

The Exploitation of Women Under the Nazi Regime

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A dark blue diagonal graphic that starts from the bottom left corner and extends towards the top right corner, creating a triangular shape in the bottom right of the slide.

“In war, women have to do things they wouldn’t dream about in peacetime. We all have to survive.”

In the early 1920’s the Nazis had clearly laid out the role women would play in the Reich, “the German girl will belong to the state and with her marriage become a citizen.” Josef Goebbels added to this already established belief, “the mission of the woman is to be beautiful and bring children into the world.”

Programs like *Lebensborn* and *Einsatzfrauen* forced women under Nazi rule to make the ultimate sacrifice and give everything they had to the Nazi cause.

Lebensborn “fountain or source of life” was a program financed by the SS, created in December 1935, by the Race and Settlement Central Office, under the direction of Heinrich Himmler. This program was seen as a way to rebuild the dwindling German population and increase the number of “pure” Aryans in Germany at the same time. As a way to encourage German wives to have more children, mothers were rewarded with financial privileges, child care, and health care at no cost to them. For mothers with more than 4 children, the “Mother’s Cross” was awarded.



Even with all of the privileges and recognition, there were not enough “pure blood” children being born in Germany.

October 28, 1939-a memo was issued from Himmler to the SS and Chief of the German police that encouraged SS men to reproduce. Women choosing to bear these children were performing a “noble task” for the Reich, even if the women were unmarried. Himmler encouraged SS men to father as many children as possible, referring to it as part of their “duty” as an officer. Himmler hoped to add 120 million people of “pure blood” to the German population.

German women who wanted to be in the program had to apply and prove their pure heritage, going back at least 3 generations; only 40% of those who applied were accepted.

When the number of German women Himmler had hoped for did not apply, he expanded the program to accept women of similar nationalities and again expanded the program in 1942, with Hitler encouraging the soldiers to “fraternize” with women in the occupied areas. Women were cared for in one of the twenty-six *Lebensborn* homes that had been set up and furnished by Himmler, often from Jewish homes that had been looted throughout Germany. The homes also acted as a meeting place for the SS officers and women in the program.

Lebensborn in Norway was very different. Many Norwegian women were forced to participate and their children were taken from them and sent to Germany without their consent.

With an Allied victory in Norway, the situation for these women and their children became very difficult. The Norwegians were eager to punish all those who had associated with the Nazis and the women and their children became their prime targets. Many of the children were not sent to Germany due to poor conditions there at the end of the war. These children were referred to as "Nazi swine" and hundreds were institutionalized as "mentally defective."

Part two of *Lebensborn* came into play when not enough children were being born. This part of the program involved kidnapping “Aryan looking” children in Norway, France, and Poland.

250,000 children were kidnapped, put through a “Germanization” program, and sent to Germany to live with German parents. Those who refused to comply were sent to concentration camps. Only 25,000 of these children were ever reunited with their birth families and 150,000 of them have no idea about their true origins.

Einsatzfrauen
“traveling brothels”
women who were
involved in the
state-sponsored
brothel system in
German-occupied
countries and camps.

First used in the east-Poland and the Soviet Union as a way to “regulate” the sexual behavior of their soldiers on the Eastern Front. The women who worked in the brothels were recruited and considered to be “racially suitable” German who had proven their Aryan bloodline. Eventually local blonde haired, blue eyed women were also needed for the brothels.

Himmler established the brothel system in 1942 for both economic and political purposes. Women were used as a reward for men who accomplished the most work, a visit to the brothel was listed as one of several privileges for those who worked the hardest, additional options were extra bread rations, cash, improved living conditions, or tobacco.

Brothels were established in the following camps: Mauthausen, Gusen, Flossenburg, Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, Dachau, Neuengamme, Mittelbau-Dora, and Auschwitz (I and Monowitz)

Each of these brothels had ten to fifteen women working in them at a time between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five. Most of these women came from Ravensbruck or Auschwitz-Birkenau. Women were “lured” into this work through promises of privileges that they never received—things like less work, more food, better living conditions, better treatment of their children, and being allowed to keep their hair. Many of the women who worked in the brothels had been imprisoned in Germany for being “asocial.” Eventually Polish and Ukrainian women were used as well, there is no record of Jewish women being used, although many survivors testimonies say otherwise. Many women became pregnant and were forced to have abortions, while many others contracted STD’s and were sent back to Ravensbruck to be experimented on, most died without any treatment.

In the Spring of 1942, IG Farben began constructing their chemical factory on the grounds of Auschwitz–Monowitz through the use of prisoners from the camp. A brothel was est for these prisoners as the answer to “low productivity.”

In 1943, Himmler visited Buchenwald and was upset to find that a brothel had not been established. He cited that the lower production rates at Buchenwald were hurting the war effort. Himmler had planned to establish brothels at all of the camps. Referred to as the “bonus system” there isn’t any evidence to support that the system was successful in increasing production anywhere that it was implemented. The reality was that the reward system designed to improve life for one part of the population served to further enslave the other part of the population in the camps.

Resources:

“The ‘Lebensborn’ Program,” *Jewish Virtual Library*

Gisela Bock, “Racism and Sexism in Nazi Germany: Motherhood, Compulsory Sterilization, and the State.” in *When Biology Became Destiny, Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany*,

Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rochelle G Saidel. *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women During the Holocaust*.

“Norway’s *Lebensborn*.” *news.bbc.co.uk*.

Joshua Hammer, “Hitler’s Children.” *www.newsweek.com*.

David Crossland, “Nazi Program to Breed Master Race, *Lebensborn* Children Break Silence” www.spiegel.de

Wendy Lower, *Hitler’s Furies: German Women in the Nazi Killing Fields*

Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*

Christina Schikorra, “Forced Prostitution in the Nazi Concentration Camps,” in *Lessons and Legacies VII: The Holocaust in International Perspective*,