

Compulsory Sterilization and Euthanasia Rehearsal for the Holocaust

People with disabilities became the first victims of the Nazis' attempt to create a "master race" by a policy of "purification" through mass murder. On July 14, 1933, the government promulgated the Law for the Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring. It required the compulsory sterilization of people with disabilities — depression, retardation, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, cancer, mobility impairments, deafness, blindness — even so-called "slow learners." More than 400,000 people were forcibly sterilized under this program, by surgically removing their reproductive organs (sometimes without anesthesia), or irradiation of the genital area (which often caused severe burns). In September 1939, Adolf Hitler signed a secret decree authorizing physicians to impose "mercy death" on patients with these disabilities. The first Nazi gas chamber was constructed at Brandenburg in the winter of 1939, where mentally ill patients were put to death in January of 1940 to demonstrate the efficiency of poison gas. Plans to disguise gas chambers as showers also grew out of this program. These became the techniques for implementing the Holocaust, the extermination of European Jews.



From the beginning, and continuing until the very end of World War II, doctors at Gugging State Hospital ruthlessly sterilized and killed disabled patients under these programs. On this December 30, 1938, postal card to the hospital at Gugging, a mother inquired about the fate of her child. The card was routed to the section in charge of insane patients. The manuscript "K" indicates "Kind[er]" (child[ren]).

