

EUGENICS TIMELINE

Michael Nevins, MD

1883: Francis Galton coined the term “eugenics” (good birth.) He believed in the superiority of Europeans compared to “the lower races” (Jews are parasites; Negroes are childish simpletons.) Medical care has interrupted the natural struggle for existence by artificially preserving the weak and “defective” (Social Darwinism.) He proposed selective breeding in order to strengthen the human race – as with thoroughbred horses and show dogs.

1903: American Breeders Association, funded by Carnegie, Rockefeller and Harriman money, promotes the value to society of “superior” blood and the menace of “inferior” blood. Members believe that the feeble-minded (including epileptics) account for most crime and immorality in our civilization.

1904: The Station for Experimental Evolution opens in Cold Spring Harbor, L.I. and soon becomes the epicenter of eugenics research and promotion. By 1924 they have more than 750,000 “pedigrees” stored on index cards. They propose the “better” classes should be fruitful and multiply while the “lower” classes should have their seeds cut off – literally.

--It's leader Charles Davenport writes that “Heredity stands as the one great hope of the human race... The general program of the eugenicist is clear – it is to improve the race by inducing young people to make a more reasonable selection of marriage mates; to fall in love intelligently.” Sterilization could be used to “dry up the springs that feed the torrent of defective and degenerate protoplasm.”

--Harry Laughlin (head of the Eugenics Records Office) says that “The mothers of unfit children should be relegated to a place comparable to that of the female of mongrel strains of domestic animals.”

1907: Indiana passes the first state law providing for government mandated sterilization. “Idiots, imbeciles and degenerate criminals are prolific and their defects are transmissible...so we owe it not only to ourselves but to the future of our race and nation to see that the defective and diseased do not multiply.” Vasectomy of prisoners is a

“rational means of eradicating from our midst a most dangerous and hurtful class...radical solutions are necessary.”

“COLONIES” & “VILLAGES” supplant the Kirkbride model of massive prison-like buildings for mental patients. William Letchworth favors seclusion of mental defectives (including epileptics) on large tracts of land, housing them in small decentralized cottages and offering humane treatment and limited efforts to educate and rehabilitate them. The biggest and best open at Vineland (1887) and Skillman (1898) in NJ and Letchworth Village in Rockland County (1911).

1906: Henry Goddard is appointed to head research at Vineland and popularizes the Stanford-Binet IQ test. He distinguishes between “morons” (a term he coined), idiots and imbeciles and claims that two thirds of the feeble-minded have inherited their defect. After intelligence testing immigrants at Ellis Island, he concludes that “We are getting the poorest of each race.” During WWI some 1.7 million military recruits are tested and more than half meet his definition of morons; Jews 60%, Negroes 86%.

1912: With social worker Elizabeth Kite, Goddard studies the pedigrees of “Pineys” especially the “Kallikak” family. As a result of his book, Dorothy Kallikak becomes “the most famous moron in the world.” Kite’s Report describes Pineys as “lazy, lustful and cunning.” When NJ Gov. Felder visits the Pine Barrens, he is shocked by the number of inbred Pineys who lead “lawless and scandalous lives, till they have become a race of imbeciles, criminals and defectives.”

NEW JERSEY’S STERILIZATION LAW (1911—1913)

“An act to authorize and provide for the sterilization of feeble-minded (including idiots, imbeciles and morons), epileptics, rapists and certain criminals and other defectives.” Gov. Woodrow Wilson, who wishes to suppress “citizens of the wrong type, enthusiastically signs it into law. But ruling on the test case of Alice Smith, Supreme Court Justice Charles Garrison (a former MD) declares the law to be “palpably inhumane”, immoral and unconstitutional. Although NJ was the fourth state to pass a sterilization law, it was the first to overturn it and no one was ever sterilized in NJ against their will.

Undeterred, Vineland's leaders Edward Johnstone and Bleeker Van Wagenen aggressively promote the New Jersey experience; BVW chairs an elite "Committee on Sterilization" with the goal of "purging the blood of the American people." After New York follows suit by repealing its own sterilization law, Dr. Charles Little (Superintendent at Letchworth Village) says, "There is no question but that the lower strata of society is reproducing its kind all out of proportion to the middle and upper classes upon whom we depend for the stability of our government. To meet this situation steps should be taken to protect society before it is overwhelmed by this growing menace."

FAMOUS EUGENICISTS:

1907: Luther Burbank writes that "Only by selection of the best can any race be improved...Environment and education alone cannot make appreciable progress in the improvement of the races. But with favorable surroundings and the selection of the best types, the field for improvement is limitless."

1910: Winston Churchill supports compulsory sterilization for the "feeble minded." They should be segregated "so that their curse dies with them and is not transmitted to future generations."

1912: Charles Darwin's son Leonard hopes that the 20th century will be known as the time "when the eugenics ideal is accepted as the creed of civilization."

1913: Theodore Roosevelt says "We have no business to permit the perpetuation of citizens of the wrong type."

1915: Dr. J.H. Kellogg writes "Our race is going to seed...The world needs a new aristocracy...a real aristocracy made up of Apollos and Venuses and their fortunate progeny."

1916: Madison Grant's book *The Passing of the Great Race* was enormously influential. He was a prominent environmentalist and also a white supremacist and rabid anti-Semite. "The individual himself can be nourished, educated and protected by the community during his lifetime, but the state through sterilization must see to it that his line stops with him, or else future generations will be cursed with an ever increasing load of victims of misguided sentimentalism." He

dehumanized the “unfit” by calling them “human weeds or insects.” After reading the book, Adolf Hitler wrote a letter of praise to Madison Grant.

Other well-known eugenicists included Alexander Graham Bell, Abraham and Simon Flexner, George Bernard Shaw, H.G.Wells, Mary Harriman, Adolph Meyer, William Welch, Alexis Carrel, Charles Lindbergh.

THE 1920s

1922: Lathrop Stoddard in *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World Supremacy* writes that uncontrolled reproduction among defective families and the intermingling of defective and normal stock is resulting in “the twilight of the American mind” and “the dusk of mankind.”

1922: Harry Laughlin estimates that perhaps eleven million Americans – “the lowest ten percent” – are unfit due to inherent defect and weakness. They are an economic and moral burden on the 90% and “a constant danger to the national and racial life.” After the lowest tenth are dealt with, then on to the next lowest ten percent. Laughlin drafts a model sterilization law intended to serve as a template for all states to follow -- and before long many do. The Nazi government honors him for his work.

1923: Princeton psychology professor Carl Brigham’s book, based on the WWI experience, reports that IQ tests proved that the Nordic Race is intellectually superior to negroes, Jews, Italians and other ethnic groups.

1924: The U.S. Immigration Restriction Act limits influx of the wrong types with disastrous results a decade later -- It remains in effect until 1968.

1927: In a U.S. Supreme Court decision (*Buck v. Bell*) Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. says that “Three generations of imbeciles are enough.” The ruling upholds the right of states to mandate sterilization of defectives against their wishes. After this decision, more states pass sterilization laws, and by 1966 23 states still had them on the books.

THE 1930s

Social scientists and many others continue to speak in apocalyptic terms: the fate of civilization as we know it is at stake. Some eugenicists oppose aid to poor families because lowering the cost of living would encourage irresponsible reproduction.

1933: In California Paul Popenoe reports favorably on 6,000 government mandated sterilizations between 1909 and 1929 and estimates that between five and ten million Americans should be sterilized. We fall far short with “only” about 65,000 sterilized by 1966. In 2002, North Carolina, which sterilized some 7,600 people between 1933 and 1977, officially apologizes to victims and considers compensation.

1933: Margaret Sanger says that In order to create a decent civilization, a top priority is to rectify fertility imbalance through sterilization. She coins the term “birth control” to control the births of those who threaten the genetic integrity of humankind. Her motto: “More children for the fit; less for the unfit.”

1934: Marion S. Olden argues that “Defectives are menacing our better stock.” Several times reintroduces sterilization bills in NJ, but they are rejected largely because of Catholic opposition. “See the happy moron; He doesn’t have a care, His children and his problems are all for us to bear.” Her “Sterilization League of NJ” is renamed “Birthright.”

1936: Dr. Alexis Carrel claims that “Society must identify and encourage those with greatest ability, while the dregs should be disposed of in small euthanistic institutions supplied with the proper gases...Why preserve useless and harmful beings?”

While in jail and writing *Mein Kampf* (1923-24), young Adolf Hitler read translations of books by Madison Grant, Charles Davenport and Harry Laughlin and approved. He concluded that sentimental ideals about individual liberty must give way for the good of the people (Volk) and in order to preserve “the master race.” German sterilization laws resembled Laughlin’s model and an American eugenicist complained, “The Germans are beating us at our own game.”

American laws were used as justification for Nazi compulsory sterilization of about 150,000 people which soon led to more than a million “mercy killings” and then mass murder. At the Nuremberg Trials after WWII, the American precedent was cited again, as if to say, we were only following your example.

According to Stephen Jay Gould (*The Mismeasure of Man*, 1981), “The eugenicists battled and won one of the greatest victories of scientific racism in American history. The paths to destruction are often indirect, but ideas can be agents as sure as guns and bombs.” In 1998 an international survey of nearly 3,000 geneticists concluded that “eugenics is alive and well.”

(Greater detail about all of the above can be found in my book *A Tale of Two Villages: Vineland and Skillman, NJ*)