

Sadie Schmitz

Justin Zelenka

Age Of Genocide

The United State's Role In WWII: How America's Racism Inspired the Holocaust

As World War II ravaged Europe, America was engaged with its own nation, attempting to handle its social and political problems. Legislation emerged throughout the American south, regulating social interactions, voting laws, public spaces, relationships, and education. Other countries and groups watched as these laws were woven into the skeleton of the American experience, especially the Nazi party. The American Jim Crow laws and German Nuremberg laws are directly tied. The Nazi party took inspiration, ideology, and insight from the United States' racially driven caste system, and the legislature that supported it. Ultimately, the Nazi party developed their own set of discriminatory legislation which mirrored that of the United States. The most important role the United States played in holocaust was not that of the savior, or of the party that turned the tides in the war, rather that of the inspiration to the holocaust.

After the civil war in the mid-1860s, the inherently racist culture of America began fostering new, more palatable methods to establish and maintain white supremacy. One of the most prominent ways was the development of Jim Crow laws. These laws included segregatory and discriminatory mandates relating to "public" facilities, voting, and education.¹ This method of preserving and perpetuating white supremacy was one of the catalysts for the generations-long sequence of racial violence in America which continues to exist today. One of the most prominent instances of Jim Crow law in America were the anti-miscegenation laws. 41 states developed laws that regulated all interracial relationships, not just realtionships between white Americans and Black Americans.² These laws were in place until 1967, when

¹PBS: Jim Crow Laws

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/freedom-riders-jim-crow-laws/>

²Lee, Robert. E, The Rocky Mount N.C: Miscegenation: *This Is The Law*

<https://sharetn.gov.tnsosfiles.com/tsla/exhibits/blackhistory/pdfs/Miscegenation%20laws.pdf>

the Supreme Court ruled that a ban on interracial marriage was unconstitutional. These specific laws stemmed from long-term ideologies of social darwinism, eugenics, and eurocentric views on race and ethnicity. These laws perpetuated white supremacy by forcing every American to abide by the racist policies they established. From slavery, and by extension, the Jim Crow laws, an entire American caste system emerged. This racial hierarchy was built upon educational disparities, wealth disparities, and an institutional lack of opportunity. These laws, which prevented Black Americans from liberation within the American social system, were upheld by ordinary people, those who rejected educational integration, a universal right to vote, and the right to interracial marriage. While race is often discussed in the context of American history, it is important to also understand the impact that the United States' racial tenants had on the rest of the world.

While the United States underwent social transformation during the Jim Crow era, Germany underwent a similar transformation under the era of the Nuremberg laws. In 1935, Germany revealed a set of laws eerily similar to the American Jim Crow laws. One of the most prominent Nuremberg laws was known as the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor. This law prohibited interracial relations, similarly to the United States' anti-miscegenation laws.³ No German person and Jewish person could have a relationship of any kind, lest there be unlawful miscegenation of superior and inferior races of people. This law also effectively established an ethnic caste system, reminiscent of the United States caste system, in Nazi Germany by segregating Jewish Germans from those who were considered "pure" Germans. Not only were these laws anti-semitic, they were also racist, oppressive, and harmed, and continue to harm, generations of Jewish people.

While patterns have been detected between the United States and German caste systems in the early 1900s, it was only until recently that academics and historians made unshakeable connections between the two. In more recent years, the phrase "Hitlers American Model" has emerged to explain the idea that the Nazi party looked directly to the racially charged American hierarchical model to emulate,

³ The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: *The Nuremberg Race Laws*
<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-nuremberg-race-laws>

when attempting to solve the “Jewish Question.”⁴ In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler himself stated that the United States was the “leader in developing explicitly racist policies of nationality and immigration.” This statement was one of many which led to the intense study of the American racial hierarchy by German lawyers. Professor James Whitman describes the connection between the American and German race-based laws well, saying “America in the early 20th century was the leading racist jurisdiction in the world. Nazi lawyers, as a result, were interested in, looked very closely at [and] were ultimately influenced by American race law.” Author Isabel Wilkerson also delves into the connection between Nazi Germany and Jim Crow America in her book, *Caste: The Origins Of Our Discontents*.⁵ In this book, she explains how Anti-miscegenation laws were put in place in Germany, and how the Germans acquired the knowledge regarding how to construct a racially motivated caste system. Wilkerson states “the Nazis needed no one to teach them how to hate. But what they did was they sent researchers to the United States, to study Jim Crow laws here...to research how the United States had managed to subordinate and subjugate its African American population.”⁶ In addition to the United States’ influence on German anti-miscegenation laws, America also offered a successful example of how to racially categorize others. This categorization began amid the era of anti-miscegenation laws, and existed to legally determine what race an individual belonged to. In the United States, the “one-drop” rule referred to the notion that if an individual had any Black ancestors, that individual was Black and could not legally have a relationship with a white person. In early 20th century Germany, the Nazis determined that a Jewish person was anyone who had three or more Jewish grandparents. Both Whitman and Wilkerson also note that many of the American laws regarding racial categorization and interracial relationships were harsher than the Nazi party was willing to enforce. Wilkerson discusses this when referring to anti-miscegenation laws in her book, where she describes that the Nuremberg laws preventing miscegenation were not enforced to the same extent as anti-miscegenation laws in the United States. In his book (*Hitlers American Model*)

⁴Whitman, James Q: *Hitlers American Model: The United States and the Making Of Nazi Race Laws*
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26532961>

⁵Wilkerson, Isabel: *Caste: The Origins Of Our Discontents*

⁶Wilkerson, Isabel: *What The Nazis Learned From Jim Crow*
https://www.democracynow.org/2020/8/12/caste_isabel_wilkerson

Whitman states that “American racial classification laws was much harsher than anything the Nazis themselves were willing to introduce in Germany.”⁷ Today, the parallels in ideology, practices, institutions, and beliefs in Jim Crow America and Nazi Germany are undeniable. It is also clear that there were distinct measures taken by the Nazi party as they rose to power to study the American caste system, and that many of the actions taken by America to perpetuate white supremacy were used by the Nazis to establish and uphold a superior “Aryan race”.

In the modern day, a common phrase surrounding the holocaust is “never again”. As Isabel Wilkerson states in her book *Caste*, “We make a serious error when we fail to see the overlap between our country and others.” It is crucial that patterns can be detected and interpreted in order to determine that there will truly, never again be another holocaust. It is essential that the United State examines the role of “ordinary men” in the American caste system, how normal people continue to uphold the racist institutions that established our contunty, in order to better understand the way “ordinary men” upheld the social structure of Nazi Germany. The evolution of research regarding the inspiration American provided to the Nazi party immediately before the holocaust ensued is now an opportunity to learn from the past errors of society. It is a chance to examine past patterns and do better in the future. It is a chance to ensure that the events of the holocaust will truly be never again. The decades-long Jim Crow laws that existed to separate races, oppress Black Americans, and uphold racist systems worked exactly as they were designed to operate in the United States. These laws inspired the Nazi party to establish a paralell caste system, structuring Germany as a racial hierarchy. There is irrefutable evidence of the United States’ role in the holocaust as the inspiration for the racially established caste system in Nazi Germany. It is clear that while the United States’ roles in the holocaust shifted from pioneer of racist ideology and policy, to bystander, to active party, the most important role the United States played in the holocaust was as an agent of inspiration to the Nazi party.

⁷History: *How the Nazis Were Inspired By Jim Crow*
<https://www.history.com/news/how-the-nazis-were-inspired-by-jim-crow>

