

## Handicapped- US Holocaust memorial museum

- United States led the world in forced sterilizations. Between 1907 and 1939, more than 30,000 people in twenty-nine states were sterilized, many unknowingly or against their will while incarcerated in prisons or institutions for the mentally ill.
- Nearly half the operations were carried out in California.
- This socio-biological theory took Charles Darwin's principle of natural selection and applied it to society.
- Forced sterilizations began January 1934
- 300,000 to 400,000 people were sterilized under the law.
- A diagnosis of "feeble-mindedness" provided the grounds in the majority of cases, followed by schizophrenia and epilepsy.
- The usual method of sterilization was vasectomy and ligation of ovarian tubes in women. Radium or x-rays were used in a small number of cases.
- Several thousand-people died as a result of the operations, women disproportionately because of the greater risk of tubal ligation.
- Most were patients in mental hospitals and other institutions.
- A majority were between ages 20-40 and were equally divided between men and women.
- Most were "aryan" German, although gypsies were sterilized as deviant "asocials", as were some homosexuals
- 500 teenagers of mixed African and German parentage of French colonial troops stationed in the Rhineland in the early 1920s were sterilized because of their race by secret order outside the provisions of the law.
- More than 200 Hereditary Health Courts were set up across Germany with two physicians and one district judge
- Doctors were required to register with these courts every known illness.

- Appeal courts were also established, but few decisions were ever reversed. Exemptions were sometimes given artists or other talented persons afflicted with mental illness.
- The Marriage Law of 1935, which required for all marriages proof that any offspring from the union would not be afflicted with a disabling hereditary disease.
- Only Roman Catholic Church opposed the sterilization program consistently, German Protestant Churches accepted and often cooperated with the policy
- Popular films such as *Das Erbe* (“Inheritance”) helped build public support for government policies by stigmatizing the mentally ill and the handicapped and highlighting the costs of care.
- School mathematics books posed such questions as: “The construction of a lunatic asylum costs 6 million marks. How many houses at 15,000 marks each could have been built for that amount?”
- In October 1939, Hitler himself initialed a decree which empowered physicians to grant a “mercy death” to “patients considered incurable according to the best available human judgment of their state of health.”
- In the 1920s a book co-authored by Alfred Hoche and Kar Binding argued that economic savings justified the killing of “useless lives” (“idiots” and “congenitally crippled”).
- Economic deprivation during WW1 provided this idea.
- Patients in asylums had ranked low on the list for rationing food and many died from starvation and disease.
- Hospital beds and medical personnel would be freed up for the war effort
- To make the connection to the war explicit, Hitler’s decree was backdated to September 1, 1939
- Unlike the forced sterilizations, the killing of patients in mental asylums and other institutions were carried out in secrecy.
- The code named was “Operation T-4”, a reference to Tiegartenstrasse 4, the address of the Berlin Chancellery offices where the program was headquartered.

- Hitler's personal physicians, Dr. Karl Brandt headed the program along with Chancellery Chief, Philip Bouhler.
- T-4 targeted adult patients in all government or church-run sanatoria and nursing homes run by the interior Ministry
- The completed forms sent to expert physicians, usually psychiatrists, who made up "review commissions." They marked each name with a "+", in red pencil, meaning death, or "-" in blue pencil, meaning life, or "?" for cases needed additional assessment
- Medical experts rarely examined any of the patients
- In the beginning, patients were killed by lethal injection, but by 1940, Hitler, on the advice of Dr. Werner Heyde suggested carbon monoxide gas be used
- Physicians using fake names prepared death certificates falsifying the cause of death, and sent letters of condolences to relatives
- 70,273 deaths by gassing at the six "euthanasia" centers between January 1940 and August 1941
  - This included 5,000 Jews: all Jewish mental patients were killed regardless of their ability to work or severity of their illness
- Hadamar 1941, the staff celebrated the cremation of their 10,000<sup>th</sup> patient with beer and wine served in the crematorium
- A handful of church leaders, notably the Bishop of Munster, Clemens August Count von Galen, local judges, and parents of victims protested the killings.
- One judge, Lothar Kreyssig, instituted criminal proceedings against Bouhler
- Hitler ordered a halt to the Operation T-4 on August 24, 1941.
- Gas Chambers from some "euthanasia" killing centers were dismantled and shipped to extermination camps in occupied Poland.
- In late 1941 and 1942, there were rebuilt and used for the "final solution to the Jewish question"
- Redeployed from T-4 were future extermination camp commandants Christian Wirth, Franz Stangl, Franz Reichleitner, Irmfried Eberl

- Hitler continued to send the message mental patients were “useless eaters” and “life unworthy of life”
- Between the middle of 1941 and the winter of 1944-45, in a program known under code “14f13”, experienced psychiatrists from the T-4 operation were sent to concentration camps to weed out prisoners too ill to work
- 20,000 people are believed to have died under the 14f13 program
- Thousands of mental patients in the occupied territories of Poland, Russia, and East Prussia were killed by Einsatzgruppen squads (SS and special police units)
- November 1, 1939, SS units shot about 3,700 mental patients in asylums in the region of Bromberg, Poland
- December 1939 and January 1940, SS units gassed 1,558 patients from Polish asylums
- Between 200,00 and 250,00 mentally and physically handicapped persons were murdered from 1939 and 1945 under the T-4 and other “euthanasia programs”