

Fifty Years After the Nuremberg Nazi Doctor's Trial: Reviewing How the Laws of the Third Reich Applied to Individuals with Oral Clefts

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The Nazi Doctor's Trial, held in the city of Nuremberg 50 years ago, is a landmark in the history of medicine and science. For the first time, the horrors inflicted by a group of German scientists on innocent victims became widely known. Most of the defendants received sentences that ranged from relatively short imprisonment to death. The Trial also provided elements to develop standards for permissible medical experimentation, known as the Nuremberg Code. The atrocities judged in the Nazi Doctor's Trial, however, were not isolated. They were part of an overall, eugenic system that encouraged euthanasia, compulsory sterilization and selective marriages based on "genetic health" and "racial hygiene". Individuals with oral clefts were considered subject to these laws and suffered their consequences. This presentation will briefly describe the main features of the Trial, it will review the state of knowledge on oral clefts in the 1930s and 1940s, it will present how the laws of the Third Reich impacted on the lives on individuals with oral clefts, and it will speculate on the implications of past and present eugenic policies in the future of humankind.