

Hitler's American Model

Review

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2018

a review of

Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law by James Q. Whitman. Princeton University Press 2017 press.princeton.edu/titles/10925.html

The United States and Germany shared an important characteristic in the 1930s. Both were determined to cement white supremacy into Law. Racist statutes in the US were then state of the art. The Nazis sought to catch up after taking power in 1933.

Hitler's 1936 Nuremberg Laws Laid the legal foundation for persecution of Jews. Many scholars since have downplayed the importance of America's example, claiming that Jim Crow said nothing about Jews, who were considered Caucasian in the US. Besides, the idea that the USA could be so closely associated with the gas chambers was understandably repellent. James Whitman thoroughly demolishes contentions that American influence on the Nuremberg Laws was "plain wrong" (Mark Mazower), that Jim Crow received only "few and fleeting references by Nazi polemicists" (Richard Bernstein) and was not an "important influence" (Marcus Hanke).

In fact, Nazi legal theorists were very interested in American race laws, and made careful studies of how each state chose to enact them.

They admired direct white supremacist sentiments in miscegenation laws, and understood denial of voting rights. On the national level, they closely parsed the legal language of Congress's anti-Asian and anti-Latino immigration acts. Detailed reports compiling this data were then presented and debated at a 1934 Nuremberg planning conference. A meticulous record was kept, which Whitman cites in depth. Nazi lawyers were obsessed with their American model.

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Fifth Estate #401, Summer 2018

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