

EUGENICS

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Abstract. *Eugenics is a pseudoscience aimed at improving and controlling the genetic structure of the human species by selective breeding, which implies preventing inferior people from having children (negative eugenics) and encouraging superior ones to reproduce (positive eugenics). The Eugenics movement originated in the early 19th century and it was largely developed under the influence of Francis Galton in the United Kingdom and Charles Davenport in the United States. These two scientists advocated the selective breeding of desirable traits and reproductive control of undesirable traits in the human race. Racially-oriented eugenics had a dramatic expansion and its peak in Nazi Germany. Being the essence of many racial laws, eugenics was atrociously applied in practice by means of mass euthanasia, mass sterilization, extermination in gas chambers, and horrible experiments on people of lower races or those unworthy of living.*

Key words: *eugenics, positive eugenics, negative eugenics, Nacism.*

INTRODUCTION

Eugenics is the study of or belief in the possibility of improving the qualities of the human species or human population, especially by such means as discouraging reproduction by persons having genetic defects or presumed to have inheritable undesirable traits (negative eugenics) or encouraging reproduction by persons presumed to have inheritable desirable traits (positive eugenics).¹ The notion was derived from two Greek words (*eu* and *genos*), which literally mean good genes.²

The development of eugenics into a movement was preceded by a study of the world of flora and fauna, which later led to the conclusion that the achievements in the selection and crossbreeding of the best specimens of plant and animal species with the aim of improving them, are applicable to the human race as well.

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¹ Dictionary.com: *Eugenics*, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/eugenics>, accessed 16.05.2018.

² Велики Речник мање познатих речи и израза: Еугеника (Dictionary of foreign words and phrases: Eugenics); <https://velikirecnik.com/2016/04/01/eugenika/>, accessed 16.05.2018.

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In the first half of the 19th century, England became the most advanced capitalist country with a highly developed industry and agriculture. Small estates were liquidated and the land was taken over by large landowners who had both time and money to raise new breeds of hunting dogs and horses, which was highly beneficial for sports of this kind. New sorts of plants (vegetables, fruits, decorative plants, etc.) were developed through selection and crossbreeding. Moreover, in search of new markets for raw materials and manufactured products, England sent expeditions to various countries which were its commercial and military targets. Scientists, who took part in these expeditions, gathered specimens and brought plenty of descriptions of newly discovered species for museum collections. The success of biological sciences was huge at the time. As the organism began to be studied as a unique system of the external and internal features, scientists came to the conclusion that there are systemic groups of organisms in nature which must sustain the natural systems. It was also proven that all organisms develop from cells. Paleontology, the science dealing with extinct species, provided a diversity of facts that testify about the unity of the origin of plants, animals and human beings. All these scientific discoveries provided a firm ground for the emergence of Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory on the origin of species. It was Darwin who examined all these elements and devised a harmonious system (Pešić, 2016: 29- 30).

Darwin consolidated the historical interpretation of the living nature and successfully resolved the issue of diversity of species and organic purposefulness, as inevitable consequences of natural selection and divergence of traits. At his point, it should be noted that Darwin's book *On the Origin of Species* was only about animals and plants in a biological community, while the study and development of man was left aside. Although Darwin did not explore the development of man, the very title of this book inevitably raises the question of preserving better human races in the universal struggle for survival (Pešić, 2016: 32). Darwin established that man raised new breeds and sorts of plants and animals through artificial selection. The essence of artificial selection is that only those animals and plants which manifest interesting and beneficial changes are left for breeding. As this is done in every subsequent generation, the desirable traits accumulate and amplify (Pešić, 2016: 33).

All new theories subsequently developed in that period, which gravitated around Darwin's main ideas, may be subsumed under the conceptual framework of *Social Darwinism*. At first, this conceptual framework was used by the supporters of Social Darwinism to criticize Darwin's evolutionist standpoint but, in the course of its development, this concept gained a different connotation. Thus, Social Darwinism aimed to bring together different types of utilitarian and other viewpoints on the origin of species by advocating a single idea: in the same way as animals and plants, human beings struggle to survive and participate in the survival competition where natural selection results in the survival of the fittest, the most capable and the the most adaptable ones (Pešić, 2016: 33).

THE EARLY BEGINNINGS OF EUGENICS

The Eugenics movement originated in the early 19th century and it was largely developed under the influence of Francis Galton in the United Kingdom and Charles Davenport in the United States. Eugenics gained popularity throughout the late 19th and early 20th century, as some scientists incorrectly believed that many human behaviors, like alcoholism or social dependency, were solely the product of genes, independent of environmental influences.³

Race-oriented eugenics had a dramatic expansion and its peak in Nazi Germany. Being the essence of many racial laws, eugenics was atrociously applied in practice by means of mass euthanasia of *the less worthy*, mass sterilization, extermination in gas chambers, and horrible experiments on people of *the lower races*. In this paper, we will discuss the eugenic practices in the US and Nazi Germany, although eugenics was widespread in other parts of the world as well.

The first fundamental presentation of Eugenics was the book *Hereditary Genius* by Francis Galton (1869), in which he suggested that a system of arranged marriages between prominent men and wealthy women would ultimately bring forth the race of the gifted. Galton's theories were supported by the *American Eugenic Society*, founded in 1926. American eugenicists also supported the restriction of immigration from the low-income countries, such as Italy, Greece and other countries of Eastern Europe, and advocated the sterilization of the feeble-minded, mentally ill, retarded and epileptics. Sterilization laws were passed in more than half of the states, and isolated cases of violent sterilization continued into the 1970s. The Eugenics was strongly criticized in the 1930s and discredited only after the Nazi Germany used eugenics as an alibi for the extermination of Jews, black people and homosexuals (Mišić, 2005: 61).

EUGENICS IN THE USA

In the United States, biologist Charles Davenport (1866-1944) published a book titled *Heredity in Relation to Eugenics* in 1911. The book was so successful that even the President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt, stated (in 1914): *I wish very much that the wrong people could be prevented entirely from breeding; and when the evil nature of these people is sufficiently flagrant, this should be done. Criminals should be sterilized and feeble-minded persons forbidden to leave offspring behind them... The emphasis should be laid on getting desirable people to breed.*⁴

The first Eugenics law was passed in 1907 in Indiana. Eugenic-based immigrant tests were devised, according to which 80% of immigrants from Eastern Europe (Poles, Jews, Russians) were classified as feeble-minded. This resulted in passing a new law in 1924, which restricted immigration from Eastern Europe on the basis of genetic inferiority. The law was in force until 1965. By the end of 1930, most US states had legislation on sterilization for *mentally ill, drunkards, epileptics, and degenerates*. In 1935 alone, about

³ See: Helix Magazine-Modern Eugenics: Building a Better Person?, <https://helix.northwestern.edu/article/modern-eugenics-building-better-person>, accessed 20.05.2018.

⁴ See: ABC News: Eugenics, power and prejudice: Why America had a Nazi problem before Charlottesville, by Natasha Mitchell, published 8 Sept. 2017, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-09-08/eugenics-history-us-had-nazi-problem-before-charlottesville/8883074>, accessed 20.05.2018.

22,000 sterilizations were carried out, with or without the consent of sterilized people. Devenport had a major impact on this issue in the United States.⁵

The 20th century American criminology contains a powerful thread of what Nicole Rafter called the *eugenic criminology*, which gave the US a doubtful distinction that it was not among the first countries in the world to start sterilizing criminals, the practice which started in 1907 and continued until 1945 (Kostić, 2012: 187).

In the early 20th century, physicians, legislators and social reformers throughout the United States supported the program of an increasing number of Eugenics movements that joined forces to try to legalize the sterilization of certain groups of people. Such regulations were motivated by cruel theories on the heredity of certain states and traits, and even criminal predisposition and sexual deviations. Many sterilization advocates felt that it was necessary to introduce a reproductive policy that would deprive the *unfit* persons of the right to procreate, so that the society would be protected from their harmful genes. In the period between 1907 and 1937, as many as 32 US states passed sterilization laws that prohibited the procreation to those who were considered unfit. The largest number of people were sterilized in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and it was not before the early 1970s that state legislatures began to re-examine and repeal such laws. A study conducted by experts at the University of Michigan, which included the analysis of 19,995 health care cards of the sterilized patients, revealed that a vast majority of them were young women proclaimed promiscuous, sons and daughters of Mexican, Italian and Japanese immigrants, as well as men and women who did not fit into sexual norms, or persons whose sexual orientation and gender identity were different from the generally accepted social perception of gender roles, and thus regarded as inherently perverse. Preliminary statistical analysis indicates that in the peak of these operations (from 1935 to 1944), patients with Spanish surnames were 3.5 times more likely to be sterilized than others.⁶

One of the most famous cases of eugenic sterilization was the *Buck v. Bell* case, which involved a poor mentally impaired young girl. After the Virginia Court of Appeal upheld the trial court decision to subject Carrie Buck to sterilization or to return her to the mental institution, the case reached the US Supreme Court in 1927. As both her grandmother and mother were found to be feeble-minded, Judge Oliver Wendell Holmes ordered sterilization, saying that “*Three generations of imbeciles were enough*”.⁷ Although the sterilization law was repealed in 1979, sterilization of inmates was allowed until recently under a strict set of criteria. Yet, in the period between 2006 and 2010, a total of 146 female inmates in two Californian prisons were sterilized without meeting those criteria; in at least thirty of these cases, the unauthorized procedures directly violated the state legislation on informed consent. Most of the sterilized women were first-time offenders of African-American and Latin-American descent, and the doctor in charge of these operations said that this procedure saved a lot of money as compared to the welfare that the state would have to pay for care of unwanted children if these women kept breeding. The story about

⁵ See: In medias res: *Eugenika* (Eugenics) by Vojin Petrovic; <http://www.medias.rs/eugenika>, accessed 21.05.2018.

⁶ Huffington Post: That Time the United States Sterilized 60,000 of Its Citizens, by Prof. Alexandra Minna Stern, University of Michigan; published 01/07/2016, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/sterilization-united-states_us_568f35f2e4b0c8beacf68713, accessed 20.05.2018.

⁷ See: Facing History and Ourselves: The Supreme Court and the Sterilization of Carrie Buck, <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/supreme-court-and-sterilization-carrie-buck>, accessed 21.05.2018.

these cases was reported by a journalist at the Center for Investigative Journalism in 2013, which ultimately led to passing a ban on sterilization in California prisons.⁸

NACISM AND EUGENICS

Certainly the most dreadful and consistent use of Eugenics took place in Nazi Germany, where eugenic practices paved the way for the most monstrous crimes ever remembered in the history of human civilization. These monstrosities and victims' cries will resound in the human consciousness for many more years, thus setting a categorical imperative for all people in power, rulers, lawmakers, scientists and lawyers that such an Armageddon committed by humans shall never be repeated. However, it is also imperative to make a clear distinction between Nazi Germany and the present-day Germany, in order to avoid discriminatory treatment of the latter.

In 1904, anthropologist Dr. Alfred Ploetz founded the *Archive for Racial and Social Biology*, and a year later, he established the *Society for Racial Hygiene*. He formulated the goal of his pseudo-scientific research as follows: "*As a dog protects itself from fleas or the flesh protects from the flies, so our race must be protected against harmful heritage and the influence of foreign blood.*" The book *Human Heredity and Racial Hygiene*, written by E. Baur, E. Fischer and F. Lenz in 1921, was a standard textbook on racism in the period before the publication of Hitler's book *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle) in 1925 (Đurić, Miletić, 2008: 33).

In her work on criminal biology in Nazi Germany, American criminologist Nicole Rafter links her study of eugenics to the period of the Third Reich in Germany from 1933-1945.⁹ She cites the leader in Nazi eugenics research, Dr. Eugen Fischer, who said: "*It is a rare and special good fortune for a theoretical science to flourish at a time when the prevailing ideology welcomes it, and its findings can immediately serve the policy of the state.*" (Rafter, 2008: 293). Hence, two scientific programs developed within the framework of the Nazi criminal biology: eugenics and racial hygiene. These terms are often used as synonyms. The Eugenic project aimed to improve the quality of the human race, by encouraging superior people to reproduce (*positive eugenics*), and discouraging the inferior ones from procreating (*negative eugenics*), by means of forced exile, ban on marriages, imprisonment or elimination. In general, eugenics was aimed at preventing the genetic reproduction of all people with hereditary defects, for the benefit of the society as a whole. Rafter also notes that "*into the 1930s, Jews were among those who, in Germany and elsewhere, supported the eugenics movement, which, criminologically, aimed at identifying hereditary criminals of all races and ethnicities and preventing them from reproducing*" (Rafter, 2008: 293). On the other hand, the racial hygiene project was aimed at identifying the ethnic and racial group of people, such as Jews or Roma, in favor of restoring the purity of the Germanic Aryan race. From the standpoint of criminology,

⁸ See: Huffington Post: That Time the United States Sterilized 60,000 of Its Citizens, published 01/07/2016, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/sterilization-united-states_us_568f35f2e4b0c8beacf68713, accessed 20.05.2018.

⁹ See: Rafter, Nicole (2008), *Criminology's Darkest Hour: Biocriminology in Nazi Germany*, The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology, Vol.41, No. 2, 2008, pp. 287–306; <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.876.4474&rep=rep1&type=pdf>, accessed 21.05.2018.

racial hygiene overlaps with eugenics in the part where specific racial and ethnic groups were identified as having genetically criminal predispositions (Kostić, 2012: 187-188).

Eugenics was definitely thriving in Nazi Germany. From the very beginning, anti-Semitism was a very prominent concept of Nazism, both as a political program and an ideology. Anti-Semitic political slogans were very sharply introduced as early as in the 1923 coup, which Hitler attempted with several of his associates in Munich but failed at the time. Later, while he was in prison, Hitler wrote his book *Mein Kampf*, which became a sort of the Bible of the Nazi movement. There, he openly and extensively elaborated on the concept of the harmfulness of Judaism, its negative aspects, its racial inferiority and, in principle, already outlined a series of measures he thought should be taken against Judaism when, one day, he would come to power (Weiss, 2013: 143).

Hitler's concept of Nazism coincided with certain needs and endeavours of some social strata in Germany at that time, which developed in two directions. On the one hand, Germany in those years, especially in the 1920s, was faced with a severe social crisis: a lost war, reparations, territorial restrictions, arms control. Germans, who until 1918 believed that they would become the leading nation, could hardly bear it, particularly the most affected circles (one part of the nobility, the officers' corps, the declared imperial authority, etc.) but also the petty German bourgeoisie, which lost its savings and money owing to inflation crises (Weiss, 2013: 146). On the other hand, the concept of the *less worthy* (inferior) race, which first referred to the Jews and later included other nations (especially the Slavs) and ethnic groups (such as Roma), was in fact politically a very tempting, practical and acceptable concept which consequently gave rise to the following conclusion: if the Jews were *less worthy*, then they should be removed from all positions and replaced by the *superior* race. The idea that the Slavs were *less worthy* was practically justification of a century-old German dream, historically embodied in the concept of *Drang nach Osten* (expansion to the East). These were the real roots of Nazi ideology, which operated under the slogan *Blut und Boden* (Blood and Soil). On the one hand, it implied the spirit of undefiled Germanic blood of the noble Aryan race and, on the other hand, its connection with the soil and the exclusive rule not only over the soil it governed then but also over the soil needed to sufficiently expand the living space (*Lebensraum*) (Weiss, 2013: 147).

To this effect, the Nazi campaign made use of propaganda, education, research, publications, films, bans and taboos in all social and cultural domains within the Third Reich and throughout Europe. The Nazis resorted to drastic measures of deleting, removing and altering the religious texts and opera librettos which were even slightly *tainted* and *defiled* by Judaism, renaming of the streets bearing the names of Jews, prohibiting the music and literary works of Jewish artists and writers, destroying Jewish monuments and libraries, eradicating the Jewish cultural heritage and *Jewish science*, burning books and human beings (Friedlander, 2013: 17).

Under the impact of racist teaching, some scientists considered that the ethnic Roma and Sinti groups¹⁰ living in Germany and Austria were a real threat to the purity of the Aryan blood of the German race. The most prominent figures among them were the German anthropologist Dr. Heinrich Wilhelm Kranz, director of the *Institute of Anthropology, Human Heredity and Eugenics* in Giessen, and Dr. Robert Ritter, a psychiatrist from Tübingen. Kranz believed that Roma people were “free agents” prone to vagrancy; thus, in order to protect the German race and preclude the social and racial danger of their

¹⁰Sinti, a Roma community group whose members live mainly in Germany and Austria.

procreation, Roma men were to be separated from the women and deported to concentration camps. Among the so-called scientists of Nazi Germany, Ritter was one of the main leaders and organizers of the destruction of Roma and Sinti. In November 1936, he was appointed Head of the *Racial Hygiene and Demographic Biology Research Department* of the German Reich Ministry of Health in Berlin, known as the *Institute for Racial Hygiene*. The main task of the Institute was to register all Roma and Sinti in Germany, perform data processing based on race criteria and conduct the so-called selection. Ritter and his closest associates aimed at proving that the Roma and Sinti, although they came from India, were no longer the Aryans, as they lost their racial purity by mixing with non-Aryans and other asocial groups. Their task was, therefore, to prepare and justify the *Final Solution* of the Roma and Sinti, which Himmler announced first on December 8, 1938, in the *Circular Combatting the Gypsy Nuisance* (Đurić, Miletić, 2008: 34).

The Nuremberg laws represent the realization of a racist concept at the legislative level. The laws based explicitly on racial theory were passed for the first time in 1935-1936, mainly including two sets of laws: the Citizenship Law, and the Law on the Protection of German Blood (Weiss, 2013: 154).

The essence of the Nuremberg Citizenship Law is based on the fact that there were two types of citizens in Nazi Germany. The first category included the people of pure *Aryan blood*, who were the citizens of the Reich (German nationals) and thus the bearers of all rights. The second category of citizens included the "subjects" of the state, who were obliged to be completely loyal, obedient and submissive to the state, and to pay all their dues, but they were deprived of civil and political rights: they had no right to vote or participate in any kind of public life, public services, and the like. In Germany of that time, the law basically applied only to the Jews and served as an instrument for their anti-semitic persecution (Weiss, 2013: 155).

The Law on the Protection of German Blood further reinforced the racist ideology. It strictly prohibited marriages between *the Aryans* and *the non-Aryans*, and imposed rigorous penalties for sexual intercourse between *the Aryans* and *the non-Aryans*, including death penalty in some cases. Under this law, only people with four German-born grandparents (two grandfathers and two grandmothers) were full-blooded *Aryans*. A *non-Aryan* was any person who had at least three grandparents of non-Aryan blood. Hence, as stated in Hitler's definition, those who had four or three Jewish grandparents were regarded as full-blooded Jews. The main goal of this law was to draw a sharp racial line (Weiss, 2013: 155).

The most monstrous chapters of the Second World War and the Holocaust are various medical experiments on *non-Aryans*. In the Third Reich, eugenics gained the status of a legitimate science, which was organized and carried out by the state. In concentration camps, brutal experiments were carried out on prisoners, without any ethic and common sense, by doctors and scientists who willingly agreed to do so. A number of SS physicians who performed such experiments in concentration camps, including *Auschwitz*, went down in history as notorious medical criminals.¹¹

In *Auschwitz*, Prof. dr. Carl Clauberg experimented with mass sterilization on several hundred Jewish women from different countries. He developed a system of non-surgical mass sterilization which entailed injecting certain chemicals into the subjects, which resulted in female infertility and death; some of them were killed so that an autopsy could

¹¹ For more, see: Jewish Virtual Library, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/nazi-medical-experimentation-at-auschwitz-birkenau> (Source: The State Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau), accessed 01.06.2018.

be made on the corpses, in order to acquire relevant knowledge that would ensure the success of experiments.

Like Clauberg, Horst Schumann conducted experiments on mass sterilization at *Birkenau*. Schumann used X-ray sterilization, exposing the ovaries and testicles of the victim to radiation, which resulted in severe burns and eventual deaths of most of the treated prisoners. In his report to Himmler in 1944, discontent with the X-ray experimentation results, Schumann gave preference to surgical castration, as a quicker method that produced more reliable results.

The notorious Dr. Joseph Mengele was also involved in eugenics experiments, working in collaboration with the *Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Genetics, and Eugenics*. He was particularly interested in the phenomenon of twins and dwarfism. His first subjects were Gypsy children who served as guinea pigs for experimental treatment and further scientific examinations. After being subjected to starvation and agonizing experiments *in vivo*, the treated twins and people with disabilities were killed by phenol injections so that Mengele could proceed with the comparative analysis of the internal organs at autopsy.

In 1942, SS-Hauptsturmführer Prof. Dr. August Hirt, the Chairman of the Anatomy Department at the Reich University in Strassburg, received Himmler's permission to select the required number of prisoners from Auschwitz for his pseudo-scientific anthropological research on Jewish skeletons. A total of 115 prisoners (79 Jewish men, 30 Jewish women, 2 Poles, and 4 Asians) were selected, quarantined and killed in gas chambers at the *Natzweiler-Struthof Concentration Camp*. The corpses became part of Hirt's skeletons collection and his anthropological studies aimed at proving the superiority of the Nordic race.¹²

CONCLUSION

In spite of the fact that the century we live in represents the Renaissance and the Golden Age of Human Rights, as well as the age of the highest human enlightenment, the presence of transformed and latent eugenics in the form of modern eugenics remains undeniable. No matter how contradictory or controversial this may seem, developments in medical and genetic technology have generated a new form of eugenics, generally known as human genetic engineering, which has potential benefits as well as drawbacks.

Although the term *eugenics* has been abandoned, "eugenic ideas remain prevalent in many issues surrounding human reproduction. Medical genetics (a post-World War II medical specialty) encompasses a wide range of health concerns, from genetic screening and counseling to fetal gene manipulation and the treatment of adults suffering from hereditary disorders. (...) Furthermore, it is now possible to diagnose certain genetic defects in the unborn. Many couples choose to terminate a pregnancy that involves a genetically disabled offspring. These developments have reinforced the eugenic aim of identifying and eliminating undesirable genetic material. (...) Direct manipulation of harmful genes is also being studied. If perfected, it could obviate eugenic arguments for restricting reproduction among those who carry harmful genes. Such conflicting

¹² See: Jewish Virtual Library, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/nazi-medical-experimentation-at-auschwitz-birkenau> (Source: The State Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau), accessed 01.06.2018.

innovations have complicated the controversy surrounding what many call the “*new eugenics*”.¹³

Given the fact that both religious and secular laws strictly prohibit and sanction the act of depriving another person of his/her life, it is absurd to talk about organized legitimate pseudo-scientific groups, which would work on the *final solution* for the *ineligible misfits*. In the eye of religion, morality and jurisprudence, every human being is *eligible* by the very fact that he is a human being. Nevertheless, bearing in mind the greatest atrocities in human history that occurred during World War II, permanent caution must be exercised in order to prevent such a barbaric advancement of pseudo-science and harmful practices of the so-called scholars and visionaries.

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¹³ See: Britannica.com:Al Eugenics –Description, History & Modern Eugenics, <https://www.britannica.com/science/eugenics-genetics>, accessed 02.06.2018.

EUGENIKA

Eugenika je pseudonauka o poboljšanju i kontroli ljudske vrste i to tako što bi trebalo sprečiti inferiorne ljude da imaju decu (negativna eugenika) i podsticati superiorne da se što više razmnožavaju (pozitivna eugenika). Eugenički pokret vuče poreklo iz ranog 19. veka i u velikoj meri se razvijao pod uticajem Francisa Galtona u Velikoj Britaniji i Charlesa Davenporta u SAD. Ova dva naučnika su ohrabivala uzgajanje poželjnih i reproduktivnu kontrolu nepoželjnih ljudi. U nacistički orijentisanoj Nemačkoj, eugenika doživljava vrtoglavu ekspanziju i svoj vrhunac. Eugenika se, budući da je bila esencija mnogih rasnih zakona, na najsurovije načine primenjivala u praksi putem masovnih eutanazije manje vrednih, sterilizacije, gasnih komora i i stravičnih eksperimenata na ljudima nižih rasa.

Ključne reči: *eugenika, pozitivna eugenika, negativna eugenika, nacizam.*

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