The Role of Women in the American Eugenics Movement

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1900 –1945

by

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Introduction

In 1912, La Reine Helen Baker, a prominent writer and suffragist wrote,

> There has never been a time in the history of the world when parents would not rather have a healthy progeny than an unhealthy. The nation would always prefer to be able to boast of improvement instead of blushing for its deteriorating citizenship. As long as Mothers love their own young and as long as the average man sympathises with undeserved suffering there will be perpetual possibilities for rousing interest in the most promising of all sciences, Eugenics.[1]

These are among the first few lines of her book, *Race Improvement or Eugenics*, an influential treatise on the subject from this era. In this bold statement, Baker touches on a few key points that appear often in eugenic rhetoric: the idea of healthy vs unhealthy (or “fit” vs the “unfit”), the locus of control in the nation, the centrality of a mother’s love, and the promising newness of the “science” of eugenics.

What is eugenics, and why would a woman activist and author like Baker be interested in the subject? The term “eugenics” was coined in 1883 by Sir Francis Galton, a cousin of evolutionary biologist Charles Darwin, to mean the science of racial improvement through selective breeding by the laws of heredity. The idea of heredity itself was new at this time; Darwin published his theory of genetic inheritance in 1868, not even two decades prior.[2] Soon after in the late 19th century, eugenic ideology sprouted up across the world, characterized by sterilization laws, growth of marriage counseling, and new mental health diagnoses such as “feebleminded.”

[1] La Reine Helen Baker, *Race Improvement or Eugenics: A Little Book on a Great Subject* (New York, NY: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1912), 3, accessed February 6, 2024, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/47976/47976-h/47976-h.htm.
[2] Yawen Zou, "Charles Darwin's Theory of Pangenesis," in *Embryo Project Encyclopedia* (Arizona State University), last modified July 20, 2014, accessed May 6, 2024, https://embryo.asu.edu/pages/charles-darwins-theory-pangenesis.

The American eugenics movement was a political, social, and ideological movement during the early 20th century which sought to protect the future stability of the white "race" through a variety of means, including public health measures such as comprehensive sex education as well as medical interventions such as forced sterilizations. Eugenics permeated every aspect of American life. Eugenic philosophy was being published in newspapers and implied in advertisements, and eugenic ideology was being touted by medical doctors and college professors. Eugenics even began to influence lawmaking; eugenicists pushed for the immigration quota system that would largely block immigrants from non-white nations. Alongside legislation, eugenic laws, such as the Eugenical Sterilization Act in Virginia, were actively enforced in courts. The effect of eugenics on public life can not be minimized–whether explicit or simply implied, eugenic ideology was present in every aspect of American life during the early 20th century.

Historians in this field have emphasized the centrality of women's reproductive health to the conversation of eugenics.[3] Certainly, this topic was a chief concern at the time. One landmark case that sprung eugenic sterilizations into the spotlight was the Buck v. Bell Supreme Court case in 1927. Carrie Buck was a poor white woman who was raped by the nephew of her foster parents and became pregnant. Once her foster parents discovered her pregnancy, they had her involuntarily institutionalized due

[3] See Nancy Ordover, *American Eugenics: Race, Queer Anatomy, and the Science of Nationalism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Wendy Kline, *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005).

to perceived “feeblemindedness.” She was declared unfit to be a mother and was sterilized by the mental institution, the Virginia State Colony for Epileptics and Feeble-Minded. While Buck’s story was notable for legalizing eugenic sterilization laws across the nation through her Supreme Court case, the emphasis on her story above others centralizes the victimhood of poor white women in the greater narrative of American eugenics.

Historians have generally portrayed the eugenics movement in America as a movement dominated by men. It is true that most doctors, politicians, and social scientists, three main groups of perpetrators in the eugenics movement, were still almost entirely male professions at the time. Consequently, women have been largely left out of the historical discourse on the topic; historians have relegated women’s role to that of solely a victim. In his book *Imbeciles: The Supreme Court, American Eugenics, and the Sterilization of Carrie Buck*, lawyer and journalist Adam Cohen follows the story of the Buck v Bell case through the lens of the four men who pushed for the case to succeed in their respective professions. Cohen writes, “Four of the nation’s most respected professions were involved in Carrie Buck’s case–medicine, academia, law, and the judiciary–in the form of four powerful men… In each case, however, these men sided forcefully with the eugenic cause, and used their power and prestige to see that Carrie was sterilized.”[4] In Cohen’s description, Carrie Buck is little more than a victim used by men to further her agenda. While this may well be

[4] Adam Cohen, *Imbeciles: The Supreme Court, American Eugenics, and the Sterilization of Carrie Buck* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2016), 7.

true in this case, Cohen's decision to emphasize the role of men in the history of a prominent eugenics case is an archetypal representation of how many historians have presented this history as a whole–with women solely as victims.[5] What Cohen does not show are the dozens of women's clubs across the country that lobbied for these sterilization laws, the women fieldworkers who played a role in deciding who was "unfit," and the countless other ways in which women were deeply involved in the movement.

Rather than focusing on women in the role of victims, my research analyzes how women acted as perpetrators. This paper will examine the role of women in the American eugenics movement from 1900 to 1945 as well as how ideas about motherhood interacted with ideas about race and hygiene through an examination of early 20th century women's activism. I argue that women were not only prominent figures in the American eugenics movement, but they also brought their own unique perspectives. Women activists tended to focus on traditionally feminine issues–such as family, love, and marriage–in the context of eugenics, which were topics often ignored by male eugenicists.

My research builds upon scholarship such as historian of medicine Wendy Kline's book *Building a Better Race* focuses on how the American eugenics movement sought to control female sexuality through sterilization campaigns. Again, like much of the other research on this topic, Kline's

[5] Historians like Adam Cohen, Edwin Black, and Paul Lombardo tend to fall into this category.

book positions women's role as purely the victim of eugenics policies, and spends little time on how women were often perpetrators as well. Ordover and Kline's books are just two examples of this in the field as a whole.[6] Both of these approaches to the history of eugenics in America provide valuable context to the field, but neither present the whole picture.[7] I plan to add a new perspective to the existing literature and research on this subject through my analysis of how a broader array of women, particularly white women, were perpetrators of the American eugenics movement and how they used ideas about motherhood and social hygiene to influence reproductive health in America.

Furthermore, historian Nancy Ordover's book *American Eugenics* follows the development of the American eugenics movement through three main perspectives: the anti-immigration movement, the search for a "gay" gene, and the birth control movement and Margaret Sanger. Like most other research on this topic which highlights only a few famous women, Ordover's main analysis of women's involvement in the eugenics movement is primarily focused on Margaret Sanger's involvement, but mentions few other women. While certainly worthwhile topics, each of these three topics Ordover examines focus primarily on the activism of men. Ordover's work is representative of broader patterns within scholarship on eugenics in its

[6] See also Elizabeth Catte, *Pure America: Eugenics and the Making of Modern Virginia* (Cleveland, OH: Belt Publishing, 2021), digital file.

[7] While little research examines the role of women in depth, some journal articles have begun to look more in depth at women's active involvement in the eugenics movement. See "'In the Finest, Most Womanly Way:' Women in the Southern Eugenics Movement" by Edward J. Larson and "'Fitter Families for Future Firesides': Florence Sherbon and Popular Eugenics" by Laura L. Lovett.

focus on Sanger with little mention of other women involved in the movement.

Women's portrayal as victims can be partially attributed to the sterilization data, which shows that a majority of people sterilized in the United States were female. There is little data that portrays sterilization trends across the nation as a whole, but looking at numbers state by state shows a clear pattern in which women were primary targets. When divided by racial makeup, 70 percent of Black individuals sterilized in Virginia were women, and 55 percent for white individuals.[8] In North Carolina, women made up around 85% of total sterilizations done in the state throughout its history until the law was repealed in the 1970s.[9] However, some states, such as California, show roughly equal sterilization patterns across genders. Furthermore, most notable field work studies of this time focused similarly on women; in particular, Henry Goddard's *The Kallikak Family* highlighted the life and ancestry of an institutionalized woman named Deborah.[10] While it is certainly true that many American women were victims of eugenic ideology that promoted coerced sterilization, it is important to study the ways in which women were also perpetrators of this reproductive violence.

[8] Elizabeth Catte, *Pure America: Eugenics and the Making of Modern Virginia* (Cleveland, OH: Belt Publishing, 2021), 52, digital file.
[9] Lutz Kaelber, "Eugenic/Sexual Sterilizations in North Carolina," Eugenics: Compulsory Sterilization in 50 American States, last modified October 30, 2014, accessed May 6, 2024, https://www.uvm.edu/~lkaelber/eugenics/NC/NC.html.
[10] Allison C. Carey, "The Feebleminded versus the Nation: 1900–1930s," in *On the Margins of Citizenship: Intellectual Disability and Civil Rights in Twentieth-Century America* (n.p.: Temple University Press, 2009), 66, JSTOR.

Many first-wave feminists, long regarded as icons and pioneers, were deeply involved in perpetuating the ideology of the eugenics in America. Most infamously, activist and writer Margaret Sanger, who promoted increased access to birth control, had deep ties to the movement. However, many other important women activists have been found to be at least sympathetic to the movement, including Helen Keller, Victoria Woodhull, Elizabeth Blackwell, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and more. Eugenics has become a small note in the byline of many famous feminists, but why were so many women activists of this time supporters of eugenics, and why have historians not interrogated these connections further? Ultimately, we can not continue to view women as solely victims in the history of eugenics. Doing so would set a dangerous precedent; it is perilous to absolve women in history of their sins, just as it would be to absolve all men. Exploring the negative roles women have played throughout history is just as crucial as celebrating women's successes.

There has been some debate amongst scholars on the prevalence of eugenic ideology in first wave feminism. American historian Linda Gordon argues that

> Feminists used eugenic arguments as if aware that arguments based solely on women's rights had not enough power to conquer conservative and religious scruples about reproduction. So they combined eugenics and feminism to provide evocative, romantic visions of perfect motherhood.[11]

For Gordon, feminists saw the eugenics movement as an opportunity for mutual benefit; by pursuing this coalition, Gordon argues that feminists

[11] Linda Gordon, *The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America* (n.p.: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 68, JSTOR.

created a new, uniquely eugenic ideology about womanhood and motherhood. In contrast, some historians have argued that the history of first wave feminism should not be studied as closely tied to eugenics. Cultural historian Clare Makepeace argues that there was no “marriage of convenience” between eugenicists and feminists in the interwar years, as some scholars like Linda Gordon have claimed, and that if there was, it was solely on the part of the eugenicists. While Makepeace does acknowledge that certain eugenic schemes from the time period, including family allowances and voluntary sterilization, did have some overlap with feminist crusades, she argues that it was the eugenicists, and not the feminists, who used these intersections to their advantage.[12]

Some scholars have begun to answer this question by portraying a more whole picture of the biographies of famous feminists. Historian Susan Rensing has explored in depth author Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s ties to the eugenics movement in her paper “Women ‘Waking Up’ and *Moving the Mountain*: The Feminist Eugenics of Charlotte Perkins Gilman.” Gilman is best known for her short story “The Yellow Wallpaper,” which is studied in high school English classes across the country and follows a woman struggling with postpartum depression. Beyond her notable fiction works, however, Gilman also published multiple treatises on feminism, including *Women and Economics* (1898) and *Concerning Children* (1900), both of which tackle the intersections between first wave feminism and the

[12] Clare Makepeace, "To What Extent was the Relationship Between Feminists and the Eugenics Movement a 'Marriage of Convenience' in the Interwar Years?," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 11, no. 3 (2009): 67.

burgeoning eugenics movement. Rensing writes “For Gilman, women would advance the race not by transcending their traditional roles as wives and mothers, but by fully committing themselves to these roles and improving on them with the help of science, in particular the science of eugenics.”[13] Rensing positions Gilman’s feminism as deeply intertwined with eugenics; Gilman may have believed in women’s equality, but still saw their main roles as wives and mothers, and Rensing makes this point clear.

Some historians have focused on a broader approach to the connections between feminism and eugenics rather than focusing on individuals. Sociologist Mariana Valverde expands on these ideas in her article “When the Mother of the Race is Free.” Valverde nods to the beliefs of many early feminist thinkers on race science and evolution, both American and international. In particular, Valverde delineates how feminist thinking of many women from various Western countries, including England, Canada, the United States, and South Africa, were tied to ideas about race progress. Valverde summarizes the beliefs of this diverse group of feminist thinkers by writing

> Feminist evolutionism, however, not only failed to question the racist presuppositions of evolutionary thought, but produced a profoundly racist form of feminism in which women of ‘lower’ races were excluded from the specifically Anglo-Saxon work of building a better world through the freeing of ‘the mother of the race.’[14]

[13] Susan Rensing, "Women 'Waking Up' and Moving the Mountain: The Feminist Eugenics of Charlotte Perkins Gilman," *MP: An Online Feminist Journal* 4, no. 1 (2013): 103, https://www.academia.edu/11613762/Women_Waking_Up_and_Moving_the_Mountain_The_Feminist_Eugenics_of_Charlotte_Perkins_Gilman.

[14] Mariana Valverde, "'When the Mother of the Race Is Free': Race, Reproduction, and Sexuality in First-Wave Feminism," in *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History* (n.p.: University of Toronto Press, n.d.), 8, JSTOR.

Valverde highlights the role that specifically white women played in the eugenics movement: the mother of the race. White women were seen as the key to salvation for the white American future. In this role, white women were not only expected to reproduce fruitfully but also raise their children to be good, home-bred American citizens. This same role was not afforded to women of color, however, who were the target of anti-natalist policies that restricted their reproductive health, especially in the latter half of the century. Valverde's writing here illuminates the distinct dichotomy between white and nonwhite women during the 20th century; white women were saviors, while women of color were perceived as a threat to American life.

Many first wave feminists were likely attracted to eugenic ideology through its intersections with other important Progressive era causes. Women may have learned about eugenics through their local club groups which may have also promoted women's suffrage or temperance. Organizations such as the League of Women Voters and the Women's Christian Temperance Union are known to have endorsed eugenic ideology during the early 20th century. Valverde writes that "In calling on women to 'uplift the race,' the WCTU was arguing that mothers (actual and symbolic) could do a great deal to shape both their children and the future of the nation."[15] The endorsement of these Progressive organizations illustrates the deep connections between feminism–and feminist issues such as temperance–and the eugenics movement.

[15] Valverde, "'When the Mother," 16.

When looking back on the Progressive era, historians have typically characterized the period as one of great progress. However, in recent years, some historians have tried to push back on a wholly positive characterization of the era. In particular, eugenics is a key point when elucidating the dark side of the period. Historian Thomas Leonard has outlined some of the less positive policies of the Progressive era and their ties to eugenics.[16] Leonard introduces the influence of eugenics on many economic policies of the Progressive Era in order to illuminate how the period is possibly not as morally positive as we once thought. Leonard identifies three cardinal values of the Progressive era, the first being "a belief in the power of scientific social inquiry," a "belief in the legitimacy of social control," and finally "a belief in the efficacy of social control via state scientific management."[17] These values were reflected in policies that included pushing back against minimum wage efforts and instituting the race-based quota system through justification of race suicide.[18]

Scholars have also emphasized how Progressive era ideas shaped conceptions of motherhood. For example, Wendy Kline explains how eugenics built off of older ideas, such as the "cult of true womanhood" from

[16] See also Thomas C. Leonard, *Illiberal Reformers: Race, Eugenics, and American Economics in the Progressive Era* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), JSTOR.
[17] Thomas C. Leonard, "'More Merciful and Not Less Effective': Eugenics and American Economics in the Progressive Era," *History of Political Economy* 35, no. 4 (2003): 706, Project MUSE.
[18] Many eugenicists lobbied for the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act, which limited the number of immigrants through a quote based on the country of origin. Countries considered to have "non-white" residents were given substantially lower quotas in order to block "undesirable" immigrants from entering the country. Countries excluded from immigration by this act included many Asian nations as well as countries in Southern and Eastern Europe. This policy remained in place until it was repealed in 1965.

the 19th century. The cult of true womanhood was an ideology that regarded women as arbiters of virtue and purity with their role placed firmly and solely inside of the home.[19] Historian Barbara Welter's article "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820–1860" is considered a foundational feminist text; in it, Welter describes the belief system of True Womanhood through a survey of women's magazines from the forty year period. Women were considered to be naturally religious creatures who should be entrusted with running a warm and comforting home for her husband and children to return home to. On motherhood, Welter writes "The corollary to marriage, with or without true love, was motherhood, which added another dimension to her usefulness and her prestige. It also anchored her even more firmly to the home."[20] This idea began to fall out of fashion with the ushering in of the Progressive era as more and more women began to work outside of the home. Eugenics sought to reinstate this philosophy by reinventing it as new ideas and terms about womanhood arose.

The phrase "mother of tomorrow" grew out of ideas about race progress as a contemporary successor to the cult of true womanhood. The mother of tomorrow connotes a woman, specifically a white woman, who would further the progress of her race by having many children, all of "good stock." Kline argues that "The mother of tomorrow reaffirmed the nineteenth-century 'cult of true womanhood,' which positioned women as arbiters of morality within the home and dissuaded women from asserting

[19] Wendy Kline, *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 18.
[20] Welter, "The Cult," 171.

too much social and sexual independence."[21] Like the cult of true womanhood, mothers were entrusted with proliferating virtue in future generations. In many ways, the "mother of tomorrow" was a repackaged version of the 19th century cult of true womanhood, but with added ideas and anxieties about the future of the white race. This terminology adds context to my assertion that women used emerging ideas about motherhood to shape eugenic thought; terms like "mother of tomorrow" were used as a rallying point by women activists to encourage eugenic organizing and education.

As positive words to describe women and mothers surfaced, so too did more negative terminology. Terms such as the "woman adrift" appeared to describe women who were seen as sexually or socially deviant. These terms could not be considered a diagnosis, however, so eugenicists and medical professionals invented new words to describe deviant young women in order to justify hospitalization and sterilization. The terms were assigned into a hierarchy, each with a prescribed mental age. In the early 20th century, "feebleminded" became a loosely defined term in order to justify the institutionalization and sterilization of large groups of people, especially women. Historian of disability Allison Carey notes that the diagnostic criteria was so "broad and malleable" that some contemporary estimates listed somewhere between 30 and 40 percent of the American population as feebleminded.[22] Feebleminded became a vague umbrella term that was split

[21] Kline, *Building a Better Race*, 18.
[22] Carey, "The Feebleminded," 63.

into three separate categories, each defined by an approximate mental age, ranging from one to twelve years old.

Fitness, and consequently, “unfitness,” is not a static idea; it was defined in different ways by different groups of people and changed significantly over time. In the early years of the eugenics movement people deemed “unfit” for reproduction were often the impoverished and sexually deviant. As the movement grew, it shifted to targeting the disabled and people of color. A variety of different terms were used to justify people, especially young women, as “unfit.” These terms included feebleminded, moron, delinquent, and more. These words were used not just to justify eugenic actions taken against young women, such as forced sterilization, but their dehumanization and segregation from society. Words like “feebleminded” positioned vulnerable young women as unintelligent and unable to manage their own reproductive health and placed them at mercy of the state.

American eugenic ideology generally falls into two main categories: “positive” eugenics and “negative” eugenics. Positive eugenics, while not necessarily morally positive, is concerned with adding more good genes into the race. During the peak of American eugenics, this typically looked like encouraging people identified as good breeding stock (usually white, nondisabled people) to produce more children. Negative eugenics, in turn, is the practice of discouraging and even preventing those seen as “unfit” from reproducing. Overall, eugenics sought the improvement of not just

individuals or families, but the entire “race.” The improvement of the “white” race specifically is implied here. Early in the eugenics movement, the preferred method of preventative action against the reproduction of the “unfit” was segregation rather than sterilization. States across the country built institutions, often called “colonies” to house and employ young women deemed unfit for reproduction. The hope was that by separating these women from society, they would not be able to meet young men or become pregnant, and therefore not pass on their undesirable traits.

Overall, I argue that women were active participants in both forms of eugenics, positive and negative, although their contributions to the field looked different than how men were often involved. In my research, it is clear that women activists promoted positive and negative eugenics in very different ways. Positive eugenics was most often advocated through public education projects. Most notably, women pushed positive eugenics through the Better Babies and Fitter Families contests at state and local fairs across the country.[23] However, women also championed positive eugenics through propaganda posters, comprehensive sex education projects, and their participation in social clubs and educational organizations.

I assert that negative eugenics, however, was proselytized differently. Women promoted these ideas instead through academic correspondence or legal reforms rather than public educational projects. Women founded and formed academic reading groups and pushed for eugenic sterilization laws

[23] See also Annette K. Vance Dorey, *Better Baby Contests: The Scientific Quest for Perfect Childhood Health in the Early Twentieth Century* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1999).

in states across the country. Many of these women published their thoughts and theories on eugenics in prominent journals such as the *Journal of Social Hygiene*.

This project will examine a variety of primary sources from the early 20th century with the aim of analyzing how and why women were involved in the American eugenics movement. These primary sources fall into two main categories: works written by women and works aimed towards women as the audience. Often, these approaches are one and the same; women activists often appealed to an audience of primarily or exclusively other women. Both of these demonstrate the prominent role women held in this movement; women were not only actors in the dissemination of eugenic ideology, they were also sought out as an important audience for the movement's ideals. The importance of women as an audience reveals a larger subset of women who may not have been vocally active but were active participants in eugenics through their interaction with these ideas in the media.

In Chapter One, I examine the academic correspondence made by American eugenic activists. This took the form of journal articles, such as entries in the *Journal of Social Hygiene*, as well as books, such as *Four Epochs of a Woman's Life* and *Race Improvement or Eugenics*. I argue that the presence of this wealth of work written by women on the topic of eugenics shows a clear trend of women's active involvement in the academic and research-based aspects of the movement. I also examine

women's involvement in eugenic political organizing, using Marion Olden, the founder of the Sterilization League of New Jersey (SLNJ), as a case study. Olden's case and the SLNJ shows a clear interest on behalf of women in eugenic political organizing. While women were certainly less dominant in this sphere than male activists were, I assert that we must examine women's role in organizing eugenic sterilization legislation.

Chapter Two explores the role of public educational materials in the eugenics movement and how women were involved at the forefront of this project. Examples of public educational materials include propaganda posters and materials from Better Babies and Fitter Families contests. The language used in many of these sources highlights how women were seen as the arbiters of home and family life, which was the primary sphere of eugenics. Furthermore, this chapter examines how eugenics interacted with many other public issues, such as venereal disease and infant mortality, and how these intersections were used to push eugenic information to individuals and families across the country for both noble and nefarious purposes.

Both chapters illustrate the clear and significant presence of women's involvement across all spheres of the eugenics movement in the United States. Women were writers, political activists, field and social workers, researchers, contest and fair organizers, and so much more. Any narrative of the eugenics movement without examining the role of women as perpetrators tells an incomplete story.

Chapter One: Academic and Formal Correspondence

One important way in which women were involved in the eugenics movement in America was through published academic texts and organizational correspondence. Women's academic writing tends to fall in three main categories: publishing, correspondence in and between political organizations, and field and social work. In this chapter, I focus mainly on the first two categories. Of the three different types of formal eugenic correspondence by women, field and social work has been studied by historians the most extensively.[24] Scholars have argued that women field workers did have a significant presence in the research aspects of the eugenics movement, but few published research themselves. Due to this, I have chosen to instead focus on women's publishing and political efforts in the eugenics movement. These works illustrate how women came to be involved in more academic circles, which at the turn of the 20th century were predominantly male.

This chapter examines the depth of women's involvement in academic publishing and formal and organizational correspondence on eugenic

[24] For more sources on women in field work, see Nicole Hahn Rafter, *White Trash: The Eugenic Family Studies, 188-1919* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1988), http://tankona.free.fr/rafter1988.pdf; Amy Sue Bix, "Experiences and Voices of Eugenics Field-Workers: 'Women's Work' in Biology," *Social Studies of Science* 27, no. 4 (1997): SAGE Journals Online.

matters. I focus on these types of correspondence because they illustrate how deeply women were involved at the most rigorously academic and educated levels of the movement. Even at a time when few women achieved higher education, they still found ways to contribute to academic causes such as eugenics research. Furthermore, although women were more involved in some aspects of the movement than others, such as the push for positive eugenics and pronatalism, many women contributed their own unique perspectives to the existing research conducted by men. Women brought new viewpoints to the research table; many women writers pursued academic study of traditionally feminine topics, such as child rearing, which were most often overlooked if not entirely ignored by male writers.

In this chapter, I examine the works of women writers who published books, articles, and treatises on eugenics in the first few decades of the twentieth century. Some of these women are familiar, such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, but many have been largely overlooked by historians, such as La Reine Helen Baker and Anna Galbraith, among many others. Many of these writers tended to touch on the same few themes. First, I look at contemporary panics about race suicide and how women interpreted and assuaged these fears. Next, I look at some of the justifications women used to legitimize eugenics, such as both biological and biblical imagery and language. I then examine how women used both fear and legitimations on topics such as love, marriage, and legitimacy to persuade a larger audience of women into agreement with their ideals. As a whole, women writers

tended to use language of both nature and nurture, rather than an exclusively hereditarian viewpoint, in their arguments to persuade both preventative and immediate action for a more eugenic society.

Furthermore, I look at how women advocated new and emerging techniques such as segregation and sterilization of the unfit as a method of social control. In the next part of the chapter, I analyze women's role in political organizing by looking at Marion Olden, the founder of the Sterilization League of New Jersey, as an example. Finally, I briefly examine how women were involved in both field work research and the emergent field of social work at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Formally published works took several different forms including books, academic journals, and newspaper articles. The publishing industries tended to platform well-educated middle and upper class women, most of whom were otherwise involved in public activism or academia. Some women gained this platform through their expertise, such as experience as a doctor, while others used their existing celebrity to publish their opinions publicly. In addition to being wealthy and educated, many of these women were also suffragists. This camp of well-educated upper-class women were most likely to recognize the benefit of a coalition between first wave feminism and eugenics due to their past experience in activism during the women's suffrage movement. Rensing writes that the women activists "connected eugenics with the goals of feminism: namely, the equalizing of

the marriage relation, the elimination of the sexual double standard, and, in many cases, voluntary motherhood."[25]

Even so, women were less likely to be published by major presses or newspapers. Women's academic treatises on eugenics were primarily published in smaller presses or local newspapers in secondary cities rather than major ones. Academic journals tended to provide more opportunities for women, although those published in them were still predominantly men. Most editions of the *Journal for Social Hygiene*[26] in the early 20th century featured maybe one or two articles written by women out of six to eight articles published per edition. On the whole, women were not given the same academic status as men, and their publication history reflects that. Furthermore, many women published under their husbands' names or pseudonyms rather than their own.

A number of different patterns and themes pop up across the works of various women authors. These themes provide a window with which to see what activist talking points women were most concerned with. Overall, these discussion themes fall into two main categories: identified societal problems and their proposed solutions. Even among these two categories there was a great deal of debate, especially concerning which solutions to these problems were best and how to implement them. Some of the societal problems that women discussed at length in academic publications include

[25] Susan Rensing, "'Falling in Love Intelligently': Eugenic Love in the Progressive Era," *Journal of Popular Romance Studies* 5, no. 2 (2016): 6.
[26] The *Journal of Social Hygiene* was an academic journal published by the American Social Hygiene Association from 1914 to 1954.

criminality, venereal disease, and illegitimate children. Several solutions were suggested such as segregation of the unfit in mental colonies, but above all else sterilization of the unfit was suggested as the best course of action in bettering society.

Amidst these common themes, many women writers used the same tropes to justify their ideas to their audience. Women writers tended to use both scientific rhetoric as well as biblical allusions as a persuasive tactic. Despite seeming contradictory, these two tactics were often intertwined; most American families in the early twentieth century were still deeply Christian, but many began to place more stock on contemporary scientific advancements such as Darwin's theory of evolution. These scientific and biblical references used by women authors were meant specifically to target a general audience of educated people in America, most of whom were deeply religious Christians. The biblical references would have felt natural to this audience, as references to the Bible were ubiquitous in literature during the 21st century, but the inclusion of scientific allusions was more novel; with the creation of Darwin's theory of evolution in the mid-19th century, more Americans began to think of humans in commonality with animals rather than seeing humanity as a distinct class designated by God.[27]

[27] The Social Gospel movement beginning in the early 20th century blended Protestant beliefs with evolutionary science in a uniquely Progressive Era philosophical trend. There was still some debate about the role of evolution and religion, however, as seen by the 1925 Scopes "Monkey" Trial, which sent the problem of teaching evolution in schools to the Supreme Court. See Thomas C. Leonard, "Religion and Evolution in Progressive Era Political Economy: Adversaries or Allies?," *History of Political Economy* 43, no. 3 (2011): https://doi.org/10.1215/00182702-1346815.

In addition to Biblical and scientific allusions, blatant racism was pervasive across eugenic texts written by women. Language of “inferiority” and “savagery” is often used to refer to communities of color, while concerns about “civilization” are leveraged to uplift white bloodlines as superior. For example, Baker writes that “we have mingled the seeds of evil with the seeds of good… weeds are always of quicker growth than the flower plants which they deprive of their due share of light and air.”[28] The language of “good” and “evil” here is clearly religious in nature, but Baker also includes scientific references to the photosynthesis processes of plants. Baker is just one example of how women writers used a blend of both scientific and religious allusions to justify their beliefs to both religious and non-religious audiences.

Among these ideas of white superiority, “race suicide” is a commonly touched upon theme across academic works written by women. The idea of superiority of the white “race” was inherent to the idea of race suicide. Calls to combat race suicide coaligned with anti-immigration measures; as an influx of immigrants entered the country in the latter half of the 19th century, many white Americans felt threatened as their numbers dwindled in comparison with new entries. Many of these immigrants were perceived as a non-white “other” who reproduced excessively. The solution, then, was not just to restrict immigration but also encourage higher birth rates among wealthy white families. President Theodore Roosevelt popularized the term

[28] Baker, *Race Improvement*, 12.

in 1905 in a presidential speech attacking birth control. President Roosevelt specifically attacked white women who sought to control reproduction in fear that the white race would be overwhelmed by “inferior” races entering the country and reproducing faster.[29] This philosophy was applied to thoughts about reproductive control as well as immigration control. Race suicide was a largely academic idea, discussed in formally published works and less so in public educational materials. It was seen as a concern for the wealthier and more educated classes. Through this lens, it becomes clear that saving the white race became a goal of the wealthy who sought to save their own kind, often at the expense of everyone else.

However, some women activists pushed back against the mainstream male-dominated discourse about race suicide. Author and suffragist La Reine Helen Baker argued against popular notions of race suicide, despite believing in its basic concept. Baker believed that an increasing birth rate amongst whites was not an inherent sign of progress and instead could signify a possible regression if not handled carefully.[30] Baker and other women activists chose to promote the more positive idea of race improvement over the scare tactic of race suicide, which was more often leveraged by men.

While race suicide was seen as the problem in society, the solution many women adopted was a focus on race improvement. To Baker and other women activists, race improvement necessitated a new emphasis on

[29] Linda Gordon, *The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America* (n.p.: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 86, JSTOR.
[30] Baker, *Race Improvement*, 15.

motherhood. While both male and female eugenicists identified women as crucial to the salvation of the white race, women writers tended to focus on the mechanics of motherhood in an effort to revitalize it as an act of labor. Many women at this time believed that interest in motherhood was dying amongst women due to modern interests and pursuits, including working outside of the home. According to Baker, this phenomenon was most prevalent in the upper classes. Baker wrote "It is when we reach the exclusive circles of the rich that we see how the race is decaying. Children are at a discount. Parentage is coming to be considered a waste of time. A man cannot spare his wife from social functions."[31] Activist women feared that the majority of "fit" American parents, especially upper-class women, were losing interest in the act of parenting. For eugenic activists, motherhood was not just a noble pursuit, but a deeply necessary one in the goal of saving the white race. Upper-class women in particular were more likely to be seen as eugenically fit in contrast to poor families who were more often identified as "unfit" for various reasons, most tracing back to their poverty itself.

Famous feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman, best known for her short story "The Yellow Wallpaper," was also deeply involved in the eugenics movement and wrote treatises on the subject of eugenics and motherhood. Despite suffering from what was likely postpartum depression and later giving full custody of her daughter to her ex-husband, in 1903 Gilman wrote

[31] Baker, *Race Improvement*, 30-31.

Concerning Children, an in-depth treatise on child care and rearing.[32] Gilman writes that "According to our religious belief, the last best work of God is the human race. According to the observation of biologists, the highest product of evolution is the human race."[33] Here, Gilman asserts that biology and religion have come to the same conclusion: that the human race is the "highest product" or "best work" of the world. Gilman uses both sources as justification to her audience that humanity is superior to all other races of animals and therefore crowned by both God and nature as champion. What she does not mention here is the idea of races within humanity; however, it can be assumed that Gilman, like many other women during this period, believed the white race ultimately reigned superior within this hierarchy.

Furthermore, eugenics and race improvement are key issues in her book. She argues that "we have the power to improve the species, to promote the development of the human race… race improvement must be made in youth, to be transmitted. The real progress of man is born in him."[34] Throughout the book, Gilman positions the woman, specifically the white woman, as the savior of the race while also advocating for a higher respect and position for women in society. According to literature scholar Dana Seitler, the improvement of social conditions for women and

[32] Gilman dedicates the book to her daughter Katharine, writing that she has "taught [me] much of what is written here" in *Concerning Children*. While Gilman mentions a variety of anecdotes on parenting throughout the book, she neglects to mention her own experience with parenting and her daughter outside of the dedication.
[33] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Concerning Children* (Boston, MA: Small, Maynard & Co., 1903), 3, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/40481/40481-h/40481-h.htm.
[34] Gilman, *Concerning Children*, 3-4.

improvement of the race itself were “not simply juxtaposed, but fundamentally related to one another” for Gilman.[35] Seitler continues, “Eugenics became a model through which (white) women’s social significance could be restructured.”[36]

Love and Marriage

Marriage was a central point of concern for women involved in the eugenics movement and was a central theme in many eugenic articles, books, and treatises. This was almost exclusively a concern of women writers; as a whole, men were uninterested in the preservation of love in building a more eugenic future, although many were still interested in the perpetuation of marriage and the traditional family structure. Who should get married and when were common discursive talking points across academic correspondence addressing marriage and eugenics. Both marriage and motherhood were seen as necessary milestones within a woman’s life–ones which she would not be (or feel) complete without. Marriage was so important because it was seen as the necessary precursor to motherhood and therefore was a common concern of women in the eugenics movement. In contrast with motherhood, which was viewed as an instinctive urge within women, marriage was acknowledged as something more negative that could control or restrict a woman’s freedom. Through

[35] Dana Seitler, "Unnatural Selection: Mothers, Eugenic Feminism, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Regeneration Narratives," *American Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (2003): 68, JSTOR.
[36] Seitler, "Unnatural Selection," 69.

these new eugenic ideas about marriage, women eugenicists sought to introduce new feminist ideals of women's equality within marriage combined with eugenic ideals about thoughtful reproduction.

Anna M. Galbraith's book *The Four Epochs of Woman's Life: A Study in Hygiene* dedicated a whole chapter to how a woman should conduct herself eugenically throughout her life. Galbraith was an accomplished medical doctor at the New York Orthopedic Hospital and Dispensary in their neurology department. Galbraith also published other books on women's hygiene and physical education. *The Four Epochs* was first published in 1905, but two more editions were published thereafter with added chapters about eugenics and sex education. In addition to her introductory "Eugenics" chapter, Galbraith divides the book into four "epochs" that divide a woman's life: maidenhood, marriage, maternity, and menopause. These four chapters clearly emphasize the importance of marriage and reproduction in a woman's life above other equally noble pursuits such as education or a career. This is a particularly striking critique, given Galbraith's own career as a published writer. Galbraith's decision to break up chapters by a woman's role in the home (i.e. marriage and children) denotes a continued stress on a woman's role as a wife and mother rather than a worker or independent woman.

In her maidenhood chapter, Galbraith what she believes to be the most appropriate age and conditions for marriage. Galbraith writes that twenty-one years old should be the minimum age of marriage for a woman

because “It is only then that the standard of development is reached that is most compatible with the successful bearing of the grave responsibilities of wifehood and motherhood.”[37] Galbraith cites not only physical but also psychological reasons as to why women should wait until their twenties to marry; she adds that before this time most women do not have the knowledge or life experience to “wisely make the choice of a companion for life, or to become mothers.”[38] According to Galbraith, women should have a certain set of both physical qualities as well as life experiences before taking on the task of becoming a mother. Motherhood was seen as a serious duty, not to be taken lightly. Women should be aptly prepared before performing what many viewed as a sacred obligation. Galbraith’s assertion fits into older ideas about appropriate marriage age but adjusts them to include a new emphasis on maternal education before women would be considered ready.

Galbraith also outlines several concerns over who should and should not marry each other. As a doctor, she uses her medical background to justify the danger in passing what she believed to be genetic conditions to future generations. She specifically states that cousins should not marry as a rule. Furthermore, she asserts that women with a “distinct history” of hereditary disease such as “cancer, tuberculosis, or insanity for two generations back” should not be allowed to marry whatsoever.[39] She

[37] Anna M. Galbraith, *The Four Epochs of Woman's Life: A Study in Hygiene*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders and Company, 1920), 120.
[38] Galbraith, *The Four Epochs*, 121.
[39] Galbraith, *The Four Epochs*, 121.

reasons that this is a “fearful legacy” to hand down to future generations. Galbraith and other women physicians saw their unique position as both women and healthcare professionals as an opportunity to push a eugenic agenda onto what they viewed as the “lower” classes of society. This was a theme common amongst women nurses and physicians; Elizabeth Fee and Barbara Greene argue that “women physicians shared the social values of progressive reformers, and felt a special commitment to women, children, and the poor.”[40]

Beyond anxieties about reproduction and the health of future generations, women (unlike their male counterparts in the eugenics movement) were commonly concerned with the place of love in eugenic marriages. Many women feared that prioritizing eugenic potential in a marriage would sacrifice the importance of true companionship and attraction, and instead would bring in a wave of loveless marriages. Susan Rensing argues that eugenics can be viewed as a sort of “OkCupid of the Progressive Era” in the way it sought to modernize love and marriage through science.[41] Rensing contends that although the science of eugenic love was promoted to both men and women, women were expected to “take the lead in this endeavor” of falling in love wisely and eugenically. Rensing’s assertion fits into the broader narrative of women’s leadership in eugenic matters, especially those regarding love, marriage, and family.

[40] Elizabeth Fee and Barbara Greene, "Science and Social Reform: Women in Public Health," *Journal of Public Health Policy* 10, no. 2 (1989): 164, JSTOR.
[41] Susan Rensing, "'Falling in Love Intelligently': Eugenic Love in the Progressive Era," *Journal of Popular Romance Studies* 5, no. 2 (2016): 1.

In her 1913 newspaper article about the dawn of the “Super-Baby,” journalist and suffragist Nixola Greeley-Smith argued that love plays an important role in the production of eugenically “perfect” babies. The article outlined a contest which will give a $1000 reward in two installments for the production of a “super-baby” following the marriage of a eugenically perfectly-matched couple. Greeley-Smith wrote that “after we have found a man and woman who meet all the requirements of the board of examiners, which will be made up of men and women physicians, the problem will still remain of making them fall in love with each other.”[42] Love, here, is a “problem” for the examiners; it is vital that a couple is not only a eugenic match, but also a love match. Mr. Robinson, one of the contest directors, is quoted in the article as saying that if the couple does not fall in love it will “end all matters” because “love is a very important factor in the production of the super-baby.”[43] Without love, the so-called super-baby would not exist because as much as perfect genetic material is important, a stable household and a couple in a legitimate marriage is equally important to eugenicists, who valued the family above all else. These ideas were defined by the core value of the nuclear family[44], which included a husband and wife as mother and father to their children. The key to guaranteeing the

[42] Nixola Greeley-Smith, "The Super-Baby Is Soon to Become a Living, Breathing, Squalling Fact," *The Day Book* (Chicago, IL), November 14, 1913, America's Historical Newspapers.
[43] Greeley-Smith, "The Super-Baby.”
[44] Many eugenicists did not use this term which was coined in 1924, but it is a term that I use for clarity with modern audiences. Many writers at the time may have used language about a “traditional” American family rather than using the word “nuclear” specifically.

longevity of the family was love, which is why many eugenic activists continued to emphasize its importance.

In a newspaper article titled “Why Washington Society Women Study Eugenics” by Mrs. John Hays Hammond, the issue of love in eugenics is addressed similarly. Hammond argued that “The fear is in some minds that a knowledge of eugenics will banish marriage. Far from it. It will make marriages happier as well as better. There will always be love, and by making the race better we will make love more permanent.”[45] The word “permanent” is key here – racial improvement measures were believed to make people happier and discourage divorce or familial separation. Even amidst academic treatises, women eugenicists were still concerned with taking a persuasive approach to eugenics by acknowledging common concerns. The argument amongst women in eugenics was that making thoughtful choices in a partner based on their eugenic potential as well as their other qualities would create a much longer lasting form of love, one that would last generations.

Although love was increasingly emphasized, women eugenicists saw sex, even more so than love, as a vital aspect of marriage. Sex was viewed as the precursor to the true point of marriage: legitimate reproduction. Galbraith, for example, argued that women with fibroids should “give up all thoughts of marriage” if she could not get them removed, for the “marital relations would tend to favor [the fibroids] growth.”[46] For Galbraith, if a

[45] John Hays Hammond, Mrs., "Why Washington Society Women Study Eugenics," *The Times Dispatch* (Richmond, VA), July 6, 1913, America's Historical Newspapers.
[46] Galbraith, *The Four Epochs*, 123.

woman had a condition to prevent her from having sex, the idea of engaging in marriage at all was fruitless. Sex was so vital because without sex, there would be no children, and without children, there was no point to entering into a marriage. A woman's value was defined by her reproductive potential, and without it she was perhaps not worthless, but certainly undesirable.

Debates about the role of eugenics in marriage represented contrasting emotional and legal values; for example, children born out of wedlock were seen as a social evil due to circumventing the most important aspect of reproduction: legal marriage. This was also due to the emphasis on the nuclear family, which was seen as the saving grace of a white race under threat. Extramarital affairs were viewed as a gateway drug of sorts to other social evils, including venereal disease, criminality, and prostitution. Children who were not given a stable home life with two parents and at-home maternal care from their biological mother were seen as at-risk for delinquency. In her article for the *Journal of Social Hygiene*, Katharine Lenroot, a woman working for the Children's Bureau in the U.S. Department of Labor, noted that of "11,000 children appearing before seven juvenile courts… 40 percent came from homes in which one or both parents were dead or in which there was divorce, separation, or desertion."[47] The traditional family structure was seen as protection against society's evils, and when parents deviated from this model, their children suffered as a

[47] Katharine Lenroot, "Social Responsibility for the Care of the Delinquent Girl and the Unmarried Mother," *Journal of Social Hygiene* 10, no. 2 (1924): 76, https://reader.library.cornell.edu/docviewer/digital?id=hearth4732756_192_002#page/9/mode/1up.

result. Through the emphasis on a conventional family form, legitimacy became a key aspect of eugenics as women scholars in particular sought to use familial norms to enforce against social evils.

Illegitimacy was also closely tied to the idea of purity; many women were afraid that white men would have extramarital affairs and contract venereal diseases that would be passed onto their wives and children. Similarly, prostitution was seen as a prominent social evil which led to the spread of venereal disease, so many women eugenic activists promoted legislation that would criminalize prostitution.[48]

Beyond venereal disease, however, many white women feared that men would have affairs with Black women and other women of color who would reproduce and taint the purity of the white bloodline. Emphasizing legitimate marriage and reproduction was a path to controlling not just the purity of individuals, but of the white race as a whole.

Not only was illegitimacy seen as a cause for social evils, it too was seen as a reflection of inferior traits in an individual. Ruth Reed, a professor at the women's school Wells College in Aurora, New York, wrote a paper following the issue of illegitimacy among Black women. Reed argues that "the greater prevalence of illegitimacy among domestic servants might be associated to some degree with inferior mentality."[49] Here, Reed is specifically referring to young Black women who entered the workforce as

[48] Seitler, "Unnatural Selection," 67.
[49] Ruth Reed, "Illegitimacy among Negroes," *Journal of Social Hygiene* 11, no. 2 (1925): 79, https://reader.library.cornell.edu/docviewer/digital?id=hearth4732756_193_002#page/9/mode/1up.

domestic servants in order to make ends meet for their families. Reed's argument that the "inferior" mental capacities of Black women who do this work is a determining factor in their lesser position. Again, the racism here is glaring; Reed operated on the assumption of the time that Black people were intellectually subordinate to white Americans. She uses this as an explanation for the purported higher rates of illegitimacy and delinquency amongst Black women rather than looking to other societal factors. Implicit in most eugenic treatises from this period is the ultimate goal of saving the white race; however, this text instead focuses specifically on Black women. By looking at a diverse set of sources from the period, it becomes clear that alongside the main goal of upholding white supremacy, there remained an additional mission to wipe out social evil from all aspects of society, including in non-white communities.

In her article published in the *Journal of Social Hygiene*, Reed posits that the occupations of Black women may lead to their extramarital affairs and illegitimate children. She writes that "long hours of work under exacting circumstances, the loneliness of the life, and the lack of stimulation that comes from working with a group contribute to making a situation very trying for young women with strong social impulses."[50] For Reed, young girls and women entering the workforce was seen as a pathway to immorality due to the "lonely" conditions of this lifestyle. Young women,

[50] Ruth Reed, "Illegitimacy among Negroes," 78.

especially young Black women, with “strong social impulses” were seen as vulnerable to social evils such as extramarital sex and venereal disease.

To prevent young white women from succumbing to temptation, some activists suggested a stronger social network for youth. Another article from the *Journal of Social Hygiene* written by Katharine Lenroot suggested encouraging all young girls and women to participate in social clubs such as the “YWCA, the Girl Scouts, and the Campfire Girls” in order to deter young women from temptation.[51] Wholesome, supervised activities were seen as a favored alternative to labor in hopes that through social and intellectual enrichment young women would be less tempted to give in to their perceived immoral impulses. As a whole, women activists in the early 20th century sought many different avenues towards combating illegitimacy.

Social Control

The idea of the social responsibility to solve societal issues is fundamental to the common beliefs of the Progressive Era. For the first time in American history, large amounts of government funding were funneled towards helping the people of the nation by tackling social issues. These problems of illegitimacy, criminality, delinquency, and venereal disease, among many others, became targets of attack and resolution by the federal government.[52] Women in particular were deeply interested in combating

[51] Lenroot, "Social Responsibility," 75.
[52] See also Don S. Kirschner, "The Ambiguous Legacy: Social Justice and Social Control in the Progressive Era," *Historical Reflections* 2, no. 1 (1975): JSTOR.

and solving social issues. Many women joined social and political clubs or even volunteered in order to help their communities. Social organizations, such as Jane Addams's Hull House in Chicago, were erected by women across the nation to aid the impoverished and cure social ills. Furthermore, women writers began to use their platforms to draw attention to the issues they cared about on a local or national level.

Women activists like La Reine Helen Baker looked to the state for help in resolving social issues. Baker refers to the state as a "Step-mother" which will in "self-defence protect its maternal arms from the influx of undesirables."[53] Baker feminizes the state as a maternal figure to the populace. Much like individual women in their households, the state took on a motherly persona in order to parent the nation and resolve social issues. Baker imagines this figure as not the natural mother of the American people, but rather a sort of "step-mother" which has stepped in as a parental figure to guide specifically white Americans from negative influence that would harm the race.

Despite many contemporary pushes to use federal funding to combat social problems, women involved in the eugenics movement were also deeply concerned with the social expenditures of the state that were required to help those that they deemed "unfit." The vision was clear–to end the reproduction of the unfit now in order to prevent government expenditures in perpetuity. Marion Olden[54], the founder of the Sterilization

[53] Baker, *Race Improvement*, 108.
[54] Marion Olden sometimes went by Marion Norton. This paper will continue to refer to her as Marian Olden for clarity.

League of New Jersey[55], wrote in her booklet *The ABC of Human Conservation* that the "unchecked reproduction" of feebleminded people "requires the utmost expenditure to provide institutional care for the most helpless cases."[56] Olden views the seemingly "unchecked" reproduction of people viewed as mentally disabled as a social evil that places a burden on the healthy to provide for. Furthermore, Olden views these supposedly disabled people as "helpless." Olden catastrophizes the ability and condition of the people whom she considers mentally disabled and considers them a total lost cause. This was not necessarily a shared opinion amongst all women of this time period, however. Many women viewed feeblemindedness and other perceived mental disabilities as curable diseases despite disagreement on proposed treatments.

Concerns about high social expenditures led women activists to seek different solutions for social problems. One debate that became common amongst feminists was the discussion of segregation or sterilization of the "unfit." Segregation was the more traditional or conservative option while sterilization was a newer and far more controversial recourse. In the first half of the twentieth century, solutions to mental inferiority in the population shifted from institutions to colonies to sterilization, sometimes in conjunction with a colony stay. These seemingly opposing ideas eventually

[55] The Sterilization League of New Jersey changed names several times. At the time of the publication of *The ABC of Human Conservation*, the League operated under the name Birthright, Inc.
[56] Marion S. Olden, "The ABC of Human Conservation," 1948, Box 230, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

became a joint solution–many progressive reformers sought both avenues as a solution to purported social evils.

Mental “colonies” were proposed as an alternative to the traditional mental institution, which many women criticized as too prison-like. Ethel Anderson Prince, the secretary for the New York State Commission for Mental Defectives, wrote in her article “Colonies for Mental Defectives” for the *Journal of Social Hygiene*, “There is no reason why able-bodied women… of the moron grade mentally cannot contribute toward the expense of their maintenance by the state.” Prince added that the “result in lessening the custodial burden of the state” and the “result in segregating this most dangerous group” adds up to a net positive for everyone.[57] The idea of the “colony” is specifically positioned as a solution to both social evils and social expenditures; women could be segregated from society in these colonies but contribute to the nation’s dissipations through their labor.

On the surface, colonies do not seem to be vastly different from their institutional predecessors. However, the most key differences lie in the architecture of the establishments themselves; Wendy Kline describes the new plan for the colonies as “smaller, separate buildings to distinguish various grades of deficiency and thus illustrated the new emphasis on both specialization, and by the early twentieth century, mental measurement.”[58]

[57] Ethel Anderson Prince, "Colonies for Mental Defectives," *Journal of Social Hygiene* 6, no. 3 (1920): 364, https://reader.library.cornell.edu/docviewer/digital?id=hearth4732756_188_003#page/25/mode/1up.
[58] Kline, *Building a Better Race*, 41.

In contrast with institutions, colonies were compartmentalized by grade of designated mental deficiency rather than housing all mentally disabled patients of various support needs in one facility.

Prince addressed these concerns about the costs and benefits of mental colonies; Prince argued that colonies provide a better solution for families who are hesitant to send their relatives away to an institution for life. She wrote, “The colony offers more scope, more promise, and is less like a life sentence.”[59] For Prince, colonies were a more humane alternative to mental institutions and included benefits that could possibly reform the individuals sent to them rather than imprisoning them in perpetuity. Prince posited that “It appears to be a conservative estimate that individuals may be maintained in these colonies on the average fifty per cent cheaper than can be done at the parent institutions,” due to the wages[60] earned by the colonists.[61] Both the aforementioned colonies and mental institutions of this era were exploitative, but the mental colonies saw their colonists as investments rather than patients.

In contrast to the colonial option, many women advocated for sterilization of the unfit. Sterilization was posed as an even more efficient cost-saving option in which individuals could return to society after being sterilized with one procedure. Doctors, especially, insisted that such procedures would not “unsex” the patient. What “unsexing” meant is never

[59] Prince, "Colonies for Mental," 362.
[60] It is not, however, clear whether or not any of the colonists get to keep any percentage of their earnings.
[61] Prince, "Colonies for Mental," 364.

clearly defined, but physicians emphasized that the sterilized would be able to continue having healthy sex lives. Who, exactly, expressed fears that sterilization would “unsex” women is unclear; however, many sterilization advocates do seem to respond to some anxieties. The push back against the concern of “unsexing” women may represent an attempt at justification for eugenic sterilization among people who were unsure of its effects.

Marian Olden wrote that girls “who come from defective stock yet who are trained sufficiently to pass for normal by those with superficial judgement, are the greatest menace to the race when returned to the community without the protection of sterilization.”[62] For Olden, sterilization was a “protection” against harm to the community that allowed young women of “defective stock” to return to society. She believed that segregation was not enough to quell this threat and instead advocated for sterilization legislation. Olden also expressed anxieties about the young women in particular who could hide amongst “normal” people in society and blend in despite their purported inferiority. Olden further argued that these women are “trained” to conform in this way, although she did not identify who was spearheading this training. Olden has no evidence that any of these supposed “trainers” of the feebleminded exist, and yet she comes up with solutions to combat their possible harm to society. Olden believed that the only way to tackle the great “menace” of the feebleminded was through sterilization, rather than segregation or institutionalization.

[62] Olden, "The ABC of Human,” 6.

A key feature of the push for sterilization in the eugenics movement was the decentering of motherhood from the idea of women's sexuality. Wendy Kline argues that "eugenicists helped to modernize female sexuality by suggesting desire, rather than motherhood, was sexuality's primary function."[63] I assert that while Kline is not wrong, there was a bifurcation in opinions about women's sexuality during this period. There was an effort to modernize women's sexuality, but only for women perceived as "fit." Not all women were included in this modernization, specifically poor, disabled, and women of color. In the case for sterilization, then, it was pertinent to preserve sexuality while removing the possibility of reproduction in the individual. This justification seemingly diverges from the general ideology towards sex and reproduction of the time, which as previously discussed, emphasizes legitimate marriage and reproduction. However, the two are not incongruous; the world of legitimacy was largely reserved for the fit (or those who could be made fit), and the unfit were in many ways exempt from these rules.

Many of the authors I have examined defended themselves against critiques that sterilization of the unfit was immoral. La Reine Helen Baker sought to alleviate these fears in her book *Race Improvement or Eugenics*. She wrote, "Sterilisation as now recommended and performed by our highest scientific authorities is in no sense cruel, it is not even painful… it

[63] Kline, *Building a Better Race*, 61.

leaves the person operated on possessed of every faculty for use and capacity for happiness, it only takes away the power of reproduction."[64] Baker and many other women activists that approved of sterilization pushed the fact that it would not change quality of life, nor was the procedure painful or inhumane. Furthermore, Baker argued that "Sterilisation will not be a mere added infliction of a degrading punishment, it will substitute an awful warning for a long imprisonment."[65] Here, Baker clarifies that sterilization can be used as a direct alternative to segregation. It serves as an effective but non-degrading solution to what Olden described as the "unchecked" reproduction of the unfit. Despite Baker's assurances, the ultimate goal of sterilization is clear: to reduce the population of unfit individuals in society by direct bars to reproduction.

Political Organizing

Academia was not the only access point for American women interested in eugenics. Many middle class women, whether educated or not, gained entrance to the eugenics movement through women's clubs, which advocated for eugenic sterilization laws among other issues. Historian Edward Larson notes that women's clubs organized on issues such as child labor laws, temperance, education, and suffrage; Larson argues that

[64] Baker, *Race Improvement*, 110.
[65] Baker, *Race Improvement*, 111.

eugenicists recognized women's organizing power and sought out a relationship with these clubs because of it.[66]

Marion Olden was an active member in the League of Women Voters, a women-led voting coalition that sought to enact political change nationwide. In 1935, Olden drafted her own eugenic sterilization bill and rallied her peers in the League to get it passed in the New Jersey state legislature with no success. After this legislative failure, Olden founded the Sterilization League of New Jersey (SLNJ) with the sole purpose of pushing eugenic sterilization legislation through in the state.[67]

Meeting minutes and other records from the Sterilization League of New Jersey, for example, illuminate how women were involved in the political sphere of the eugenics movement. The Sterilization League of New Jersey was a small political action group comprised mostly of women. In their founding meeting on January 9th, 1937, half of the members present were women.[68] In later meetings, the gender ratio leans far more heavily in favor of women. Furthermore, at this first meeting, founder Marion Olden was one of three people elected by the cohort to act as a chairperson, the other two being men. Initially, it seems that the gender ratio of members is fairly balanced. It is clear, however, in later meetings that the most active

[66] Edward J. Larson, "'In the Finest, Most Womanly Way:' Women in the Southern Eugenics Movement," *The American Journal of Legal History* 39, no. 2 (1995): 122, https://www.jstor.org/stable/845898.
[67] Ian Dowbiggin, The Sterilization Movement and Global Fertility in the Twentieth Century (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, USA, 2008), 37.
[68] Memorandum by Marion S. Norton, "Minutes of the Meeting," January 9, 1937, AVS Legal Box 1, Folder 1, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

members of the organization were women. In the meeting held by the SLNJ on February 14th, 1938, there is only one specific reference to a man present at the meeting, but multiple references to other women present. Throughout the SLNJ papers, the men mentioned had prominent roles both in and outside of the organization through their careers as professors, doctors, and more. When discussing the history of political eugenics measures, most historians have focused solely on the role of male lawmakers and activists. However, many women held key leadership positions in political activist organizations or even founded them themselves.

Of the women involved, almost all are identified as married women. In general, most women are referred to by their own names with “Mrs.” as the title attached, but on some occasions are addressed by their husband’s names. Additionally, most of the women are not accompanied by their husbands in the meetings, as few attendees share a last name. In the first meeting, when presenting the names of the people in attendance, the names are listed in alphabetical order by last name.[69] In this documentation, there is no hierarchical distinction between men and women; instead, all attendees are listed equally in the cohort.

Women activists were central to the administration of the SLNJ and were able to hold many key leadership positions. For example, Marion Olden was elected the chairperson of personnel. While a man was identified

[69] Memorandum by Norton, "Minutes of the Meeting."

as the chairperson of finance, Olden was also given the task of “[keeping] an account of expenditures” to present at the next meeting.[70] Similarly, in the report of the literature committee in 1938, Olden reported the inventory of booklets in possession of the league as well as the financial balance of this expenditure.[71] Olden’s almost single-handed management of the funds for the SLNJ represents her centrality to the organization and its day to day administration and success.

At a meeting in May of 1938, the members present made two key decisions that decisively affected the women in the SLNJ. First, they decided to hire a paid field worker. At this time, most of the field workers in eugenics research were young women. The committee discussed the nomination of Miss Gail Elizabeth Sampson of Princeton to the role.[72] Sampson is clearly unmarried, as designated by her title of “Miss,” in contrast with most of the women present who are married. She appears to be associated with Princeton, designating her status as an educated young woman. The nomination of Sampson to a paid field work role is significant because it showcases the importance of educated, unmarried women in the political field. Sampson is not a volunteer; instead, she is recognized for her intelligence and aptitude and is offered pay by the league because of it.

Furthermore, in this meeting in May 1938, the committee designated Marion Olden as the public face of the organization. The report states, “it

[70] Memorandum by Norton, "Minutes of the Meeting."
[71] Memorandum by Margaret de F. Roberts, "Report of Literature Committee," February 14, 1938, AVS Legal Box, Folder 1, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.
[72] Memorandum by Condit.

was decided that Mrs. [Olden] was most valuable to the League in research, speaking, and publicity. She is urged to do all of them in the fall."[73] Olden is identified as an asset to the organization through her unique skill set, and the league intends to use these skills to further their mission. It is clear that Olden is not simply a leader in the internal matters of the organization, but she is also an important face to their external relations as well.

While the meeting minutes and records of the SLNJ generally address the administrative functions of the organization, some of the notes convey the policy objectives of the league. As denoted by the title of the institution, sterilization was the primary focus. However, during this time period several different categories of sterilization emerged, and the league appeared to support all of them in some capacity. Compulsory sterilization was the main goal of the legislation they proposed. The minutes of the first meeting includes a sort of mission statement in the first paragraph – Olden writes that the committee gathered to "consider ways and means of promoting education and legislation for selective sterilization in New Jersey."[74] In this phrasing, the goal of the SLNJ is "selective" sterilization. A group of elites, whether that be the government or a medical board, are the ones selecting who needs sterilization, but the individuals involved have little to no choice in the matter.

Furthermore, in the minutes for the meeting on February 13, 1939, "voluntary sterilization" was added to the League's agenda. The report

[73] Memorandum by Condit.
[74] Memorandum by Norton, "Minutes of the Meeting."

notes that the committee will invite “Mrs. Harry Montgomery of Westfield to be present at our next meeting to give us her experience.”[75] Evidently, the committee invited a married woman who underwent a voluntary sterilization surgery, most likely as a means of contraception, to come to speak to the organization about her experiences. Little information is included in the meeting notes about this woman, but its inclusion represents a push for both voluntary and selective sterilization measures as a goal for the league. Overall, this illustrates the diversity of goals of the league beyond just compulsory sterilization of the unfit.

The league also had apparent connections to the birth control movement and other first wave feminist objectives. Marion Olden strongly believed that the sterilization movement and the birth control movement had common goals; in a letter to the New Jersey Birth Control League, Olden asserted that she would “appreciate a clarifying of the relationship between these two movements which must be organized separately but which should appeal largely to the same group of workers.”[76] Olden’s statement in some ways acknowledged a “marriage of convenience” type relationship that Clare Makepeace rejected; she recognized these intersections between the two movements and, although she advocated separate organizing, sought to connect them through their united missions. Olden reached out to other politically active women because she recognized

[75] Wright MacMillan to Robie, Mrs., memorandum, February 13, 1939, AVS Legal Box 1, Folder 1, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.
[76] Marion S. Norton to Durand, Mrs., May 19, 1937, AVS Legal Box 1, Folder 3, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

the commonality between the birth control movement and eugenics and wished to identify allies whom she could collaborate with.

Similarly, Stella Hanau, the Educational Director for the National Committee on Federal Legislation for Birth Control, wrote a letter to Marion Oldern on behalf of Margaret Sanger. She writes,

> Certainly the interrelation between the two movements and the similarity of their aims should be obvious to anyone at all informed on the subject. I know Mrs. Sanger wishes to be as helpful and cooperative as possible, and trust that you will let us know if there is anything our Committee can do to further the general movement for race betterment in which we are all interested.[77]

Like Olden, Hanau recognized a direct relation between the compulsory sterilization and birth control movements – she acknowledged that both serve the ultimate purpose of "race betterment" of the white race. Hanau also noted that Margaret Sanger, the President of the National Committee for Federal Legislation for Birth Control, feels the same and wants to seek allyship between the two movements. This note is key; at this time, Margaret Sanger was the leading voice in birth control advocacy in the United States and was seen as an icon by many first wave feminists. Not

[77] Stella Hanau to Paul R.C. Norton, Mrs., May 22, 1936, AVS Legal Box 1, Folder 3, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

only was she an avid advocate of rights for women, she is also notably remembered as a strong supporter of eugenics.[78]

The SLNJ collaborated with the League of Women Voters and other women's clubs of the time. The League of Women Voters, despite not being able to successfully promote Olden's first sterilization bill, remained involved in the mission after the founding of the SLNJ. Charles Geddes, a member of the House of Assembly of New Jersey, wrote to Elise Crossley, the chairmen of the League of Women Voters of Plainfields, New Jersey, thanking her for her support of the sterilization bill. He also noted in his letter that he had received multiple letters of endorsement from local women and the Roselle Park Women's Republican Club.[79] These collaborations show evidence of a true coalition between feminists and eugenicists in refutation of Makepeace's claims that there was no "marriage of convenience."

The Sterilization League of New Jersey represented the prominence of the intersection between first wave feminist goals and those of the eugenics movement. It is clear from Olden's correspondence and letters and records from other women in the movement that women activists perceived key commonalities between the two movements and sought to take advantage of these intersections. Through its birth out of the League of Women Voters, it is impossible to separate the feminist agenda apparent in the mission of the

[78] For more extensive information on Margaret Sanger, see Nancy Ordover, *American Eugenics: Race, Queer Anatomy, and the Science of Nationalism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).
[79] Charles R. Geddes to Elise Crossley, April 20, 1936, AVS Legal Box 1, Folder 3, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

Sterilization League of New Jersey from its overt eugenic impetus. While the SLNJ may not be representative of all eugenic activist organizations of the time, women were clearly involved at all levels of political organizing, including in organizational leadership.

Field and Social Work

While field work and political advocacy work were certainly different fields, political organizing relied on the research produced by field workers to build their case both publicly and in legislatures across the nation. In the academic study of scientific racism and eugenics, women held an incredibly prominent role through field work. While men were typically the official authors of the studies produced, such as the famous eugenic family studies *The Jukes* or *The Kallikak Family,* women field workers were instrumental in data collection through their boots on the ground work. Young women were given the opportunity to study under prominent eugenicists such as Charles Davenport and Harry Laughlin at Cold Spring Harbor, New York, the home of the Eugenics Record Office. Out of all of the students in attendance from 1910 to 1918, only 26 were male, meaning approximately 85% of students were women.[80] This overrepresentation of women in a field otherwise dominated by men signifies a consequential contribution by women to eugenic research.

[80] Nicole Hahn Rafter, *White Trash: The Eugenic Family Studies, 188-1919* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 21, http://tankona.free.fr/rafter1988.pdf.

The women conducting field work were wholly instrumental to the scientific journal articles and books published during this period. Henry Goddard's influential book, *The Kallikak Family*, was based on the field work data collected by Goddard's assistant Elizabeth Kite. Larson argues this text "probably did more than any other single study to persuade a generation of Americans about the need for eugenic restrictions on reproduction."[81] The Kallikak family, as Larson states, was wholly instrumental to the passage of eugenic sterilization legislation in many states. It is significant that the data collection for this influential work was produced by a woman, but history remembers Goddard for his contributions rather than Kite.

Eugenic field work created major job opportunities for one of the first major classes of women graduating from higher education. Historian Nicole Hahn Rafter argues that as women gained access to higher education and professional science opportunities, the field also developed an increasingly gendered division of labor. Rafter claims that "the eugenics movement formed part of this process, providing new opportunities for women in science while assigning them to 'women's' work."[82] Women were believed to have a certain skill set that uniquely suited them to eugenic field work, allowing them to connect with strangers and be more observant than men could.

[81] Larson, "'In the Finest," 121.
[82] Rafter, *White Trash*, 21.

While women scientists may have been pushed into field work by gendered labor practices, these women were no less complicit in perpetuating eugenic ideology than the men they worked for. Rafter argues that the research methods used by field workers were not only unethical but outright harmful to the families studied. Rafter writes, "In the hands of Elizabeth Kite conjecture becomes outright invention: she can quote remarks made in the mid-nineteenth century and deduce that the listener was 'simple-minded.'"[83] Kite's observations, according to Rafter, are based more in assumption than in facts, and the latter texts written by Goddard reflect these harmful biases of Kite and other field workers of the era. Rafter goes as far as labeling these assumptions and conjectures of the field workers as creating a sort of "mythology" about the families studied.

Like the scientific and biblical allusions used in the other academic sources I've examined, the family studies utilize animalistic imagery to dehumanize their subjects. Rafter identifies a widespread use of insect metaphors in particular; she writes, "The cacogenic[84] 'mate' and 'migrate,' 'nesting' with their 'broods' in caves and 'hotbeds where human maggots are spawned…' Not only do these images suggest great danger: they also imply that the cacogenic would hardly notice if they were treated as less than human."[85] The language used in the examples provided by Rafter are clearly harmful depictions of the subjects of the studies, but this language

[83] Rafter, *White Trash*, 24.
[84] Cacogenic was another word used to describe "dysgenic" or "unfit" people.
[85] Rafter, *White Trash*, 26.

was normalized at the time. The poor and perceived disabled were viewed by many, largely due to the influence of these studies, as subhuman. It was this dehumanization that justified the widespread sterilization of those viewed as “unfit.”

Furthermore, Rafter asserts that the use of this language was meant as a sort of contrasting “self-definition” for the “fit” people of society in a struggle for power and the future of the nation. Rafter claims that “The studies themselves were propaganda for a particular (middle-class, professional) view of how society should be organized, part of a bid for ideological control.”[86] In agreement with Rafter’s claims, I assert that these studies fit into a larger conversation about anxieties about control and authority in the Progressive Era. Many middle class white Americans were afraid of an influx of the “unfit” in society due to uncontrolled breeding and social evils such as prostitution, venereal disease, and feeblemindedness. The studies produced by the educated upper echelon of society reflect this anxious mindset as the nation faces what many viewed as an increasingly unsettling future. Women, in particular, had a great deal of power in the publication of these studies through their field work; educated women’s biases were reflected in the data collected, as well as in the consequences for the families and individuals studied, many of whom were pushed out of their homes or separated from their children.[87]

[86] Rafter, *White Trash*, 28.

[87] Field workers played an instrumental role in the establishment of the Shenandoah National Park, which had been inhabited by many impoverished families. Field workers were able to justify the removal of these families by labeling them as feebleminded or otherwise unfit. See Katrina M. Powell, "Converging Crises: Rhetorical Constructions of

Field work reports from the early 20th century also illustrate the contemporary debate over nature versus nurture and its role in eugenics. In a case file written about a young boy named Pedro Castro, a student Whittier State School in San Diego, California, the field workers make note of the conditions of Pedro's environment as well as his genetic heritage. In the report, they write in his summary of heredity that of his siblings, there are "eight children in all; one definitely feeble-minded, two apparently, and other probably feeble-minded."[88] The field workers here are obviously unsure of the condition of Pedro's siblings, but label them as feeble-minded anyway, reflecting Rafter's assertion that the field workers often operated on biased assumptions.

Additionally, Pedro's file demonstrates a clear pattern of racial and ethnic bias on the part of the data collectors. The field workers are incredibly biased in their assessments of Pedro and often draw conclusions with little evidence. In particular, the field workers are negatively biased against Pedro's ethnic background and Hispanic heritage. The report classifies Pedro as a "moron," in large part due to his deficient language skills and vocabulary usage. However, the report does note that he had a "language handicap" because "the boy had never spoken anything but Spanish until nearly 10 years old."[89] There is a clear explanation for Pedro's language lacking due to English being his second language, yet the field

Eugenics and the Public Child," *JAC* 33, no. 3/4 (2013): 463, JSTOR.
[88] "Social Case History No. 351: Pedro Castro," March 2, 1922, ERO Papers, Field Worker Files Box #1, Series VII #94, American Eugenics Society Records, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, PA.
[89] "Social Case History No. 351."

worker still includes this to his detriment in the assessment. Pedro's report also follows racial stereotypes that depict Hispanic people as lazy and unmotivated. The field worker is concerned with Pedro's father permitting him to "loaf" and work "only when necessary to eke out an existence." Yet again, however, the report also notes that Pedro is adaptable and "thorough in the performance of his tasks."[90] These two statements are contradictory; how can Pedro be both prone to laziness and productive in his work?

Following his summary of heredity, however, the field workers note the conditions of Pedro's environment, including that he "lives in a neighborhood of questionable moral level" and that his parents "associate with people of low social status."[91] Here, the field workers seem concerned both with Pedro's inherited genetics as well as the moral conditions of both his family and the environment surrounding him, reflecting a value placed by the field workers on both nature and nurture on the problem of Pedro's delinquency. His purported inferiority can not, and is not, solely explained away by the conditions of his family members, but the field workers also continue to make note of other possible contributing factors, including the cleanliness of his house and the people he is surrounded by. At the beginning of the twentieth century, eugenic ideology emphasized both nature and nurture, while in later decades many eugenicists preferred a more exclusive emphasis on nature over environmental influence.

[90] "Social Case History No. 351."
[91] "Social Case History No. 351."

Conclusion

In conclusion, amongst the wide variety of academic texts written and created by women during this period, a few key themes emerge. Firstly, the wealthier women who were most often the ones drafting these pieces held many anxieties about the future of the nation and the white race. These anxieties manifested in a multitude of different ways, namely, in promoting laws to sterilize the unfit or reduce prevalence of “social evils” such as prostitution, venereal disease, and illegitimacy. Women activists were also highly involved in the development of mental colonies which sought to control the labor force as well as who was allowed “out” as productive members of society. The rise of sterilization laws and mental colonies reflect a bigger conversation about control in society and how to go about reining in the “unfit.” Eugenic sterilization in particular was posed as the solution to all of society’s problems, and many states would respond to this claim by passing selective sterilization laws. Through this conversation, social control became a big theme of not just the American eugenics movement but also politics in the early 20th century as a whole.

In the midst of these anxieties, early feminists sought to redefine love and sexuality and their relationship with motherhood. The idea of motherhood became increasingly less about encouraging everyone to be a mother, and instead raised questions about who was “fit” for the role. With a new assertion about motherhood also came new ideas about love and marriage; women eugenicists responded to fears that a new emphasis on a

eugenic life would eradicate love and happy marriages. These patterns as a whole represent an attempt to return to the “traditional” American family amongst fears of the degeneration of the white race and American culture. Eugenics was viewed as the solution to bolster a better future for white Americans specifically. Women in the eugenics movement stood out from their male counterparts in their emphasis on home and family life; these discussions started by women would make way for the public education measures introduced in the next chapter.

Chapter Two: Public Education

The growing institution of public education as a focus of American eugenics represented a major ideological shift within the movement at the start of the 1920s. Historian Laura Lovett argues that the philosophy of American eugenics in the first two decades of the twentieth century largely followed the ideas of Charles Davenport, the leader of the Eugenics Record Office in Cold Spring Harbor, New York. Davenport’s eugenics philosophy primarily focused on research on human inheritance. However, in the 1920s, the broader eugenics movement began to shift towards an educational focus rather than research-based one. This was reflected in the rise of the American Eugenics Society. Lovett writes, “Unlike the Eugenics

Record Office, the AES emphasized education and the promotion of eugenics in American society more than scientific research."[92] With this shift away from a research focus toward an educational one, the eugenics movement gained mass popularity through its public educational models.

While academic eugenic sources generally pandered to an audience of other academic eugenicists and policy makers, some activists in the eugenics movement focused on disseminating eugenic messages to a wider audience: the whole of the American people. Like in academia, this took many forms; eugenicists targeted state and local fairs, schools, and doctor's offices with pamphlets, treatises, and exhibits in order to spread their agenda. Many of the women involved in the public health and education aspects of American eugenics were the same women who were involved in political organizing or the research and academia-based aspects of the movement.

This chapter will examine pamphlets, exhibitions, and public educational programs targeted toward a general American audience about eugenic topics during the first half of the 20th century. Across these different kinds of primary sources, a few common themes stand out. First, many social hygiene activists, and women in particular, were concerned about rising prostitution and venereal disease. Like in the academic sources discussed, these problems were deemed a "social evil" and were viewed as high-priority problems to combat through both public education and

[92] Laura L. Lovett, "'Fitter Families for Future Firesides': Florence Sherbon and Popular Eugenics," *The Public Historian* 29, no. 3 (2007): 76, JSTOR.

legislation. Solutions such as comprehensive sex education, health screenings, and the establishment of healthcare clinics were both proposed and implemented by women social hygiene activists. Additionally, prostitution and venereal disease were viewed as problems exacerbated by the world wars, so a priority in some sex education literature targeted soldiers and military bases. Women seemed particularly interested in this problem and authored many of the educational materials targeting this issue.

Secondly, at the turn of the century many women activists in particular raised a new interest in an oft overlooked category of American citizens: the baby. Activists and physicians became increasingly concerned with tackling infant mortality. Although infant mortality was the advertised focus of this mission, the ultimate aim of the focus on infant health was to create a healthier, more eugenic generation of white American children. Women also became invested in improving the act of motherhood through scientific methods. Exhibits, classes, and contests like the Better Baby Contests in fairs across the country sought to educate mothers on how best to parent their infants. Finally, advertisements in magazines such as the *Woman's Home Companion* show how deeply rooted eugenic rhetoric was into everyday life, as well as the prominent role women held as an audience for eugenic ideas.

Prior to the advent of baby health contests, eugenics had been a scientific methodology largely out of reach to the American public. Its realm

was largely managed and mitigated almost exclusively by scholars and professionals, with little information about its belief system extended to the general public. Some people may have experienced glimpses by participating in (or being subjected to) field work studies, but for the most part, the world of eugenics was uncharted territory to the average American.

In the field of eugenic public education, one organization stands out: the American Social Hygiene Association (ASHA).[93] The ASHA was founded in 1914 as a merger between two prominent social coalitions, the American Federation for Sex Hygiene and the American Vigilance Association.[94] The ASHA's primary operations involved creating state and local social hygiene clubs as well as disseminating public educational materials to local clubs, schools, and doctor's offices. The ASHA also helped to establish public health infrastructure across the country by influencing national legislation, including laws to track social problems such as venereal disease.[95] Despite these seemingly–or actually–positive national public health improvements, the ASHA was also tacitly involved in nationwide eugenic missions, especially "positive" eugenics by encouraging fertility of "fit" populations. As a whole, the ASHA was an influential institution in the realm of eugenic

[93] The American Social Hygiene Association changed its name several times over the course of the 21st century, to American Social Health Association in 1960, and then to American Sexual Health Association in 2012. See Erin Wuebker, "Social Hygiene in America," in *Public Health in America, 1890–1970* (Gale, 2020), 2, accessed March 26, 2024, https://www.gale.com/binaries/content/assets/gale-us-en/campaigns/archives-explored/essays/phma_essay_wuebker1_final.pdf.
[94] C. Walter Clarke, "The American Social Hygiene Association," *Public Health Reports (1896–1970)* 70, no. 4 (1955): 1, https://doi.org/10.2307/4589089.
[95] Wuebker, "Social Hygiene," 2.

public organizing and women in particular were crucial to its success. Like in political organizing, women were involved at all levels; the philanthropist Grace Dodge provided funding, and women such as Jane Addams of Hull House in Chicago and writer Anna Garlin Spencer were active on the board of directors for the organization.[96]

Social hygiene can be defined as the focus on the health of individuals in order to benefit society as a whole. In a speech titled “What Social Hygiene Means” in 1925, Dr. Gordon Bates declared that the “aim of social hygiene is to create a finer, happier, nobler race.” For Dr. Bates, this mission is achieved not by the government or “enthusiasts,” but by “average men and women.”[97] For Bates and other social hygiene activists, social hygiene was a public health mission that specifically sought to better the white American race.

The two organizations that the ASHA grew out of are notable for their implicit eugenic missions. The American Vigilance Association focused on eradicating “white slavery,” a contemporary term for coerced prostitution. In particular, liberal reformers sparked fear in white, upper-middle class families about the Chinese immigrant populations in the United States whom they believed would kidnap and force young white women into prostitution rings. While some women were, of course, coerced into sex

[96] "American Social Hygiene Association History and Forecast," VCU Libraries Social Welfare History Project, accessed May 12, 2024, https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/programs/health-nutrition/american-social-hygiene-association-history-and-a-forecast/.
[97] Gordon Bates, "Radio Talks: What Social Hygiene Means," *The Public Health Journal* 16, no. 8 (1925): 384, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41973351.

work, the term “white slavery” was often used to shame women who had chosen this work themselves. Labeling the role of women in sex work “slavery” effectively takes women’s agency in their decisions away.

White slavery quickly became a moral panic which rallied reform across the nation. Historian Mary Ting Yi Lui argues that this scare “coincided with the last decade of dramatic mass political mobilization for women suffrage.” She continues, “The overlap of these two social movements was hardly coincidental or accidental but reveals the ways in which public concern with racial and sexual transgressions played an important role in the woman suffrage movement.”[98] Lui explicitly connects the two movements and claims that this intertwining was purposeful. In this way, the social hygiene movement can be clearly connected to the activism done by women in the suffrage movement. Many of the women who fought for voting rights in the first two decades of the twentieth century were the same women who advocated for better social hygiene practices during this period.

Although it is clear that women were deeply tied to the social hygiene movement, not all women reformers were the same in their values or activism. Historian Erin Wuebker argues that the social hygiene movement involved the joining of two distinct groups of reformers, the “Progressive female activists” who participated in social activist and public health work such as running settlement houses or nursing, and physicians, who she

[98] Mary Ting Yi Lui, "Saving Young Girls From Chinatown: White Slavery and Woman Suffrage, 1910-1920," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 18, no. 3 (2009): 395, JSTOR.

notes were mostly male.[99] There are two important ideas to address here. Firstly, it is clear that first wave feminists promoted multiple important social activist missions at once. Wuebker accounts for Progressive era women activists who also ran settlement houses or worked as nurses. Many of these Progressive women were suffragists as well as liberal reformers, as Lui notes. Secondly, the social hygiene movement represented two important, and often juxtaposed, factions: women activists and educated men. This coalition is monumental because it represents a common mission between first wave feminists and male physicians, as well as an acknowledgement by physicians of women's own maternal health knowledge and expertise.[100]

While seemingly different factions on the surface, social hygiene and eugenics were deeply intertwined social movements. The social hygiene movement in America focused on combating many of the same social evils also identified by eugenicists. While not all social hygiene practitioners were involved in eugenics, nearly all eugenicists took part in social hygiene discourse. The language in many of the pamphlets published by the ASHA is explicitly eugenic in nature. The pamphlet titled "The Need for Sex Education" boldly claims that "No race can remain vigorous and endure when its young men are weakened by venereal disease, when its women are

[99] Wuebker, "Social Hygiene," 1.
[100] There was, however, a small subset of women physicians who were also deeply involved in the eugenics movement; many of these women participated in baby health fairs as examiners.

barren, and when its children are defective."[101] The ASHA clearly connects "defectiveness" and the inability to reproduce with venereal disease; the implicit message here is that if venereal disease is eradicated, women will be able to produce a healthier generation of children for the future of the race.

At the beginning of the 20th century, reformers began to recognize the rising dangers that venereal disease held to society when untreated and unchecked. A pamphlet published by the American Social Hygiene Association argued that "No disease known to medical science has such a murderous effect on the offspring as syphilis; no disease has such a destructive effect upon the health and reproductive power of woman as gonorrhea."[102] The ASHA identifies syphilis and gonorrhea, two of the most prevalent venereal diseases of the time, as "murderous" and "destructive" to the health of the populace. The victims specifically identified here are "offspring," or children, and women, with no mention of the harmful effects sexually transmitted infections can have on men. The focus here is not just on attacking the prevalence of venereal disease in society but also on saving women and children from its detrimental effects. The anti venereal disease campaign became more than just a healthcare issue, it became specifically eugenic through the demonizing language used against people who contracted these diseases. This vilifying language was used as a scare tactic to avoid venereal disease for the ultimate goal of race preservation.

[101] American Social Hygiene Association, "The Need For Sex Education," Box 170, Folder 14, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.
[102] American Social Hygiene Association, "The Need."

In order to combat venereal disease in the United States, reformers turned to one solution more than anything else: the introduction of comprehensive sex education. Many social hygiene activists identified more comprehensive sex education as a way to combat rising levels of venereal disease infections, despite a majority of the audience for this education being children. In a sense, sex education was seen as playing the long game with future generations and instilling social morals about how men and women should act around each other. Sex education was viewed as a way to prevent growth of the unfit population in two key ways: one being the avoidance of births of the unfit through genetic inheritance, and the other being prevention of the fit becoming unfit through contracted diseases. Sex education, then, was seen as another way to combat the proliferation of the unfit in society before they would exist at all.

The history of sex education in the United States has been contested. In 2016, Planned Parenthood released a report titled “History of Sex Education in the U.S.” which placed the start of the sex education movement firmly in the 1960s. The report reads, “Until the 1960s and 1970s, the goals of social hygiene and moral purity activists eclipsed broader sexual health concerns in the public health arena.”[103] In this timeline, Planned Parenthood argues that there was no widespread interest in sexual health education until the rise of second-wave feminism; however, this is untrue. While it is certainly true that social hygiene activists in the

[103] Planned Parenthood, *History of Sex Education in the U.S.*, 1, November 2016, accessed March 24, 2024, https://cdn.plannedparenthood.org/uploads/filer_public/da/67/da67fd5d-631d-438a-85e8-a446d90fd1e3/20170209_sexed_d04_1.pdf.

first few decades of the 20th century were focused on abstinence, it does not mean that they were not also concerned with Americans' sexual health. Historian of sexuality Julian B. Carter more correctly places the beginning of the sex education movement in the 1910s.[104] First wave feminists had different motivations to promote sex education than latter feminists, but their agenda was in some ways surprisingly similar. Second wave feminists in the 1960s and 70s focused more on sexual liberation for women, while first wave feminists were more concerned with sex education for the means of creating better, healthier children for the white race. In each case, for feminists, birth control, including the sterilization campaigns discussed in Chapter One, and sex education were an important part of the movement.

A major goal of social hygiene activists during the American eugenics movement was to introduce comprehensive sex education into schools nationwide. Teaching children about sex was then, as it is now, highly controversial; articles published on this subject addressed this apparent controversy with assurances that the educational measures would be appropriate even for young children. Many reformers wanted to address sexual health education to younger children rather than adults in a novel pivot from the previous standard. While there was still a focus on adapting sexual health information for a younger audience, many of the sex education materials for young children sought to establish healthy

[104] Julian B. Carter, "Birds, Bees, and Venereal Disease: Toward an Intellectual History of Sex Education," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 10, no. 2 (2001): 214, JSTOR.

friendships and relationships between the sexes from an early age.[105] Social hygiene activist and writer Laura B. Garrett extensively outlined a plan for teaching sex education to children in a way that is age-appropriate in an article for the *Journal of Social Hygiene*. She stressed that

> In teaching human parenthood throughout the entire course, we say over and over again that the great message from nature is this: human beings must wait till they are 'big enough and strong enough, and wise enough and good enough' before they get the cradles ready for their little ones.[106]

Garrett positioned this as the main lesson to be learned from her sex education course for children; after an introduction to how parenthood and conception works by discussing plant reproduction, Garrett emphasizes the ultimate lesson as waiting to reproduce until one is "ready." The focus on plants as a means for education is reminiscent of much of the language I highlighted in Chapter One–eugenicists sought to create connections between humans and the natural world by educating on plant reproduction before focusing on human reproduction.

Furthermore, the words Garrett uses for readiness are eugenic in nature: "big," "strong," "wise," and "good" all denote a positive eugenic value a human must wait to achieve before they should be allowed to reproduce. In this way, the word "ready" represents both a physiological and a mental achievement before one is supposed to reproduce. While the

[105] While today we would generally use the term "gender," at the time writers almost exclusively used the term "sex" to refer to this topic. When referring to contemporary rhetoric, I will use "sex," but otherwise I will use "gender."
[106] Laura B. Garrett, "How Shall We Teach?," *Journal of Social Hygiene* 1, no. 2 (1915): 259, accessed March 27, 2024, https://reader.library.cornell.edu/docviewer/digital?id=hearth4732756_183_002#page/96/mode/1up.

idea is that all of these children will reach this point eventually, inevitably some never will; many children would not grow up to fit these unclear attributes due to illness or disability later in life. These markers of readiness are constructive in discouraging teen pregnancy, but they reinforce harmful eugenic values about who should and should not be allowed to reproduce.[107]

There was some debate amongst reformers about exactly how, where, and when sex education should be relayed to children and young adults. A pamphlet by the ASHA argues that teachers should be specially trained by colleges to provide this necessary information, and that uninformed teachers would be dangerous. The pamphlet reads, “Members of these [social hygiene] societies realize, perhaps better than others, the folly of asking immature, untrained teachers to impart the facts of sex to young children.”[108] The concern here is that teachers who had not been adequately informed would be harmful rather than helpful to children when relaying this sensitive information. The pamphlet recommends training educators at the college level to best teach sex education, but this was recognized as a non-immediate solution.

Reformers like Garrett believed that starting this education at the youngest age possible would instill these values for life and cement them into future generations. Another social hygiene activist, Mabel Grier Lesher, argued that family life education should begin in kindergarten and “be

[107] The term “teen pregnancy” was not used by social hygiene activists. Instead, much of the language focused on encouraging young women to wait until they were “ready,” which was likely believed to be when in the early 20s.
[108] American Social Hygiene Association, "The Need For Sex Education," Box 170, Folder 14, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

continued throughout the twelve grades as an integral part of the training in character building."[109] For Lesher, sex education does not only guarantee the health of the child in their adolescence and adulthood, but also develops their character and prepares them for an emotionally healthy life through marriage and reproduction. It was imagined that these topics would start simply, with discussions of reproduction in plants and then animals before building up to the more sensitive topic of human reproduction.

Sex education aimed at children was also viewed as a way to infuse eugenic values into the minds of young children. Garrett wrote that "During this discussion it is easy to inculcate high ideals of citizenship, and the great importance of national and international brotherhood."[110] Garrett believed that these conversations around eugenics and parenthood paved the way naturally into a conversation about improving the nation and the race as a whole. Garrett's rhetoric here also holds some explicit nationalistic overtones; she believes that by instilling eugenic values to improve the race, children will grow up to appreciate their identity as Americans, and more specifically, white Americans.

Sex education had multiple goals beyond decreasing rates of venereal disease; reformers also sought to redraw social norms between men and women from a young age. Lesher wrote that the three main goals of this educational process were to

[109] Mabel Grier Lesher, "An Approach to Sex Education in Schools," 1941, Box 174, Folder 05, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.
[110] Garrett, "How Shall," 259.

> develop (1) wholesome satisfying relationships between boys and girls, (2) finer present homo relationships, and (3) ultimately, the wise selection of life partners, constructive marriage, homo making and parenthood, or fine adult living outside of marriage.[111]

Lesher's defined goals of sex education are interesting for a few key reasons. Foremost, Lesher identifies "wholesome" and "satisfying" relationships between young boys and girls as a key goal and stepping stone to achieving healthy relationships between men and women as adults. At this time, physicians and reformers such as Lesher began to recognize the value in opposite sex friendships in childhood in order to foster healthy relationships into adulthood. Lesher's delineation of this idea here is notable in that this is listed as a primary goal of the sex education mission as a whole. Lesher also seems to prioritize same sex relationships through her mention of "finer present homo relationships."

Secondly, Lesher discerned between a few different life "options" for young men and women, including a life "outside" of marriage. Lesher seems to condone a life without marriage and reproduction and offers it as a fine alternative to the norm. In a similar way to many of the academics sources I have examined, reformers like Lesher in the public education field tended to contradict themselves to an extent; marriage was still seen as the goal for the majority of the population but alternatives, like Lesher's "life outside of marriage," are presented to the unfit who were discouraged from reproducing. What this life would have looked like was not explained;

[111] Lesher, "An Approach."

however, the importance of labor and “contribution” to society was emphasized when discussing the value of the unfit. If one could not achieve value to society through reproduction of fit children, they were expected to contribute by working and contributing to the economy.

Sex education was also generally divided between the genders. Pamphlets with titles such as “For Girls,” “Questions and Answers for Girls,” and “From Boy to Man,” targeted sexual health information specifically to one gender or the other.[112] Many of the pamphlets aimed towards girls focus on issues of beauty and hygiene, while the pamphlets for young boys discuss the issue of sexual impulses or urges and how to control them. The avoidance of this topic in many of the pamphlets aimed toward young women suggests that the need for self control was believed to be only a boy’s problem. The girls pamphlets also tend to focus more on the threat of venereal disease and quelling the fears surrounding it. The pamphlet “For Girls” reassures young women that they should not “be hysterically alarmed” by these facts and that they should help to eradicate these diseases that “may become a national health plague if men and women continue to be ignorant and prudish.”[113] This language not only assumes that women are more concerned or “alarmed” by this issue than men, but it

[112] American Social Hygiene Association, "For Girls," Box 171, Folder 02, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN; American Social Hygiene Association, "Questions and Answers for Girls," Box 170, Folder 01, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN; American Social Hygiene Association, "Other Sex Education Publications of the ASHA," Box 173, Folder 14, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.
[113] American Social Hygiene Association, "For Girls," Box 171, Folder 02, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

also acknowledges that both men and women have the burden of responsibility in ending the “plague” of venereal disease. While information on venereal disease is included in some educational materials aimed towards men, its repeated inclusion in women’s materials signifies a greater burden placed on women.

Despite this emphasis on teaching sex education separately, socializing young girls and boys together more generally was seen as important to childhood and adolescent development. In her pamphlet “Social Hygiene and the Child,” Dr. Valeria Parker, a suffragist, medical doctor, and policewoman, argued that children had a “natural need for wholesome play outlets and boy and girl companionship during childhood and adolescence.”[114] For Parker, children have not only a natural inclination, but a “need” to socialize with the opposite sex during childhood. Parker encouraged not separating children not just in playtime but also in school. She continued, “Boys and girls have sought one another for joyful adventures since the world began. Any attempt to thwart or repress the urge for friendship and admiration which one sex holds for the other swells the rebellious tide.”[115] At this time, children were often separated by sex for both school and play, which Parker and others believed would cause inappropriate relationships as children got older. This rebellion could have devastating consequences, especially as young men and women grow up –

[114] Valeria Parker, "Social Hygiene and the Child," Box 173, Folder 13, University of Minnesota Libraries, Social Welfare History Archives, Accessed January 12, 2024. https://umedia.lib.umn.edu/item/p16022coll223:193587.
[115] Parker, “Social Hygiene.”

Parker's justification for socializing between the genders in youth was viewed as another way to prevent illegitimacy, sex outside of marriage, and venereal disease.

Beyond sex education for children, some reformers focused on educating soldiers during both World War I and II about sexual health in order to reduce rates of venereal disease among those participating in the war effort. What is interesting about documents focused on social hygiene and the war, however, is that many of them were written by women at a time when women could not serve. For many women reformers, providing education on sexual health and wellness to men serving in the army was a way to contribute to the United States military without being able to serve themselves.

Some areas in the country considered other reform initiatives to combat high rates of venereal disease in their communities such as opening clinics and closing red light districts. Reformer Kathryn Close wrote a pamphlet for the American Social Hygiene Association in 1943 about the rates of venereal disease in the United States military during World War II by using the city of San Antonio as a case study. San Antonio became a notable location for this study both due to its several close military bases as well as its reputation as an "open city" with a red light district. Close noted that the "rate of army hospital admissions for venereal diseases was more than three times as high in the San Antonio area as in the army as a

whole."[116] Here again, the identified root of the issue was prostitution in the city, and in this case, it threatened the health and efficacy of the United States military at wartime. The need for eugenically fit soldiers was crucial; sick or disabled soldiers could compromise the war effort and the nation as a whole. Close wrote that the first solution to the problem was a private clinic designed specifically to treat women who were carriers of venereal disease. According to Close, in order to save the health of the male soldiers, reformers sought to cleanse the problem through the women of the town exclusively, rather than targeting infected men as patients for the clinic. When the effectiveness of the clinic was called into question, the town decided to close the entire district via police force.

Reflecting the taboos of the era, Close's article used harmful, animal-like rhetoric when describing young women especially. Close cited an analogy used by military epidemiologist Lt. Col. Alonzo F. Brand, writing that "compares venereal disease to malaria; prostitutes to malaria-carrying mosquitoes; a house of prostitution or a segregated district to a swamp."[117] Brand–and consequently Close, by publishing his argument–promotes harmful stereotypes about women who participated in sex work during the period by comparing them to "mosquitoes" who carry disease rather than women who are victims of disease themselves.

[116] Kathryn Close, "Sick Men Can't Fight," Box 175, Folder 04, University of Minnesota Libraries, Social Welfare History Archives, Accessed January 16, 2024, https://umedia.lib.umn.edu/item/p16022coll223:43937.
[117] Close, "Sick Men Can't Fight," 5.

Close went even further; when describing other identified sources of venereal disease in the city, she described “another disease carrier” as the prostitute’s “sister of amateur standing, the promiscuous girl.”[118] Close both sexualizes and infantilizes this figure with her language, calling her a “child… caught up by the glamor of the uniform and the excitement of the war.”[119] Calling these young women “girls” or “children” effectively takes away their agency; Close instead depicts them as wide-eyed and confused young girls and yet still dangerous vectors of disease. Close’s report continuously blames women, especially young women, rather than the men who participated equally in illicit sexual acts. Close is representative of a body of women reformers who identified as advocates for women in ways that we would now see as antithetical to feminism. Instead, they sought to police women’s bodies rather than liberate them, as later feminists would. Close’s depiction of the policing of women’s sexuality during this period reflects a similar nature to the justifications used by men to sterilize women but this time perpetrated by women themselves.

Baby Saving and Maternal Advice

Infant mortality was also identified as a major public health concern at the beginning of the 20th century. With the rise of modern medicine, many illnesses and diseases were increasingly treatable as the average lifespan was lengthened, but many infants still faced dire situations. In

[118] Close, "Sick Men Can’t Fight," 5.
[119] Close, "Sick Men Can’t Fight," 6.

particular, infant mortality was a large problem in urban areas, largely due to the dependence on bottle feeding by urban mothers.[120] "Baby saving" became a new and important goal, but this mission also included more explicitly eugenic aims; maternal and infant health education was focused not just on ending infant mortality, but also on creating a more eugenic generation of babies in order to better the white American race.

In a mission to improve infant and maternal care nationwide, the federal government authorized the creation of the Children's Bureau in 1913. The Children's Bureau primarily focused on ending infant mortality but also more generally focused on improving healthcare for children and mothers. The Children's Bureau was headed by Julia Lathrop, who had previously worked at Jane Addams's Hull House in Chicago. Lathrop's tenure at the Children's Bureau signified a tie between the settlement house movement and the baby saving movement, as both were Progressive era movements that aimed to improve the lives of average Americans. The Children's Bureau's main goal at its founding was ending infant death by being the first governmental organization to collect and study infant mortality rates across the country. Furthermore, historian Alexandra Minna Stern argues that the Children's Bureau was founded on the ethos of progressive maternalism. Using women's recently achieved right to vote, Stern claims, progressive maternalists resolved to put forth a policy agenda

[120] At this time, many mothers used cow's milk rather than baby formula, which did cause a great deal of infant deaths. Of course, there were many other factors that would have contributed to infant mortality at this time, but bottle versus breastfeeding arose as a major debate among social hygiene activists.

that prioritized better babies. Through this philosophy, the Children's Bureau pushed a program of ending infant mortality while promoting private physicians rather than informal and traditional networks of care.[121]

Infant mortality was not only viewed as a hereditarian issue; many social hygiene activists criticized issues of nurture as well. Debates about milk and breastfeeding became central to the cause of ending infant mortality in the early 20th century. Public health activists urged women to avoid bottle feeding if at all possible; breastfeeding was seen as the best option for reducing infant mortality. Historian and psychologist Annette Vance Dorey notes that "The death of one-third of the children under age five was considered preventable and largely due to 'impure milk.'"[122] *The Indiana Mothers' Baby Book*, an informational book given to all mothers who registered infants in the state of Indiana, declared that "80% of the babies that die are bottle-fed. Bottle feeding is unnatural."[123] Breastfeeding was seen as the best recourse for mothers in order to avoid infant death. Even still, bottle feeding was seen as the only alternative for mothers who could not breastfeed their children.

Debates about the best way to feed your children, whether bottle or breast fed, became a way in which child rearing expertise was outsourced to physicians, public health officials, and even journalists rather than

[121] Alexandra Minna Stern, "Making Better Babies: Public Health and Race Betterment in Indiana, 1920–1935," *American Journal of Public Health* 92, no. 5 (2002): 745.
[122] Annette K. Vance Dorey, *Better Baby Contests: The Scientific Quest for Perfect Childhood Health in the Early Twentieth Century* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1999), 15.
[123] Indiana State Board of Health, *The Indiana Mothers' Baby Book* (1920), 51, accessed April 7, 2024, https://hdl.handle.net/1805/1104.

mothers themselves. This debate was largely so controversial because it was seen as vital to the economic success of physicians. Professor of Nursing Diane Thulier argues that physicians saw breastfeeding conversations as a way to "control" women; she writes, "Physicians wanted mothers to understand that they needed to visit doctors and to follow their instructions but not to possess so much information that they could ignore or interfere with their physician's advice."[124] Thulier claims that doctors used this breastfeeding debate as a way to otherwise influence mothers to follow their advice. The breastfeeding issue was used as a sort of "gateway" conversation between physicians and patients to convince young women that their doctor's advice was valuable.

With the new focus on eradicating infant mortality, the concept of motherhood shifted across the United States; motherhood was no longer a trusted instinct. Instead, motherhood became a shared community of advice and expertise. There were obvious upsides and downsides to this new philosophy towards child rearing. On the positive side, women were no longer alone and had trusted sources to guide them through what had once often been a lonely process with little formalized help for the average mother outside of their traditional community and family networks. However, on the down side, many women felt as though they could no longer trust themselves or their own instincts to care for their children. This instilled a feeling of inadequacy in many mothers.

[124] Diane Thulier, "Breastfeeding in America: A History of Influencing Factors," *Journal of Human Lactation* 25, no. 1 (2009): 88, SAGE Journals Online.

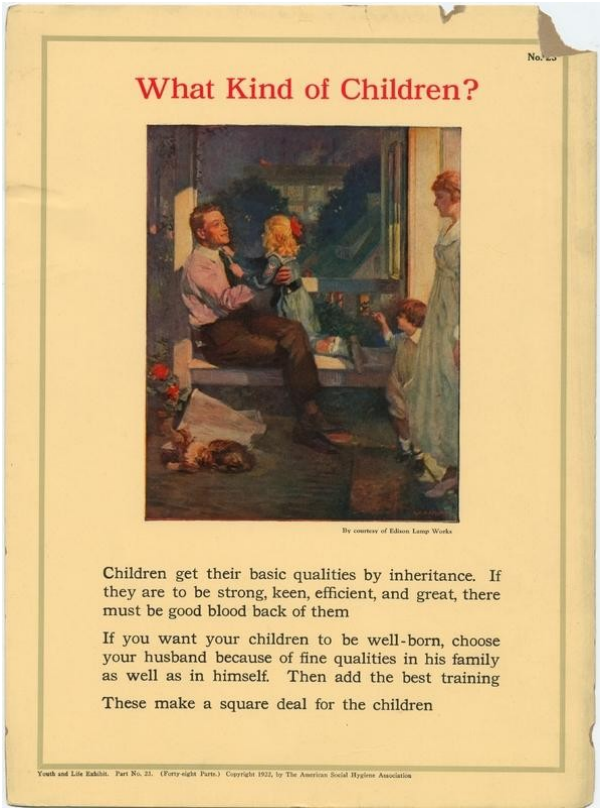
In addition to encouraging mothers to pursue professional maternal advice after the births of their children, eugenicists also pushed women to seek counseling before marriage even began. Ensuring the positive eugenic value of a family began before the family itself was even created by introducing eugenic counseling during a couple's engagement. Eugenic activists during the first few decades of the twentieth century believed that premarital screening and counseling was the best way to ensure a eugenic family life for the couple. A pamphlet published by the ASHA titled "Preparing for Your Marriage" instructs that "A thorough physical examination ought to be one of the 'firsts' for the engaged couple."[125] By this recommendation, once a couple was engaged their eugenic potential should be considered before all else, including wedding planning. Furthermore, this examination would also include a thoughtful consideration of the couple's individual family health histories. The pamphlet reads, "A family history of serious illnesses, mental diseases or alcoholism requires careful consideration and medical advice."[126] While a potential partner having a "bad" family history does not necessarily exclude them from marriage in the language used here, it is clear that this was a consideration to be taken seriously by both partners. Engaged couples were encouraged to participate in these premarital health screenings in order to

[125] American Social Health Association, "Preparing for Your Marriage," 1952, Box 176, Folder 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN. https://umedia.lib.umn.edu/item/p16022coll223:69603/p16022coll223:69579?child_index=0&facets%5Bcontributing_organization_name_s%5D%5B%5D=University%20of%20Minnesota%20Libraries%2C%20Social%20Welfare%20History%20Archives.&page=2&q=%22men%20and%20women%22&query=&sidebar_page=1
[126] American Social Health Association, "Preparing for Your Marriage."

have the happiest future as a married couple, which necessitated good health for themselves and their children. For eugenicists, including a doctor, and therefore the field of science, into all lifetime milestones was the only way to ensure a better future for the white race.

Additionally, groups like the American Social Hygiene Association engaged in public outreach campaigns to educate young couples and families about a eugenic life through good marital and reproductive choices In 1922, the ASHA published two different poster series about social health and hygiene issues; one series was aimed towards young men and the other towards young women. In general, each of the posters in either series include an image (typically painted or sketched, sometimes a photograph) with a simple, hard hitting caption. Topics of the posters ranged from syphilis and other venereal diseases, family life, and how to choose the right partner for marriage. As a whole, the posters aimed towards men (part of a series called “Keeping Fit”) generally focused on physical fitness as well as education on reproduction and the “sex impulse.” The women’s series, titled “Youth and Life,” focused instead on homemaking, child rearing, and bodily hygiene, in addition to the anatomical explanation aspect.[127]

[127] Some posters aimed toward women gave advice about how to maintain beauty in a hygienic way. One poster titled “Beauty That Will Last” advises young women to brush their hair every day and brush their teeth twice a day. See American Social Hygiene Association, *Beauty That Will Last*, 1925, image, https://gallery.lib.umn.edu/exhibits/show/youth_and_life/item/68.

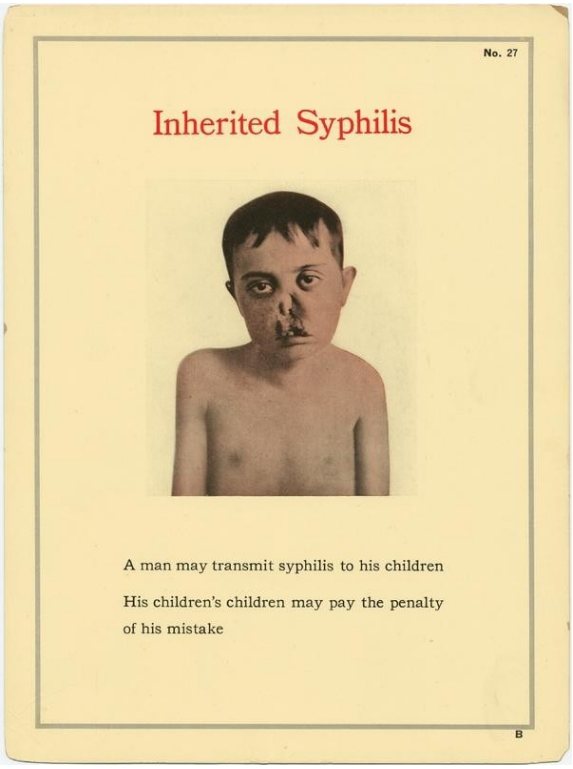


American Social Hygiene Association, What Kind of Children?, 1922, illustration, accessed April 7, 2024, https://gallery.lib.umn.edu/exhibits/show/youth_and_life/item/56

One poster from the Youth and Life series aimed towards women titled “What Kind of Children?” emphasized the importance of choosing a good husband for healthy reproduction. The poster recommended that young women “Choose [their] husband because of fine qualities in his family as well as in himself.”[128] The ASHA encouraged young women to look beyond just the man they are thinking about marrying; they were urged to look at what his family was like as well in order to determine possibly heredity of their hypothetical children. The poster further advises that children with “good blood” and “the best training” achieve a “square deal”

[128] American Social Hygiene Association, *What Kind of Children?*, 1922, illustration, accessed April 7, 2024, https://gallery.lib.umn.edu/exhibits/show/youth_and_life/item/56.

in life.[129] The combination of good genetics and good “training” indicate that social hygiene reformers believed in both nature and nurture for good health, rather than simply heredity. This belief diverged from some eugenicists of the time; reformers like Charles Davenport, the director of the Eugenics Record Office, were “strictly hereditarian” in that they did not believe nurture had influence on fitness of an individual.[130] As a whole, women reformers in the ASHA and other social hygiene organizations at this time believed in the value of nature and nurture far more equally and placed emphasis on each in their public education measures.



American Social Hygiene Association, Inherited Syphilis, 1922, photograph, accessed April 7, 2024, https://gallery.lib.umn.edu/exhibits/show/swha_keeping_fit/item/2

[129] American Social Hygiene Association, *What Kind of Children?.*
[130] Lovett, "'Fitter Families," 76.

Rather than advising men on how to choose a wife, ASHA posters warned men of the dangers of promiscuity and its consequences. The posters aimed towards men were often very blunt and used scare tactics in order to enforce eugenic values. One poster, titled “Inherited Syphilis,” features a photograph of a child with a cleft palate. The image is simply captioned: “A man may transmit syphilis to his children. His children’s children may pay the penalty for his mistake.”[131] The text, especially combined with the image, are ominous. The poster includes no explanation of what the “penalty” for congenital syphilis is, besides the implication that it could cause birth defects such as the cleft palate shown in the photograph. Furthermore, the phrase “children’s children” in the poster warns of a generational consequence for men’s actions. Evidently, reformers believed that these traits acquired by disease could then be inherited by future children down the line. This methodology is largely absent from the women’s poster series; reformers likely believed that young men were more likely to have sex outside of marriage and contract venereal disease that they would then pass on to their future wives. This assumption diverges from the beliefs present in many of the academic sources, which place the burden of social evil on the promiscuity of “feebleminded” young women.

As a whole, both the men’s and women’s poster series showcase a pattern of eugenic thought in the field of public education on social hygiene

[131] American Social Hygiene Association, *Inherited Syphilis*, 1922, photograph, accessed April 7, 2024, https://gallery.lib.umn.edu/exhibits/show/swha_keeping_fit/item/251.

matters. Like in other sex education materials, some of the posters feature illustrations of how reproduction works in plants (“Reproduction in the Plant”) and in animals using photographs (“Reproduction in the Chick”).[132] Other topics include the “correct dancing position” for men and women, exercise, healthy eating, and more.[133] The combination of both scientific views on health as well as guidance for behaviors represents a focus on not just individual responsibility but also social behavior for creating a healthier, more eugenic society.

One measure of health screening encouraged at this time was pre-screening pregnancy through blood tests of the mother. A pamphlet circulated by the ASHA titled “Safe Motherhood and a Healthy Child” read, “One of the main reasons that so many expectant mothers and new-born children die, and that others have poor health, is because many such mothers do not place themselves early enough in the hands of a competent doctor.”[134] Although men were sometimes encouraged to get similar screenings, many pamphlets from the early 20th century specifically targeted pregnant women as the market for this procedure. Furthermore,

[132] See American Social Hygiene Association, *Reproduction in the Plant*, 1922, image, accessed May 12, 2024, https://gallery.lib.umn.edu/exhibits/show/youth_and_life/item/60; American Social Hygiene Association, *Reproduction in the Chick*, 1922, image, accessed May 12, 2024, https://gallery.lib.umn.edu/exhibits/show/youth_and_life/item/59.
[133] See American Social Hygiene Association, *Danger in Familiarities*, 1922, image, accessed May 12, 2024, https://gallery.lib.umn.edu/exhibits/show/youth_and_life/item/46; American Social Hygiene Association, *Exercise upon Arising*, 1922, image, accessed May 12, 2024, https://gallery.lib.umn.edu/exhibits/show/swha_keeping_fit/item/270; American Social Hygiene Association, *Eat Wholesome Food*, 1922, image, accessed May 12, 2024, https://gallery.lib.umn.edu/exhibits/show/swha_keeping_fit/item/267.
[134] American Social Hygiene Association, "Safe Motherhood and a Healthy Child," (Box 173, Folder 07), 1937, accessed January 12, 2024, https://umedia.lib.umn.edu/item/p16022coll223:193443.

this pamphlet also reveals the true eugenic purpose of pregnancy screenings: to avoid production of “unfit” babies. The pamphlet cautioned that even the infected babies who survive to birth “are likely to be crippled in body and mind.”[135] Rather than attempting to cure disability at birth or in early childhood, the prescreening movement pushed prevention over cures. The burden of ensuring the health of the infant is placed solely on the mother here. The pre-screening blood test for pregnancy was explicitly designed to protect against congenital syphilis. As the “Safe Motherhood” pamphlet warned, “Many children of mothers infected with syphilis are born dead because the mothers did not receive treatment.”[136] This statement explicitly places the blame of infant death on the mother for not receiving adequate medical care. Paradoxically, the focus on mothers receiving health screenings here contradicts the message of the ASHA posters which place the blame on men for contracting syphilis. Both examples provide evidence of a litany of finger pointing among eugenicists in the early decades of the 20th century.

Some pamphlets circulated by the ASHA acknowledged that some families may not be able to afford a private doctor. These pamphlets, unlike the “Safe Motherhood” pamphlet and others, did include instructions on how to find a doctor. A pamphlet titled “For Expectant Mothers” apprised women, “Do not attempt to go through this important time without the advice and supervision of your doctor. If you cannot afford a private

[135] American Social Hygiene Association, "Safe Motherhood."
[136] American Social Hygiene Association, "Safe Motherhood."

physician, go to a prenatal clinic."[137] At this time, many women felt they did not need a doctor throughout pregnancy, but the ASHA advised against this method. This quotation is a great representation of historian Steven Selden's argument about the privatization of health responsibility. Women were expected to find their own doctor and only attend a public clinic as a last resort. Above all else, it was the mother's responsibility to acquire her own access to healthcare and the burden of consequence is placed upon her if she did not meet the established scientific standard of care.

Selden argues that with the new focus on eradicating infant mortality, "responsibility moved from the state to the mother."[138] Previously, it had been the state's obligation to protect the health and wellbeing of its people, but that duty quickly shifted to the mother as public health information became more widespread. Moreover, Selden also argues that "to a degree, the responsibility had been privatized."[139] In the context of maternal care, for example, women were responsible for doctor's visits and the consequent health of their infant, while men were not expected to take on this same responsibility in any noted capacity. Additionally, the word "competent" is key; many women did not have easy access to a doctor at this time, especially well-educated ones. The local town doctor may not be "good enough" to examine a woman's health for pregnancy, instead, an expecting

[137] American Social Hygiene Association, "For Expectant Mothers," 1935, (Box 173, Folder 04), https://umedia.lib.umn.edu/item/p16022coll223:193787.
[138] Steven Selden, "Transforming Better Babies into Fitter Families: Archival Resources and the History of the American Eugenics Movement, 1908-1930," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 149, no. 2 (2005): 209, JSTOR.
[139] Selden, "Transforming Better," 210.

woman needs to find a “competent” one, but how to analyze the competence of a doctor is not explained in the pamphlet. For eugenicists and social hygiene activists, the inclusion of a doctor in the cycle of motherhood was not enough; women should be seeking out a “good” doctor who was especially knowledgeable, rather than simply the local doctor who may not know as much about maternal care.

Some public health pamphlets published by the ASHA aimed to establish trust among families and their doctors, especially families of color. A pamphlet titled “Our family is having its blood test like thousands of others” showed an image of a Black family being blood tested on the front cover. The pamphlet does not acknowledge why some Americans may not have trusted their doctors, but the inclusion of a Black family on the cover suggests that this distrust was particularly prevalent among nonwhite families in America. This pamphlet, which was clearly aimed toward Black families, included more details about how to find a “good” doctor, which other pamphlets aimed more generally toward white families did not include. The pamphlet instructed, “If you don’t know a good doctor, ask your County Medical Society or Health Department where you can go for a blood test and treatment.”[140] Implicit in these pamphlets is the assumption that Black families did not have access to a doctor, while white families did. Furthermore, on the back of the pamphlet, a young Black woman points to

[140] Mary S. Edwards, "Our Family Is Having Its Blood Test Like Thousands of Others," (Box 173, Folder 10), University of Minnesota Libraries, Social Welfare History Archives, Accessed January 12, 2024. https://umedia.lib.umn.edu/item/p16022coll223:194853.

the phrase “trust your doctor, he is your best friend.”[141] Evidently, the reformers perceived a mistrust in Black families in their doctors and sought to reassure them. Social hygiene activists made attempts through their public education measures, such as the pamphlets examined here, in order to convince American families to visit private physicians in hopes of creating a more eugenic society for all.

Better Babies: Contests and More

The idea of the Better Babies Contests was first popularized by the *Woman’s Home Companion (WHC)*, a popular woman’s magazine covering topics from homemaking to politics. The editors at the Companion formed the Better Babies Bureau in 1913 specifically to publicize the Better Baby Contests throughout the nation.[142] At this time, the WHC was one of the top three circulated women’s magazines in the United States.[143] The Companion became a reliable source of advice and trusted information for women across the country, and reformers used this platform to their advantage.

The purpose of the Better Babies Contests was described in the Illinois Health News in 1917 as “devoting more attention to babies for the purpose of producing a better physical and intellectual type of men and

[141] Mary S. Edwards, “Our Family.”
[142] Reem Gerais, "Better Babies Contests in the United States (1908–1916)," Embryo Project Encyclopedia, last modified May 14, 2017, https://hdl.handle.net/10776/11493.
[143] Mary Ellen Zuckerman, "From Educated Citizen to Educated Consumer: The Good Citizenship and Pro-Advertising Campaigns in the 'Woman's Home Companion' 1920–1938," *American Periodicals* 5 (1995): 87, JSTOR.

women."[144] The stated mission was explicitly eugenic; the Illinois Health News's description of the contests is explained here to be creating a healthier future race of adults by focusing attention on babies. Additionally, the eugenic goal is twofold: to produce both better physicality and intellect in the race. The eugenic mission was not focused just on the physical health of the future race but also the intelligence and academic ability which would be able to further advance society. This mission of both intellectualism alongside physical health seems to hint at a dual focus on nature and nurture. Once again, the creation of a eugenic child did not stop after birth; mothers were expected to nurture their children in a eugenic way in order to create smarter, healthier, and stronger adults.

Besides popularizing baby health contests, the *Woman's Home Companion* also provided a wealth of advice on motherhood and child rearing. Caroline French Benton, an author of cookbooks and writer for the WHC, published a column titled "The Trained Motherhood Club" in each edition of the magazine. The idea of "trained motherhood" harks back to many of the ideas discussed in the first chapter, such as those mentioned in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Concerning Children,* like the belief that young women should be educated on how best to mother their children. Benton argues that club women should "read on this subject some of the words

[144] Illinois State Board of Health, *Illinois Health News*, 3, no.3 (March 1917), 51, accessed April 7, 2024, https://books.google.com/books?id=DTRNAAAAMAAJ&dq=%E2%80%9CBetter+Babies:+Suggestions+for+Organizing+and+Conducting+Better+Baby+Conferences.%E2%80%9D+Illinois+Health+News&source=gbs_navlinks_.

written recently, not from a sentimental but a scientific standpoint."[145] Benton, like Gilman, promoted rational thinking over instinct in child rearing with her recommendation that women study the best practices in parenting not from a sentimental standpoint, but a scientific one. This ideology relates back to the guidance on women visiting private physicians, as women were expected not to rely on their family and surrounding community for maternal advice but instead on complete strangers. Furthermore, unlike the Children's Bureau and other governmental resources, the *Woman's Home Companion* and its focus on maternal advice illustrates a corporate interest and benefit from the maternal advice industry. The writers and editors at the WHC, like Benton and others, profited off of distributing this advice to the same women they shamed into needing it.

The Better Babies Bureau featured in the *Woman's Home Companion* magazine became another trusted source for young mothers on how best to care for their children as the maternal advice industry arose in the first few decades of the twentieth century. Even as maternal advice became normalized, some women felt ashamed for seeking this information, and some articles attempted to address this issue. An article promoting the Better Babies Bureau reassured women receiving pamphlets of advice that "No mention of the Better Babies Bureau is made on the envelopes in which

[145] Caroline French Benton, "Women's Clubs: Trained Motherhood," *Woman's Home Companion*, October 1915, 36, HathiTrust.

the material is mailed."[146] Being discreet about receiving this information was clearly important to many women. The *Woman's Home Companion* and the Better Babies Bureau revolutionized maternal and infant health care advice by making it more accessible to women across the country.

Much like the biblical and scientific allusions used in academia that I examined in the first chapter, Better Baby Contests used scientific language, particularly that reminiscent of agriculture, to establish credibility with their audience. The Illinois Health News represented the contests as "the application of 'live stock principles' to the young of the human race."[147] Public health reformers did not shy away from the animal comparisons, which today come across as dehumanizing. This agricultural language stemmed from the environment in which these Better Baby Contests first grew in Iowa and the greater Midwest region.[148] Modeled after livestock competitions, the first baby health contest was held in the bread basket and agricultural center of the United States. By comparing baby health to raising prized livestock, contest organizers gained credibility with skeptical rural audiences. In addition, Lovett argues that eugenic health contests "were staged at agricultural fairs because many eugenicists at this time idealized the rural family."[149] Some believed that rural families

[146] "What the Better Babies Bureau Is," *Woman's Home Companion*, January 1918, 46, accessed April 9, 2024, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/umn.319510028031086.
[147] Illinois State Board of Health, *Illinois Health News*, 52.
[148] The location of the first baby health contest is debated; Steven Selden places the first contest in Louisiana in 1908. See Steven Selden, "Transforming Better Babies into Fitter Families: Archival Resources and the History of the American Eugenics Movement, 1908-1930," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 149, no. 2 (2005): JSTOR.
[149] Lovett, "'Fitter Families," 83.

were the pinnacle of American life and culture, and by modeling these contests after American agricultural fairs, more Americans would be brought back to these traditional values.

Illinois Health News (Springfield, IL), March 1917, vol. 3, No. 3 edition, 49, accessed May 13, 2024, https://books.google.com/books?id=DTRNAAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

The livestock comparison was an important justification in establishing the baby contests. Images and cartoons showing babies and animals were one such way in which the contests were promoted and justified to the average family. These kinds of images and cartoons are significant for their portrayal of the ideal American family and their specifications of what that may have looked like. In many cases, these images were aspirational, but they also sought to encourage conformity to eugenic values. One cartoon shown in the Illinois Health News showed a baby holding a prize cup seated beside a prize cat, rabbit, dog, and

chickens. Above the baby and animals, a banner in the cartoon reads "County Fair: It pays to raise good stock." The cartoon as a whole is captioned "A new dignity for the baby – at last the young human receives consideration."[150] For better baby reformers, devoting attention to the health of the baby through these contests was a "dignity" being awarded to an overlooked class in society. This dignity had been applied to animals through careful breeding and attention through livestock contests. By placing the baby between animals commonly held as pets–as well as working animals–by many families, the cartoon served as a reminder that babies were a valuable part of the American family and should be treated as such.

In the Better Baby Contests, there was a clear element of pageantry in the method in which infants and toddlers were examined. While babies were measured for their positive or negative eugenic potential as measured by physical fitness (such as height and weight, among many other factors) and intellectual capability, there was an element of beauty in the examinations. Although exact specifications varied from contest to contest without total standardization, many contests included features such as "symmetry" in their analysis of perfection. Similarly, babies could also have points deducted for "irregular" or "defective" features, such as being too short or too tall, or having large ears or noses.[151] While the contests may have purported to be scientific in nature, there was certainly an aspect of

[150] Illinois State Board of Health, *Illinois Health News,* 49.
[151] Vance Dorey, *Better Baby,* 60, 63.

aesthetic appeal that signifies subjectivity in scoring. Nevertheless, the contests were generally regarded as authoritative, and mothers sought advice on how to mitigate these defects in order to improve their baby's eugenic potential.

In addition to beauty being taken into account, race often was as well. Some baby health contests gave prizes separated by race and even evaluated babies separately. In the eugenic worldview, non-white babies were wholly separate from white ones and were considered inferior to the superior white race. As such, non-white babies were evaluated on their set of markers defined by different standards. Vance Dorey notes that some localities divided their contests by different categories, with race being one category that was differentiated.[152] Organizers in Indianapolis, for example, divided their contest between "white" and "colored" babies.[153] Some contests directly excluded babies of color. However, as a whole, the contests were almost exclusively targeted towards a white, middle class audience, with little participation in most contests from families of color. Since the contests were decentralized with no true overarching structure to govern them, individual fairs and towns were given the freedom to exclude or segregate as they wished.

In response, the NAACP founded their own branch of baby health contests targeted exclusively toward Black families in the 1920s. Unlike white American baby contests, the NAACP's contests focused on both

[152] Other categories included, age, sex, bottle or breast fed, or whether or not the baby was raised in an urban or rural area.
[153] Vance Dorey, *Better Baby*, 49.

eugenic principles as well as social justice. The aim of these contests, then, was twofold: to raise money for anti-lynching initiatives and to push the "Tenth Crusade," a movement which sought intraracial improvement and social control. Law scholar Gregory Michael Dorr and professor of nonprofit administration Angela Logan describe the Tenth Crusade as a "movement within a movement," fitting into W.E.B. DuBois's "Talented Tenth" framework which pursued a class uplift of the most "talented," or otherwise "fit," Black Americans.[154] For Dorr and Logan, this idea falls under what they call "assimilationist eugenics," which aimed to better humanity by distinguishing between the "fit" and "unfit" regardless of race.[155] Black Americans specifically used the idea of "assimilationist" eugenics to establish an ideology specific to Black American culture that focused on improving the Black race with the benefit of better assimilating into white American society. This aspect of eugenic ideology is severely overlooked and under researched by historians as Dorr and Logan are one of very few scholars to publish on this subject.

The goal of combatting lynching through eugenic baby contests was by no means random. Dorr and Logan write that "from the perspective of Du Bois and many others, lynching thus claimed the very flower of black youth–the best and brightest who were unwilling to genuflect before

[154] Gregory Michael Dorr and Angela Logan, "'Quality, Not Mere Quantity, Counts': Black Eugenics and the NAACP Baby Contests," in *A Century of Eugenics in America: From the Indiana Experiment to the Human Genome Era*, comp. Paul A. Lombardo (n.p.: Indiana University Press, 2011), 81, EBSCO eBook Collection.
[155] Dorr and Logan, "'Quality, Not Mere," 69.

racists."[156] In this way, lynching was specifically deteriorating the Black race by murdering who Du Bois imagined as the Talented Tenth–the most hopeful and "fit" future of Black youth, who were expected to reproduce better generations of Black Americans. Dorr and Logan claim that "breeding an improved black population–one genetically predisposed to achieve beyond white expectation or reproach–offered another mode of resistance. Du Bois and other assimilationist eugenicists fought white supremacy on both fronts: the political and the biological."[157] Baby health contests, then, by raising money for anti-lynching measures while also educating the Black population in America about eugenics, was expected to improve the future of the Black race through better breeding.

In all iterations of the Better Babies contests, the eugenic value of a baby was not seen as set at birth by contest examiners. For many contest administrators, the purpose of the contest was more than just education but also improvement. In this way, the contests encouraged an interest in both nature and nurture in creating a eugenic child, rather than a strictly hereditarian view. Vance Dorey writes that baby health contests

> were a unique blending of the two theories, claiming that heredity shaped superior human development and that domestic practices (sanitation, sleeping conditions, systematic feeding, and so forth) made significant differences in a child's development and health. This thinking acknowledged the interrelated influence of a family's nationality (heredity), rural or urban residence (environment), and maternal habits (nurture).[158]

[156] Dorr and Logan, "Quality, Not Mere," 83.
[157] Dorr and Logan, "'Quality, Not Mere," 83.
[158] Vance Dorey, *Better Baby*, 72.

By including an emphasis on nurture and environmental factors alongside heredity, which could not be changed once an infant was born, baby health contests instilled hope in young mothers that their “imperfect” babies could improve with a mother’s hard work and determination. This ideology differs from much of the research put out by eugenicists which emphasized a solely hereditarian view. The Better Babies contests perpetuated a more “hybrid” form of eugenics that stressed both nature and nurture in creating a better future for the race. Again, this viewpoint emphasized the burden of health on the mother to improve her child’s wellbeing in ways that were not always possible for the mother to change. Certain factors, like weight or temperament, might have been able to be modified by maternal influence. However, many features such as facial shape or symmetry were simply impossible to improve, despite whatever guidance mothers may have been given. In this way, baby health contests may have given mothers hope for improvement for their child, but these may have sometimes been a false hope.

In addition to the contests being founded and often run by women, female physicians were an important aspect in the administration of baby health contests in the United States. While women had worked in various health care capacities long before the 20th century, women physicians were a new phenomenon at the time that baby health contests began popping up across the country. These women physicians were foundational to the baby health political and activist organizations, including the Better Babies

Bureau which administered the Better Babies Contests. Women doctors were viewed as uniquely qualified to administer medical advice to women and families. Vance Dorey notes 54 female physicians who participated in baby health contests across the nation throughout the contests' existence.[159] Many of the physicians identified by Vance Dorey were located in the West and Midwest of the nation. Most prevalent in her listing are the states of Colorado, Iowa, and Ohio. This statistic aligns with the major popularity of the Better Babies Contests in these regions. Furthermore, Vance Dorey includes statistics about the number of female graduates of medical school. In 1915, four years after the foundation of the first baby health contest, there were only 92 female graduates from medical schools in the United States, making up 0.026% of all medical school graduates.[160]

The spiritual sister to the Better Baby Contests was the Fitter Families Contest, which, rather than examining individual infants, evaluated the eugenic value of families as a whole. Fitter Families contests were born as an offshoot of the popular Better Babies contests. Founders Dr. Florence Sherbon and Mary Watts gained approval and financial support from the American Eugenics Society for the Fitter Families contests in 1925, at a time when Better Babies Contests were still taking place around the United States. This funding from the AES is significant; while the Eugenics Record Office had been more powerful in the field of eugenics at the beginning of

[159] Vance Dorey, *Better Baby*, 258.
[160] Vance Dorey, *Better Baby*, 239.

the century, the American Eugenics Society held more influence beginning in the 1920s.

However, the goal of fitter families contests was decidedly different. Fitter Families contests would amass a body of data that could be synthesized with existing research into heredity by the Eugenics Record Office.[161] While baby contests had a goal of decreasing rates of infant mortality alongside bettering the white race, the goal of the Fitter Families contests was far more explicitly eugenic. In this sense, the Better Babies contests were far more solution oriented (at least in an immediate timeline) while Fitter Families contests were more ideology-based.

Eugenics and Advertising

Advertising was central to the educational mission of the *Woman's Home Companion*. Historian Mary Ellen Zuckerman argued that the WHC took steps to ensure engagement between readers and advertisers for the magazine. In 1925, Zuckerman notes, the WHC began a "pro-advertising" campaign that sought to educate consumers about thoughtful consumption of advertisements, following along the lines of the magazine's previous educational campaigns. Zuckerman argues that the campaign pushed the narrative that "advertising gives value by educating consumers and cutting the price of goods… the *Companion* only allowed the best quality products to be advertised in its pages, thus serving as a reliable guide to readers in

[161] Lovett, "'Fitter Families," 78.

their purchasing decisions."[162] Advertising was represented as a net positive for readers because it would give helpful guidance on the best products for women and their families. Through this pro-advertising campaign, women were instructed to trust and believe in the benefits they were informed of in each of the magazine's advertisements. It is notable, then, that many of these advertisements used eugenic language to persuade readers to purchase their products.

Many of the advertisements in the WHC promoted everyday household items such as record players, cooking oil, and canned soups. However, knowing that the WHC's primary audience comprised young women and mothers, many advertisers sought space for maternity-specific items in the magazine. Some examples included baby formula, humidifiers, maternity corsets, and more. In addition, many of the ads prominently featured images of babies and young children. In an ad for Colgate toothpaste that takes up nearly half of one page in the magazine, advertisers included hand-drawn images of a child next to a drawing of the toothpaste box. The ad portrays toothpaste as "a habit" (written in big letters) that "well taught to a child, may be in time taught to that child's own children, and by them to their children, to continue for generations."[163] Rather than focusing solely on the health of a child already born, the

[162] Mary Ellen Zuckerman, "From Educated Citizen to Educated Consumer: The Good Citizenship and Pro-Advertising Campaigns in the 'Woman's Home Companion' 1920–1938," *American Periodicals* 5 (1995): 93-94, JSTOR.
[163] Colgate & Co, "A Habit," advertisement, *Woman's Home Companion*, January 1918, 47, accessed December 27, 2023, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/umn.319510028031086?urlappend=%3Bseq=53%3Bownerid=13510798902554637-75.

advertisement promoted toothpaste as a healthful habit that would be passed onto future generations of children. This statement was explicitly eugenic in the manner that it promoted better health for future generations rather than just the current; the eugenic value promoted here indicates that mothers were encouraged to make decisions for the health of not just their children but also for their entire hypothetical future lineage. This further reinforces the hybrid nature and nurture argument proposed by many women in eugenics with the idea that healthy habits could overcome some aspects of heredity.

Conclusion

The public educational measures implemented by eugenicists were essentially the forward facing strategies based on the philosophies discussed in Chapter One. As researchers identified problems such as venereal disease and prostitution as the root of social evil, eugenic activists executed public health campaigns that promoted sex education and health screenings as a targeted effort to eradicate these issues.

Infant mortality was another major social evil identified in this period, and the solution proposed was the Better Baby contests, as well as a range of other forms of public health outreach to train mothers in best practices for parenting. As these contests popped up across the nation, eugenics gained a mainstream popularity never before seen. These contests provided health care and maternal advice to women across the country, both in rural

and urban areas. Out of these contests birthed the Fitter Families Contests, which examined not just infants but families as a whole for their eugenic potential. Both iterations of eugenic health contests represent both a public educational effort to disseminate eugenic information to average Americans, as well as proof of women's significant involvement in the movement. Both Better Babies and Fitter Families contests were created by women (Mary DeGarmo, Florence Sherbon, and Mary Watts), for women.

The maternal advice industry expanded beyond the eugenic health contests, however. Magazines like the Woman's Home Companion issued advice through monthly columns and even advertisements by recommending the best products for a eugenic life. As a whole, the public educational aspects of the eugenics movement revolved around women and their leadership and expertise. Women were not only viewed as a vital audience for this information, but more often than not, they were the ones delivering it as well.

Conclusion

Women, as I have shown, played a key role in every aspect of the eugenics movement across the United States. Chapter One examined women's involvement in academic and political eugenic organizations.

Women writers such as La Reine Helen Baker and Charlotte Perkins Gilman philosophized on topics such as trained motherhood, race suicide, and the role of the federal government in protecting the race. Women published their own books and in journals, such as the *Journal of Social Hygiene*, in a time when the publishing industry was still dominated by men. As such, most of the women who were published were upper class, educated white women. Some women also wrote treatises about how to best lead a womanly, eugenic life, such as Anna Galbraith's *Four Epochs of a Woman's Life*. Galbraith and other women sought to define a way to implement eugenics into every aspect of life, especially as some skeptics began to question how eugenics would fit into love and marriage. All together, these women-authored eugenic writings represent a large presence of women in the academic and research-based fields of eugenics, which existing scholarship has typically presented as male-dominated.

In addition, women were deeply involved in political movements for furthering eugenics across the nation. One of the most notable examples of female eugenic activists in this sense was Marion Olden. Olden founded the Sterilization League of New Jersey, which attempted to pioneer a eugenic sterilization law in the state of New Jersey. Olden's leadership of the SLNJ represents a notable example of women's prominence in the political spheres of the eugenics movement, especially when regarding women's role in sterilization measures. As an example, Olden's work refutes the idea that

women were not involved in eugenic political organizing, and in fact, they were sometimes even involved in political activism at the leadership level.

As a whole, sterilization was a key issue in academic and formal correspondence written by women. Women scholars debated the best way to separate the “unfit” from the “fit” in order to produce a better society. The crux of this debate was the decision to promote segregation or sterilization of the unfit. Some women believed that the unfit should be housed in mental colonies, where disabled or otherwise unfit individuals could work and contribute to the economy while still remaining separate from society. These colonies represented a moral step up from the mental institutions, which focused on imprisonment more so than reform. As a whole, women in the eugenics movement were more concerned with the conditions of those in mental colonies and institutions than male eugenic activists were. This crucial debate represents a difference in focus between the men and women involved in the eugenics movement.

Chapter Two focused on women’s involvement in public health and education initiatives. There was a lot of overlap between the women that participated in each subset of the movement; overall, these female activists were still largely upper class, educated white women. Although these women represented many of the same demographics as the women discussed in the first chapter, the women involved in public education made attempts to rope in lower and middle class women into a eugenic life. Public educational efforts targeted a much more diverse set of women for eugenic

information, but there was still a larger focus on white women for the purpose of improving the white race.

Through organizations like the American Social Hygiene Association, women had a vast swath of opportunities for eugenic activism. One way in which many women got involved was through the Better Babies contests, which preached eugenic ideology at state and local fairs across the nation. The spiritual successor to these contests were the Fitter Families contests, which were even more explicitly eugenic in their purpose. Both contests represented a unique mode of public health education: by encouraging individuals and families to compete to make themselves more eugenically fit. These contests, which played on agricultural themes of animal and livestock pageantry, reflected a similar philosophy to many of the more academic eugenic treatises mentioned in the first chapter. Both academic and educational eugenic projects leveraged scientific language as justification and legitimation for their work.

Furthermore, the Better Baby contests and other forms of public education were not only created and pioneered by women, but they were also targeted towards women. As a whole, women were seen as an active and valuable audience for eugenic ideology due to their unique position as mothers. Motherhood, then, became an important part of public health education. Magazines like the *Woman's Home Companion* doled out advice on how best to parent one's children and debates about bottle versus breastfeeding became central to medical discourse. Women were expected

to work to create eugenically fit children not only before their children were born, but even after through guidance given by experts.

The history of eugenics can not be examined out of context. There were a litany of new and influential social movements emerging during the early 20th century, which is titled by historians as the Progressive Era. Progressive movements from this period, such as the temperance movement and the Second Great Awakening provide important context for the history of eugenics in America. Eugenics arose in a period of new ideas and new tensions between the relationship of science and religion in society. Eugenics provided an answer; science could be used to ensure a brighter future for the United States, and specifically, the white race.

Women's eugenic activism also had distinct ties to first wave feminism. Most notably, many eugenic activists had also been involved in organizations such as the League of Women Voters. Marion Olden's Sterilization League of New Jersey was an offshoot of her failure to pass eugenic legislation through the League of Women Voters in New Jersey, and many of her former League members continued to support SLNJ's actions after the organization's founding. The SLNJ's ties to the League of Women Voters is just one example of how intertwined these two movements were. Many of the women activists involved in eugenics during this period were also suffragists who had advocated for the right to vote in the first two decades of the 20th century. Their history of eugenic organizing was

specifically built on the public and political organizing many of the same women did for the suffrage movement.

While women were clearly deeply involved in the American eugenics movement, it is certain that it was still a movement largely dominated by men. When remembering the eugenics movement in America, most historians focus on the contributions of prominent male figures such as Charles Davenport, Harry Laughlin, and Paul Popenoe. There were several reasons why men were more involved in the movement as a whole than women were. One reason is that there were still very few women who were college educated at this time. Few women had access to higher education, which was almost exclusively available to the upper classes. Secondly, culture had a large influence on why women were less involved; at this time, women were still expected to keep to the domestic sphere. This began to change with the first wave of feminism, which promoted activism in the public sphere (such as the temperance movement) alongside women's suffrage.

As a whole, men were largely focused on different eugenic issues and missions than women activists were. In particular, male eugenic activists tended to focus on sterilization measures and legalizing forced sterilization in states across the country. As outlined, women instead tended to focus on topics surrounding motherhood and public health. I add a wealth of information on women's involvement in the movement to the existing field of scholarship.

It is important to note that the eugenics movement was not necessarily entirely pervasive in the United States. Thirty one states would go on to pass eugenic sterilization laws, but the topic remained less prominent in the remaining US states. Eugenic ideology could be found anywhere, but it did not always achieve enough popularity to be codified into law. Popularity of eugenics as a whole was centralized in different places. Most notably, California had the highest eugenic sterilization rate in the country, with approximately 20,000 individuals sterilized over a 30 year period.[164] Another locus of eugenic ideology was on the East Coast; Virginia had the second highest sterilization rate, and the Eugenics Record Office which harbored a wealth of eugenic data was stationed in Cold Spring Harbor, New York. Better Baby contests tended to be the most popular in the Midwest, with its origin in Iowa and extensive history in states such as Indiana. As a whole, eugenics was most popular among rural communities rather than in major cities, largely due to rural families being seen as the pinnacle of American life and values.

Beyond women, another oft overlooked demographic by historians studying eugenics is Black Americans. As noted in Chapter Two, there was an element of race involved in many baby health contests around the nation. Many contests were either segregated, or excluded Black families entirely. In response, some Black activist groups, such as the NAACP, formed their own baby health contests. Dorr and Logan argue that

[164] Alexandra Minna Stern et al., "California's Sterilization Survivors: An Estimate and Call for Redress," *American Journal of Public Health* 107, no. 1 (2017): 50, National Library of Medicine.

> The influence of hereditarian ideas within the African American community has received much less attention. Most studies position African Americans as the targets of eugenic control and repression, or as vocal–if disempowered and ignored–critics of eugenics. These accounts strip black historical actors of their agency and oversimplify the American eugenics movement.[165]

Like the historiography of women in eugenics, Black Americans' involvement in the eugenics movement has been underrepresented in studies of American eugenics. As I have discussed, these gross oversimplifications of history do not serve marginalized groups in any way. Stern's assertion that this method removes historical actors' "agency" is wholly and completely true; in order to best portray the history of marginalized groups, including women and African Americans, it is imperative to portray a whole and complex image of their thoughts, beliefs, and actions, including the more negative aspects.

Historians often have a habit of overlooking women throughout history. It is assumed that this is done in an effort by men to minimize women's role as a positive presence in the events of the past. However, this is not always true; there is clearly an effort to paint women as entirely innocent of the negative actions performed by men as well. We can not only look at historical women through a positive lens. Ultimately, that is erasure of history. We must look at women throughout history as whole human beings with complex motives and morals. This project is not written in an effort to villainize nor victimize women. Instead, I intend to portray a wider

[165] Dorr and Logan, "'Quality, Not Mere," 68.

perspective as one piece in the puzzle of providing a more full view of history.

Eugenics after 1945

There is no true, concrete “end date” for the eugenics movement in America. Traditionally, scholars have argued that eugenics fell out of favor with the rise of Nazism in Europe during the second World War. However, this is not exactly true. Certainly, many eugenicists abandoned their overtly eugenic public-facing projects as eugenics became increasingly associated with America’s enemy in the war. Even still, eugenic ideology was still a devastatingly pervasive part of daily life for many Americans of color well into the 1970s. Stern argues that after World War II, rather than diminishing in power, eugenic ideology was simply “repackaged.”[166] Rather than focusing on overt eugenic projects, American eugenicists shifted the focus to more covert plans. This focus shift included agendas involving family planning and population control rather than the prior, more explicitly eugenic-aligned missions of “fitness” and “better breeding.” Some organizations, such as the American Eugenics Society and the Sterilization League of New Jersey, even changed their names to reflect this shift.[167] As a

[166] Stern, *Eugenic Nation*, 13.

[167] The American Eugenics Society changed its name to the Society for the Study of Social Biology in 1973. The SLNJ would go on to change their name multiple times, reflecting geographic changes as well as the general climate around American eugenics. Some name changes include Birthright, Inc., Human Betterment Association, the Association for Voluntary Sterilization, and today, EngenderHealth. See: Stern, *Eugenic Nation*, 14; “History of EngenderHealth," EngenderHealth, accessed April 21, 2024, https://www.engenderhealth.org/about/history.

whole, women's involvement became less significant after 1945, as women either returned to home life during the family-centered culture of the 1950s, or were ousted from their organizations, as Marion Olden was from the SLNJ in 1948.[168]

Furthermore, eugenics also became more unambiguously racist after 1945. While race had always been a factor in American eugenics, some sterilization programs before 1945 targeted whites and people of color somewhat equally.[169] Rather than simply race, sterilization initiatives often targeted class or ability/disability as the most important characteristics in an individual. However, after the end of the second World War, eugenic sterilization programs almost exclusively targeted women of color.

In particular, Native women in the United States suffered these updated forced sterilization programs the most. There are few exact statistics, but sociologist D. Marie Ralstin-Lewis estimates that up to 70,000 Native women were forcibly sterilized by Indian Health Services (IHS) programs from the mid 1960s to mid 1970s.[170] This caused a severe drop in Native birth rates. Ralstin-Lewis argues that "This dramatic statistic indicates that the sterilization and birth control campaign was significantly more than an attack on women in general: it was a systematic program

[168] Dowbiggin, *The Sterilization Movement*, 66.
[169] According to Elizabeth Catte, this was the case in Virginia. See Elizabeth Catte, *Pure America: Eugenics and the Making of Modern Virginia* (Cleveland, OH: Belt Publishing, 2021).
[170] These programs also reflected a shift in sterilization methods. Some IHS medical centers prescribed DepoProvera, a contraceptive shot, before it had received FDA approval. These methods were often specifically targeted toward disabled Native women and without proper informed consent.

aimed at reducing the Native population, or genocide."[171] Ralstin-Lewis clearly states that this eugenic program can not be viewed as simply sexist; it must be viewed as a racist, and ultimately genocidal, program aimed at Native women.

Women of color as a whole were specifically targeted for coercive sterilization practices in the 1960s and 70s especially. Poor women of color, specifically Black, Latina, and Indigenous women, were especially vulnerable. Historian Rebecca Kluchin argues that "Poor women of color were popular targets of physicians who believed that it was their social responsibility to prevent the reproduction of the 'unfit' populations that they believed 'drained' government resources."[172] Kluchin also notes that stereotypes such as the "welfare queen" that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century represented harmful stereotypes about poor women of color. These stereotypical portrayals of women directly contributed to their coercion in reproductive health choices. Federal family planning measures in particular aimed to depict these sterilizations of poor women as "voluntary" rather than coerced.[173]

These forced and coerced sterilizations in the second half of the twentieth century clearly show how eugenics as a method of social control had not disappeared but merely shifted focus. Women of color, particularly Black, Hispanic, and Native women, were seen as a "threat" to society,

[171] D. Marie Ralstin-Lewis, "The Continuing Struggle against Genocide: Indigenous Women's Reproductive Rights," *Wicazo Sa Review* 20, no. 1 (2005): 72.
[172] Rebecca M. Kluchin, "Locating the Voices of the Sterilized," *The Public Historian* 29, no. 3 (2007): 133, JSTOR.
[173] Kluchin, "Locating the Voices," 134.

much as disabled and promiscuous people had at the beginning of the century. The way to control this threat was through coercive sterilizations on women. The label of “unfitness” shifted from a catch-all term for anyone undesirable and instead focused on women of color, especially poor women of color. These patterns of coercive sterilization declined sharply after the 1970s, largely due to protest and organizing by women of color across the country.

Eugenics Today

The study of eugenics remains a deeply relevant and crucial topic. Few people learn about eugenics in history classes, and if it is taught, it tends to remain a minor footnote in the story of American history. When taught, teachers often contextualize it with Nazi race science programs rather than their American predecessors. In her book *Eugenic Nation*, historian of eugenics Alexandra Minna Stern argues that “the looming presence of the Holocaust in our collective memory… has helped to privilege renditions and narratives of eugenics in America that, ultimately, flatten and simplify the historical terrain.”[174] Stern believes that this educational focus on the Holocaust rather than providing additional information on American eugenics programs oversimplifies American history and even attempts to erase our own country’s negative past. While

[174] Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 12, epub.

historiography on the Holocaust is monumentally important, it is important to educate on eugenics outside of this sphere.

Some scholars today have even theorized that we will soon be entering a “second wave” of eugenics. Former Google employee and computer scientist Timnit Gebru has argued that with the rise of artificial intelligence, we can soon expect another wave of eugenics based in the ideology of transhumanism. Transhumanism is the ideology that promotes using modern technology for human enhancement to lengthen and augment human life.[175] Gebru describes this process as becoming “posthuman” in which humanity will be lifted into a “superior species.”[176] This language is suspiciously familiar; rather than a narrow focus on improving just the “white race” as many twentieth century eugenicists emphasized, transhumanism seeks to uplift the human“species” as a whole. Still, there are complications to these seemingly positive technological advancements. Emerging technologies such as CRISPR gene editing provides evidence of eugenic ideologies resurfacing. These technologies are harmful for the class divide they will create. Who exactly will have access to these improvements, and who will be left behind? Today already, processes such as in vitro fertilization (IVF) cost tens of thousands of dollars and are thus largely inaccessible to most Americans.

[175] P. D. Hopkins, "Transhumanism," in *Encyclopedia of Applied Ethics*, 2nd ed., ed. Ruth Chadwick (2012), accessed May 6, 2024, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/B978012373932200243X?ref=pdf_download&fr=RR-7&rr=87fa1a4ec9cd43ca.
[176] "SaTML 2023 - Timnit Gebru - Eugenics and the Promise of Utopia through AGI," video, 48:29, accessed May 6, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P7XT4TWLzJw.

Through these new technologies, it is clear that historical education about the American history of eugenics is more important than ever. We must strive to not relive our darkest pasts and instead ensure a brighter, more inclusive future for all people, regardless of their race, class, gender, or ability.

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