Policy and Harm

Trace how Nazi racial ideology became law and medical practice

SS24.HOS.6b "Analyze the Nazis' pursuit of racial purity, including sterilization and other eugenics practices."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each Nazi policy or action, circle the justification its supporters gave, and write one consequence for people beside each action.

When an Idea Became Policy

1. In 1933, Nazi leaders turned their idea of "racial purity" into government policy. They falsely claimed that inherited traits made some people a danger to the nation's future. The Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring allowed courts to order sterilization, surgery that prevents a person from having biological children. Doctors reported patients to special courts, which could approve the operation without a person's consent. People diagnosed with conditions such as epilepsy or schizophrenia were among those targeted. About 400,000 people were forcibly sterilized under this law. The policy treated a person's rights as less important than the Nazis' imagined "healthy" population.

2. The Nazis also used laws to decide who could belong to their imagined national community. In 1935, the Nuremberg Laws denied Jews full citizenship rights and banned marriage or sexual relationships between Jews and people classified as being of "German or related blood." Officials used ancestry records, not a person's beliefs or actions, to classify people. These laws did not sterilize Jews as a group. Instead, they blocked certain relationships and political rights, helping isolate Jewish people and making discrimination seem legal. Both this policy and forced sterilization used state power to control which families could form and whose lives were valued.

3. During World War II, the Nazi campaign grew more deadly. Beginning in 1939, officials organized the murder of disabled adults through a program known as Aktion T4. They also ordered the killing of disabled children through a related program. Officials used medical records to select victims and presented the killings as mercy or a way to save resources. The government announced an end to the centralized T4 program in 1941, but killings of disabled people continued. Officials called these measures "racial hygiene" or public health. In practice, they relied on coercion and false ideas about human worth, not impartial care or patients' choices.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the 1933 law turn a Nazi claim about inherited traits into a loss of control over a person's body? Describe two steps.

2. How did the Nuremberg Laws use ancestry to limit both rights and family relationships?

3. What belief did forced sterilization and Aktion T4 share, and how did their methods differ?

4. Why would it be misleading to understand the Nazis' claim of "public health" as impartial care or patient choice? Use two details from the passage.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a museum displays a doctor's patient report and a marriage application. Write a short exhibit label explaining how officials could use each document to enforce a different Nazi policy from the passage, then end with a warning about what both reveal about state power.

Policy and Harm

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each Nazi policy or action, circle the justification its supporters gave, and write one consequence for people beside each action. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the 1933 law turn a Nazi claim about inherited traits into a loss of control over a person's body? Describe two steps.	**The Nazis claimed certain inherited traits endangered the nation. Doctors reported patients to special courts, which could order sterilization without the patient's consent.**
2	How did the Nuremberg Laws use ancestry to limit both rights and family relationships?	**Officials classified people using ancestry records. The laws denied Jews full citizenship rights and banned marriage or sexual relationships between Jews and people classified as being of "German or related blood."**
3	What belief did forced sterilization and Aktion T4 share, and how did their methods differ?	**Both treated disabled people as less worthy because of Nazi ideas about a "healthy" population. Sterilization prevented people from having biological children, while Aktion T4 murdered disabled adults.**
4	Why would it be misleading to understand the Nazis' claim of "public health" as impartial care or patient choice? Use two details from the passage.	**Courts could order sterilization without a person's consent, and officials selected disabled people for murder using medical records. These actions were coercive, not impartial care.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A doctor's report could send a patient before a special court that might order sterilization without consent. A marriage application could reveal whether officials classified a couple under the Nuremberg Laws, which banned certain marriages based on ancestry. One document helped the state control whether a person could have biological children; the other helped it control whom people could marry. Both show the danger of giving officials power to restrict rights based on false claims about human worth.

Accept answers that distinguish the Nazis' stated justifications from the harms their policies caused. For the exhibit label, students may connect the patient report to sterilization or to the selection of victims for murder, provided the connection is accurate.