

PRESS RELEASE

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM EXHIBITION *DEADLY MEDICINE: CREATING THE MASTER RACE* TO OPEN AT THE South Carolina State Museum

July 20, 2009

“Nazism is applied biology.”

— Rudolf Hess, Deputy to Adolf Hitler

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s traveling exhibition, *Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race*, examines how the Nazi leadership, in collaboration with individuals in professions traditionally charged with healing and the public good, used science to help legitimize persecution, murder and, ultimately, genocide. It will premiere on Friday, August 14, at the South Carolina State Museum.

“Deadly Medicine explores the Holocaust’s roots in then-contemporary scientific and pseudo-scientific thought,” explains exhibition curator Susan Bachrach. “At the same time, it touches on complex ethical issues we face today, such as how societies acquire and use scientific knowledge and how they balance the rights of the individual with the needs of the larger community. We are pleased to be bringing this important exhibition to the United Nations and an international audience.”

This version of *Deadly Medicine* is based on the acclaimed exhibition of the same name that originally opened at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., in April 2004. Two other successful traveling versions of the exhibition have been on display in Canada and Germany. An online version of the exhibition is available at www.ushmm.org/deadlymedicine. *Deadly Medicine* will be open through February 2010.

Eugenics theory sprang from turn-of-the-century scientific beliefs asserting that Charles Darwin’s theories of “survival of the fittest” could be applied to humans. Supporters, spanning the globe and political spectrum, believed that through careful controls on marriage and reproduction, a nation’s genetic health could be improved.

The Nazi regime was founded upon the conviction that “inferior” races and individuals had to be eliminated

Dr. Otmar von Verschuer examines twins at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute. As the head of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute’s Department for Human Heredity, Verschuer, a physician and geneticist, examined hundreds of pairs of twins to study whether criminality, feeble-mindedness, tuberculosis, and cancer were inheritable. In 1927, he recommended the forced sterilization of the “mentally and morally subnormal.” Verschuer typified those academics whose interest in Germany’s “national regeneration” provided motivation for their research.

Credit: Archiv zur Geschichte der Max-Planck-Gesellschaft, Berlin-Dahlem



from German society so that the fittest “Aryans” could thrive. The Nazi state fully committed itself to implementing a uniquely racist and antisemitic variation of eugenics to “scientifically” build what it considered to be a “superior race.” By the end of World War II, six million Jews had been murdered. Millions of others also became victims of persecution and murder through Nazi “racial hygiene” programs designed to cleanse Germany of “biological threats” to the nation’s “health,” including “foreign-blooded” Roma and Sinti (Gypsies), persons diagnosed as “hereditarily ill,” and homosexuals. In German-occupied territories, Poles and others belonging to ethnic groups deemed “inferior” were also murdered.

In response to the medical community’s interest in *Deadly Medicine*, the Museum established its Science and Medicine Initiative to augment medical ethics education in the healthcare professions. The Initiative is creating collaborative opportunities to explore the implications for contemporary bioethics by presenting the history in *Deadly Medicine* to prompt exploration of such 21st-century ethical issues as the rapid advances in genetics and medicine, and the value of individual lives, especially those of people considered to be disabled. Following its presentation at the United Nations, the exhibition will travel to medical schools and universities around the country. Exhibition brochures in French, German and Spanish will be available on site.

This South Carolina exhibition is made possible through the support of the South Carolina Council on the Holocaust.

A living memorial to the Holocaust, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum inspires citizens and leaders to confront hatred, promote human dignity and prevent genocide. Its far-reaching educational programs and global impact are made possible by the generosity of donors nationwide through legacy and annual giving. For more information, visit www.ushmm.org.



Head shots showing various racial types. Most western anthropologists classified people into “races” based on physical traits such as head size and eye, hair and skin color. This classification was developed by Eugen Fischer and published in the 1921 and 1923 editions of *Foundations of Human Genetics and Racial Hygiene*.

Credit: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum