

# The Link between the Rockefeller Foundation and Racial Hygiene in Nazi Germany

By Lia Weintraub

Upon first glance, a connection between Adolf Hitler, chancellor and dictator of Nazi Germany between 1933 and 1945, and the Rockefeller Foundation, championed by the poster child of capitalism, seems laughable. While Hitler viewed internalization of German businesses as mandatory, the Rockefeller oil empire flourished upon personal wealth and privatized businesses. Hitler's politics were purely nationalistic, aiming to resuscitate the war-torn Germany and make it a great nation. The Rockefeller Foundation, in contrast, valued internationalism. Even today, the goal of the Foundation is "to promote the well-being of mankind throughout the world." It viewed its duty as assisting peoples throughout the globe.<sup>1</sup> Yet the two – the Rockefeller Foundation and Adolf Hitler – came together in their efforts to support eugenics and eugenics research throughout Germany in the 1930s. They both saw the possibilities of a future order determined by eugenics. Hitler's motives are clear; he yearned for a solution to the debilitating poverty that overtook Germany after the war, something that would make Germany great. Ridding the country of its "inferior" stock would finally allow Germany to flourish. The Rockefeller Foundation's motives, however, are less concrete. While true that eugenics were largely accepted by the upper class of American society, no clear reason exists to perfectly describe the Foundation's motives in funding eugenics research in Germany. One can make that conjecture that the Rockefeller Foundation aligned itself ideologically with Nazi Germany not necessarily because it supported the Nazi's racist aims, but in order to further the reputation of American science throughout the world and allow other countries to expand their eugenics research.

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<sup>1</sup> Carol Sachse, "What Research to What End: The Rockefeller Foundation and the Max Planck Gesellschaft in the Early Cold War," *Central European History* 42, no. 01 (2009), <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayFulltext?type=6&fid=4370928&jid=CCC&volumeId=42&issueId=01&aid=4370924&bodyId=&membershipNumber=&societyETOCSession=&fulltextType=RA&fileId=S0008938909000041>

In its purest form, eugenics has little to do with the political motives of Rockefeller and Hitler. The movement originated shortly after Charles Darwin pronounced his theory of evolution and Gregor Mendel wrote of genetics and the innate expression of traits. Francis Galton, Darwin's cousin, combined these theories and transformed them into guidelines for the improvement of the human race.<sup>2</sup> In 1904, he published *Eugenics: Its Definition, Scope, and Aims* in the American Journal of Sociology. In it, he outlined the possibility of improving our stock over time through selection and propagation of the fit people. He wrote: "Let us for a moment suppose that the practice of eugenics should hereafter raise the average quality of our nation to that of its better moiety at the present day, and consider the gain. The general tone of domestic, social, and political life would be higher. The race as a whole would be less foolish, less frivolous, less excitable, and politically more provident than now."<sup>3</sup> Galton truly believed that his cousin's scientific research from the Galapagos could be applied to all humans. Eventually, the weak stock would die off, as their "inborn qualities", or innate features found in their genomes, did not prove suitable for reproduction.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps Galton's most pronounced shortcoming, however, came in his attempt to determine which traits were superior to others. Instead of citing particular qualities, he urged: "We must...leave morals as far as possible out of the discussion, not entangling ourselves with the almost hopeless difficulties they raise as to whether a character as a whole is good or bad."<sup>5</sup> Galton's omission of any specific superior characteristics would lead future eugenicists and followers of eugenics to create their own definition of a superior stock.

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Crook, "American Eugenics and the Nazis: Recent Historiography," *The European Legacy* 7, no. 3 (2002), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10848770220132366>.

<sup>3</sup> Francis Galton, "Eugenics: Its Definition, Scope, and Aims," *The American Journal of Sociology* X, no. 1 (July 1904), <http://web.archive.org/web/20071103082723/galton.org/essays/1900-1911/galton-1904-am-journ-soc-eugenics-scope-aims.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Eugenics would be used by scientists and politicians alike, both of whom sought a scientific framework to back their political convictions of superiority.<sup>6</sup>

While now portrayed as a fringe movement vastly unpopular with the majority of the population, eugenics jived with the philosophy of many of America's most powerful. Some might even say that "[Eugenics] was conceived at the onset of the twentieth century and implemented by America's wealthiest, most powerful, and most learned men against the nation's most vulnerable and helpless."<sup>7</sup>

A clear dichotomy between the wealthy, "true Americans" and the new immigrants became apparent beginning in the 1890s. At this time, immigrants moved to the Land of the Free like never before. These immigrants were assumed to be of a lesser genetic stock, and would thus pollute the American gene pool. According to scholar Peter Quinn, "Along with the alarm over hordes of foreign defectives swarming into America was a growing perception of a fecund stratum of feeble-minded whose numbers, if left unchecked, would fatally weaken the germ plasm of the country's Anglo-Saxon majority."<sup>8</sup> With such an onslaught of inferior bloodlines, American eugenicists worked to encounter and preserve America's most pure genes. They "craved blond, blue-eyed, Nordic types. This group alone, they believed, was fit to inherit the Earth. In the process, the movement intended to subtract emancipated Negroes, immigrant Asian laborers, Indians, Hispanics, East Europeans, Jews, dark-haired hill folk, poor people, the infirm, and anyone classified outside the gentrified genetic lines drawn up by American

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<sup>6</sup> Peter Weingart, "German Eugenics: Between Science and Politics," *Osiris*, 2nd ser., 5 (1989): page 260, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/301800?seq=20>.

<sup>7</sup> Edwin Black, *War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America's Campaign to Create a Master Race* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2003), page 7.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Quinn, "Race Cleansing in America: a Nationwide Gene-Purity Movement Promoted Methods that Eventually were Adopted by the Third Reich. And everyone from John D. Rockefeller to W. E. B. Du Bois Supported." *American Heritage* (February-March 2003), [http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA100174015&v=2.1&u=mlln\\_m\\_tufts&it=r&p=PROF&sw=w](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA100174015&v=2.1&u=mlln_m_tufts&it=r&p=PROF&sw=w).

raceologists.”<sup>9</sup> In sum, the eugenics movement in the United States sought to preserve the social hierarchy that was emerging – allow the Nordic Americans to propagate their race, while eradicating any sign of the inferior minority populations. An early eugenicist, Lothrop Stoddard, wrote that “the Nordic native American has been crowded out with amazing rapidity by these swarming, prolific aliens, and after two short generations, he has in many of our urban areas become almost extinct.”<sup>10</sup> In essence, many Americans who had lived in the country for years felt threatened by the surge of foreign breeds and thought that the status of the United States would deteriorate with such lowly demographics. They wanted to protect the “racial purity of the hegemonic white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, middle to upper classes.”<sup>11</sup>

With such aims, it is no wonder that America’s upper classes flocked to the eugenics movement. A New York Times article from 1913 stated that some eugenics work aimed to “study...the origins of and the best methods of restricting the strains that produce the defective and delinquent classes of the community.”<sup>12</sup> Certainly, taxpayers associated the lower classes – the minority populations – with criminality and insanity and wanted to rid their country of such burdens.<sup>13</sup> The elites wanted to protect their status from foreigners and take away the financial strain of supporting federal institutionalization of the criminals and feeble minded. By 1912, eugenics supporters in attendance at the International Congress of Eugenics included such illustrious names as “the American inventor, Alexander Graham Bell; Charles B. Davenport, director of the

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<sup>9</sup> Edwin Black, “Eugenics and the Nazis – the California Connection,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (San Francisco), November 9, 2003, <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2003/11/09/ING9C2QSKB1.DTL&ao=5>.

<sup>10</sup> Lothrop Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1926), p. 165 in Black, *War Against the Weak*, page 30.

<sup>11</sup> Crook, pages 366-7.

<sup>12</sup> “Extends Work in Eugenics,” *New York Times*, March 30, 1913, <http://ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/97385592?accountid=14434>.

<sup>13</sup> Crook, “American Eugenics and the Nazis: Recent Historiography,” page 367.

Eugenics Record Office in Cold Spring Harbor, located in Long Island, New York; Charles W. Eliot, president of Harvard University; and David Starr Jordan, president of Stanford University.”<sup>14</sup> The robust support for eugenics among American elite makes it no surprise that the Rockefeller Foundation involved itself in funding research in the field. The Carnegie Foundation had already established a eugenics research center in the United States at Cold Spring Harbor. It was time for the Rockefeller Foundation to bring eugenics abroad.

John D. Rockefeller Jr., head of the Rockefeller Foundation since 1897, had a strong interest in eugenics – specifically population control. He had learned population control theory from his professors at Brown University, many of whom viewed rapid population growth and immigration as serious threats. Rockefeller would later join the American Eugenics Society and become a trustee of the Bureau of Social Hygiene.<sup>15</sup> Some would describe him as “shy and intensely private,” but records show that John D. Rockefeller Jr. enjoyed sharing his ideas regarding eugenics.<sup>16</sup> He corresponded with Charles Davenport, the Director of the Carnegie-funded Eugenics Records Office, regarding his personal ideas for incarcerating weak-minded women for longer than their jail sentence so they “would...be kept from perpetuating their kind...until after the period of child bearing had passed.”<sup>17</sup>

Placed in an uncommon position of wealth and prestige, Rockefeller could use these propensities toward eugenics to greatly influence the research in the field. As head

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<sup>14</sup> Stefan Kühl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), page 14.

<sup>15</sup> Rebecca Messall, "The Long Road of Eugenics: From Rockefeller to Roe v. Wade," *The Human Life Review* (Fall 2004), [http://www.humanlifereview.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=57:the-long-road-of-eugenics-from-rockefeller-to-ro-e-v-wade&catid=36:2004-fall&Itemid=6](http://www.humanlifereview.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=57:the-long-road-of-eugenics-from-rockefeller-to-ro-e-v-wade&catid=36:2004-fall&Itemid=6).

<sup>16</sup> Black, *War against the Weak*, page 93.

<sup>17</sup> Biography of John D. Rockefeller Jr. Rockefeller to Davenport, 27 January 1912 in Ibid.

of the Rockefeller Foundation, he had much say in where dollars were given. This “wealth and social standing gave [the Rockefellers] indescribable political influence, which, along with their money, they plowed into the eugenics movement around the world.”<sup>18</sup> The Rockefeller Foundation had a decidedly international focus in their grant making. Expanding programming beyond national borders would spread the Rockefeller name and the accompanying prestige. It would also expand U.S. influence, bringing American ideas to distant lands. The Foundation principally focused on health-related issues, funding researchers to find cures to diseases ravaging different populations. Starting in the 1920s, American foundations turned much of their focus toward supporting the sciences.<sup>19</sup> The Rockefeller Foundation, in particular, hoped that funding health-related causes would “stimulate progress, encourage experiment, demonstrate new methods, and increase efficiency.”<sup>20</sup> As eugenics was considered a viable science at the time period, it would fit into this category. Scholar Carol Sachse says that this incorporation of eugenics in the category of science would pervert the Rockefeller Foundation’s mission. She wrote: “The Foundation’s goal narrowed from ‘promoting the welfare of mankind’ to the ‘rationalization of human behavior.’”<sup>21</sup> In a modern day perspective, it is easy to say that funding eugenics corrupted pure scientific pursuits. It is worth adding, however, that eugenics was a viable movement in the early half of the twentieth century. People genuinely believed that some groups were innately inferior due to genetic differences. The Rockefeller Foundation sought to make eugenics a global

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<sup>18</sup> Messall, “The Long Road of Eugenics: From Rockefeller to Roe v. Wade.”

<sup>19</sup> Sachse, “What Research to What End: The Rockefeller Foundation and the Max Planck Gesellschaft in the Early Cold War.”

<sup>20</sup> *The Rockefeller Foundation Annual Report: 1926*, page 14, <http://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/about-us/annual-reports/1920-1929>.

<sup>21</sup> Sachse, “What Research to What End: The Rockefeller Foundation and the Max Planck Gesellschaft in the Early Cold War.”

movement, naturally selecting the prime bloodlines, while suppressing the reproduction of the innately more criminal and feeble-minded minority groups.

Some might wonder why the Rockefeller Foundation decided to support eugenics research in Germany, in particular. It is clear that the eugenics movement sought to expand to new countries; the ultimate goal of eugenics was to eradicate lesser genetic material from the entire world, not just the United States.<sup>22</sup> Germans, in particular, were eager to expand their capabilities and have their country become a center for research. In 1911, Germany founded the Kaiser Wilhelm Society in response to the lack of research coming from German universities and the seemingly rapid advances of American scientific research capabilities.<sup>23</sup> Germans wanted to compete internationally in research and scholarly innovations, while providing an environment in which German science would receive the support necessary to be the best in the world.<sup>24</sup>

After World War I, however, the Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes had aims loftier than simply allowing Germany to compete with the European (and American) superpowers. The Great War devastated Germany, not only wrecking its infrastructure, but also deeply wounding its people's morale. Eugenics held the promise of building upon the past, of building upon the time before war and defeat stung Germany. The country could erase the devastation of loss and poverty to start anew.<sup>25</sup> At this point, eugenics changed from being a fringe movement in Germany to an integral part of social medicine. People embraced new social values with the hope for a Germany without poverty or

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<sup>22</sup> Black, *War Against the Weak*, page 61.

<sup>23</sup> Sachse, "What Research to What End: The Rockefeller Foundation and the Max Planck Gesellschaft in the Early Cold War."

<sup>24</sup> Gretchen E. Schafft, *From Racism to Genocide: Anthropology in the Third Reich* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), page 46.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, page 47.

destruction.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, eugenics would be useful in the creation of a new Germany. Although the Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes were established in the early twentieth century, research in the field of eugenics did not begin until the mid-1920s. This society would build research centers in many scientific disciplines, including The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Psychiatry and the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Genetics, and Eugenics, which both focused upon eugenic research. Even still, many German scientists – especially eugenicists – idolized the research being done in the United States. In regards to eugenics, racial hygiene was a purely academic field in Germany up until 1926. It was the United States who actually brought the research into the political arena.<sup>27</sup>

Eugenicists in the United States strongly emphasized the need to put their findings into practice. It was one thing to do the research and something else entirely to use it as a catalyst for societal change. As eugenics was quite popular among influential members of American society, it was not difficult to bridge the gap between scientific research and constitutional law.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps the most obvious manifestation of eugenics thought in United States legislation came in the Supreme Court decision of *Buck v. Bell* in 1927. The case did little more than firm up the judiciary endorsement of eugenic practice in the United States. It was seen as a viable alternative to the increasing amount of poverty and criminality in the United States. In defense of his decision, Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote, “It is better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or to let them starve for their imbecility, society

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<sup>26</sup> Paul Weindling, "Weimar Eugenics: The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics in Social Context," *Annals of Science* 3, no. 42 (1985): page 307, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00033798500200221>.

<sup>27</sup> Kuhl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism*, page 20

<sup>28</sup> Messall, "The Long Road of Eugenics: From Rockefeller to Roe v. Wade."

can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind.”<sup>29</sup> Eugenics was, therefore, seen as a solution to the problems that lower populations brought to the United States. If certain inferior bloodlines were cut off, then the problems contained in their genome would not extend to future generations and continue to plague the United States.

As a result of the ruling, 28 states imposed eugenic legislation to govern the practice. The decision greatly increased the amount of forced sterilization procedures done in the United States. The annual average of sterilizations increased tenfold, from 230 to 2,300 after laws were put in place.<sup>30</sup> Estimates suggest that, as a result of the *Buck v. Bell* decision, “eugenics practitioners coercively sterilized some 60,000 Americans, barred the marriage of thousands, forcibly segregated thousands in ‘colonies,’ and persecuted untold numbers.”<sup>31</sup>

The Germans admired the success that eugenics research in America had in adapting its findings to public policy. Researchers in Germany “felt the need to broaden acceptance of their beliefs. All of them wanted eugenic solutions to be applied on a global basis.”<sup>32</sup> Because the United States had achieved success in integrating the findings of eugenics research with actual practices, it was lauded as the leader of the field. German eugenicists, with their emergent sector, admired American practices and sought to replicate them in Europe. They specifically admired the comprehensive eugenics legislation passed in the United States. Indeed, Germans were interested in the study of eugenics even before Hitler came to power. “In the early 1920s, the Germans had seen themselves as more disposed towards pure research, while the Americans

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<sup>29</sup> Quinn, "Race Cleansing in America: a Nationwide Gene-Purity Movement Promoted Methods that Eventually were Adopted by the Third Reich. And everyone from John D. Rockefeller to W. E. B. Du Bois Supported."

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Black, "Eugenics and the Nazis – the California Connection."

<sup>32</sup> Black, *War Against the Weak*, page 70.

excelled in ‘practical statesmanship’, but by the mid-1930s Nazi racial hygienists were congratulating themselves on having the world’s most efficient system, admittedly achieved with the crucial support of America.”<sup>33</sup> The Germans’ early work in eugenics would not have been possible without the extensive support of the Rockefeller Foundation. And without this initial study, they would not have been as prepared for Hitler’s creation of a state-controlled eugenics program.

The Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes would have a leading role in furthering German eugenics research. The institutes, along with the Rockefeller’s help, would allow Germany to follow the American example of integrating eugenic studies into society. The Rockefeller money highlighted the German admiration of American eugenics policies and the American desire to bring their style throughout the world. In this way, the research done at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes would both allow Germany to emulate American research styles and compete with its prestige. The Rockefellers, known supporters of eugenics in the United States, would expect the German researchers to use their money in a way that aligned with American practices. Indeed, as wielders of the money, the Rockefellers had leverage in determining the direction in which the projects they funded went. In this way, American perspectives seeped into the German eugenics program. Historians write that German and American eugenicists had such a close relationship because of the extensive financial support of American foundations for eugenic research in Germany.<sup>34</sup> The ties of money also linked practices between the two countries. The largest of such donors was, of course, the Rockefeller Foundation.

The Rockefeller Foundation, for its part, hoped to extend eugenics research around the globe. Eugenics was still an infant industry in Germany; it had not received

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<sup>33</sup> Crook, "American Eugenics and the Nazis: Recent Historiography."

<sup>34</sup> Kuhl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism*, page 20.

the support as it had in the United States. Through aid to the Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes and their work with eugenics, the Rockefeller Foundation fueled the eugenics movement in Germany and allowed it to grow in the image of American eugenics. Yet the Rockefeller Foundation had connected itself to the growth of German eugenics much before it turned its gaze toward the Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes. In 1923, the Foundation granted funding to Agnes Bluhm, a female German racial hygienist. They supported her research on heredity and alcoholism in early 1920.<sup>35</sup>

Following funding of Agnes Bluhm, the Rockefeller Foundation began supporting hundreds of German eugenicists. The Rockefeller Foundation officials did a European tour in December of 1926. On this tour, they could both see how past funds were used and scout out new projects to sponsor in the future. After this tour, the Rockefeller Foundation began supporting other German eugenicists, including Herman Poll, Alfred Grotjahn, and Hans Nachstein.<sup>36</sup> By 1926, reports suggest that the Rockefeller Foundation had donated \$410,000 – equivalent to \$4 million in today’s money – to hundreds of German researchers.<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps what the Rockefeller is most known for, however, is its support of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes in regard to their eugenics research. Also in 1926, the Foundation allocated \$250,000 to the creation of the German Institute for Psychiatric Research (under the Kaiser Wilhelm umbrella).<sup>38</sup> Despite such a formidable allocation, the Rockefeller Foundation hardly mentions this funding decision in their 1926 Annual Report. While there are paragraphs on end about yellow fever funding and the Chinese Medical Board, the report only devotes one sentence to the expansion of the German

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Black, “Eugenics and the Nazis – The California Connection.”

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

Institute for Psychiatric Research, highlighting only that “a substantial sum has been voted to a psychiatric clinic of international importance in Munich.”<sup>39</sup> One cannot say if this trivialization of the allocation was intentional to hide the Rockefeller Foundation’s engagement with the Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes. It must, however, be stated that future annual reports devote more attention to allocations in Germany.

As a result of this initial grant, programming and research flourished at the German Institute for Psychiatric Research. At this facility, researchers documented the link between race and mental disorders. They “concentrated on locating the genetic and neurological basis of traits such as criminal propensity and mental disease.”<sup>40</sup> Ernst Rüdin, the head of the German Institute, often “spoke of the relationship between mental retardation and race.”<sup>41</sup> In such a statement, it is clear that, even before the Nazis came to power, the link between eugenics research and racism was quite apparent. In line with these interests, Rüdin primarily focused his research on the inheritance of psychiatric disorders, writing a renowned report on the genetics of schizophrenia as early as 1916.<sup>42</sup> The Rockefeller Foundation did not oppose such research, even though it was later used to support the Nazi racial cleansing project. Between 1925 and 1935, the Rockefeller Foundation spent nearly three million dollars funding both the construction of the new facility and research within the institute.<sup>43</sup> As it appears, the Rockefeller Foundation did not discontinue funding to this institute, despite Hitler’s rise to power in 1933.

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<sup>39</sup> *The Rockefeller Foundation Annual Report: 1926*, page 14,

<http://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/about-us/annual-reports/1920-1929>.

<sup>40</sup> Kuhl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism*, page 20.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, page 28.

<sup>42</sup> William E. Seidelman, “Science and Inhumanity: The Kaiser-Wilhelm/Max Planck Society,” *If Not Now* 2, (Winter 2000), <http://www.doew.at/thema/planck/planck1.html>

<sup>43</sup> Sachse, “What Research to What End: The Rockefeller Foundation and the Max Planck Gesellschaft in the Early Cold War.”

In addition to his work with the Institute for Psychiatry, Ernst Rüdin also chaired the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Brain Research in Berlin. This institute, quite similar to the Institute of Psychiatry, was one of the “main centers of investigation in the field of neurology and psychiatry in Europe.”<sup>44</sup> Seeing that the research facility was housed in a single room in Berlin, the Rockefeller Foundation decided to augment the capacity of the institution by building a new facility. The foundation allocated a grant of \$317,000 to the Institute in 1929, allowing it to construct a prominent facility and move to the forefront of German race biology. After this initial grant, the Rockefeller Foundation funded various research projects within the institution.<sup>45</sup>

At the time that the Rockefeller Foundation made its grants to the Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes of Brain Research and Psychiatry, the Nazi party had not yet taken power. Although not heavily documented in the annual reports, the foundation continued funding for the institutes well past Hitler’s rise to power. These institutes, headed by Rüdin, would provide some of the most significant backings to Hitler’s racist policies.

Soon after Hitler took power, Rüdin became a prime supporter of the Nazi racial hygiene policies.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, many would consider Rüdin “the primary medical presence behind the Nazi sterilization program.”<sup>47</sup> Much of Hitler’s Sterilization Law of 1933 reflected research that Rüdin carried out. Under this legislation, people with manic-depressive disorder and schizophrenia could be sterilized, both groups that Rüdin had researched intently. In fact, Rüdin was one of the primary drafters of the sterilization legislation.<sup>48</sup> The Rockefeller Foundation would have known about this law, as it was

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<sup>44</sup> The Rockefeller Foundation, *The Rockefeller Foundation Annual Report: 1929*, New York, 1929.

<sup>45</sup> Black, “Eugenics and the Nazis – The California Connection.”

<sup>46</sup> Seidelman, “Science and Inhumanity: The Kaiser-Wilhelm/Max Planck Society.”

<sup>47</sup> Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide*, New York, Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1986.

<sup>48</sup> Seidelman, “Science and Inhumanity: The Kaiser-Wilhelm/Max Planck Society.”

publicized in the American press. The New York Times ran an article entitled, "Pure German Race is Aim of New Law" on August 6, 1933. The piece describes the legislation and the prominence that racial hygiene would play in Nazi Germany. A German doctor was quoted: "National Socialism stakes its future on [the question of race] and regards race purity as taken for granted."<sup>49</sup> The Germans did not hide that they wanted to create a purely Aryan race. Much like the American decision in *Buck v. Bell*, they viewed sterilization as a way to maintain national purity. The Rockefeller Foundation would have had knowledge that the Germans wanted to create a pure race, much like Americans did.

Under Hitler's regime, the Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes, headed by Rüdin, turned into centers for Nazi eugenic practices. Doctors who had questions or sought advice about eugenic practices came to Rüdin for guidance; in many respects, he was the eugenics guru. He was so supportive of sterilization, in fact, that many of his colleagues nicknamed him "Reichsführer for Sterilization."<sup>50</sup>

It is difficult to say how much the Rockefeller Foundation knew about Rüdin's ties to the Nazi regime. One cannot distinguish the precise reasons why funding for the Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes for Brain Research and Psychology slowed in the mid 1930s. What can be said, however, is that the Foundation continued funding for two years after the Nazi regime came to power. The Rockefeller Foundation cut back funding when Rüdin emerged publicly as a propagandist for Nazi racial hygiene.<sup>51</sup> However, they

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<sup>49</sup> Guido Enderis, "Pure German Race is Aim of New Law," *New York Times*, August 6, 1933, <http://search.proquest.com/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/100881638/1366639641C27A06919/3?accountid=14434>.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Sachse, "What Research to What End: The Rockefeller Foundation and the Max Planck Gesellschaft in the Early Cold War."

continued funding various other eugenics projects within the Kaiser Wilhelm apparatus well through the 1930s.

Many such projects came out of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics (KWIA). Established in 1927 due to popular demand, the institute focused on the study of German social problems.<sup>52</sup> Perhaps the most well known research program to come out of the KWIA was known as the German Mapping Project. Conceived by Eugen Fischer, the head of the institute, the project would map the racial variation in Germany by location. In essence, the research would be a comprehensive measure of the German population makeup.<sup>53</sup> Fischer wanted to determine which populations were located in which areas. In particular, Fischer was fascinated with the intermixing of different racial populations. Although the Nazi party would later despise this phenomenon, Fischer took a fairly positive viewpoint. He had done a study on the Rehoboth intermarrying of settlers and natives in Namibia and reported quite favorable results.<sup>54</sup> The German Mapping Project would allow Fischer to analyze racial mixture in his native country – Germany. He would analyze “the question of the Jewish population living among a non-Jewish one.”<sup>55</sup> When asked about these aims, Fischer said: “Finally, we have to think of the foreign Germans... Whether without crossing or mixing, through their own development, eventual incest, or through some kind of environmental influence (climate, altitude, lifestyles, etc.) the progeny of German immigrants have changed over the centuries... These are questions of great importance,

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<sup>52</sup> Weindling, "Weimar Eugenics: The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics in Social Context." page 305.

<sup>53</sup> Schafft, *From Racism to Genocide: Anthropology in the Third Reich*. page 49.

<sup>54</sup> Weindling, "Weimar Eugenics: The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics in Social Context." page 313.

<sup>55</sup> Weingart, "German Eugenics: Between Science and Politics," page 263.

for there are areas where large numbers in relatively pure form are located.”<sup>56</sup> In this case, one must understand “Foreign Germans” as a euphemism for German Jews. Fischer, therefore, sought to determine the racial differences between the German Jews and the pure Germans, highlighting the effects of interbreeding. Fischer ultimately sought to control and direct German reproduction in the way that would be most favorable for his country. The German Mapping Project would assist in this task.

This project, however, proved far too expensive for the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute to fund without outside help. Desperate, Eugen Fischer contacted the Rockefeller Foundation in March of 1932, requesting funding for this project, among others.<sup>57</sup> The KWIA had already attracted the attention of Rockefeller Foundation employees, who made regular visits to Germany in order to determine which projects they would fund.<sup>58</sup> Eugen Fischer wrote to the Foundation explaining the program: “In substance it deals with a comprehensive investigation of the anthropological relations of Germany, with the object of finding a really scientific foundation to judge the anthropological constitution of the population.”<sup>59</sup> From this explanation, the Rockefeller Foundation thought that the project would merely be a “cultural atlas” of the German people. A Rockefeller staff person wrote in his diary about the project: “The purpose is to establish a cultural atlas of the German speaking peoples. Some 15,000 people being studied by the questionnaire method...[The] maps, when completed, should throw considerable light on sequences of cultural diffusion and existence of distinct cultural areas within the areas populated by Germans.”<sup>60</sup> Their description differed from the Germans, as natives instead called it,

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<sup>56</sup> E. Fischer, “Anthropologische Erforschung der deutschen Bevölkerung”, in Schafft, *From Racism to Genocide: Anthropology in the Third Reich*, page 51.

<sup>57</sup> Kuhl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism* page 21.

<sup>58</sup> Schafft, *From Racism to Genocide: Anthropology in the Third Reich*, page 48.

<sup>59</sup> RAC 1.1, A, 10, Box 20, Folder 187, Sept. 20, 1929, 4 in *Ibid.*, page 49.

<sup>60</sup> RAC 1.1, A, 10, Box 20, Folder 187, Jan. 3, 1931, in *Ibid.*, page 51.

“Racial Knowledge about the German People.”<sup>61</sup> It is clear that the Germans defined the project in more racial terms. It is not clear, however, if Fischer fine-tuned his description of the project to match what the American funders wanted to hear, or if the Rockefeller Foundation simply turned a blind eye to the racial component of the funding request. Regardless of this ambiguity, the Rockefeller Foundation decided to fund the project. In fact, they allocated \$125,000 to assist Eugen Fischer in his mapping of the German population.<sup>62</sup> The Foundation continued support of the KWIA’s German Mapping Project, despite many failings with the results. As expected with such an ambitious project, the results fell short of the goals. By 1933, only ten reports had been published. Many other funders pulled out of the program, but the Rockefeller Foundation paid to have the remaining publications set to print. They would, however, give no future funding to the German Mapping Project.<sup>63</sup>

Along with documenting the racial segments of the German population, the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute on Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics focused research on twins. This subject would assist researchers in determining the development and nature of races. It would open up a wide array of information regarding racial mixing, racial capabilities, and racial degeneration.<sup>64</sup> In addition, research on twins would provide scientists information about the inheritance of mental qualities and the genetic character of certain illnesses. When asked about the importance of researching twins, Fischer said that, “The most important differences in the characteristics between the monozygotic and dizygotic pairs prove the action of heredity and allow a summing up

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., page 54.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. pages 54-55

of the action of environment.”<sup>65</sup> In other words, Fischer believed that twins proved the most controlled group to experiment on because they are two people who have grown up in the same environment, so any differences come from genes.

A specific project carried out by the KWIA involved injecting twins with various substances, including “X-ray, lead, mercury, and certain gland extracts” to determine how these substances affected future generations and the general deterioration of the racial stock.<sup>66</sup> The scientists also tested twins for their reaction to toxic substances, including “atropine, pilocarpine, denonoline, and histomine.”<sup>67</sup> Scientists would inject test subjects with these substances to see how they affected the germ plasm differently in each twin. The researchers measured the saliva, blood pressure, and pulse of each person after ingestion, and determined that identical twins reacted more similarly than did fraternal, suggesting that the results were hereditary.<sup>68</sup> Needing funding for the project, the KWIA appealed to the Rockefeller Foundation. Indeed, officials at the philanthropic organization proved sympathetic to the request. Their reasoning included: the leadership of the KWIA in the field of eugenics, the harsh economic times in Germany, and the importance of the research project.<sup>69</sup> After agreeing to fund the request, the Rockefeller officials at the New York office sent the following telegram to the Paris office on May 13, 1932: “JUNE MEETING EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE NINE THOUSAND DOLLARS OVER THREE YEAR PERIOD TO KWG INSTITUTE ANTHROPOLOGY

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<sup>65</sup> RAC 1.1 A, 717, Box 10, Folder 63, Feb. 16, 1932, 2, in Ibid. page 54.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, page 55.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., page 156

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> RAC 1.1, A, 717, Box 10, Folder 63, May 13, 1932, 4., in Ibid., page 55.

FOR RESEARCH ON TWINS AND EFFECTS ON LATER GENERATIONS OF  
SUBSTANCES TOXIC FOR GERM PLASM.”<sup>70</sup>

While it was quite clear at the time why the Rockefeller Foundation would fund this research, it has come under much fire since the decision was made. The foundation knowingly funded a project that would harm people, a project that would inject otherwise healthy twin with toxic substances “in the name of science.” Through correspondence, the foundation had clear knowledge that test subjects were injected with harmful toxins, but did nothing to stop it.<sup>71</sup> The foundation however, did not have clear knowledge of how the experiment would be used for Nazi racial hygiene. The Rockefeller Foundation had written the grant before Hitler came to power, thus not knowing how the project would be used. The research took three years, coming under Hitler’s influence for two. In private, Eugen Fischer said that the benefit of doing research on twins would be to “promote ‘positive racial hygiene’ and to be able to ‘influence the biological basis of culture.’”<sup>72</sup> In correspondence with the Rockefeller Foundation, however, he referenced the importance of twin research in the study of heredity and how a person’s environment affects their behavior.<sup>73</sup> The Rockefeller Foundation had a clear interest in the eugenics movement, as defined by scientists in the United States. They assumed that funding eugenics research abroad would be analogous to spreading American research to other parts of the world. What they did not expect, however, was that the Germans would contort the definition of eugenics to fit their own racist aims, expanding the movement far beyond its limits in the United States.

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<sup>70</sup> Radiogram to Alan Gregg, 13 May 1932: RF 1.1 Ser 7171 Box 10, Folder 63, in Black, *War Against the Weak*, page 297.

<sup>71</sup> Schafft, *From Racism to Genocide: Anthropology in the Third Reich*, page 156.

<sup>72</sup> MPGA, I abt., Rep. 1A, Nr. 2404/2, Tätigkeitsbericht KWIA 1933, 14-17 in *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, page 157.

Once Hitler came to power, the research done at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes was put into action. The collaboration between the state and science served to justify Hitler's eugenic plan, resulting in the sterilization, mutilation, and murder of thousands of innocent victims.<sup>74</sup> In addition to the research done in his native Germany, Hitler turned toward the United States and their eugenics movement. He admired the United States for its decision in *Buck v. Bell*, saying that he had "studied with great interest the laws of several American states concerning prevention of reproduction by people whose progeny would, in all probability, be of no value or be injurious to the racial stock."<sup>75</sup> Indeed, German racial hygiene strategies followed the American lead. Many American eugenicists were initially impressed by the Nazis – some, even jealous. "Laughlin, Davenport, and other American eugenicists became envious of the thoroughness with which the Nazis implemented their race measures."<sup>76</sup> The Nazis were taking the next steps, integrating eugenics and politics in ways that American eugenicists could only dream of. This contentment with Nazi policies toward the beginning of Hitler's regime can explain why the Rockefeller Foundation continued funding its preexisting projects throughout the 1930s.

The Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes, once autonomous units, began working for the Nazi state. Much of the research they had completed was internalized by the state and used to justify the racial hygiene program. Eugen Fischer, the head of the KWIA, had once been a member of a nationalist, conservative political party. He was reportedly ambivalent toward the Nazi conceptions of the Nordic (later, Aryan) race, racial mixing,

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<sup>74</sup> Sachse, "What Research to What End: The Rockefeller Foundation and the Max Planck Gesellschaft in the Early Cold War."

<sup>75</sup> Otto Wagener, *Hitler aus nächster Nähe: Aufzeichnungen eines Vertrauten 1929-1932*, ed. Henry A. Turner (Frankfurt a.M.:Ullstein, 1978):28, in Kuhl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism*, page 37.

<sup>76</sup> Crook, "American Eugenics and the Nazis: Recent Historiography."

and the role of race in national groups.<sup>77</sup> When Hitler's party took over, however, Fischer changed his politics in order to keep his job. He was even quoted in a New York Times article in 1933 denying that the Nazis worked to eradicate the lesser genetic material in their country. He said, "It is not a question of better or worse, of cultural superiority or inferiority between different nations or races. It is simply believed that Germans had better remain German, such as they are."<sup>78</sup> Many upper class Americans would have understood this quote; they too wanted to preserve the purest race in their country. This statement would prove that the Germans only wanted to follow in the American style of eugenics, instead of expanding the movement to exterminate entire populations. Since Fischer had a relationship with the Rockefellers and had an interest in preserving their fiscal support, it is plausible that he would want to assure Americans that the Nazi regime did not present any dangers.

The Foundation, for its part, continued supporting the research of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes. Much controversy exists, however, in determining why they took such a stance. The most commonly accepted perspective is that the Rockefeller Foundation sought to fund quality research and attempted to break it off from any political associations. Inside Rockefeller officials intently watched the Nazi regime's progress, but appeared to have little concern with supporting research that could be used by that administration.<sup>79</sup> The officials had studied the Nazi regime and viewed the research done at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes as separate from the state. In June of 1933, a foundation official in New York wrote: "It remains to be seen whether any attempt may be made by the authorities to use these studies in any way to support the theories of the

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<sup>77</sup> Schafft, *From Racism to Genocide: Anthropology in the Third Reich*, page 71.

<sup>78</sup> Hugh Jedell, "Denies Reich Seeks to Improve Race," *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, September 3, 1933,

<http://ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/100775033?accountid=14434>

<sup>79</sup> Schafft, *From Racism to Genocide: Anthropology in the Third Reich*, page 79.

National Socialist Party. There seems no reason to believe at the moment that the scientific character of the studies will be influenced by the doctrines of the regime.”<sup>80</sup> Even four years later, the Rockefeller Foundation highlighted the importance of funding the research, denying its connection to the Nazi regime. Another official wrote in 1937: “[In] the relations of the Foundation to the totalitarian states, scientific considerations alone have thus far provided the governing principle. Whether the Nazi regime or some other regime is in power would, it would seem, have no bearing on our desire to promote scientific work in these fields.”<sup>81</sup> This official highlighted that the foundation’s goal was to promote research in the sciences, regardless of the regime researchers worked under. They viewed research as independent from the state.

The Nazi regime, however, did not share this perspective. They built upon the principles of German hygiene established by the likes of Eugen Fischer and Ernst Rüdin to create a state ruled by eugenics. They spread propaganda of the inferiority of the Jews, among other “degenerate groups.” A German scientist remarked about the Jews: “It probably is the Near Eastern-Asian race that gives the Jews, particularly those in East Europe, their physical and mental condition, their typical and strange aggressive tendency. It is exactly their strong business and entrepreneurial sense and their lack of scruples in many things that characterize Near Eastern race.”<sup>82</sup> The Nazi racial hygiene, therefore, was not solely focused on creating a German race, as articulated to the American press and the Rockefeller Foundation. The Germans wanted to rid their country of any inferior stock through measures more powerful than only sterilizations.

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<sup>80</sup> RAC 1.1, A, Box 20, Folder 187, June 27, 1933 in Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> *Confidential Monthly Report* to the trustees dated October 1, 1937 (RAC, RG 3.1), in Sachse, "What Research to What End: The Rockefeller Foundation and the Max Planck Gesellschaft in the Early Cold War."

<sup>82</sup> UJA, Folder 104, Draft Report, 19, in Schafft, *From Racism to Genocide: Anthropology in the Third Reich*, page 23.

And, in many respects, they succeeded. They killed near eleven million people in concentration camps and sterilized more than 375,000 by the end of the war.<sup>83</sup>

The Rockefeller Foundation, for its part, did not sustain funding throughout the war. In 1939, the foundation began to change its views, and would eventually pull out funding after the invasion of Poland.<sup>84</sup> The invasion on September 1, 1939 shocked the world and led Great Britain and France to declare war on Nazi Germany, starting World War II. Surely, this declaration of war would change the way that the Rockefeller Foundation viewed their support of Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes in Germany. Foundation officials would not want to be sending aid to a country engaged in war with Britain and France – powers that the United States had been allied with. The declaration of war and emphasis on Germany as a belligerent power would signify to the Rockefeller Foundation that it was not a politically wise decision to continue support of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes. Without further research at the Rockefeller Foundation archives, however, these claims are difficult to ascertain. While the termination of funding and the declaration of World War II fall very close together, it is difficult to prove this with certainty without access to inside documents.

It is worth noting that the Rockefeller Foundation was skeptical about funding all aspects of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes after the Nazis came to power. The major projects for eugenics were funded before 1933 – before Hitler came to power. Raymond B. Fosdick, president of the foundation in 1936, was quoted in the New York Times regarding its decision to allocate resources to the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Physics after the Nazis came to power. He said in 1936, “It is quite possible that the foundation

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<sup>83</sup> Quinn, "Race Cleansing in America: a Nationwide Gene-Purity Movement Promoted Methods that Eventually were Adopted by the Third Reich. And everyone from John D. Rockefeller to W. E. B. Du Bois Supported."

<sup>84</sup> Schafft, *From Racism to Genocide: Anthropology in the Third Reich*, page 90.

would not have made the grant if it could have foreseen present conditions in Germany.”<sup>85</sup> Although physics had little to do with the racial hygiene program in Nazi Germany, Fosdick was still critical of this funding decision. Such a statement would suggest that, when the foundation pulled out funding after the Nazi invasion of Poland, it was due to political reasons, instead of distaste for Nazi eugenics.

Even though the Rockefeller Foundation officials would have know about the German sterilization laws, their primary reason for cancelling funding was most likely due to the start of World War II, instead of disagreement with racial hygiene practices. With further research, one would be able to answer such questions as: How much did Rockefeller officials know about the Nazi racial hygiene program? Why exactly did they cancel funding after war was declared? What one can ascertain, however, is that the Rockefeller Foundation had not received adequate explanations of the projects they would be funding and, most likely, was not alerted to the connection between their projects and the Nazi regime. It is, thus, difficult to blame the Foundation officials for their decision to fund eugenics research in Nazi Germany. They expected that the money would allow Germans to emulate the American eugenics program, instead of following its own path. The Rockefeller Foundation would not have known the injustices that its policies would fuel.

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<sup>85</sup> "Rockefeller Gift Aids Reich Science," *New York Times*, November 24, 1936, <http://search.proquest.com/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/101654911/13664ABCBA86E566121/1?accountid=14434>.

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