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Book Review

“Hitler’s American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law”
by James Q. Whitman, Princeton, \$24.95, 208 pp.

U.S. racial atrocities as the model for Nazi rule

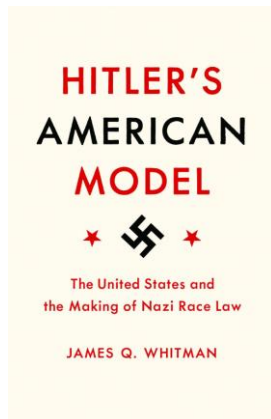
by [Jeff Guo](#)

When Adolf Hitler seized control of Germany in 1933, one of his priorities was to create a legal framework for his vision of an anti-Semitic state. Thus began a meticulous Nazi research project on race-based lawmaking aimed at [erasing the rights](#) of Germany’s Jews.

One foreign country in particular grabbed the Nazis’ interest because of its advanced and innovative system of legal racism.

The object of Nazi fascination? America.

“In the early twentieth century the United States was not just a country with racism,” writes Yale law professor James Whitman in his book “Hitler’s American Model.” “It was *the* leading racist jurisdiction — so much so that even Nazi Germany looked to America for inspiration.”



In his startling new history, Whitman traces the substantial influence of American race laws on the Third Reich. The book, in effect, is a portrait of the United States assembled from the admiring notes of Nazi lawmakers, who routinely referenced American policies in the design of their own racist regime.

As they drafted their own laws to exclude German Jews from public and civic life, Nazi lawyers carefully studied how the United States suppressed nonwhite immigrants and consigned minorities to second-class citizenship. In private hearings, they discussed how the U.S. model for white supremacy in the Jim Crow South could be transposed to Germany and inflicted on the Jews.

The Nazis were keenly influenced by America's laws forbidding interracial marriage. Dozens of states not only banned black-white unions but subjected violators to lengthy jail sentences. The harsh criminalization of mixed-race marriages in America set an example for the Nazis as they created their Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour, which forbade German Jews from marrying non-Jews, invalidated existing mixed marriages and sent offenders to prison labor camps.

Whitman's book contributes to a growing recognition of American influences on Nazi thought. Other historians have shown, for instance, that the vigorous U.S. eugenics movement emboldened the Nazis, who copied America's forced-sterilization programs and took cover in the pseudoscientific theories of American eugenicists.

[Biographer John Toland](#) has noted that Hitler admired the American conquest of the West, particularly the decimation of the Native American population. The Nazi concentration camps may have been based, in part, Toland argued, on the Native American reservation system.

The Nazi atrocities held a dark mirror to some of America's most shameful impulses. On some level, Americans understood this. After World War II, eugenics fell out of favor, and the United States gradually rolled back some of its racist laws. [Jim Crow was dismantled](#), at least on paper, by the efforts of the civil rights movement in the 1960s. And the last anti-miscegenation laws

were struck down in 1967. This was slow progress, but it probably would have been slower if the Nazi regime hadn't horrified the world with its racial intolerance.

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