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978-0-521-86184-7 — From Nurturing the Nation to Purifying the Volk

Michelle Mouton

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From Nurturing the Nation to Purifying the Volk

WEIMAR AND NAZI FAMILY POLICY, 1918–1945

Fearing that the future of the nation was at stake following the First World War, German policymakers vastly expanded social welfare programs to shore up women and families. Just over a decade later, the Nazis seized control of the state and created a radically different, racially driven gender and family policy. This book explores Weimar and Nazi policy to highlight the fundamental, far-reaching change wrought by the Nazis and the disparity between national family policy design and its implementation at the local level. Relying on a broad range of sources – including court records, sterilization files, church accounts, and women's oral histories – it demonstrates how local officials balanced the benefits of marriage, divorce, and adoption against budgetary concerns, church influence, and their own personal beliefs. Throughout both eras, individual Germans collaborated with, rebelled against, and evaded state mandates, in the process fundamentally altering the impact of national policy.

Michelle Mouton is assistant professor of history at the University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota in 1997. She is the recipient of the Fritz Stern Prize awarded by the German Historical Institute for the best dissertation in German History, on which this book is based. She has published articles in *Central European History Journal*, the *Journal of Women's History*, and the *History Workshop Journal*.

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“Since the 1980s the history of the Third Reich has been entirely rewritten as the history of the Holocaust and the racial state. Less widely appreciated is the equally far-reaching impact of women’s history. First during a time of recurring crisis, political polarization, and unbounded hopes, and then under a regime of unparalleled coerciveness and ideological ambition, biopolitical questions involving family, reproduction, and the placement of women in the imagined moral-political order moved to the centerground of politics in early twentieth-century Germany. In a salutary reminder of the radicalism of the right-wing assault on Weimar welfarism, Michelle Mouton delivers an excellent guide to the Nazi counter-ideal of a racially driven familial state.”

– Geoff Eley, University of Michigan

“Mouton’s fascinating book is path breaking along numerous dimensions. It offers the first comprehensive and comparative account of Weimar and National Socialist family policy. Its evidence and analysis move gracefully between the national level of policy, laws, and regulation and the regional one of implementation, looking in detail at developments in Westphalia. It is based on an extraordinary range of carefully analyzed sources that allow Mouton to illuminate not only the responses to state policy of social workers, physicians, and judges but also ordinary Westphalians. In documenting the myriad ways in which non-Jewish Germans, especially women, maneuvered within and around Nazi family policies, it provides an unusual window onto everyday lives and attitudes, while always setting these individual responses within the framework of National Socialism’s racist ideology, politics, and war.”

– Donna Harsch, Carnegie Mellon University

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Edited by Christof Mauch
 with the assistance of David Lazar

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*This book is for my children,
Kirsten and Bjorn,
And for the memory of my father,
David Lynn Mouton (1932–1986)*

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Abbreviations

BGB	German Civil Code, <i>Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch</i>
BDF	Federation of German Women's Organizations, Bund Deutsche Frauenvereine
BDM	League of German Girls, Bund Deutscher Mädel
BfM	Federation for the Protection of Mothers, Bund Deutscher Mütterschutz
DDP	German Democratic Party, Deutsche Demokratische Partei
DNVP	German National People's Party, Deutschnationale Volkspartei
DVP	German People's Party, Deutsche Volkspartei
EFH	Protestant Women's Aid Society, Evangelische Frauenhilfe
GEG	Marriage Law for Greater Germany, <i>Groß Deutsches Ehegesetz</i>
HJ	Hitler Youth, Hitler-Jugend
KPD	Communist Party of Germany, Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands
NSDAP	National Socialist German Workers' Party, Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei
NSF	National Socialist Women's Organization, Nationalsozialistische Frauenschaft
NSV	National Socialist People's Welfare Organization, Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt
RBdKR	Reich League of Child Rich Families, Reichsbund der kinderreichen Familien
RJWG	Reich Youth Welfare Law, <i>Reichsjugendwohlfahrtsgesetz</i>
RMD	Reich Mother Service, Reichsmütterdienst
SA	Nazi "Storm Front," Sturmabteilung

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SD	Security Service, Sicherheitsdienst
Sopade	Executive Committee of the Social Democratic Party in Exile
SPD	Social Democratic Party of Germany, Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
SS	Nazi Paramilitary Organization, Schatzstafel
USPD	Independent Socialist Party of Germany, Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
VFV	Patriotic Women’s Association, Vaterländische Frauenverein