

## Grade 11

The Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre is pleased to offer a series of eight (8) units covering the following Grade 11 CAPS topic:

*Ideas of Race in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries – What were the consequences when pseudoscientific ideas of Race became integral to government policies and legislation in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries?*

*Case studies: Australia and the indigenous Australians; Nazi Germany and the Holocaust.*

### Unit 6

#### Case Study: Nazi Germany Part 2

In this unit you will learn about the following:

- Nazi Germany's forced sterilisation policies
- Nazi Germany's "euthanasia" programme

### **JULY 1933:** **The very first law Hitler passed when he came to power was the Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring**

**Between 1933-1939:**

- 400 000 people were sterilised in accordance with that policy
- 800 children of African descent were sterilised as well

Forced sterilisation was a common feature of Eugenicist policies in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. But in Nazi Germany this programme was performed on a much grander scale than anywhere else. Between 1933, when the law was passed and it was the first law that Hitler passed when he came into power, and 1939 when the War started, **400 000 German citizens were sterilised.**

Most of these people were termed "**Hereditarily Diseased Offspring**", which meant that they either had a disability themselves or there were disabilities (ranging from blindness to epilepsy to physical issues) in their family. They came from "pure" German families. **800 children of African descent were sterilised as well.**



There was constant propaganda about how important forced sterilisation was. German people were told that the disabled were a burden. If you look at the image on the left, you will see that the person on the right looks a bit like a monkey. He represents people with mental disabilities. The person on the left hand side wearing the hat, his face is mask-like and he represents people who are unemployed, or otherwise 'asocial'. The 'pure Aryan' man is holding these two creatures up; they are a burden to him. He is portrayed as 'wasting' his money, money that would have been better spent on his own family. The text says '**This is also your burden**'.

- In 1939 The Nazis advocated the removal of those who would not improve the German race and had no use in society – those who Hitler called the "useless eaters" or "life unworthy of life"
- This meant killing the mentally ill, terminally ill, and the physically and mentally handicapped.
- They euphemistically called this "euthanasia."
- Euthanasia means "mercy killing" something you do usually to put an animal out of pain or misery.
- What the Nazis were doing was murdering members of the Germans population.

In 1939 the Nazis escalated their programmes against the disabled. They were no longer satisfied with sterilisation, they now wanted to *remove* those who they saw as "useless" in society. Hitler's term was "useless eaters" or "life unworthy of life".

**So the Nazis decided that they were going to kill the mentally ill, terminally ill and the mentally and physically handicapped.**

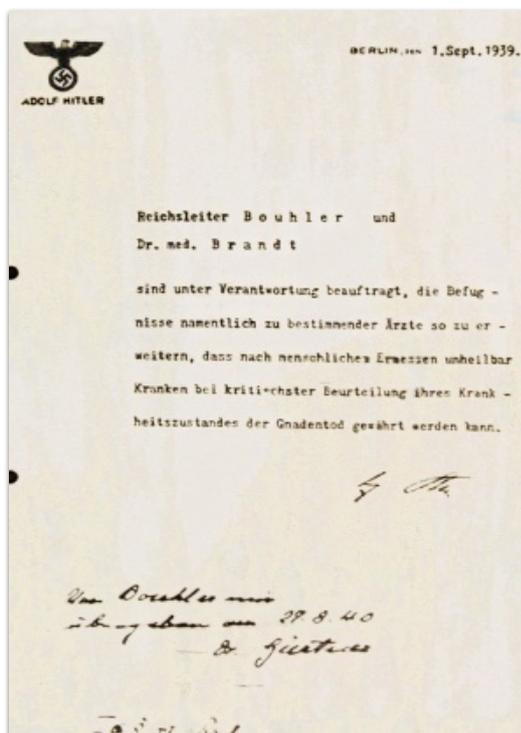
This was not a programme that the general population would agree with, so the Nazi government was not going to call it murder. They were going to use a euphemism, which is a nice way of saying something that is not so nice (for example if somebody dies you will say they have passed away or have passed over).

The Nazis weren't calling it murder; they were calling it **euthanasia**.

## Euthanasia = 'mercy killing'

What does the term **euthanasia** mean?

Euthanasia means 'mercy killing' e.g. helping a terminally ill person to die under medical supervision and with consent. But the Nazis were not doing this; they were murdering vulnerable members of their own population.



The Euthanasia programme began in 1939. On your left is an image of a document, one of the very few that was signed by Hitler personally. The date on the document it is 1 September 1939, which is the date Germany invaded Poland and WWII broke out. The Nazis knew this policy would be unacceptable to most Germans, so they did it under the cover of war. People were concerned about how they were going to get food, how life was going to be, if their relatives would survive the war. People were not concerned about disabled relatives housed in institutions. They trusted those institutions; they believed their family members would be safe. But it was the doctors and nurses in those very institutions who would be murdering people for the next few years. The very doctors and nurses, who were supposed to help and cure and protect and look after vulnerable people, were the ones murdering their patients.

## Where did the murders take place?



## How did the murders take place?



Where did these killings take place? They took place in hospitals in and around Germany. Let's focus on one hospital in particular, called Hadamar. Before the Nazis came to power, Hadamar was one of the most advanced hospitals for the care of people with disabilities. It had such wonderful programmes for the disabled that medical students and professionals and researchers from around the world came there to learn how to better care for the disabled. But in 1933 it became a death centre. How did the murders take place?

Children and toddlers were given a lethal injection. Babies and newborns were left to starve to death. Older children and adults were gassed. Initially, they used trucks and put their patients into the back of the trucks to gas them using carbon monoxide from the car engine. But that was inefficient, so they constructed specialised gas chambers at the hospitals. Now, you've heard the term "gas chamber" before. A chamber simply means a large room. So the nurses and doctors put their patients into those rooms and let poison gas come in, until those inside choked to death. Then they burnt the bodies in crematoria constructed in the hospital.

- The next step was to rid Germany of other "undesirable citizens"
- Although Jews only made up 0.8% of Germany's population Nazis use propaganda to convince the masses they posed a threat and needed to be removed
- As the Nazis moved through Europe they rounded up Jews in every country and murdered them
- By 1945, a genocide, known today as the Holocaust or the Shoah, murdered 6 million Jewish people

Once you start killing your citizens, it is a very slippery slope till you decide who should and who shouldn't be allowed to live. So from this beginning, the Nazis began singling out "undesirable" citizens. They obviously targeted the Jewish population because they had always scapegoated this group. Here, remember that Jews made up only 0.8% of the German population. They were not an army; they were a minority of ordinary people. Yet the Nazis said Jewish blood would infect the rest of society, so they needed to be killed. As they moved through Europe, they rounded up Jews in every country and murdered them.

By the end of WWII, 6 million Jewish people were dead, 1.5 million of whom were children. This genocide is known today as the Holocaust. Holocaust means complete burning. Jewish people also use the term 'Shoah'(catastrophe) to refer to the same genocide.

- Roma and Sinti “Gypsies” were also murdered in death camps
- By 1945, a genocide, known today as the Porajmos, murdered 500 000 Roma and Sinti people
- Countless other innocent people died during WWII (1939-1945)

Roma and Sinti people were also sent to death camps and murdered. By the end of the war a genocide known as the Porajmos, which means devastation, was responsible for the murder of between 250,000 - 500 000 Roma and Sinti people.

Roma and Sinti and Jews were not the only people killed by the Nazi War Machine. Over the course of WWII countless innocent lives were destroyed and millions of people died.

## QUESTIONS

1. What was the name of the law which gave the Nazis the right to forcibly sterilise citizens?
2. Why did the Nazis use the euphemistic term ‘euthanasia’ for their first mass killing programme? Give reasons for your answer.
3. Why did the ‘euthanasia’ programme start in 1939? Give reasons for your answer in your own words.
4. Which population group was targeted by the Nazi’s ‘euthanasia’ programme?
5. Nurses and doctors were over-represented in the Nazi Party, and were fully responsible for the ‘euthanasia’ murders in hospitals. Critically reflect on possible reasons for this, bringing in your own knowledge and content from prior Units.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre: <http://ctholocaust.co.za/>

Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre YouTube:  
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCwVBUs5VqvsumuwDdzYIAaQ>

Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race:  
<https://www.ushmm.org/information/exhibitions/online-exhibitions/deadly-medicine-creating-the-master-race>

Euthanasia Programme: <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/euthanasia-program?series=19222>

Unworthy to Live: <https://www.facinghistory.org/holocaust-and-human-behavior/chapter-8/unworthy-live>

CARING CORRUPTED - The Killing Nurses of The Third Reich:  
<https://youtu.be/Rz8ge4aw8Ws>