

CHAPTER 2 CONFRONTING RACIAL DANGER, NEUTRALIZING RACIAL POLLUTION

Afro-Germans and
the National Socialist Sterilization Program

“BLURRED VISION”: THE *MISCHLING* AND NAZI RACIAL LEGISLATION

The rhetoric of the Rhineland propaganda campaign reached a peak in 1921, when protest publications were widespread and at their most intense. Shortly thereafter, public outrage regarding the use of Black troops in the occupation appears to have declined. The public campaign against the Black troops appears to have ended by 1922, when, as noted in chapter 1, the more pressing issue of the Ruhr conflict came to displace the hysteria surrounding the presence of the Black occupation troops. Yet the specter of racial danger that a Black German population presented for the German nation was a threatening trope that resurfaced long after the end of the occupation. As one of the most resilient metaphors of this specter, the continued influence of the figure of Rhineland Bastard in the Third Reich confirms the enduring power of the discourse of racial endangerment associated with the Black German population in this period. The response that was repeatedly proposed as a means of neutralizing this threat was sterilization. Calls for the sterilization of the Rhineland children were made as early as 1927, when a local official in the Pfalz, Hans Jolas, wrote to the Bavarian Minister of Health, Sperr, regarding the province’s growing concern about the danger posed by the presence of these Black German children, who would soon be coming of age. Jolas asked Sperr to investi-

gate what measures might be taken to secure and protect the purity of the race in the region from this emerging threat. Jolas suggested sterilization as a potential solution to this problem, though he acknowledged that such measures were illegal according to existing law. The Bavarian ministry denied Jolas's request. Sperr's response emphasized the fact that the ministry recognized the "serious racial danger" presented by the procreative potential of these Black German children. Yet he affirmed that there was to date no legal basis on which to carry out such sterilizations. Born to German mothers and thus holding German citizenship, the children could also not be deported, a possibility also discussed by the ministry. Moreover, such an undertaking would be hindered by the fact that few mothers would agree to it. A further consideration was the potentially negative effects on domestic and foreign policy.¹ Yet what is most salient about these discussions is the fact that, as was also the case earlier in the colonies and later in the Third Reich, these discussions revolved around the protection of the purity of the race from the dangers of "colored blood."

Beyond measures specifically directed at dealing with the threat posed by the children of the Rhineland, National Socialist (NS) policy toward Afro-Germans who were not part of this group was not characterized by a top-down execution of legislative power, and for the most part, the regime's actions were neither systematic nor coherent.² Rather, the actions taken toward these individuals were ambivalent, with often-contradictory measures implemented at the local level and usually carried out on the initiative of individual bureaucrats or community members. As a result, it is impossible to present a comprehensive account of Nazi policy toward Afro-Germans in the form of a linear narrative. For this reason, the National Socialist program to sterilize the children of the Rhineland occupation is significant as one of the only systematic programs directed toward Black Germans as Blacks. This chapter examines this program's genesis as a continuation of the trajectory of the echoing specter of racial mixture charted in chapter 1. Unlike in the Kaiserreich and the Weimar Republic, in the Third Reich the threat of racial endangerment formed a central part of a political regime structured around race as the fundamental basis on which the state was organized and functioned.

Although racial anti-Semitism was central to National Socialist ideology, this philosophy was also part of a larger biologist ideology of

racial superiority that targeted a range of individuals for elimination from society. This ideology sought to purify the German nation of racially inferior elements and eventually to expand the country's empire to include other racially superior nations, obliterating or enslaving all inferior races in service of a "master race." In this ideology, eugenic thought played an important role.³ As Jeremy Noakes points out, National Socialism combined an ideology of racial anti-Semitism with a program of eugenics toward the end of improving German racial stock. They shared a common perspective that not only viewed humans and society in biological terms but also saw humans from a particular Social Darwinist standpoint that maintained that an individual's abilities—both mental (psychic and intellectual) and physical—were determined genetically, through heredity.⁴ Put another way, the value of all individuals was determined on the basis of their essential, biological attributes—as raced subjects who were viewed only in terms of their allegedly inherited character traits. The eugenic dimensions of NS racial ideology endowed it with a program to actively control, improve, or impair certain racial qualities in the development of the race. In this ideology, not only Jews—the most explicitly targeted group—but also homosexuals, people with disabilities, alcoholics, people of African descent, individuals with emotional disorders, and the homeless were among those viewed as racially inferior. The practical implementation of such measures was possible through the positing of a logic of racially superior "master race" of individuals—Aryan Germans.

In spite of the fact that racism was and is an international phenomenon, National Socialism's innovation was the fact that it institutionalized racism at the level of the state through innumerable laws and decrees that marginalized and discriminated against those considered racially inferior.⁵ To a degree perhaps unparalleled in Western history, National Socialism created a society structured around the biological poles of race and gender—what it viewed as the two paramount and immutable categories of human nature. Under the Nazi regime, these two categories came to replace class, cultural, and religious divisions as the predominant social markers.⁶ For a society in the throes of the post-World War I economic crisis, humiliated by recent military defeat, and confused by the new social norms of the progressive/avant garde generation that came of age during the war, these categories pro-

vided a sense of security through the clarity of “natural” classifications and designations of individuals and their place in society.

The specter of racial mixture figured in NS racial policy through the complex status ascribed to the *Mischling* (individuals of mixed racial heritage—literally, “half-caste”), most notably in the form of the Jewish *Mischling*. This threat was perhaps best articulated by the architects of NS racial law, Wilhelm Stuckart and Hans Globke, in their commentaries to the Nuremberg Laws, where they clearly stated the dire consequences they saw in racial mixture:

The addition of foreign blood to one’s own brings about damaging changes in the body of the race because the homogeneity, the instinctively certain will of the body, is thereby weakened; in its stead an uncertain, hesitating attitude appears in all decisive life situations, an overestimation of the intellect and a spiritual splitting. A blood mixture does not achieve a uniform fusion of two races foreign to each other but leads in general to a disturbance in the spiritual equilibrium of the receiving part.⁷

In the deliberations that accompanied the drafting of the Reich citizenship law, the status of Jewish *Mischlinge* was a particularly thorny issue. The law explicitly sought a reformulation of the citizenship law to exclude Jews from the rights of full citizenship. Hitler demanded a citizenship law broad enough to encompass racial and biologically based anti-Jewish legislation. Members of the NS administration debated how to categorize half-Jews, or people with two Jewish grandparents (“*Mischling* of the first degree”). Both sides agreed that three-quarter Jews (persons with three Jewish grandparents) were to be considered Jews and that one-quarter Jews (those with one Jewish grandparent) were *Mischlinge*. On one side of the issue, party members, particularly such radicals as Gerhard Wagner and Arthur Gütt wanted either to include half-Jews in the category of Jews or to make this decision the responsibility of a public agency. On the other side of the debate, the Interior Ministry (and specialists within it such as Stuckart and Hans Loesener) wanted to relegate these individuals to the category of *Mischling*. The final decision was left to the Führer and was rendered more in line with the position of the ministry than the party. Half-Jews were classified as *Mischlinge*. Only as a result of per-

sonal choice—either by marrying a Jewish spouse or by joining the Jewish community—did they take on the status of Jews.⁸ The impact of this definition became more apparent in the supplementary decrees to the citizenship law and in subsequent racial legislation (particularly in the marriage law, the Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor). To dispel any confusion, Rudolf Hess spelled out the intent of the law in no uncertain terms in a 2 December 1935 circular sent to party agencies:

The Jewish *Mischlinge*, that is, the quarter- and half-Jews, are treated differently in the marriage legislation. The regulations are based on the fact that the mixed race of the German-Jewish *Mischlinge* is undesirable under any circumstances—both in terms of blood and politically—and that it must disappear as soon as possible.⁹

As Saul Friedländer emphasizes, Rudolf Hess's interpretation of the law ensured that "either in the present or in the next generation, the German-Jewish *Mischlinge* would belong either to the Jewish group or to that of the German citizens."¹⁰ In general, the policy aimed to compel half-Jews to marry only Jews and thus to become part of the Jewish group.

The ambivalent status of the Jewish *Mischling* in NS racial policy eventually came to include and ascribe an equally ambivalent status to Afro-Germans. The restrictions that the 1935 Law for the Protection of Blood and Honor imposed on mixed marriages extended these racial prohibitions beyond the Jews to Sinti and Roma (so-called gypsies) and for the first time explicitly cited "Negroes and their bastards" to be included in this legislation. Together, these laws effectively required proof of pure Aryan heritage as well as proof of the absence of a Jewish or other "alien" background as essential prerequisites to everyday life in the Third Reich. Chapters 3 and 4 will use the recollections of Afro-Germans who lived through this period to examine the racial policies directed against Black Germans and the ways in which these policies were contested at local levels of society. The memories of Afro-Germans paint an ambivalent and often contradictory picture of life in the Nazi racial state. It is clear nevertheless that the children of the Rhineland were central in Nazi formulation and codification of a racial

policy toward Afro-Germans. In point of fact, the Rhineland Bastard remained the dominant, if not the sole, image of a Black German population in NS racial legislation. As such, the children of the Rhineland constituted one of the few groups of Afro-Germans that the Nazis directly targeted for persecution on explicitly racial grounds.¹¹

CONFRONTING RACIAL MIXTURE: STERILIZATION AS EUGENIC POPULATION POLICY

In his classic study, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, Saul Friedländer outlines two “different but complementary methods” used by the Nazis to achieve the exclusion of racially “dangerous” groups from the *Volks-gemeinschaft*: segregation and expulsion on the one hand and sterilization on the other. The first method was applied primarily to Jews, homosexuals, and Sinti and Roma; the second was applied to carriers of so-called hereditary diseases and those “racially contaminated individuals” who could not be expelled or interned in camps.¹² With regard to the Black children of the Rhineland, the Nazi response was somewhat more complex and in some ways highlights the ways in which such categories blurred and overlapped. In spite of the efforts of those responsible for the administration and execution of racial policy within the Reich, Black German children exceeded these categories. For a variety of reasons, the NS administration was unable to fully incorporate these children under the terms of the carefully crafted existing racial policy, despite the flexible terms in which this legislation and these policies were drafted and despite the fact that this flexibility was intended to cover just such cases.¹³

The Nazi response to the Black children of the Rhineland took essentially two forms: a concrete attempt to neutralize the threat of pollution of “Aryan racial stock” through compulsory sterilization and the more indirect attempts to use legislation to limit and regulate social interaction between Aryans and non-Aryans. The first of these approaches was a strategic policy of persecution directed against the only group of Black Germans popularly acknowledged to exist in Germany. Yet although the sterilization law specifically restricted its application to certain categories of individuals deemed to suffer from hereditary diseases or defects, the threat of sterilization was perceived to be far more general and, in certain circumstances, came to be used beyond

the boundaries outlined by the sterilization law.¹⁴ The second approach was a less coherent policy of social management that was thoroughly ambivalent in its attempt to regulate and define particular forms of contact between Aryan and non-Aryan members of Nazi society. Chapter 4 will focus on the implications of this second approach to dealing with Afro-Germans in the Third Reich. This chapter examines the first approach, the concrete persecution of Afro-Germans—specifically, the NS sterilization of the Black children of the Rhineland.

The NS sterilization program must be understood as part of the Nazis' larger goal of achieving a racially pure Aryan state by means of both positive and negative eugenic measures. The NS regime pursued a positive eugenic agenda through a pro-natalist policy of encouraging procreation using a combination of propaganda and incentive programs aimed at compelling women to bear as many children as possible. At the same time, the regime embarked on a negative eugenic program by enforcing an antinatalist program of birth prevention in which millions of men and women were discouraged or physically prevented from having children. This program's goals were accomplished primarily through the compulsory sterilization program, enacted six months after Hitler came to power in July 1933 as the first in a series of racial legislation.

The sterilization law was the culmination of an international eugenic and racial hygiene movement that institutionalized what had previously been largely restricted to ideology and scientific research. Yet the use of sterilization (both voluntary and compulsory) as a means of achieving a variety of social ends was in no way an innovation of National Socialism. As a central element of eugenic thought, sterilization had long been part of public and scientific discourses both in Germany and abroad. This was particularly true of the United States, which had eugenic policies regarding criminals and the mentally ill that served as models for eugenicists and racial hygienists from the 1920s until the implementation of the more far-reaching measures of the NS eugenic program. In fact, the United States had established some of the first laws legalizing eugenic sterilization for patients in mental institutions. California in particular was seen as a leader in this context, legalizing sterilizations as early as 1909.¹⁵ By 1928, California's status at the forefront of these measures caused such leading physi-

cians and supporters of eugenic sterilization as Robert Latou Dickinson to praise officials for the state's widespread use of the practice. Dickinson's research on eugenic sterilization in California's state mental institutions formed the basis of his successful lobbying campaign to gain the American Medical Association's endorsement of sterilization as a legitimate and ethical procedure to prevent procreation.

During the Weimar Republic, eugenic thought gained new legitimacy through a combination of factors. The tremendous number of war casualties coupled with the much-publicized declining birthrate led widespread popular articulation of trepidation with regard to the perception of a growing imbalance in post-World War I demographics that seemed to offer strong evidence of unrestrained growth among the lower classes. Thus, the fear that breathed new life into the postwar eugenic movement was first and foremost an issue of class that came to be articulated in racial terms. The anxieties regarding the rapid growth of the lower classes were expressed through dichotomies that relied on powerful metaphors of inferiority and superiority, purity and pollution. At issue was not only the quantity of births but also their quality. This concern prompted a renewed Weimar Republic interest in positive eugenics but even more in negative eugenics. Positive measures aimed at encouraging procreation among eugenically favorable segments of the population. Negative eugenics discouraged those considered eugenically inferior, dysfunctional, or defective from procreation through such measures as marriage restrictions, confinement, and sterilization.

Despite the model character of early-twentieth-century U.S. sterilization policies, the advent of National Socialism gave sterilization as well as other eugenic measures a long-awaited legal, institutional, political, and perhaps even moral backing, allowing for their implementation on a widespread basis. Here it is important to note that sterilization was portrayed less as a negative measure than as a positive and beneficial form of prevention. By omitting any explicit reference to sterilization in the measure's title, NS legal experts hoped to avoid a hostile response from the Catholic Church and other religious or diplomatic circles by effectively packaging sterilization as a "truly beneficial deed for the hereditarily sick family."¹⁶

Between 1934 and 1945, between three and four hundred thousand

individuals were sterilized by the National Socialist regime under the 1933 Law to Prevent Hereditarily Sick Offspring (*Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses*). These forced sterilizations were undertaken for the purpose of “uplifting the Aryan race” by eradicating “inferior hereditary traits” and preventing “racially unfit” people from having children. As the Ministry of Propaganda put it, “The goal is not ‘children at any cost’ but ‘racially worthy, physically and mentally unaffected children of German families.’”¹⁷ The sterilization program was an integral component of NS racism. Racism in the Third Reich involved not only discrimination against “alien” races or peoples but also the “regeneration” of its own peoples, for the “master race” not only had to be maintained but also selectively (re)produced. As one member of the Reich Ministry of the Interior put it, the “degenerative effects on the racial body may arise not only from outside, from members of alien races, but also from inside, through unrestricted procreation of inferior hereditary material.”¹⁸ Nazi experts stressed that from a racial standpoint, childbearing was not in and of itself necessarily a merit. Instead, the point was whether the “biological basis”—that is, a particular hereditary value—was present. This alone would determine a child’s value for the race. According to this logic, not just a small minority but about 20 percent of the German population was considered undesirable for procreation.¹⁹

The unifying logic of National Socialist racism was the definition and treatment of each individual according to what was assessed as her or his differing “biological value.” Nazi racism attempted to resolve what it conceived as social and cultural problems through biological means—that is, by intervening in the body and private life. This biological conception of social relations justified the state’s authority to legislate the affairs of the body and private life in the service of social order. The sterilization law was the first manifestation of this policy. When enacted, the law was officially declared to embody the “primacy of the state over the sphere of life, marriage, and family.”²⁰ Through this policy of birth prevention, the private sphere came to be subordinated to and ruled by the political sphere. The sterilization program was thus an expression of a state policy under which the private was political and under which any decision regarding the dividing line between private and political was the terrain of politics and the state.

**NEUTRALIZING RACIAL MIXTURE: IMPLEMENTING
EUGENIC STERILIZATION**

The sterilization law legalized voluntary and compulsory sterilizations for individuals diagnosed as suffering from genetic disorders (*Erbkrankheiten*), including “hereditary feeble-mindedness [*angeborener Schwachsinn*],” schizophrenia, manic depression, epilepsy, Huntington’s chorea, hereditary blindness, hereditary deafness, severe physical handicaps, and severe alcoholism. Most of the sterilizations were carried out in 1934 and 1935, and the vast majority of the affected individuals were diagnosed as either hereditarily feeble-minded (54 percent in 1934 and 60 percent in 1935) or schizophrenic (24.4 percent in 1934 and 20 percent in 1935).²¹ The exact number of sterilizations carried out under the 1933 law is difficult to determine because Hitler outlawed publication of information about the sterilization program in 1936, in response to the increasingly negative public reaction both in Germany and abroad. Gisela Bock estimates, however, that roughly 1 percent of the German population between the ages of sixteen and fifty was sterilized. In spite of this statistical uncertainty, the NS sterilization program remains a well-researched area of German historiography. Less well known, though, are the dimensions of the Nazis’ illegal sterilizations, carried out in contravention of the 1933 law.

I began my apprenticeship with the railroad at fifteen. It had to be approved by the child welfare department. . . . I experienced hardly any discrimination on the job. I knew, though, for example, that I could never become a civil servant . . . because of my heritage. I was a non-Aryan. . . . That’s what they told me. . . . Of course, I always wanted to be [Aryan]. I always wanted blue eyes and blond hair. As a child I even straightened my hair with sugar water, because . . . it was kinky. . . . But that didn’t work. . . . [When I got older and was clearer] about my heritage, about my existence . . . it was too late by then. Hitler was already in power and during my apprenticeship, in 1936, I was sterilized. I was called up by the police with my grandmother. And I was sentenced in a pseudo-court proceeding and sterilized. I was an orphan. Had my mother remarried . . . then the children were no longer registered with the child welfare department. Through this

registration it was really easy to find out. There were five others sterilized with me. . . . After the judgment they immediately loaded us up and took us to hospital. There we were operated on, and in ten days I was released. And there I stood, back on the job. They had been informed at the railroad. And they informed me, too. I wasn't allowed to marry—I could marry no German girl. That was clear. It was part of the Nuremberg Laws.²²

The figures quoted above on the number of sterilizations conducted during the NS Regime *exclude* countless illegal sterilizations carried out in secret on the basis of racial rather than “hereditary” or “biological” grounds. This *Nacht und Nebel Aktion*, which went well beyond the legal boundaries of the sterilization law, was directed at “alien” races (*Fremdrassige*) and asocials, including homosexuals, Sinti and Roma, a small number of Jews, and several hundred Black German children of the Rhineland occupation. Of the estimated 600–800 children in this group, approximately 385 were sterilized.²³ Hans Hauck, quoted here, was one of them. Hauck stated that he was sterilized in 1936, a year after most of the legal sterilizations were carried out; however, the timing of the sterilization of the Rhineland children was only one respect in which it differed from the other legal and illegal sterilization programs carried out under the Nazi regime.

Calls for the sterilization of the children of the Rhineland were revived with the Nazi ascent to power. In a 1933 publication entitled *Rasseprobleme im Dritten Reich*, Dr. Hans Macco demanded that strong measures be taken to mitigate the danger posed by these children's continued presence in the Reich:

Another essential reason for our racial deterioration is mixture with alien races. In this regard there remains a residual of the Black shame on the Rhine that must be eliminated. These mulatto children are either the products of violence or their mothers were whores. In both cases, we haven't the slightest moral obligation to this progeny of an alien race. Approximately 14 years have passed; those of the mulattos who remain are now coming of reproductive age; thus, there is little time for long explanations. Let France and other nations deal with their racial problems as they like; for us there is only one possibility: the

eradication of all aliens, particularly those born of the damage wrought by this brutal violence and immorality. As a Rhinelander I demand the sterilization of all the mulattos left to us by the Black Shame on the Rhine. These measures must be taken within the next two years or else it will be too late, and this racial deterioration will be felt for another century. Nothing can be achieved through the legal prohibition of marriage with alien races, for what is not possible through legal channels happens illegitimately.²⁴

Macco's comments demonstrate both the perceived threat these children posed and the way in which these anxieties echoed Kaiserreich and Weimar Republic discourses on the specter of racial mixture. Yet despite the uncanny resonances of his demands with both earlier proposals and later concrete policies, Macco could not have anticipated the extent to which these demands would be implemented in the flesh within a year of the publication of his comments.

Between 1933 and 1937, various state agencies undertook painstaking research to establish the racial background and whereabouts of the Black children born during the French occupation. On 13 April 1933, Hermann Göring, the Prussian minister of the interior, requested that police authorities in Düsseldorf, Cologne, Koblenz, and Aachen register all "Rhineland Bastards" with state health officials. In many cases, similar concerns had already led local governmental agencies to collect this information through surveys conducted during the Weimar Republic (in Wiesbaden, for example, where such statistics were collected in 1924), with an eye toward possible sterilization even then. Yet neither the statistical findings alone nor the mere presence of this population offered sufficient grounds to justify the compulsory sterilization of these children, for there still existed no proof of inferiority based on hereditary illness or racial danger to the German *Volk*, the two key criteria that formed the basis of the 1933 law. As mentioned earlier, postwar Weimar Republic requests for the sterilization of these children had been rejected on the grounds that such measures were illegal under existing law, and such remained the case even in the Third Reich. Citing as an example the lists submitted by the Regierungsbezirk Wiesbaden, Reiner Pommerin writes,

All of these lists prove that the Interior Ministry's interpretation [of the sterilization law] could not be satisfied. It had hoped to be able to sterilize most of the mixed-race children of Moroccan heritage by means of the "Law to Prevent Hereditarily Sick Offspring" on grounds of alleged mental inferiority. . . . But since averting the danger to Germany through mixture with such "alien blood" remained the primary goal, an alternative solution for the sterilization of the mixed-race children had to be found.²⁵

To provide moral justification for the sterilization of these children, the Nazis enlisted the authority of science, a discourse that had both set the terms for and catalyzed discussions of race and racial mixture in Germany in previous decades. Upon its completion, the results of the survey were forwarded to Dr. Wolfgang Abel, at that time a researcher at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Genetics, and Eugenics and an assistant to the renowned geneticist Eugen Fischer, whose groundbreaking writings on racial mixture had had a profound effect on the study of racially mixed populations. Abel was commissioned to undertake a racial-anthropological evaluation of the Black children of the Rhineland to establish the effects of racial mixture on their physical and intellectual constitution. His findings were used to assess the broader social implications of this racially mixed population for the German population at large. Abel's study, conducted in late July 1933, found that his subjects demonstrated various degrees of deficiency in intellectual ability and behavior.²⁶ The study provided the NS regime with a scientific rationale that supported (at least in principle, though not according to the letter of the law) its claims for the necessity of sterilization. The Prussian Ministry of the Interior used Abel's findings to show the dire consequences if this population were allowed to procreate with the German population and offered these arguments as justification for a procedure for which the ministry had been able to find no other legitimate basis.

On 28 March 1934, the Interior Ministry presented the results of Abel's study to the Foreign Office. In addition to emphasizing Abel's scientific findings regarding the "inferior intellectual and emotional predisposition [*minderwertige geistige und seelische Veranlagung*]" of the *Mischlinge*, the ministry's arguments in support of sterilization

focused on the threat posed by the protean nature of these *Mischlinge*, who could not easily be distinguished from the rest of the German community.

For obvious reasons, many mothers hide the alien racial heritage of their children. . . . and for these and other reasons, a more accurate assessment is not possible, because in addition, in our experience the *Mischlinge* often appear to be an almost pure European type and therefore cannot easily be distinguished from the German population even by racial experts. This is particularly the case for *Mischlinge* fathered by white Frenchmen who are themselves of African blood and already have mixed with the French population in substantial numbers.²⁷

The letter also emphasizes a cautionary example from France to demonstrate why the children should not be allowed to procreate and to illustrate the danger of unchecked intermarriage between *Mischlinge* and the white population.

In France today there are already half a million coloreds. With the low birthrate of the French people, in four to five generations the *Mischlinge* may already make up half the population. Thus there exists the obvious danger that through the increasing number of Moroccan offspring, the racial differences in the Franco-German border zone will in time become increasingly more diffuse and that the current protective boundary between the races will be leveled.²⁸

The specter of racial mixture reappears as a threat of mulattoization that was familiar from earlier discourses on Black Germans. Again, a fear of the dissolution of the distinction between whites and Blacks or “colored people” fuels eugenic arguments for controlling the procreation of inferior human mixtures and cultivating the production of pure racial stock. The response to such a threat is again all too familiar:

This danger can, without a doubt, be confronted with every hope of success through the use of a conscientious population policy . . . since this appears to be the only measure available to us at this

time. Even if it is recommended by various sides that *Mischlinge* in the older age groups who are about to become capable of reproducing be sterilized, it must be said that according to the stipulations of the Law for the Protection of Hereditarily Ill Offspring, only those *Mischlinge* who are hereditarily ill in the sense of the law can be sterilized.

Nevertheless, it can be assumed on the basis of the results of previous studies that of the *Mischlinge* named of Moroccan heritage a large number are genetically inferior, and the law of 14 July 1933 could be applied to these individuals. If the responsible agencies would be instructed to pay particular attention to these *Mischlinge* in their execution of the law, we could expect that not an insignificant number of these unwanted seeds could be prevented from reproducing on the basis of the already existing law.²⁹

The anxieties expressed in this memo were taken very seriously by the NS regime. As this excerpt shows, the ministry was also attuned to the complexity of negotiating the stipulations of the law as it applied to using sterilization to confront this perceived threat to racial purity. The regime would take up more directly precisely these issues in response to concerns voiced about the future of this population. On 11 March 1935 the Expert Committee on Population and Racial Policy (Sachverständigenbeirat für Bevölkerungs- und Rassenpolitik, or SBR), Work Group II for Racial Hygiene and Racial Politics discussed the question of how best to deal with the so-called *Bastardfrage*.³⁰ From the outset of the committee's deliberations, members acknowledged that this case went beyond the boundaries of the existing law. The discussion centered on a presentation by the head of the Office for Racial Politics of the Nazi party (NSDAP), Walter Gross. Gross's presentation outlined a number of different options that might be pursued with regard to the Black children of the occupation.

Gross proposed to the committee three primary means to accomplish the sterilization of the Rhineland children.³¹ The first proposal called for sterilization by means of an unspoken agreement among regional doctors, the health department, and medical evaluation committees "in an awareness of the greater good, that ran contrary to moral objections (*im Bewußtsein des höheren Zweckes wider besseren*

Wissens)." The necessary legal infrastructure for sterilization thus could be constructed through "collusion."³² However, the SBR saw this proposal as far too dependent on the cooperation of individual doctors to be effectively implemented on a large scale. A second proposal involved the creation of a new law specifically legalizing sterilization for the Black German children of postwar French occupation troops. Committee members believed that this proposal was impractical, since the current sterilization law had already provoked negative reactions abroad as well as among the German population. Nevertheless, participants in the debate argued that the 1933 law remained tenable inasmuch as it supposedly affected only those individuals diagnosed with "genetic illnesses" and as such was arguably not racially motivated. The third proposal advocated illegal sterilization by means of secret authorization, with a precedent in the abortions carried out during this period on eugenic grounds through a special directive from the Führer. Although an additional suggestion to deport the children was also briefly considered, the third proposal was eventually agreed upon as the most feasible: "Sterilization should be carried out either voluntarily or by compulsion based on the law from 14 July 1933, or illegally on a voluntary basis."³³ In his remarks, Gross took pains to emphasize the central difficulty of the task at hand.

It is regrettable that even today, Germany does not yet have at its disposal a discreet and reliable apparatus for dealing with such special cases—an apparatus for the silent and unnoticed commission of breaches of the law out of a *völkisch* sense of responsibility.³⁴

It is unclear on what authority the sterilizations of Black German children of the Rhineland occupation were carried out. The sterilizations began soon after the SBR deliberations based on what seems to have been administrative initiative. The sterilizations of Afro-German children were still technically illegal when, in the spring of 1937, Sonderkommission III was established at the Gestapo Headquarters in Berlin and charged with the task of accomplishing "the discrete sterilization of the Rhineland bastards."³⁵ Similar to the procedure followed in the case of eugenic abortions, medical evaluations from regional health officials were required for the sterilization of the Rhineland children, giving the procedure the appearance of legal sanction. To further

maintain the appearance of legality, parental permission was also required for each sterilization. These measures gave superficial legitimacy to the procedure in spite of the program's illegality.³⁶ Moreover, secrecy was key to this action. The requirement that the initiative be kept covert was necessary not only because it was technically illegal but also because of the desire to avoid potentially negative effects on foreign policy and trade negotiations—an issue discussed at length several times during the SBR's deliberations. As we have seen, party officials and Nazi administrators were already concerned about foreign as well as domestic responses to their actions in this area and, given the growing dissent over the current law, were unwilling to risk any further bad publicity. In instituting its eugenic policies, the NSDAP consistently strove to maintain at least the semblance of legality. However, in the end, the NS program to sterilize the Rhineland children was carried out “illegally on a voluntary basis [*illegal auf freiwilligem Wege*].”³⁷

CONCLUSION

The sterilization of the Afro-German children of the Rhineland occupation represents a curious anomaly in the NS eugenic sterilization program. These children constituted a special group for whom a special procedure was required. Although the exact details of its evolution from idea to reality remain unclear, these sterilizations were carried out illegally, in spite of the fact that extensive forethought and discussion had been devoted to considering ways of circumventing legal complications, and in secret. One question raised by these events is why the sterilization of this small population was regarded as sufficiently important to warrant such complicated measures rather than, for example, the amendment of the original July 1933 law to include explicitly racial provisions.³⁸ On one level, the use of explicitly racial language in the law seems not to have been deemed necessary, as the sterilizations appear to obviously have been racially motivated. Although the sterilization of the Rhineland children had been discussed at least five years prior to the 1933 law, even under the Third Reich no such sterilizations could be authorized without a genetic basis for doing so. For this reason, the NS initiative against the Rhineland children was instituted on neither a legal nor a genetic basis but by means of an “administrative initiative” that apparently did not require official

authorization. The assumption of the legitimacy of racially motivated sterilization seems to have been enough.

However, on another level, like the disproportionate amount of concern and alarm that the presence of a Black German population provoked in both the immediate post-World War I period and in the Kaiserreich during the debates on racially mixed marriages, the symbolic threat that these children were seen to pose to the German nation was interpreted as greatly exceeding their small numbers. As a specter seen to have long-term consequences for the future of the German race, nation, and culture, a domestic Black population repeatedly gave rise to exaggerated responses of dire and impending threat that rarely bore any relation either to the size of this population or to the actual circumstances of their existence. On the contrary, these responses must be read as important historical articulations at moments when Germany was forced to confront the limits of its reliance on concepts of purity as a constituent element of German national identity. Faced with nonwhite Germans in the flesh, such responses in each of these contexts demonstrate Germany's attempts to negate, contain, or control this population's claims to the category of Germanness while securing this category for those seen as entitled to the status of German by virtue of dubious claims to purity.