologists believed that a race represents a group of people who through their genetic physique, mind, and soul should have characteristics that distinguish them from other groups of people...they did not believe that races were synonymous with political boundaries, although they wished for this. Blut und Boden would be achieved when a homogeneous match between a land and the people who belonged on it was achieved (215).

Race was not determined by religion or language. Thus, the Nazis used “blood” as a basis to include and to exclude as well as to exterminate. “German blood” was the equivalent to “Germanness”, which was synonymous with “German culture and soul.” Hence, one way that Germans could reclaim their blood was to reclaim the land where it was found (Lebensraum). Over time, this German blood was being lost or degraded due to breeding with non-Germans. In addition to mixed breeding, the degenerative situation was exasperated by the fact that the “wrong” people were having more children and the “right” people were having fewer children. To put an end to this, racial laws were created. Volksflege (good health leading to racial hygiene) was advocated by discouraging smoking and drinking and by giving women and the family a place of honor in the new German society the Nazis were crafting.

In the end, Schafft examines the influence of professional denial upon civic denial, as well as raises critical questions related to the role and responsibility of German anthropologists in facilitating the creation of Hitler’s racial state. The Third Reich was a racial state that was supported at every step by German anthropologists. Anthropologists provided theory, policy, formation, enforcement, and proactive engagement, and some participated in or benefited from torture, maiming and the murder of victims.... [Once in power] Hitler lent his authority to the racist ideology, and the anthropologist gave him their prestige and their allegiance (222).

It seems beyond comprehension that no more than one Nazi anthropologist was ever tried and convicted for his contribution to the murderous Nazi state. One has to question the motivation of the British and American officials who felt it was best to resume German medical science and forgo the prosecution of their crimes against humanity. Even the KWI was “white-washed” by being renamed the Max Planck Institute in July 1946. After the war, the focus of “blame or guilt” was on the killers allowing those who provided the means and rationale to go free. If anything positive about the role of anthropologist can be said, it is that they did not focus solely on Jews. Their ideas applied to all groups. Also, with the loss of WW II and their leaders disgraced, Germans were unwilling to also suffer the humiliation of their intelligentsia for their complicity in creating the Nazi state and their support of the Nazi worldview. Professional denial of the role of anthropologists in Nazi Germany thus legitimized civic denial. Consequently, those who speak out were sanctioned, information was limited or blocked, and language was used to limit discourse on the topic.

One has to wonder how educated scientists who were considered leaders in their field, could have done what they did without a hint of misgiving. Casting unwilling victims (not consenting subjects), preserving their skeletons for study, cooking corpses to remove flesh, and documenting this with pictures and ‘catalogue’ entries...how was this legitimate science? The language of their science was filled with euphemisms. They knew what was going on in the Final Solution, and they participated in it being carried out at multiple levels. It can be said without a question that German anthropologists were perpetrators who prepared the German population for the Holocaust and did their utmost to help it to succeed.