Eugenics, Sterilization, & Social Control in the U.S.
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EUGENICS

Eugenics is the self direction of human evolution

Like a tree, eugenics draws its materials from many sources and organizes them into an harmonious entity.
What is Eugenics?

- From the Greek, “eugenes” = “good birth”
- Term coined by Sir Francis Galton in 1880s, applied Darwinian ideas to controlled births
- “the study of agencies under social control, that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations, either physically or mentally,” Sir Francis Galton
- Active involvement of “the state” in reproduction of “undesirable” and “desirable” populations
Origins and Context

- “Modern America,” 1880s-1920s
- Immigration of eastern Europeans, Asians, and Mexicans worried middle class reformers, threatened social norms and sense of order
- Immigration laws in 1883 and Agreement in 1907 barred Chinese & Japanese from entry/citizenship
- Immigration laws in 1907, 1917, 1924 limited “criminals, idiots, imbeciles, those likely to become public charges”
- Declining birth rates among middle/upper classes
- Urban poverty and social reforms
Progressivism & Eugenics, 1880s-1920s

- Middle-class reformers and social control
- Fear of “disorder”
- Mental institutions
- Hospitals, Jails & Prisons
- Public education
- Child labor laws
- Racial segregation and anti-miscegenation laws
- Sterilization (IND, 1907)
Francis Galton, 1822-1911

- English cousin of Charles Darwin
- World-wide phenomena
- Traits are inherited through races and social classes
- “Positive Eugenics” v. “Negative Eugenics”
  - Increase reproduction of superior groups
  - Decrease reproduction of inferior groups
  - US, Germany, Scandinavia, Australia, Canada, etc. promoted “negative eugenics”
Popularization of Eugenics

- Intelligence Testing (I.Q. Tests for Army, 1907)
  - “Scientific tests” = culturally biased
- Charles Davenport
  - Established the U.S. *Eugenics Record Office*
    - Collect family lineages to determine reproduction policies and influence social demographics
    - Data used for sterilization
    - Cited by Nazis for sterilization programs in Germany
- Miscegenation Laws
  - Prohibited marriages/sex across races
  - “Race suicide”
- Carnegie, Rockefeller, Ford Foundations
- Margaret Sanger
  - Birth control for the poor
Eugenics and Pop Culture
Steps in Mental Development, early 1900s

Now, clinics in charge of Dr. Max Schlapp, seven assistant neurologists and three psychologists, held for the present at the Post Graduate Hospital, are receiving children from juvenile courts, from the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, from churches and settlements—in all, from 47 different individual sources, and are giving each child the best possible examination.

High Grade Imbecile
Mental Age 10 to 12 yrs. old

MORON
Mentally 10 to 12 yrs. old

Work requiring reason & judgment

Medium Imbecile
Mentally 8 to 10 yrs. old

Simple Manual Work

Steps in Mental Development

Where they stumble—
the limit of development of each type.

Low Grade Imbecile
Mentally 4 to 5 yrs. old

Simple Mental Work

Idiot
Mentally 3 yrs. & under

Self Preservation

parents, even when such care of the sick or defective child would be a great relief to the family. This is another proof of the need for a campaign of education of parents. Such education will be advanced in part by the nurses
Eugenics as Popular Practice

- Race Betterment Foundation, 1906
- American Eugenics Society, 1922
- Human Betterment Foundation, 1928
- 1910s-1950s
- Philanthropies
- New Deal Programs
- Fitter Families and Better Babies
- Contests, fairs, and public lectures
"The Triangle of Life"

Unfit human traits such as feeblemindedness, epilepsy, criminality, insanity, alcoholism, pauperism and many others, run in families and are inherited in exactly the same way as color in guinea-pigs. If all marriages were eugenic we could breed out most of this unfitness in three generations.

The Triangle of Life

Environment

Have what you do

Education

Are heritage

You can improve your education and even change your environment. But what you really are was all settled when your parents were born. Selected parents will have better children. This is the great aim of eugenics.
“Fitter families & better babies”
Men’s Magazine, 1950s
Eugenics and “Sex Harmony”
Eugenics and Crime

- Eugenics as a “scientific” (neutral, objective, fact-based, unbiased) foundation for determining the criminal behavior of groups, classes, races.
- Races and classes “biologically prone” to crime
- Proactive policies targeting groups before actual criminal violations
- “Police Science” LAPD, Chicago PD, etc.
  - Sleepy Lagoon and Zoot Suit Riots, 1940s
- State laws for sterilizing “habitual criminals”
  - Doctors in state prisons
  - Vasectomies, tubal ligations, hysterectomies
NEGROID SANE CRIMINALS
AND NEGROID CIVIL INSANE

CRIMINALS
Shorter, broader; higher heads
Lighter skin color
More woolly, less frizzly hair
Higher, wider and more sloping foreheads
Thicker eyebrows
Longer, narrower faces and noses
Shorter ears
Less pronounced antihelices
Less rolled helices
Slightly lighter eyes
Less pigmented sclerae
More inner eyelids
Higher eye-openings
Smaller brow ridges
Higher, narrower nasal roots, higher bridges
More downward inclined septa
Thinner nasal tips
Thicker integumental and membranous lips
More pronounced lip seams
Broader jaws, less chin prominence
More pointed chins, more prominent malar and jaw angles
Fuller cheeks, more wrinkles
More prognathism

Civil Insane
MASSACHUSETTS
DEPARTMENT
OF
MENTAL DISEASES
EXHIBITS
PICTURES OF 50
CRIMINAL BRAINS

CRIMINAL

576. ALCOHOLIC VAGRANT.
BRAND NARROW. SIMPLE.
WT. 1550.
MOTHER DIED INSANE.
CANADIAN.

CRIMINAL

590. SEX PERVERT. VAGRANT.
BRAND BROAD SHORT ANOMALOUS.
WT. 1400.
GOITER.
PARENTS UNKNOWN.
AMERICAN.

NORMAL

41

NORMAL

42

CRIMINAL

954. RAPE.
BRAND LONG. UNEVEN.
WT. 1230.
PARENTS UNKNOWN.
AMERICAN.

CRIMINAL

585. ALCOHOLIC VAGRANT.
BRAND LONG. SIMPLE.
WT. 1230.
PARENTS UNKNOWN.
AMERICAN.

CRIMINAL

583. VAGRANT.
BRAND LONG SQUARE ENDED SIMPLE.
WT. 1370.
PARENTS AND SIBLINGS NORMAL.
IRISH.

CRIMINAL

708. PARETIC VAGRANT.
BRAND LONG NARROW UNEQUAL.
ATROPHIC. WT. 1200.
PARENTS UNKNOWN.
ITALIAN.
Carrie Buck sued Dr. J.H. Bell, Supt. Of the Virginia Colony for Epileptics and the Feeble-Minded, for attempted sterilization

VA 1924 sterilization law violated rights

Court upheld right to sterilize because the was “unfit to continue her kind”

Fear of the “feeble-minded” being able to reproduce
The Case, continued

- Judged “feebleminded” and promiscuous because they had children out of wedlock
- She (and mother) claimed they were raped
- “Experts” judged them “feebleminded,” and the judge worried that their “promiscuous behavior” would create feebleminded children
- Institutionalized and sterilized
“Carrie Buck is the probably potential parent of socially inadequate offspring, likewise afflicted, that she may be sexually sterilized without detriment to her general health and that her welfare and that of society will be promoted by her sterilization…it is better for the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or to let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind…Three generations of imbeciles are enough.”

Chief Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes
Eugenics and Society

- 35 states followed this decision, mandating sterilization of the poor, criminals, “degenerates,” and “addicts”
- Congressional legislation requiring the sterilization of some populations to reduce likelihood they will pass on “inferior” traits
- VA state law and Court ruling copied verbatim in Germany’s Hereditary Health Laws of 1933
Sterilization of Native Women

- History of eugenics and sterilization, and Native American History
- Cultural and racial hierarchies
- Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) was agency that oversaw lives of Native people
- BIA policy of assimilation and cultural transformation
- Boarding schools, land policies, etc. sought to detribalize and “Americanize” Indians
Sterilization

- General policies of sterilizing the poor, immigrants, people of color, and those considered “feeble-minded”

- The Indian Health Service
  - Diseases, nutrition, general health care, sex education courses
  - Family planning in 1950s- onward
  - “High” birth rates = 3.79 children

- Estimated 25%-50% of ALL Native women were sterilized between 1950 and 1975
Gov’t Accounting Office Report

- GAO Report, 1976
- IHS performed 3,406 involuntary, dubious, sterilizations, out of approx 5,200 btwn 1972-1975. 
- Data does NOT include Albuquerque area 
- Medical forms lacked signatures, staff switched forms, signatures under duress, mis-informed, etc. 
- Women came in for other treatments 
- Tied to War on Poverty policies, health care access, and sterilization of economically impoverished Black and Hispanic women 
- Sometimes threatened with losing their children, welfare benefits, and immediately after childbirth 
- Damaged 2-3 generations of Native Americans
Contemporary Significance

- Suspicion of health care officials
- States pay the poor to get sterilized
- Mandatory “family planning” courses
- Culture of Poverty thesis
- Conservative skepticism about institutional sources of poverty
- Zero Population Growth
- Anti-Immigrant legislation
- Human Genome Project, Genetic Counseling, adoption programs,
- Doctors and medical establishment as “prescriptors” of normative reproductive behavior