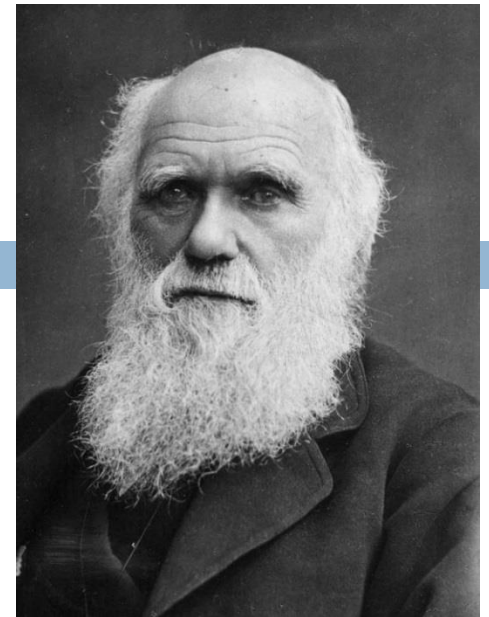# RACIAL IMPERFECTION

The Murder of the Handicapped and Disabled

Social Darwinism

- Charles Darwin (1809-1882)
  - "survival of the fittest"
  - "natural selection"
- "Social Darwinism" = application of evolutionary theory to social theory
- Treatment of the disabled, prior to Nazis?
  - Middle Ages / Early Modern Europe
  - "Pseudo-science" of the 19th century
    - Example: Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909)

The Eugenics Movement

- Eugenics = belief that society can improve its genetic makeup

- United States = model for the Nazis?

- All major European states had programs . . .

    - 1921 = Second International Congress of Eugenics

- Importance of World War I

- Support from political Progressives

Hitler and the Disabled

- Hitler, in 1929:
  - "If Germany were to get a million children a year and were to remove 700-800,000 of the weakest people, the final result [would] be an increase in strength . . . As the result of our modern sentimental humanitarianism we are trying to maintain the weak at the expense of the healthy. It goes so far that a sense of charity . . . [ensures] that even cretins are able to procreate while healthy people refrain from doing so."
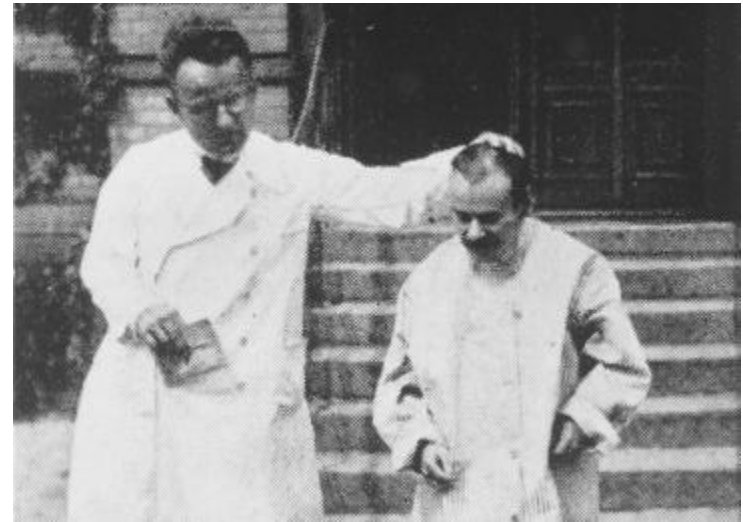
Hitler and the Disabled

- 1933 = Nazis gain control, sympathetic to eugenics
  - Justified programs with cost-benefit analyses
  - Worked to de-fund state budgets working with the handicapped
  - Supported dehumanizing literature
    - "A Courageous Step" (1937)
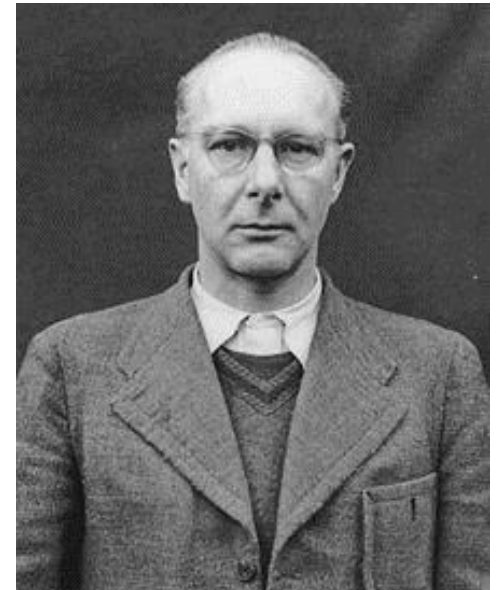 - Toured facilities

Sterilization Laws

- July 1933 = Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Progeny
  - Required sterilization
  - Created special courts
  - 400,000 Germans sterilized before 1939
    - Including 500 Roma
    - Lots of surgical problems/complications

The Decision to Kill

- After September 1939, euthanasia programs
  - Euthanasia = "mercy killing"
- No public law establishing programs
- Coordinated through Hitler's chancellery
  - Philipp Bouhler (1899-1945)
  - Karl Brandt (1904-1948)
  - Viktor Brack (1904-1948)

The Decision to Kill

- Hitler, October 1939:
  - "Reichsleiter Bouhler and Dr. med. Brandt are charged with the responsibility to extend the powers of certain doctors, in such a way that, after the most careful assessment of their condition, those suffering from illness deemed to be incurable may be granted a mercy death."

Children First

- Summer 1939 = parents request euthanasia
- August 1939 = Reich Committee for the Scientific Registration of Serious Hereditary and Congenital Illnesses
  - Required nurses/doctors to report children under 3
  - "+"s vs. "-"s
  - Never see a single patient, in person
- 1940 = pediatric wards established for euthanasia
- Most deaths from starvation, disease, luminal
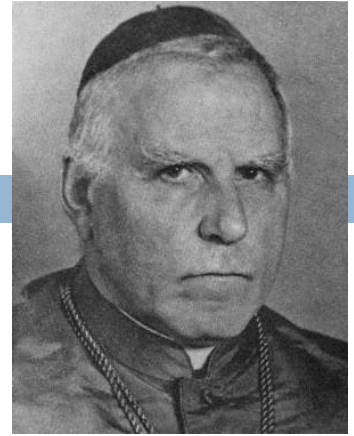- 1940-1945 = 5000-6000 children murdered

The T-4 Program

- ☐ October 1939 = seized some remote hospitals
- ☐ 21 September 1939 = local gov'ts required to send Nazi regime lists of institutions
    - ☐ Institutions required to file forms on patients
        - ■ Sent 200,000 back to the Nazi gov't
- ☐ Patients bussed to killing centers
- ☐ Most killed with gas . . .

The First Gas Chambers

- January 1940 = first hospital starts murder
- Patients, in groups, are assembled . . .
  - Told to undress
  - Measured, weighed, photographed
  - Led to mock shower
  - Gassed with carbon monoxide
- Bodies removed, disposed of
  - All within 24 hours
- Nazis work hard to deceive families

Hitler's "Stop Order"

- Deceit did not work long . . .
- Locals, near the hospitals, weren't pleased
- Opposition from the Catholic Church
  - Bishop Clemens August Graf von Galen (1878-1946)
- 24 August 1941 = Hitler's "stop order"
- T-4 continues, but without central coordination
  - Major exception: children's program

Final Tally

- We really don't know

- January 1940- August 1941 = 70,273 murdered

- September 1939-April 1940 = Polish disabled
  - Ca. 10,000 murdered

- Action 14f13 = murder of KZ prisoners
  - Ca. 20,000 murdered

- Site-specific: Mesertiz-Obrawalde
  - Mass grave: 18,232 people
  - 1944 = 3,948 admitted; 3,814 murdered