

DR. EVIL

I first learned about EDWIN KATZEN-ELLENBOGEN when I read a book called *War Against the Weak* that was written by Edwin Black in 2003. It described how the eugenics movement had enormous traction among American intellectuals early in the 20th century and how what was done in this country influenced Hitler's racist ideology. While reading this book I was shocked when I came across these few sentences:

In 1911 Woodrow Wilson became governor of New Jersey...Katzen-Ellenbogen was asked to become scientific director of the State Village for Epileptics at Skillman, New Jersey...As the state's leading expert on epilepsy, he was asked by Wilson to draft New Jersey's law to sterilize epileptics and defectives.

That sounded authoritative, but I'd never heard of this doctor nor about any such law in my home state. Because it seemed implausible, I decided to explore the issue and, from what I learned, in 2009 I published a book about eugenics in New Jersey that included the story of Edwin Katzen-Ellenbogen (*A Tale of Two Villages. Vineland and Skillman.*) Indeed, the state had passed a law that permitted asylum directors to sterilize patients in order to eliminate their "bad seeds" and it remained on the books for two years until in 1913 New Jersey's Supreme Court ruled that it was unconstitutional. Although no one ever was sterilized against their will in New Jersey, over the years roughly 65,000 Americans in other states were sterilized without their consent.

While it's true that Katzen-Ellenbogen (K-E) worked as a "psychopathologist" for about a year at Skillman Village, he surely wasn't New Jersey's expert on epilepsy, was not recruited by Governor Wilson, and had nothing to do with the sterilization law that passed the legislature three months before he even arrived in the state. That was all a fable that K-E concocted many years later in order to glorify himself to a military jury in an attempt to save his life. Let me explain.

Edwin Katzen-Ellenbogen was born in Austro-Hungary in 1882, his parents were non-observant Jews and he was descended from a long line of famous rabbis. He studied psychology and medicine in Leipzig and claimed that he received a medical degree there in 1905. While in Leipzig he met an American girl, they fell in love and he converted to her Catholicism. They married and moved to Boston where her father was a state supreme court judge. He held several jobs in mental facilities, published articles on experimental psychology and even lectured several times at Harvard.



When Sigmund Freud spoke at Clark University in Worcester in 1906, a group photograph of those attending the meeting shows K-E standing behind Freud, Jung and their host President G. Stanley Hall. (He's the young man with a dark mustache directly behind Hall who is the tall white bearded man in the middle of the front row.)

In 1911 Katzen-Ellenbogen accepted a junior position as a “psychopathologist” at Skillman Village for Epileptics near Princeton. He performed IQ testing on mental patients but was arrogant and didn't get along with his superiors. He was fired the next year and moved on to nearby Trenton State Hospital. Then in 1914 he abandoned his wife and young child and returned to Europe. That's the conventional part of the story. It gets much worse!

Back in Germany Edwin Katzen-Ellenbogen developed an unsavory reputation as a bigamist, extortionist and forger, even was briefly imprisoned. Although he'd earned a PhD in psychology in Leipzig, his behavior during the 1920s was so heinous that the university rescinded the degree. (My research was unable to find evidence that he ever completed his MD degree and he never was listed as a physician at Skillman.) When the Nazis came to power, because of his Jewish roots, K-E was sent to Dachau where he ingratiated himself with his captors and received favored treatment. During the war he was sent to Buchenwald where he was hated and feared by his fellow prisoners who realized that he was collaborating with the Nazis.



It's well known that after the end of World War II came the famous Nuremberg Trials, but few people are aware of other war crime trials of minor figures that were run by the U.S. Army at Dachau. At one of them thirty-one individuals were prosecuted and accused of doing atrocious things at Buchenwald - among them was Ilse Koch, the infamous "Bitch of Buchenwald" and among the others, who were referred to as the "Bastards of Buchenwald," was Edwin Katzen-Ellenbogen. This is how the trial was reported by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency on July 18, 1947:

Dr. Edwin Katzenellenbogen, 60, took the witness stand today in the war crimes trial at Dachau to defend himself against charges of cruelty to inmates of the Buchenwald concentration camp where he served as a camp doctor at the same time that he was an inmate. Speaking in perfect English, the defendant did not answer a question as to whether he was Jewish, but replied instead that he had attended Catholic schools. He also denied any cruelty to prisoners, admitting, however, that he did not allow inmates to sit around a campfire on winter evenings because "it was not good for them."

The prosecution expects to complete its cross-examination tomorrow. Katzenellenbogen was born in a village on the Austro-Hungarian border, and qualified as a physician in Leipzig. He emigrated to the United States in 1905...and married Aurelia Pierce, daughter of a Massachusetts Supreme Court justice, from whom he was subsequently divorced. He resided for several years in the United States and claims American citizenship. Arrested by the Gestapo in 1943 and sent to Buchenwald, he was appointed physician of the notorious "little camp" where he allegedly sent thousands of inmates to their death through experimentation or neglect. It is charged that he obtained "confessions" from many inmates through hypnotism, which led to their murder.

Testimony by K-E's fellow prisoners documented that the Nazis gave him favored treatment — his own quarters, extra food, civilian clothing. He was indifferent to the fate of other prisoners but accepted bribes from them. He controlled which sick patients were sent to the hospital and which not so he literally had the power of life or death over many. He even was accused of killing some prisoners by injecting phenol in their veins but there were no surviving witnesses. He physically abused others — especially the French and Italians whom he considered to be of mixed racial purity. The evidence against Edwin Katzen-Ellenbogen was so compelling that the military tribunal at Dachau gave him a life sentence.

During the trial the defendant appeared aloof and unrepentant, dissembled and lied about his credentials and magnified his accomplishments in order to impress the court. To the military lawyers, K-E was an enigma — erudite, self-assured, highly intelligent but amoral. In effect, the brilliant "psychopathologist" was a psychopath!



K-E in U.S. military prison.

Even after his conviction K-E connived to have his life sentence reduced to twelve years, but three years after beginning his prison term Edwin Katzen-Ellenbogen died of heart disease at age 68 in 1950. It was the end of an unlikely narrative about a Jewish-born naturalized American citizen, a doctor and former lecturer at Harvard Medical School, who had well earned my epithet for him — “Dr. Evil.”

