

The Racist American Eugenics Program: A Crime Against Humanity

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Abstract

Mostly European Americans, in our recent past, advanced the perverse idea that the human race could be purified by genetic manipulation, selective breeding and the imposed sterilization of minorities and others in the United States.

Although their logic and reasoning was flawed, with little scientific basis, white leaders in science, politics, business, journalism, and even American Presidents supported the notion that a gifted race of people could be realized if arranged marriages between white men of wealth and distinction could be interbred with a superior stock of women with beauty and other hereditary qualities.

Through this process, they also believed that designated “inferior” groups, such as the mentally challenged, the insane, blacks, homosexuals, some criminals, degenerates and the disabled could be eventually cancelled out by sterilization.

It is little known, but many states in America passed laws that forcibly and involuntarily sterilized hundreds of black women and the poor well into the 1970s.

It must also be remembered that the German Nazis learned from the American Eugenics Program and used it to support the eradication of Jews, who they considered feeble-minded, during World War II.

Finally, it must be pointed out that no one who went through forced sterilization has been compensated for this terrible crime against humanity in the United States.

Introduction

The story of the American eugenics program (or “good breeding” movement) has been a history of lies, deception, evasion, and *racism*. But the eugenics movement did happen. It was not some abstract idea, or theoretical measure. Quite obviously this sad story, riddled with complexities, is a burden for the descendents of eugenic stalwarts. I suspect that the descendents of eugenic activists do not like being reminded of their ancestors’ terrible eugenic deeds, moral degradation and depredations, and the horrible things they inflicted upon the *weak* and *powerless*—like involuntary sterilization. Although the eugenicists “advocated compulsory sterilization for criminals, sex deviants,

and the feeble-minded,”¹ many poor women were sterilized for the simple or flimsy reason as “being considered [too] lazy or [too] promiscuous.”²

Take for example North Carolina’s sterilization/eugenics program, which singled-out women—who never had it easy—on welfare. According to Journalist Rebecca Sinderbrand, “Over the last 15 years of its operation, 99 percent of the victims were women; [and] more than 60 percent were black” women.³ It is crucial to remember that many of the black women, who were unknowingly sterilized, did not volunteer for these horrendous medical procedures. Indeed, these women were treated with utter disregard. More importantly, black women (or women of color) in America were unduly affected by the various eugenics programs.

In truth, racists and eugenic activists, and even governmental policymakers all wanted to jump on the sterilization band-wagon, and the eugenics floodgates opened. Many state officials and governments even adopted the curious habit of literally performing *invasive* operations on black women, Native American women, and poor white women for no good reason, and against their will, and without their knowledge, arguing that such people or *ingrates* deserved what they got, as it kept them from reproducing, or procreating; and bringing into the world defective children.

In certain respects, these awful eugenicists were *totally* engaged, relentless, and supported the racist and discriminatory idea of doing harm to less fortunate human

¹ Barry Mehler, “The New Eugenics: Academic Racism in the U.S. Today,” *Science for the People*, Vol. 15, Issue 3 (1983), p. 18 (pp. 18-23).

² Rebecca Sinderbrand, “A Shameful Little Secret: North Carolina confronts its history of forced sterilization,” *Newsweek* (March 28, 2005), p. 33.

³ *Ibid.*

beings, or those they called—and considered—mentally retarded, morons, relative idiots, the unfit, or deplorable persons. But what happened to the idea of caring for our most unfortunate citizens? There was certainly nothing *humane* about forced sterilization. Unfortunately, many of these American eugenicists found their way into positions of power that gave them access to public policy-making, and the wheels of government, which enabled them to influence and affect the establishment of eugenical programs in almost every state in the nation.

It is no exaggeration to say that even while these heartless eugenicists thought that what they were doing was righteous and noble—and would do the human race some good—it was actually an evil *manifestation*, a cursed plot, or conspiracy, and deliberate act to manipulate human evolution. But what gave them the absolute gumption to lead such a dehumanizing movement? Their obsequious orchestrations and emphasis on the importance of creating a better race of humans was, of course, nonsense, eugenical *hucksterism*. However, eugenical programs were created, nonetheless, and even “ruled constitutional in *Buck v. Bell*, a 1924 Supreme Court decision that is still the law of the land” in the United States.⁴

It is striking and supremely wrong that such an *immoral* piece of legislation still exists in American society today, even as some states like Georgia have introduced “a resolution apologizing for forced sterilization... between 1937 and 1970,”⁵ where

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ “One Word Politics Try to Avoid: Sorry,” *Time* (February 19, 2007), p. 20. Georgia’s issuance of a resolution of apology for participation in the eugenics movement and the injustices done under the wrong-minded eugenics laws is commendable; however, to add insult to a very sad occurrence in our history, Georgia wants to pass a measure

eugenicists denied some people their rights to life and liberty. So it seems almost unbelievable that our national eugenics program has not really disappeared.

Furthermore, over the years, the American eugenics program has been fraught with controversy, but extremely popular with members of the elite or dominant group (past and present); even the wealthiest, philanthropic American families, such as the financial support given by John D. Rockefeller; Mrs. E. H. Harriman (who gave much of her time and finances, with unprecedented zeal to the Eugenics Record Office), supported the eugenics movement. Additionally, John Harvey Kellogg (brother to the famous cereal magnate), as well as Philadelphia soap manufacturer Samuel Fels—and even Theodore Roosevelt, considered one of our greatest Presidents—were known as ardent eugenicists.⁶ The eugenics movement, therefore, was helped perversely by such important men and women, without *any* ramifications.

The New Eugenics Movement

With wealth and power and almost unlimited resources available to these eugenicist monsters, such men and women were able to carry out their web of intrigue, incomprehensible actions, and master plan of racial purity and genocidal destruction—which negatively and adversely affected the livelihood and well-being of countless

that would “designate April as Confederate history and Heritage month.” To my mind, traitors to our remarkable Constitution should *never* be held up as heroes, nor praised in a misguided state Heritage month. See “Georgia may apologize for sterilization,” *USA Today* (Friday 2, 2007), p. 3A, and “Georgia considers apology for slavery,” *USA Today* (March 20, 2007), p. 3A.

⁶ Philip R. Reilly, “Involuntary Sterilization in the United States: A Surgical Solution,” Volume 62, No. 2, *The Quarterly Review of Biology* (June 1987), p. 157 (pp. 153-170).

Americans—with mental disabilities and physical deformities—or our most vulnerable citizens. It was as if these eugenicists had a disdain for life and basic human rights.

Indeed, these groups of evil, misguided men and women were given more legitimacy than they actually deserved, if you ask me; but many racist thinkers today are carrying on the eugenics legacy or new eugenics movement by joining and becoming active members, and financial contributors to several racist foundations (that span the political and social spectrum), like the Pioneer Fund, established in 1937 by Nazi sympathizers, Frederick Osborn and Harry Laughlin, which blatantly “promotes theories of black inferiority.”⁷

The secretive Pioneer Fund, however, is blinded by their own self-interest, and importance in that this parochial group only uses *selective perception* and *selective exposure* when it comes to understanding human genetics and advancing their twisted and reprehensible, racist agenda. The Pioneer Fund has also given enormous sums of money to high-level academic professionals to propagate racial misconceptions, or to put forth the myth that “whites are inherently smarter than blacks,”⁸ or dark-skinned people. Perhaps the Pioneer Fund would serve our world best if it would use its tremendous wealth to eliminate human suffering, rather than singling out an ethnic group for some kind of genocidal punishment or extermination. Indeed, why does the powerful Pioneer Fund advocate such racist-hereditary foolishness? What exactly does this group hope to

⁷ Mehler, “The New Eugenics,” p. 19.

⁸ Lawrence Mower, “Researchers tied to hate groups get invitations,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (March 11, 2007), p. 8B (pp. 1B and 8B).

accomplish? Or what do they think can be achieved by their racial/ethnic divisiveness—some exquisite torture-sterilization program for our future?

Academic or scientific racists, moreover, like Professor Richard Lynn at the University of Ulster in Northern Ireland tries to suppress our knowledge and essentially the genetic truths about humans, by justifying the modern-day eugenics movement, which represents deeply-rooted prejudices, and “the intellectual backbone of modern fascism,”⁹ by shooting from his ignorant, racist-intellectual hip, so to speak, especially when it comes to the actual racial facts.

Lynn, for example, incorrectly writes in the 2002 edition of the white separatist newsletter, the *American Renaissance*, that black Americans have a proclivity for criminal behavior, or commit more crimes because they are “more psychopathic than whites.”¹⁰ What rubbish.

Lynn makes this outrageous claim or accusation without providing a shred of evidence, however. To be more accurate, or the truth is that more white Americans commit certain types of crimes, especially white-collar crimes and corporate crimes. White Americans are simply not arrested and prosecuted with the same zeal, frequency, and sheer doggedness as with black criminals. And often white Americans are given probation and lesser prison sentences. Lynn could have simply checked the Sentencing Project Website, or reviewed the FBI crime statistics for the last decade to verify the validity of these facts.

⁹ Mehler, “The New Eugenics,” p. 23.

¹⁰ Mower, “Researchers tied to hate groups get invitations,” p. 85.

Furthermore, the conviction rate is greater for black Americans, than with white Americans, especially when it comes to *all* crimes in the United States, including penalties for illegal drug use, where black Americans are not given the benefit-of-doubt or shorter prison sentences by the criminal justice system. And Lynn's statements (or language of ignorance) about blacks' propensity or penchant to commit crimes, and whites' intellectual superiority are racist, pseudo-scientific nonsense. Must we exclude or ignore *any* environmental factors that might have caused such aberrant or criminal behavior on the part of poor black Americans?

As already noted, the powerful and vile eugenicists aggressively (and faithfully) pursued a most dangerous and most inhumane endeavor, a path of almost no return until the late 20th century. But before this time, almost 70,000 American citizens were involuntarily and sometimes summarily sterilized until the damaging and damning practice fell out of vogue, because it was linked "in the public's mind to Hitler's Germany after World War II,"¹¹ and beyond. However, American eugenicists sadly laid the groundwork for Hitler, [his mostly Jewish] death camps and his [Aryan] breeding farms."¹²

Indeed, these diabolical eugenicists—voracious mad-men and women—*never* really strayed far from what they were trying to accomplish—that is, the eugenical sterilization and (possible) elimination of a subordinate group of people—or fellow human beings—the eugenicists considered undesirables. It is a fact that these eugenicists were fiercely

¹¹ Sinderbrand, "A Shameful Little Secret," p. 33

¹² Mehler, "The New Eugenics," pp. 22-23.

enthusiastic, exuberant even, for such a racist and discriminatory program, as they imagined the “perfect race” possibilities, insisting on the sterilization of people-of-color with mental illnesses, or mostly uneducated poor women, starting between the 1900s, and continuing into the late 1970s.

But what gave these eugenicists the moral right to create and implement such devious genocidal programs? Can their deceitful and hideous behavior be justified? To my mind, there can be no legitimacy to their *immoral* acts. Such were the consequences of abandoning the principles of humanity, and what was/is fair and decent.

The Consequence of The Racist Eugenics Movement

It has also been argued that the eugenics program in America is still alive in some form, and continues to this day with the involuntary sterilization of some hereditary flawed and mentally disabled people, including mental patients; but clearly this matter is being avoided, or simply ignored by some state governments. Recently, for example, an unnamed hospital in Seattle, Washington, acknowledged breaking state law by performing “a hysterectomy on a severely developmentally disabled girl whose growth was medically stunted,” to appease her care-taking parents.¹³

Let me give you another example. Journalist Janet Elliot, writing recently in the *Houston Chronicle*, revealed that “186 mentally retarded and disabled residents died at

¹³ “Hospital admits breach in girl’s hysterectomy,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (May 10, 2007), p. 12A

state facilities [in Texas] over an 18-month period,”¹⁴ in 2007, which demonstrates more than just a *systematic* problem. This is to say that eugenical deaths happen with astonishing regularity at state run facilities in Texas and in many other states in our nation.

Professor of political science and history, Edwin Black calls the involuntary sterilization of unsuspecting women and men—*eugenicide*, or the systematic annihilation of a group of hapless people through eugenical-sterilization. Black goes on to write that “American eugenicists saw mankind as a biological cesspool,”¹⁵ which had to be completely purged, or cleansed from so-called *imbecilic*, nitwit persons. It must also be remembered that in a contrived and indirect way, “the old eugenics movement, [which] actually began in England [but] was led [almost assuredly and solely] by Americans,”¹⁶ was nothing really to be proud of, because it was vulgar in its respective renditions, and deadly in its execution and consequences.

American eugenicists also felt that it was their fundamental duty to march boldly forward and supposedly purify the entire human race. But what gave eugenicists the sanctimonious audacity to establish such depraved pogroms? The American eugenics program, of dubious purpose, was a constructed system of human irresponsibility in that such men and women, who physically administered such ideological plans, refused to treat everyone involved *humanly*.

¹⁴ Janet Elliot, “Report: 186 died at state facilities for the retarded over 18 months,” *Houston Chronicle* (March 24, 2007), p. B2

¹⁵ Edwin Black. *War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America’s Campaign to Create a Master Race* (Four Walls Eight Windows: New York, 2003), p. 235.

¹⁶ Mehler, “The New Eugenics,” pp. 23-23.

Whatever else that may be said about the American eugenics program, it is not quite clear whether the eugenicists even lived up to their own deceptive ideals and principles. For instance, did they put their own crippled children and disabled off-spring to death (as did Hitler with some disabled Germans and countless gypsies and Jews); or did they have their own autistic or imperfect sons and daughters sterilized and obliterated? Absolutely not. After all, such mentally disabled people “are individuals with their [own hearts] and minds.”¹⁷ In the final analysis, developmentally disabled people “are locked up in themselves, like in a prison, just because of their own biology.”¹⁸ But keeping such individuals from being born, through eugenics-sterilization, was/is not the answer either.

It is important to reiterate that the history of eugenics in America was a time period that was something more than a little crazy. It is not difficult to understand what happened. Maybe we expect more of an explanation? We should at least demand elucidation on the part of surviving eugenicists. Or *any* answers must begin by first acknowledging that the American eugenics program happened, because it can never be erased from our inglorious history.

Moreover, and as the story of the American eugenics movement begins to unravel, we are left to wonder how our national government was complicit in its development. But the real question we need to ask is how did we allow such a *fiendish* thing to occur? Or why did we allow this kind of thing to happen in the first place? Unfortunately, most

¹⁷ Amanda Fehd, “16-year-old testifies for autism measure,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (April 3, 2007), p. 4B.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Americans today are oblivious or blithely ignorant about the eugenics issue, as it is not even taught or mentioned in many of our history text books.

Perhaps some do not think that this controversial issue has any significance or relevancy right now in our history, where we live in a dangerous world that is dominated by war, terrorism and violence. Or many Americans (politicians especially) simply don't like to be bothered by such a harsh episode in our political and historical life. But to ignore the sins of our nation's past is a recipe or invitation for another similar disaster in the near future to happen, especially when it comes to violating human rights.

Conclusions

Maybe it is fair to say that the American eugenics program is imperfectly understood. It has been only recently that the eugenics program in America has truly revealed itself in all its horror and ugliness. Clearly, the United States has had its share of human wrongs, but the outrageous eugenics program was probably one of the worst things (in human events) that could have happened to our country, besides black American slavery—or comparatively, the American eugenics program can only be surpassed by the genocidal past events of Cambodia, Rwanda, the Jewish Holocausts—or the millions of deaths meted out to the Russian people during Stalin's Soviet Gulag. Indeed, the American eugenics program should be considered the number one horrific and deplorable act, inflicted on some of its black citizens, by our government.

Perhaps the tragic Tuskegee experiment runs a close second when it comes to our collective nation's crimes—where unsuspecting black men in Alabama, infected with syphilis, were sterilized and eventually died, by not getting proper treatment for a curable disease, and with the full knowledge of our government. No one can doubt, then, or deny that the eugenics program in the United States happened.

In fact, we must be fully aware that the fundamental rights of people were seriously violated. Indeed, the more we study and read about the American eugenics movement, the more we begin to understand and learn about the unmitigating, dehumanizing impact and disaster that it truly was—and represented. Therefore, we must take the old American eugenics movement more seriously, in part because it unnecessarily hurt people; and also because of the monstrosity and complexity of the respective eugenics programs themselves (from state-to-state) in America.

There may have been a time when American eugenicists thought that it was necessary to destroy the lives of some poor women-of-color and their unborn offspring, but we must reject such dangerous notions today. After all, the eugenicists' grotesque actions to create a perfect race through eugenics-sterilization and death are unforgivable, abhorrent and shameful. The American eugenicists were definitely irrational, chomping at the bit, so to speak, as they tried to legitimize their whole dirty business, while ruining innocent lives.

The mainstream view today is to ignore this heartbreaking issue, if possible. But we should all regard this holocaust of sorts as obscene, unspeakable, and unforgivable. And

the actions of the American eugenicists were abominable, unimaginable, as well as irresponsible. Unless we fully understand this crime against humanity, it most assuredly might happen again. Today, and for the most part, our government simply tell us that it was regrettable, but the reasons used to inflict so much pain on black women and others, who the eugenicists thought were fair game, was nonsensical, as many of these women (as victims), we now know, were perfectly normal, *sentient* human beings, not retarded or emotionally damaged, or mentally unbalanced.

Fortunately, the eugenicists of the past look less and less like heroes and legitimate scientists, but more like unconscionable, blood-lusting fools. Some racist thinkers today, however, believe that those in the early American eugenics movement are really underappreciated. Unfortunately, moreover, those who try to raise the curtain, sound the alarm, or speak-out against this painful period in our history, are often marginalized and effectively muzzled by the conservative media and the unconcerned academia, as many supporters and scholars try to inform, or set the record straight about racialist eugenics in the United States. But their voices will never be silenced.

We must finally start with the belief that nothing should be taken for granted regarding the matter of eugenics. But more than anything else, we must not try to forget, minimize, or ignore that this terrible American eugenics history happened. Such a matter deserves our undivided attention. In any event, unless we understand the cultural, social, and political context of what happened during the early American eugenics movement,

we cannot truly empathize with those who suffered. Nor will we be able to make sense of why *everyone* should abhor or be appalled at what happened.

For some Americans, the eugenics movement was a nightmare and perhaps a death sentence for others. Many of these emotionally scarred women, however, have been strong enough—mentally and physically—to beat the odds. Nonetheless, these survivors continue to suffer the emotional and psychological distress of whether or not they will receive some kind of monetary settlement. So how exactly can we make things right by the survivors, instead of waiting around for our government to do something? Should we wait for them to just die of old age? More importantly, we must not lay blame for such a horrendous historical event on these surviving women.

We must also make it clear, as many know, that, “no one who underwent forced sterilization in America has received assistance for it,”¹⁹ which shows you the mercilessness and *indignity* of humankind, and our capacity for unadulterated evil. Unfortunately, our government continues to low-ball the idea of giving *any* compensation awards to *anyone* affected by the various eugenics programs in America. But the survivors must continue to endure, like the thousands of Asian women who suffered in Japan’s World War II military brothels, where they were essentially forced into sexual slavery. The fight for these surviving women, affected by America’s eugenics programs, goes on.

¹⁹ . Sinderbrand, “A Shameful Little Secret,” p. 33.

Further, the survivors of American eugenics must never give up, back-down or become discouraged when they submit claims against the government, and are turned down, or rejected. This particular issue, of course, stirs more raw emotions than almost any other current social or political problem, when it is revealed. The eugenics movement in America, therefore, will become even more of an issue when all the facts are eventually learned. So there should be a constant reminder that long-delayed compensations or restitutions are in order for these deserving and mostly surviving black women. Demanding to be heard and asking for compensations will give more eugenic survivors the chance to at least have a piece of mind before their deaths, as they have been through so much.

Failing to do *anything* by ignoring the issue of compensations for eugenics-exploitation—and hoping that this tragic history may simply go away is unconscionable, and definitely not the answer. This is to say that we must deal more resolutely with the eugenics issue. A simple, unambiguous apology by our government is also not enough. Someone must clearly acknowledge that these horrific activities occurred. Someone must also be held accountable, and give answers to these poor old women for the pain and suffering, horrible anxiety, traumatic anguish, humiliating ridicule, as well as the emotional damage rendered against and upon them by the American eugenicists.

Finally, we must guard against this kind of depraved and outlandish activity in the future, or such evil and repugnant actions on the part of humans will rear their ugly head again, and be possibly unleashed upon the world once again.

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