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19 March 2019

### **Hans F.K. Günther: The Founder of Nazi Racial Doctrine**

Source:

- Hans F. K. Günther (1891-1968), *The Racial Elements of European History*. Translated by G. C Wheeler (1872-1943), London, Methuen & co. ltd. 1927.

Hans Günther's *The Racial Elements of European History* offers a eugenics-based explanation as to the origins of the varying ethnic groups throughout Europe. The book was published in 1927 and was translated to English immediately that year. In the book, Günther categorizes the "Aryan race" into subcategories and thus argues for the supremacy of the "Nordic Aryan."<sup>1</sup> In addition to his categorization of European Aryans, Günther also describes ethnic groups he considered to be non-Aryan and thus inferior to Aryans; for example, Jews.<sup>2</sup> Nordic supremacy and its decline through race mixing are the two overall themes of the work. In other words, Günther argues that this Nordic race possesses superior physical and psychological characteristics that members of other, less superior races within Europe do not. From the perspective of this book, the racial mixing between Nordic Europeans and members of other European races is presented as a form of tragedy that must be prevented. Günther even presents maps of what he believes to be the distribution of these Nordic Europeans that imply that those nations that have the greatest density of Nordic Europeans are superior to nations that do not.<sup>3</sup> For example, based on his doctrine, while Günther believes Germany possesses a disproportionately high density of Nordic Europeans compared to other neighboring states, states like Italy and Spain have virtually no Nordic Europeans. In addition to this book, Günther also published *Rassenkunde des deutschen Volkes* ("Racial Science of the German People") in 1922.

Günther's works were greatly admired by Adolf Hitler and ultimately became the guidelines for Nazi racial doctrine. In fact, it was later found that Hitler had six of Günther's

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<sup>1</sup> Günther, Hans F. K. *Racial Elements Of European History*. Methuen & Co. Ltd. , 1927. Pg. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Günther, Pg. 67.

<sup>3</sup> Günther, Pg. 110

books in his private collection.<sup>4</sup> To the Nazi Party, the greatness of Germany was owed to the strong presence of Nordic Europeans in their nation, and thus the preservation of Nordic race became top priority for the party. However, the preservation of the alleged superior Nordic race also meant for the Nazis that the nations hosting large populations of non-Aryan Europeans were not only inferior but also unworthy of existence. Based on Günther's doctrine that east of Germany resided large areas occupied by non-Aryans, Nazi Germany set out to conquer this Lebensraum ("living space") in order for the future generations of Aryan Germans to live. Günther's theories served as the Third Reich's racial doctrine for the entirety of its existence. Günther died in Germany in 1968.

By searching academic databases for references to Günther's works, I was able to find that academics of Günther's time either rejected his theories as unscientific or chauvinistically accepted his doctrine. This contrast reflects the anti-intellectualism that Nazi Germany's racial ideology necessitated. I also found that Günther's racial dogma influenced far beyond the racial policies of Nazi Germany. Namely, the doctrine influenced British far-right movements, eastern European racism, and Nazi Germany's medical institutions. Through speculation and mythology, Hans Günther created the guidelines for Nazi Germany's policies of hatred that have emboldened white supremacists across Europe for decades since.

### **Annotated Bibliography in Chronological Order**

Hooton, E. A. "Reviewed Works: *The Racial Elements of European History & Rassenkunde des deutschen Volkes* by Hans F. K. Günther." *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 31, No. 1 (Jan. - Mar., 1929), pp. 165- 166.

- The reviewer begins by expressing regret that Günther's intelligence be wasted on what the review regards as propaganda. The reviewer believes that Gunter is a "Nordomaniac" and that Günther is in fact wrong about Jews. The reviewer believes Jews outperform all other ethnic groups academically and therefore refutes Günther's theory.

Redfield, Robert. "*The Racial Elements of European History* (Book Review)" *American Journal of Sociology* 34, no. 4 (1929): 742. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2765113>.

- The author reviews this book as nothing more than conjecture. Specifically, Redfield highlights the fact that research documented in the book was performed in an entirely

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<sup>4</sup> Timothy Ryback, *Hitler's Private Library: The Books that Shaped His Life* (New York: Knopf, 2008), 110.

unscientific manner. In other words, as opposed to the later mentioned reviews of Günther's book, Redfield cites Günther's lack of evidence and scientific procedure as proof that Nordicism is purely mythological.

Webster, Priscilla H. "Reviewed Work: *The Racial Elements of European History* by Hans F. K. Günther." *Economic Geography* 5, no. 4 (1929): 434-35.

- The author of the journal refers to the work as if they agree with Günther's theories. Webster praises the work and speaks highly of the fact that Günther gives the audience hope for the future of the Nordic race. However, Webster provides no criticism of Günther's methodology. Webster merely evokes a positive emotional response to Günther's work, implying that Webster, like the Nazis, depends less on intellectualism than on sensation in regards to racial theory.

Morford, Dale D. "*The Racial Elements of European History* (Book Review)." *Social Science*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Feb., Mar., Apr., 1930), pp. 234-235

- The author takes an indifferent tone at the beginning of the review but by the end, the author seems at least to admire Günther's exploration of what Günther believes to be contributions to civilization on the basis of race. In other words, the author of the review at least believes in the idea that certain racial groups have particular contributions to civilization.

Ellis, Donald W. "The Propaganda Ministry and Centralized Regulation of Music in the Third Reich: The Biological Aesthetic as Policy." *Journal of European Studies* 5, no. 3 (1975): 223-38.

- This article documents Günther's association of Germanic composers like Wagner, Mozart, and Weber with German ethnic superiority. According to the article, Nazi composers borrowed Günther's racial ideas and applied them to their own musical theories. For example, Nazi composers believed that Jews had ruined certain aspects of music like chord progression. These Nazi composers believed that Jewish inferiority was responsible for the modern music Nazis deemed as degenerate. Ellis contends that without Günther and his racial theories regarding Germanic superiority, Nazi conceptions of art and music may not have been the same.

Jennifer Michael Hecht. "Vacher de Lapouge and the Rise of Nazi Science." *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (Apr. 2000), pp. 285-304

- This article simply documents some interesting details about Günther's professional career, but the thesis of the article is that a French anthropologist named Georges Vacher de Lapogue (1854-1936) was Günther's greatest influence. The author of the article explains that it was this anthropologist that Günther cited the most in his work. The article also notes that Günther, Lapogue, and a man named Alfred Rosenberg were all colleagues and influential to Third Reich racial policies. The article explains that while Rosenberg represented the drunken ramblings of a stereotypical Nazi and was hanged for his influence in the "final solution," Günther represented a more refined racism that was deemed entirely influential to the Nazi extermination policies.

Gottlieb, Julie V. & Thomas P. Linehan. *The Culture of Fascism: Visions of the Far Right in Britain*. London: I.B. Tauris, **2004**.

- In this textbook, the author explores the effect that Günther's racial theories had on the far-right in Britain. This textbook argues that far-right British activists praised the writings of Hans F.K. Günther and argued that the end of World War 2 represented the beginning of the end of the Nordic race. The perspective presented in this textbook is particularly interesting given that Günther believed England to be one of the European nations most densely populated with Nordic Europeans.

Felder, Björn M. & Weidling, Paul J. *Baltic Eugenics: Bio-politics, Race and Nation in Interwar Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania 1918-1940*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, **2013**.

- This book documents the 20<sup>th</sup> century conceptions of race in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The book references Günther in order to describe how Nazis view people living in these nations. The author seeks to describe ideas of race during this time as aligning mostly with Günther's Nordacist theory. In other words the author describes white supremacy in these three nations as being derived from Günther.

Sussman, Robert W. *The Myth of Race: The Troubling Persistence of an Unscientific Idea*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, **2017**.

- Robert Sussman's 2017 textbook documents thoroughly the history of eugenics and eugenicists like Hans F.K. Günther. Not only does this text recall the history of Günther's ideologies, it also describes Günther's political activity in Germany after World War 2. According to the text, Günther joined a far-right party in Germany and continued publishing works regarding eugenics. These theories led him to advocate for state-

sponsored family-planning in order to curb what he believed to be the dumbing down of European civilization due to what he believed to be stupidity. These details present troubling implications about Germany's far-right post-war political parties.

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