

MEMORIAL FOR THE ULM VICTIMS OF NAZI FORCED STERILISATION AND “EUTHANASIA” KILLINGS



INTRODUCTION

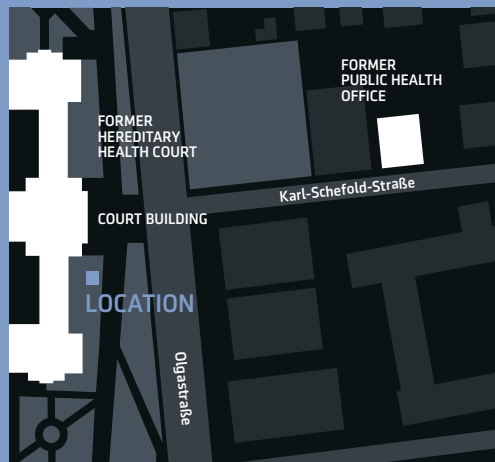
Sick and disabled people were among the first victims of the Nazi's extermination policy. After 1945, the wrong perpetrated against them was largely forgotten. There was no public acknowledgement or justice for their suffering. Families often kept their fate secret.

Two of the central locations for this persecution in Ulm were here in the court building and in the neighbouring building at Karl-Schefold-Straße 5. The Hereditary Health Court (Erbgesundheitsgericht) sat in the court building from 1934 to 1944. The Public Health Office (Staatliche Gesundheitsamt) was housed directly opposite from 1937 onwards.

Ulm's victims

1,155 people from Ulm and the surrounding area were sterilised against their will. They were deemed "unworthy of reproduction" because of an illness considered hereditary, a disability or because they did not conform to social norms. Many of them suffered all their lives from the forced childlessness and the mental and physical impact of the procedure, which some did not survive.

Mentally ill or disabled people were systematically killed from 1940 onwards. The exact number of Ulm victims remains unknown to this day. At least 184 women, children and men from Ulm were murdered by doctors and nurses in extermination centres, sanatoriums and other institutions, because they were deemed "unworthy of life".



Hereditary Health Court Ulm

The Hereditary Health Court was housed in the court building at Olgastraße 106. It ordered the sterilisations on the basis of the "Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring" (Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchs). If people resisted, the sterilisations were enforced with police assistance. Source: Stadtarchiv Ulm



Health Office Ulm

The Public Health Office was housed at Karl-Schefold-Straße 5 from 1937 onwards. The initiative behind genetic and racial persecution in Ulm and the surrounding area emanated from here. The staff checked and recorded the supposed "racial-biological value" of the population's genetic make-up. The Public Health Officer issued the orders for forced sterilisation. The Health Office was also involved in preparations for "euthanasia" killings. Source: Stadtarchiv Ulm

FORCED STERILISATION

Ideological background

The idea that the state should prevent certain people from reproducing did not originate with the Nazis. This included people with physical or mental impairments or others stigmatised as “inferior”. There had been discussions about killing terminally ill people since the 19th century. Their death was supposedly intended to spare them from suffering and was trivially referred to as “euthanasia” (Greek for “good death”) as a result. Proponents of these ideas were “eugenicists” and “racial hygienists”. The standard that was promoted was not the well-being of the individual but rather that of the “national community”.

The Nazis claimed that the people or the “race” would be destroyed if nothing was done about these people. Adolf Hitler was named Reich Chancellor in January 1933. The public and legal marginalisation of sick and disabled people began immediately.

Municipal complicity in the crimes

The “Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring” was one of the first Nazi laws to be passed, in July 1933. The Hereditary Health Court was established in Ulm at the start of 1934 on the basis of this law. It comprised one judge and two doctors and made decisions on forced sterilisation in closed sessions after a brief discussion. Many of those affected were declared incompetent in advance with medical confidentiality suspended.

Numerous people and organisations were involved in forced sterilisations in Ulm: doctors, heads of institutions, nurses, social workers, clergy, teachers, midwives and in some cases even relatives all reported people they believed to be “hereditarily diseased”. Staff from the Health Office investigated the personal details of the lives of those affected and of their families. Municipal staff, the police, employers and neighbours helped with the investigations. Judges pronounced the rulings, doctors performed the operations. The injustice was perpetrated thousands of times because so many people were prepared to cooperate.

Denunciation of a woman by her employer

“The said Rosa F. worked for me as a maid for a few months. I do not believe she is feeble-minded. [...]she is, however, mentally and physically degenerate [...] she eschews an orderly life. Sterilisation would certainly be appropriate, if the law allows.”

In his letter to the Hereditary Health Court, the employer openly requests sterilisation for social reasons. The court approved sterilisation.

Source: Letter to the Amtsgericht Ulm court, 24/2/1939, Staatsarchiv Ludwigsburg



Propaganda for forced sterilisations

The Nazi regime exerted moral pressure publicly on parents and those affected to undergo forced sterilisation.

The legal basis for the procedure was published in the Reich Legal Gazette. Source: Volk und Rasse, Volume 8, 1936

Victims of forced sterilisations

Mentally ill and disabled people were the victims of forced sterilisations. This could have been a mental disability, for example, but also extended to epilepsy, blindness or deafness. Children with learning difficulties were also condemned. The youngest victim in Ulm was a 12-year-old girl. People who lived on the fringes of society and were seen as outsiders were also persecuted. Many lived in psychiatric institutions and homes, such as the Oberer Riedhof state facility in Ulm-Grimmelfingen.

Approximately 400,000 people were forcibly sterilised under the Nazi regime. Some 5,000 men and women died as a result of forced sterilisation.

Public reactions

In Ulm the forced sterilisations were publicly advertised. A lot of medical professionals and lawyers, but even large numbers of the public as well, agreed with the practice. The Catholic Church was one exception. It believed in the absolute sanctity of human life and opposed sterilisations on that basis. This criticism did nothing to prevent the procedures though.

Propagation of forced sterilisation by an Ulm psychiatrist

“Under the liberal system of government [meaning the Weimar Republic] the feeble-minded, the hereditarily diseased and drunks were able to proliferate in greater numbers than hereditarily healthy and able people. [...] The children of feeble-minded parents are also a heavy social burden for the general public. [...] The Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring seeks to control this unsound state of affairs.”

Source: Article by psychiatrist Dr Eduard Mayer, Ulmer Tagblatt, 13/12/1933

Ein Wort an die erbkranken evangelischen Taubstummen.

Die Obrigkeit hat befohlen: Wer erbkrank ist, soll in Zukunft keine Kinder mehr bekommen. Denn unser deutsches Vaterland braucht gesunde und tüchtige Menschen.

Viele Menschen haben von Geburt an ein schweres Gebrechen oder Leiden. Die einen haben keine gesunden Hände, Arme oder Füße. Die anderen sind am Geiste so schwach, daß sie die Schule nicht besuchen konnten. Wieder andere sind blind. — Und Du selbst, lieber Freund, leidest an Taubheit. Wie schwer ist das doch! Du bist oft traurig darüber. Du hast wohl oft gefragt: „Warum muß ich taub sein?“ Und wie traurig sind wohl auch Deine Eltern gewesen, als sie merkten, daß Du nicht hören konntest!

Es gibt taubstumme Kinder, deren Vater oder Mutter auch taubstumm ist. Es gibt auch Taubstumme, deren Großeltern ebenfalls taubstumm waren. Sie haben das Gebrechen ererbt. Sie sind **erbkrank**.

Zu diesen Menschen sagt die Obrigkeit: Du darfst Dein Gebrechen nicht noch weiter auf Kinder oder Großkinder vererben; Du mußt ohne Kinder bleiben.

Wenn Du an ererbter Taubheit leidest, belommst Du wohl eine Vorladung vor das Erbgesundheitsgericht. Da geht es um die Frage, ob Du auch niemals Kinder haben sollst. — Vor allem eins: Nichtwahr, Du wirst die Wahrheit sagen, wenn Du gefragt wirst. Denn so will es Gott von Dir! Du wirst die Wahrheit sagen auch dann, wenn das unangenehm ist.

Vielleicht bestimmt das Erbgesundheitsgericht: Du sollst durch eine Operation unfruchtbar gemacht werden. Du wirst traurig. Du denkst: „Das möchte ich nicht. Ich möchte heiraten und Kinder haben. Denn ich habe Kinder lieb.“ Aber nun überlege einmal: Möchtest Du schuld daran sein, daß die Taubheit noch weiter vererbt wird? Würdest Du nicht sehr traurig werden, wenn Du sehen müßtest, daß Deine Kinder oder Enkelkinder auch wieder taub sind? Müdest Du Dir dann nicht selber schwere Vorwürfe machen? Nein, das möchtest Du doch wohl nicht. Die Verantwortung ist zu groß.

Sieh, da will die Obrigkeit Dir helfen. Sie will Dich bewahren vor Vererbung Deines Gebrechens.

Aber, sagst Du, unangenehm, sehr unangenehm ist das doch. Denn die Menschen klatschen darüber, wenn ich unfruchtbar gemacht bin. Sie verachten mich. — Nein, so mußt Du nicht denken. Die Obrigkeit hat befohlen: Niemand darf über die Unfruchtbarmachung sprechen. Du selbst auch nicht. Merke wohl: Du darfst zu keinem Menschen darüber sprechen! Auch deine Angehörigen nicht! Und der Arzt, der Richter, sie alle müssen darüber schweigen!

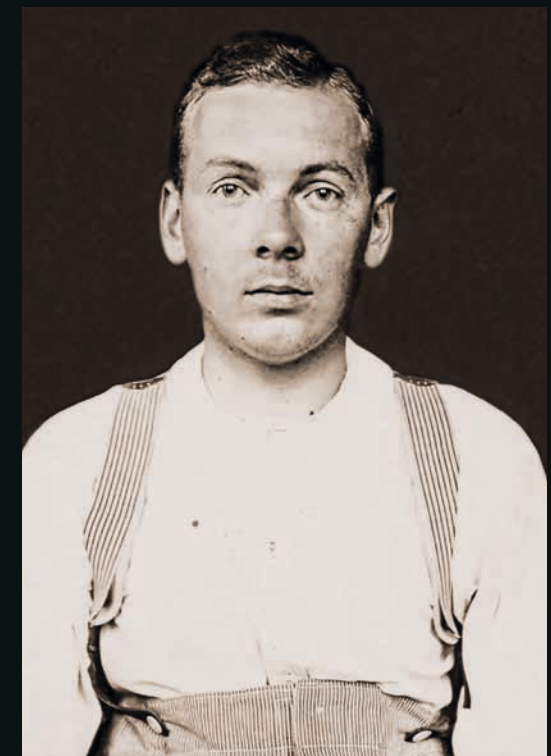
Gehorche der Obrigkeit! Gehorche ihr auch, wenn es Dir schwer wird! Denke an die Zukunft Deines Volkes und bringe ihr dieses Opfer, das von Dir gefordert wird! Vertraue auf Gott und vergiß nicht das Bibelwort: „Wir wissen, daß denen, die Gott lieben, alle Dinge zum Besten dienen.“

Reichsverband
der evang. Taubst.-Seelsorger Deutschlands.

Appeal for forced sterilisation from a Protestant association for the deaf

Even religious organisations supported forced sterilisations on the principle: “obey authority!” The leaflet was distributed to deaf people to weaken possible resistance among those affected and to motivate them to come forward voluntarily. DAFEG, the German Protestant association for the deaf, published a declaration of guilt for their involvement in 2016.

Source: Leaflet published by the Reichsverband der evangelischen Taubstummen-Seelsorger Deutschland, 1936, Archiv DZOK



Victim of forced sterilisation and “euthanasia”:
Otto Pröllochs

Otto Pröllochs was born on 3rd February 1903 in Urach. He grew up in Ulm and was an apprentice banker here before he suffered mental illness in 1927. He was forcibly sterilised in 1934 while staying at the Schussenried Sanatorium and was murdered in 1940 at the Grafeneck extermination centre.

Source: Universitätsarchiv Tübingen

“EUTHANASIA” KILLING

Increased marginalisation and “euthanasia” killing during the War

The marginalisation of sick and disabled people intensified from the mid-1930s onwards.

The propaganda focussed especially on the cost of housing patients in institutions, calling this an unreasonable economic burden on the “national community”. Even newborns with serious disabilities were considered “unworthy of life”. Systematic recording of people with illnesses and disabilities began with the outbreak of the Second World War in autumn 1939; killings began in January 1940. The Nazi regime assumed that public attention would be distracted by the War.

Secret “Aktion T4” programme

Hitler ordered the killing of terminally ill patients in a secret letter written in October 1939.

“Euthanasia” killings of institutional patients were organised centrally under strict secrecy and were performed at six extermination centres located throughout the German Reich. The central office was located in Berlin at Tiergartenstraße 4, which is where the name “Aktion T4” comes from. In Württemberg the former Grafeneck home for the disabled near Münsingen became an execution site for 10,000 people, including 148 from Ulm. Six people from Ulm were murdered at Hadamar in Hesse, while two were killed at Hartheim near Linz in Austria.

The “T4” killing programme was organised and implemented by numerous perpetrators: from the Reich and state level – especially the interior ministries with health departments – to the local doctors, nurses and administrative officials. Who should be killed was decided on the basis of disclosure forms. Institutional doctors and directors filled these forms out, before they were evaluated by external experts. The final decision was made by the “T4” central office. Staff working at the Oberer Riedhof facility in Ulm-Grimmelfingen also betrayed 55 of those in their care in this way, condemning them to murder.

hier trägst Du mit

Ein Erbkranker kostet bis zur Erreichung des
60. Lebensjahres im
Durchschnitt 50.000 RM.



Denouncing the sick as an unacceptable burden

The propaganda poster is intended to depict the enormous burden borne by healthy, working members of the nation due to the "useless hereditarily diseased". People are valued here only in terms of cost and benefit.
Source: Volk und Rasse, Volume 8, 1936



Site of mass murder in Grafeneck

The gas chamber was located in the middle two rooms of the building. This is also where the people deported to Grafeneck from Ulm were murdered.

Source: Gedenkstätte Grafeneck

Victims of “T4” murder

The victims of “euthanasia” killing were chronically ill and required care. They were deemed unproductive, or supposedly disrupted everyday life in the institution due to their behaviour. Jewish patients and people with criminal convictions were particularly at risk. Most of the Ulm victims of “Aktion T4” were female and institutionalised due to mental illness. They had been living in clinics and homes for many years, in some cases for decades. Only a few had relatives who looked after them. Their intervention could not save them either though.

“Euthanasia” killing from 1941 to 1945

Despite every effort, the “Aktion T4” did not remain a secret. Hitler stopped the killing programme on 24th August 1941 due to widespread public concern. Nevertheless, sick and disabled people continued to be murdered. This no longer occurred in central extermination centres, however, but on a local level in many hospitals and institutions. Patients were now killed by overdose, neglect or starvation rations. For adults in Ulm, the Zwiefalten Sanatorium was one site of this localised “euthanasia”. Children and young people were murdered at the Kaufbeuren Asylum as part of “child euthanasia”. Increasing numbers of people were deemed eligible for “euthanasia” killing: people the Nazis designated “asocial” or “criminal”, as well as sick forced labourers and concentration camp prisoners. Around 216,000 people were murdered throughout the German Reich, including at least 183 from Ulm.



Murdered in Grafeneck as “unworthy of life”:

Josefine Angermaier

Josefine Angermaier was born on 19th March 1891 in Stetten ob Lontal near Niederstotzingen. She moved to Ulm with her husband in 1916 and brought three daughters into the world. She suffered from mental illness following the birth of her second daughter. When her husband died in 1934, she came to the Weissenau Asylum. In 1940 Josefine Angermaier was deported to Grafeneck and murdered.

Source: private

Aug. 3. Juni 1942. Kiefer

Lieben Karl!

[illegible][illegible]

Mon Vrs. Les Anne.

Springlinway 5.

Degerloch, 3rd June 1942

Dear Karl,

Blessings and good wishes for your birthday. May God bless you in body and soul and give you what you need. I am very sorry that you did not stay at the Riedhof, where things were much better for you, but how are things going at the sanatorium? Pauline is also sad that you are there, she liked that you had your work at the Riedhof. I've included something for your birthday, I baked the bread myself and the eggs are hard-boiled, you can eat them right away; enclosed also 5 M[arks] for you as pocket money. Hopefully you will get the things too. You write that you didn't get any eggs at Easter, I've included 4 eggs for you. Be diligent and obedient in this difficult time of war, so that they do not set up a second Krafeneck [Grafeneck]. Pray too: dear God make me pious that I may go to Heaven. God willing and if nothing goes wrong, I hope that I will be able to visit you over the summer.

God bless. Much love,

your sister Susanne.

Heuglinweg 5.

Letter to an Ulm victim of localised “euthanasia”

Letter from Susanne Kircher to her brother Karl Kircher, shortly after his transfer from Ulm to the Zwiefalten Sanatorium. Karl Kircher was deaf, worked as a basket maker and had been living at the Oberer Riedhof facility since 1934. He was transferred to Zwiefalten at the end of 1941 at the age of 56. When Karl Kircher became ill there with angina in 1943, he was refused the necessary medication. He died two days after falling ill.

Source: Staatsarchiv Sigmaringen

AFTERMATH AND COMMEMORATION

Dealing with the crimes after 1945

For the people in the institutions there was no liberation in 1945. Many died in the months following the War due to hunger and a lack of care. Numerous institutional directors, doctors and nurses, who had participated in the crimes, continued to work with impunity.

The concepts of “inferiority” and “hereditary burden” persisted in society for a long time. People who had been forcibly sterilised and relatives of “euthanasia” victims found little support. Many of those affected and the families were ashamed of the wrong they had suffered and kept silent as a result. They were not recognised as victims of Nazi persecution for decades.

Public remembrance of the victims began to develop slowly in the 1980s. In 1998 the Bundestag revoked the orders for forced sterilisation. The “Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring” was not repealed by the Bundestag until 2007. No-one has ever been prosecuted for participating in forced sterilisations. To this day, the victims of forced sterilisations and the relatives of “euthanasia” victims are still not covered by the Restitution Laws (Bundesentschädigungsgesetz).

About the memorial site

Local people from Ulm worked with the Dokumentationszentrum Oberer Kuhberg (DZOK) to find a worthy location for information and commemoration. This memorial was erected in 2019 with the support of Stadt Ulm, the State of Baden-Württemberg and Ulm's Landsgerecht and Amtsgericht courts. A memorial book for the Ulm victims of Nazi forced sterilisation and “euthanasia” killings was published at the same time.

The names of Ulm's victims of “euthanasia” killings have been made public for the first time at this memorial site. They should be recognised and commemorated as citizens of Ulm and as victims of Nazi persecution. Commemoration should help us think about how we deal with disability and illness today: every person has a right to life and is of equal value.

Milwaukee, den



An den Oberstaatsanwalt bei dem Amtsgericht der Stadt Ulm

Möchte Sie kurz auftragen bezwecks Papiere wo notwendig brauche.

Ich Elfriede K. ——— jetzt verheiratete A. ——— mich hat man in 1939 Sterilisiert so daß ich keine Kinder mehr haben kann war nur 15 Jahre alt diese Zeit. Und komme mit einer Bitte zu Ihnen. Können Sie mir die Papier schicken mit der Unterschrift von der Person so, daß man mich Sterilisiert hat bitte sind Sie so gut wäre Ihnen dankbar. Die Papiere müssen auf dem Amtsgericht liegen wo die Person die Unterschrift gegeben hat. Die Person ist mein Vater Georg K. ——— er hat die Unterschrift gegeben. Bitte schicken Sie es so schnell wie möglich. Und ersten hat Georg K. ——— kein recht gehabt die Papiere zu unterschreiben so daß man mein Leben abgeschnitten hat jetzt bin ich ohne Kinder. Und jetzt will ich eine Wiedergutmachung haben wie andere Leute es bekommen haben bin auch ein Mensch. Bitte Herr Staatsanwalt geben Sie mir Antwort darauf.

Dem

Amtsgericht

U l m

zuständigkeitshalber weitergeleitet.

Ulm (Donau), den 23. Mai 1961.
Staatsanwaltschaft
JOI.

1 Beil.

Hochachtungsvoll

Hochachtungsvoll Frau Elfriede

A. ———

Danke schön.

EINGEGANGEN

23. MAI 1961

Herrn J. K.
Bitte im entspr. Feststellung
im B. Folge zum H. d. d. d. d.
23.5. H

Futile request for reparations

In a letter to Ulm's Amtsgericht court written in 1961, Elfriede A. asks for reparations for the forced sterilisation she had suffered. She was sterilised in 1939 as a fifteen-year-old girl. Her father had given his consent, although she and her mother lived apart from him. Elfriede A. emigrated to the USA after the War. Her case was rejected by various departments and the injustice she suffered was not acknowledged.

Source: Staatsarchiv Ludwigsburg