The Role of Women in the American Eugenics Movement

1900 –1945

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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."

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"

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[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.

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 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.

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[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).

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 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

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

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

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 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

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[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.

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 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.

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[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 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

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[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.

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 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

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[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.
[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.

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]

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.

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[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 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.

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]

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

[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.

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 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 too much social and sexual independence."[21] Like the cult of true womanhood, mothers were entrusted with proliferating

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[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.
[21] Kline, *Building a Better Race*, 18.

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 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."

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[22] Carey, "The Feebleminded," 63.

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 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

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[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).

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 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

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[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.

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

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[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.

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 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]

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

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[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.

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 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.

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

[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.

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 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

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[30] Baker, *Race Improvement*, 15.
[31] Baker, *Race Improvement*, 30-31.

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 *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

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[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.

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 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 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.

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[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.

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

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[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.

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 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

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[39] Galbraith, *The Four Epochs*, 121.

[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.

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.

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

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[41] Susan Rensing, "'Falling in Love Intelligently': Eugenic Love in the Progressive Era," *Journal of Popular Romance Studies* 5, no. 2 (2016): 1.
[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."

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 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 woman had a condition

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[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.

[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.

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 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

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[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.

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 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

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[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.

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, 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.

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[50] Ruth Reed, "Illegitimacy among Negroes," 78.
[51] Lenroot, "Social Responsibility," 75.

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 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

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[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.
[53] Baker, *Race Improvement*, 108.

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

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[54] Marion Olden sometimes went by Marion Norton. This paper will continue to refer to her as Marian Olden for clarity.

[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.

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] 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

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[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.
[59] Prince, "Colonies for Mental," 362.

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 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

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[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.
[62] Olden, "The ABC of Human," 6.

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.

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.

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

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 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,

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

temperance, education, and suffrage; Larson argues that 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 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

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[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.

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 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

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

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 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

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[72] Memorandum by Condit.
[73] Memorandum by Condit.

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 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

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

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

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[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.

[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).

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 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.

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[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.

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.

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.

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[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.
[81] Larson, "'In the Finest," 121.

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.

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'

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[82] Rafter, *White Trash*, 21.
[83] Rafter, *White Trash*, 24.
[84] Cacogenic was another word used to describe "dysgenic" or "unfit" people.

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 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]

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[85] Rafter, *White Trash*, 26.
[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

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 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

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labeling them as feebleminded or otherwise unfit. See Katrina M. Powell, "Converging Crises: Rhetorical Constructions of 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."

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.

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,

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

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.

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