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**A Serviceable Villain:
Eugenics, The Fear of the "Underman,"
and Anti-Democratic Discourse
in Texas Thought and Culture, 1900-1940**

BY BETSY FRIAUF AND MICHAEL PHILLIPS

In the first four decades of the twentieth century, Texas eugenicists repeatedly sounded an alarm about an enemy within: the poor, the mentally ill, the intellectually deficient, sexual deviants, and congenital criminals. They warned that this biologically unfit mob might soon outnumber the intelligent and gifted within the state and bring civilization crashing down. Eugenicists were not successful in their campaign for sterilization laws they thought would improve the human stock in the state, but that does not mean they were ignored. The years 1900-1940 marked the high point of the eugenics movement in Texas. State legislators considered four bills that called for the coerced sterilization of the "unfit" in 1913, 1932, 1935, and 1937. They also debated a proposed law in 1923 that would have required engaged couples to receive a certificate of health from "a reputable physician" before they could receive a marriage license. All five eugenics-inspired laws failed. Although Texas legislators would not go so far as to deny the unfit the right to reproduce, they did not hesitate to curtail their right to vote.

The push for eugenics laws and to reduce voting stemmed from similar anxieties and became mutually reinforcing. Eugenicists declared repeatedly that democracy was dysgenic, not only a barrier to biologically improving the species but a threat to the very survival of the human race. If they could not prevent the unfit from reproducing through sterilization laws, eugenicists claimed that by denying the ballot to millions, they could at least prevent the state from being taken over politically by what one advocate of sterilization called "Undermen."

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Hostility to democracy formed an essential part of the eugenics belief system. Eugenicists believed that biologically inferior voters -- identified by their poverty, their working-class jobs, their minority religion, culture, and language, and/or their skin color -- would demand a redistribution of the wealth created by their superiors and would impose their impulsive, ill-conceived priorities on the political process. Madison Grant, one of the nationally pre-eminent voices for eugenics, lamented that the advance of democracy led to "the transfer of power from the higher to the lower races, from the intellectual to the plebeian class . . .," with the universal franchise resulting in electoral triumphs for foolish mediocrities. One promoter of eugenics read widely across the United States, Paul Popenoe, proclaimed democracy "dangerous," while S.J. Holmes, a biologist at the University of California at Berkeley, dismissed it as a "fetish."

The eugenicist idea that democracy might be a highway to hell gained traction in Texas. A nightmare vision of a maddened proletariat breeding a race of degenerates, and ushering in an historical epoch of crime, anarchy, and bloodthirsty revolution, echoed through political speeches, novels, school textbooks, and even fairground exhibits across Texas in the forty years before the United States' entry in World War II. In response to the discontents produced by immigration and slowly increasing urbanization and industrialization, elites disdained the ballot, dehumanized the impoverished, and supported anti-immigration laws. Eugenicists despised democracy, they said, because they loved freedom. To them, freedom meant survival and improvement of the species, breeding a better human race uninjured by biological defect, and the protection of the property accumulated by the biologically superior men and women of wealth from the grasping hands of the unworthy masses.

To men like Dallas attorney Meriwether Dabney, the crawl toward a more democratic republic, begun with the abolition of slavery in 1865 and continuing with the women's suffrage campaign in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, did not represent progress but a frightening march to the abyss. Dabney learned his blunt elitism and white supremacist ideology at the knees of his father, the Presbyterian minister Dr. Robert Dabney, a professor at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia who once served as Confederate Gen. Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson's chaplain during the Civil War. In 1867, the elder Dabney bitterly denounced the recent emancipation of slaves in

his book *A Defence [sic.] of Virginia (and Through Her, of the South)*. Rev. Dabney condemned abolitionism as “anti-scriptural” and tantamount to rebelling against the law of God. He portrayed the Civil War as a struggle between a truly Christian South and Northern heretics. The elder Dabney thought a straight line ran from the violent excesses of the French Revolution to the rise of so-called “Radical Republicans” in the United States during the Civil War and early Reconstruction era. “It will in the end become apparent to the world, not only that the conviction of the wickedness of slaveholding was drawn from sources foreign to the Bible, but that it is a legitimate corollary from that fantastic, atheistic, and radical theory of human rights, which made the Reign of Terror in France, which has threatened that country, and which now threatens the United States, with the horrors of Red-Republicanism,” Robert Dabney wrote. At one point the elder Dabney declared, “We are sick of that arrogant and profane cant, which asserts man’s ‘capacity for self-government’ as a universal proposition; which represents human nature as so good, and democratic government as so potent, that it is a sort of miraculous *panacea*, sufficient to repair all the disorders of man’s condition. All this ignores the great truths, that man is fallen; that his will is disordered . . . that God, his owner and master, has ordained that he shall live under authority. What fruit has radical democracy ever borne, except factious oppression, anarchy, and the stern necessity for despotism?”

Robert Dabney left his native Virginia and began teaching philosophy, psychology, and political economy at the University of Texas in 1883. His son, Meriwether Dabney, would study English and philosophy, as well as Greek, Latin, and French, at the Austin university and would be offered a professorship in English literature there, which he would turn down. Meriwether did not inherit his father’s piety, and even though he often referred to God and Christianity, he would dismissively refer to the “Christian cult, brotherhood of man, altruism, etc.” in his writings. His prose was considerably less elevated than that of the Rev. Dabney, but his contempt for democracy proved no less blistering. Dabney opened his Dallas law practice in 1888 and quickly moved in the city’s most influential circles while practicing law. In the years before the United States’ entry into World War I, Meriwether Dabney urged the nation to shut the door to immigration by what he saw as racial inferiors from Eastern and Southern Europe and to eliminate the right to vote from all but the most intelligent

and talented white men. He saw talent and mental ability as rare commodities in a species barely ascended from its primate ancestors.

"To my mind the best proof of evolution is that ninety-five per cent of the human race are so ape-like in animal stupidity and in being attracted to glittering baubles," Dabney said in a letter written sometime between 1913 and 1915 to his brother-in-law E.Y. Chapin complaining about the demands for voting rights by women and other disenfranchised groups. "It they are shiny, seem new and alluring, they will continue to grab them no matter how many apes before them have scorched their fingers. Man's essential animalism is also demonstrated by the fact that he is lazy, greedy, and lascivious, won't work if he can pilfer, has no foresight, and precisely like any ape believes that which he desires to believe. In some respects man, in his evolution, has not reached the stage of self protective development of a gopher or a squirrel."

Dabney saw voting rights for the oppressed as "glittering baubles." Dabney habitually compared those who, unlike himself, had not benefitted from inherited wealth, to animals who needed to be controlled. Having such poor human materials to work with, Dabney argued, nations such as the United States (and by extension states like Texas) could only meet disaster by extending the franchise. "The trouble about a democracy is that things are settled by voting and ninety-five percent of the voters, not having the sense of an ant or squirrel in the summer, but having the vote, will ravage the stores of those who have laid up a few nuts when they could," he wrote. "Like any other maddened baboon they will tear the whole fabric of civilization to pieces," he insisted. Dabney believed that what he saw as an aristocracy of merit was the best form of government and he charged that democracy "by its very nature rejects the best and seeks the worst and is stumbling down into the mire."

Dabney's comments came in a period of turbulent economic, social, and political transformation. Dabney and his father saw the plantation past as idyllic. In a July 1893 letter Meriwether Lewis Dabney wrote blissfully of the pastoral Virginia of his childhood and compared it invidiously with his Dallas home. "I . . . love the Blue Mountains of Old Virginia," he said. "There is something particularly stimulating about them to the imagination and also the moral feelings. It seems to me when I get among them that I am a man again with a soul, while on this flat plain I am but a money-earning brute,

seeking to wrest a dollar from the greedy, cheating swarm of rascals around me . . . I don't think the history of the world will show where an inland prairie country has produced anything out of the ordinary beyond money getting." Dabney must have found North Central Texas at the turn of the century soul-crushing. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw the continued spread of railroad networks, then an oil boom in Texas, and the rise of Dallas as a regional banking capital. These trends spurred urbanization in the Lone Star State. As historian Randolph Campbell points out, by 1920, four Texas cities were worthy of the name, with Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio all boasting of populations of more than 100,000. Instead of Blue Mountains, Dabney watched office buildings rise in the alternately too hot and too cold prairie.

At the same time that Texas had its first experience of genuine urbanization, the violence of the Mexican Revolution that began in 1910, and the demand by landowners for agricultural labor all spurred immigration into Texas. The immigrants to Texas were more regionally, ethnically and racially diverse in the early twentieth century than their forebears. Prior to the twentieth century, most new arrivals in Texas hailed from other Southern states. The number of foreign-born immigrants to Texas, however, increased noticeably from 1900 to 1920 when Dabney entered the most active phase of his public life. The state's total population almost tripled from 1.6 million in 1880 to about 4.7 million between 1880 and 1920, while the percentage of foreign-born Texans climbed from 5.9 percent at the start of the twentieth century to 7.8 percent by 1920. Mexican immigration especially increased, with approximately 100,000 Mexicans fleeing the mayhem south of the Rio Grande between 1910 and 1920. The Mexican population in Texas reached 700,000, about 12 percent of the total population, by 1930 (compared to the 6.5 percent of the total population Mexicans and Mexican Americans represented in 1850.)

Mexican immigration in particular must have seemed ominous to Dabney. He ridiculed those who thought that the imperialistic American military interventions in Mexico in 1913 and 1916 were an opportunity to civilize a country Dabney dismissed as "savage." Dabney was particularly outraged by the pre-dawn raid on Columbus, New Mexico led by followers of Mexican revolutionary leader Francisco "Pancho" Villa on March 9, 1916, which prompted a retaliatory U.S. Army invasion led by Gen. John "Blackjack" Pershing that aimed to

capture or kill the Mexican militia commander. In Dabney's words, "I take not the slightest interest in educating throat-cutting Mexicans . . . I have never found arising in my heart emotions of loving kindness for the far off, and particularly the persistently wicked . . . I cannot understand the theory that seems to possess all the American people who do not live near the border, *viz.*, that the Mexican people will become eventually sweetly mild and reasonable if we continue to let them rob Americans and thus follow the practice of the Zoo with the boa constrictors; that is, keep on feeding them skinned rabbits until their bloodthirsty appetite is satiated and they become mild, loving, and reasonable."

In Dabney's mind, the Mexicans he despised seemed to be invading the state, not just in the farmlands of South Texas, but his home base of Dallas. There, they joined with other immigrants Dabney imagined could only bring harm. By the early 1920s, Dallas neighborhoods like Deep Ellum had become magnets for Jewish, Mexican, and Italian immigrants. Meanwhile, Mexican *barrios* arose along Eagle Ford Road, now known as Singleton Boulevard, and the so-called "El Cemento Chico" or "Cement City" in West Dallas near the Lone Star Cement Plant. Between 1910-1920, the percentage of Dallas residents who had parents born overseas increased by 51 percent, with a large percentage coming from Eastern and Southern European and Latin American backgrounds. At the beginning of the century, under 16 percent of immigrants living in Dallas came from Eastern and Southern Europe, Mexico, Central America and South American, or Asia. By 1920, more than 54 percent of immigrants in Dallas came from these parts of the world and the largest single group from Mexico.

Dabney made no effort to hide his disgust at this growing diversity. "[M]ongrelized Asiatics, Greeks, Levantines, Southern Italians, and sweepings of the Balkans, of Poland and of Russia" filled the urban landscape, Dabney complained in a speech, "Is Civilization Returning to Barbarism?" delivered to the influential Dallas Critic Club on December 4, 1922. During World War I, Dabney expressed to friends his horror at what he saw as the dysgenic consequences of that conflict. "[S]talwart, clean-cut" Anglo-Saxon men died by the millions in Europe, Dabney wrote, to "preserve liberty and happiness for the swarms of maggots of the human kind I see wriggling in the vile heaps we call our cities. Are our sons to give their lives to preserve

the happiness in rottenness and freedom for vice of these mongrel wretches, none of whom are going to sacrifice anything?"

Like Texans today, Dabney lived in a world defined by the intersection of race and economic class, but the language of race differed significantly from that of today. Race is meaningless from a biological standpoint and, therefore, the number and meaning of racial categories such as "white," "black," "brown," and so on differ over time. Randomly defined on wildly varying criteria such as skin tone and color, hair texture, language, culture and geographic origin, the number of racial categories expanded or contracted mostly due to the economic and political needs of the time. Dabney saw racial differences between those of European descent and "the Australian Black Man or African Hottentot" who, he said, had "not developed the capacity to advance even to barbarism," between whites and "American Indians and many Asiatic tribes" who "stopped with barbarism" in their cultural evolution, and between "Caucasians" and "the Mongrel inhabitants of Central and South America" who "having reached a low civilization, are incapable of going forward" and were instead "disintegrating."

Like many elites of his time, however, Dabney constructed an elaborate racial hierarchy that ranked different categories of Europeans and their descendants on an ascending scale from animal-like to the human pinnacle. Leading racial theorists of Dabney's time, such as eugenicists like Madison Grant, Henry Fairfield Osborn, and William Z. Ripley believed that so-called Caucasians did not constitute one "white" race, and could be divided into three major "subspecies" with varying levels of intelligence and worth: the lowest category, the Mediterraneans centered primarily in Southern Europe (who also occupied the Middle East and North Africa), the middle category, the Alpines (located mostly in Central Europe and parts of Eastern Europe and Western Asia); and the cream of the Caucasian racial crop, the Nordics of Northern and much of Western Europe. Only Nordics were fully developed humans. Jews were not considered part of the Caucasian family. They, along with Poles, Czechs, Russians, Greeks, Italians, and other non-Nordics, were inferior in terms of mental ability and character to their British and Scandinavian and other Northern European neighbors.

By the 1920s, American elites used this racial schema to rationalize the wide gap between rich and poor whites by explaining that the im-

poverished were also less than fully white and were stymied by their unfortunate biological differences with their better-off peers. These racial ideas deeply shaped Texas society and provided the foundation for Dabney's worldview. To Dabney, the new immigrants that so disturbed him lacked the wherewithal to adequately function in a sophisticated society and constituted barbarians who had slipped through the gate.

Dabney became a voice of the eugenics movement in Texas and worried that the wave of inferior immigrants pouring into the United States corrupted American culture, sowed political and economic instability and even threatened the survival of the human race. At the start of the twentieth century, Texas eugenicists sounded the alarm that immigration had contributed to what they insisted was a wave of feeblemindedness in Texas. Eugenicists sought to guide human evolution by encouraging the supposedly biologically fit to have more children and to prevent the allegedly unfit from reproducing. Retrograde immigrants would disrupt this project, they argued.

Eugenics had a long history in Texas by the time Dabney began his law career. A Texas surgeon, Gideon Lincecum, in 1853 had proposed a law allowing the state to castrate criminals and other "defectives." During much of the 1850s, he lobbied for such legislation. Beginning four decades later, another Texas doctor, Ferdinand Eugene Daniel, promoted similar ideas. His modes of communication were a series of medical journals he edited in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and papers published across the country. To Dabney, eugenics was proven science. "The researches of Darwin established the fact that progress is by evolution, controlled by heredity, like produces like, the good mated with the good produce offspring reproducing characteristics of the parents," he said. "[Founding British eugenicist Francis] Galton, by painstaking and extended investigation and by the collection of a great mass of statistics, has shown that capacity is transmitted and that families having it are limited . . . [I]ntelligence and genius . . . are a matter largely of family and men of genius drawn from a few families." Dabney saw immigrants pouring into Texas in the early twentieth century as lacking "men of genius."

He thought that "new" immigrants were not only threatening the nation biologically but also infecting the body politic with dangerous Marxism. Texans witnessed the rise of numerous radical political and social reform movements between the 1880s and the 1920s, with the

Greenback Party, the Southern Farmers' Alliance, the People's (Populist) Party, various socialist parties, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People challenging not just the iron domination of the segregationist Democratic Party, but in many cases capitalist hegemony itself. Reform movements exhausted Dabney. "As long as a man can secure a job of digging potatoes or sprinkling the streets or something equally useful, why should he concern himself with the frenetic yelping of uplifters, reformers and politicians, pre-millennial dawns, holy-rollers, free-lovers, or any other element of a half-educated neurotic society[?]" he asked. ". . . Just let the demagogues shout that the people are not really ruling till they get this supposed right and it will take with all the rapidity and beneficence of the itch."

Resistance movements portended a grim future, Dabney thought. Southern and Eastern Europeans, particularly Jews, raised the specter of revolution in his mind. Elites should take active steps to prevent the ignorant working class, poor whites, and even gullible college students from falling prey to the siren song of radicalism. Though he was the child of a college professor, Dabney believed it was time to curb free speech in higher education as a means of preventing revolution. ". . . [F]ar too many men are tolerated in our colleges who are busy poisoning the rising generation with doctrines all right for Russian Jews but not to be tolerated by any free Anglo-Saxon soul," Dabney said in a November 23, 1917 letter to a relative. "However, the only reason they are more dangerous than others is that they enjoy the peculiar privilege of braying their nonsense into the tender ears of the young and moulding their minds while plastic. They should be rooted out of every college, and particularly out of state-controlled colleges."

In Dabney's imagination, in the teens and the 1920s the rich constituted the oppressed and the poor and working class the oppressors. Even if his father had depicted abolition of slavery in the United States as one of the chief tragedies of the nineteenth century, Dabney told one friend that he did not, for the most part, regret the South losing the Civil War, except to the degree it stirred political restlessness among the white underclass. "[A]s the negroes put it, 'the bottom rail got on top,'" Dabney wrote, resulting in "the emerging of these 'half-strainers' from the bottom to the top. These the war liberated much more than it did the Africans. This is the day

of the poor white in the South . . ." Dabney frequently used terms like "Mongrels" and "half-strainers" to imply that the white working class was racially impure and therefore biologically tainted. In a speech to the Dallas Critic Club on January 24, 1921, he described the successes of labor unions as "the new tyranny," an "explosive, violent, destructive, and unbearable" subjugation of the rich by the masses through strikes, boycotts, and "universal suffrage." This turmoil stifled investment and job creation because reformers imposed higher wages and limits on working hours. "Great plunder has been gathered by these methods, and in doing so, the war cries and shibboleths of democracy have been freely used; this pure class exploitation has been called democracy and many have been deceived thereby," he complained. The only remedy, Dabney said, would be "open shop" laws that would prohibit workers from being required to join labor unions or to contribute dues to them at a worksite when a majority of workers voted to organize there. "The labor's union is met by the employee's open shop," Dabney told his audience of Dallas leaders. "The labor lobby, bullying legislatures, is already considerably neutralized by the counter lobbying of farmers' associations, merchants' associations, manufacturers' associations and the like, all of whom are not on the job." Dabney wanted to double down on such efforts to thwart Jacobin democracy in the workplace.

Dabney not only wanted to restrict free speech rights at colleges and universities and undermine unions, he wanted to roll back the tide toward Red Republicanism his father had decried more than a half century earlier. He desired a return to what he believed had been the rule of a "natural aristocracy" established by the Founding Fathers. That aristocracy did not include women, who Dabney feared would intensify a trend toward social reform he saw as suicidal. In a November 1914 letter, he inveighed against women's suffrage. "Taxes steadily grow, wages increase, the cost of living goes up and business has fewer opportunities to get its breath between cataclysms," he wrote to Chapin. "Now if the girls jump into this maelstrom and add their shrill outcries it will be the finishing touch. When the fairer half of creation dive in, the serious question will arise whether there will be sufficient time saved out of the scraps of universal uplift to get the meals on the table."

The last thing the United States needed was an expansion of democracy, Dabney thought, since democracy was undermining

civilization itself in the early twentieth century. Dabney urged the country to return to the system of government he said the framers of the United States Constitution intended, an elitist republic directed by the "superior man . . . the torch bearer of the race . . ." Dabney's "superior man," of necessity, needed the management skills of "mediocre man," Dabney's term for those of average ability. Mediocre man, in turn, he said, "accepts the work of genius, and performs the interminable and complex tasks necessary to construction and preservation of what the superior man devises." Mediocre man would submit to the dominance of superior man, he predicted, because of the physical comforts created by ingenious elites. Dabney failed to specify how the mass of middle men could be convinced to submit to political dominance by their presumably smarter superiors, but both superior man and middle man faced a clear and present danger from below: the possibility of revolt by "under man, the congenital savage, incapable of civilization, hating it, and desirous of reverting to the primitive, under the unchangeable biological law of his being."

For all his creativity, Dabney's superior man was too clever by half. By curing diseases, improving food production and distribution, and by advancing human comfort and safety, he had ensured the survival and rapid reproduction of "atavistic" undermen who, as they increased in numbers, were able to demand political reform and a redistribution of wealth. "As society has advanced from the primitive to the semi-civilized . . . its functioning has been biologically adverse to the best strains and favorable to the worst," Dabney said.

"Undermen" used democracy to seize the wealth created by superior man, he claimed. "Democratic institutions have placed upon the upperman increasing burdens," he said. ". . . The voice of democracy is ever to tax and harass the most capable . . . The superior man exerts himself and secures a profit; it is taxed, he works harder, and it is surtaxed. He pays taxes on all his property, his savings, his life insurance, his land, his personal property, his money, his income, franchise taxes, corporation taxes, taxes on his right to work, taxes on the product of his work . . . To prevent his children from sinking in the social scale, he has few, and as his burdens increase, his family diminishes. Democracy, therefore, is dysgenic, tending to restrict the reproduction of the best strains, and to promote large families among the unfit. The race is gradually milked of its best blood at the top, while it reproduces the worst at the bottom . . ."

As Dabney put it:

The barbarian, the underman as we may call him, finds the efforts to sustain the burden of existing in such a society more and more irksome. Loathing sustained effort and congenitally incapable of either appreciating or securing its rewards, he observes that its prizes are not for him, that his only portion in such a society is increasing toil, without any appreciable chance of rising, and that his savage appetites and lusts are restrained by laws which he hates . . . [L]ike the Red communists, [he] believes that if society could be rid of all its superior elements, of all restraints of religion, ties of family, rights of property . . . a peaceful Arcadia of easy living would be attained . . . [T]he undermen become preponderant either by birth or immigration, the social structure cracks and gives way, [and] the underman rises and smashes that civilization which he can never restore, often practically extirpating those of superior mentality.

Dabney told his Dallas audience in 1922 that the rise of the undermen could be prevented only by educating "superior men and women" that they had a moral duty to increase the size of their families; by discouraging birth control in "the upper and better classes" while promoting contraception among the lower classes; through banning marriage among or sterilizing "criminals, lunatics, idiots, defectives and degenerates"; and by ending "promiscuous immigration" into the United States by the "dregs of Europe and Asia." He colorfully added, "The United States is a nation, not a sewer." Dabney died July 11, 1923, shortly after his speeches to the Dallas Critic Club. If he were a lone voice in early twentieth-century Texas decrying the dangers of democracy, Dabney would be at best a footnote in the state's history. To the contrary, Dabney articulated anxieties widely suffered among elites that translated into a war against voting rights waged by the Texas establishment in the first four decades of the twentieth century. These laws aimed at preventing another rebellion against the political establishment such as had been waged by Populists, socialists and their allies in the 1890s and at the opening of the

twentieth century. In 1902, the state imposed for the first time a poll tax. Set originally at \$1.50 (with some counties adding surcharges), the poll tax roughly equaled an entire day's wages for many farm workers, especially African Americans. The state's chief poll tax proponent, former slave owner Alexander Terrell (who served as a judge, in the Texas Senate from 1876 to 1884, and in the state House from 1891-1892 and 1903-1905), said that he supported the poll tax not just as a means of eliminating black voting, but also to disenfranchise "the thriftless, idle, and semi-vagrant element of *both races*." The effect of the poll tax on voting proved devastating, with the Texas electorate shrinking by two-thirds.

In 1903, the state made a more determined effort to specifically eliminate black voting, with the Legislature passing what became known as the Terrell election law, which required parties that won more than 100,000 votes to hold primaries and which allowed eligible parties to determine who could vote in those primaries. The state Democratic Party followed up by establishing a whites-only primary system. Following the collapse of the state Republican Party in Texas in the 1870s and the Populists in the 1890s, the Democrats enjoyed an almost complete monopoly on elective office. African Americans could vote in general elections, but the only meaningful contests were in the Democratic primaries they could no longer participate in. Although a series of Supreme Court decisions starting in 1927 undermined the white primary, the Terrell laws and subsequent revisions rendered African Americans politically powerless until national civil rights legislation in the 1960s.

The number of eligible voters still had not shrunk enough, according to some Texas elites. In a 1927 book distributed in Dallas schools, former district Superintendent Justin Kimball insisted that uninformed, lower-class voters tended to fall under the sway of unqualified but slick candidates. "Ignorant or corruptible citizens can always be counted on to vote, although they usually vote wrong," he wrote.

Dabney's and Kimball's message about the dangers of the dysgenic underman and of the universal franchise were reflected in what Texas public schools taught children from 1900 to 1940. The Dallas school board first adopted a pro-eugenics textbook, *New Biology* by W.M. Smallwood, Ida L. Reveley, and Guy A. Bailey, on March 1, 1926, and stuck with this book for years. "There are two ways of bringing about

human progress," the authors stated in the 1924 edition of the book. "The first is by improving the environment, the second consists of seeking a better inheritance with which to begin life. This is called eugenics . . ." The authors lengthened the section on eugenics from two to four pages from the 1924 to the 1934 edition and in the later version of the book they implied that recent immigrants had brought an increased prevalence of biological defects into the American population. "Man has known for a long time that he could improve his domestic animals and plants, and eugenics is the attempt to apply the same methods to human betterment," the authors declared in the 1934 edition. ". . . The problem of immigration is complicated," the authors noted, "but there is a distinct phase of it that is related to eugenics. What is the connection?" The textbook didn't clearly answer the question, but clearly suggested that recent immigration damaged the eugenic health of the nation.

New Biology taught that not just intellect, but traits like honesty and a work ethic were in-born. "[General] ability and a tendency to industry and thrift are qualities that can be inherited," the authors informed Dallas students. "The men and women who possess such mental traits carry on the business of the country and pay taxes, not only to support the government, but also to care for the idle, the shiftless, and the criminal. If we have inherited those traits of ability and industry, we should strive to keep them unimpaired and strengthen them, so that we may pass them on to our children, in order that the next generation shall possess men and women who will be able to advance human progress beyond our best effort." Smallwood and the other authors indirectly suggested that strict and highly selective immigration policies might be a way to ensure that Americans keep certain traits "unimpaired."

Another popular biology textbook of the time (adopted by the Dallas school district on March 10, 1942), Truman Jesse Moon's *Biology for Beginners*, argued that the brain structures of advanced "Caucasians" biologically differed from those of other races, who therefore could be assumed to be physically unqualified for citizenship. "There is more *structural* difference between the lower primates (lemur) and the chimpanzee and the gorilla than there is between these higher apes and man," Moon declared. "Also, there is a greater difference between the lowest type of savage man and the highest type of civilized man, than there is between the savage and the ape." In short,

Dallas students were led to believe that in the world there were literal undermen, races more animal-like than human. Moon makes clear who some of these peoples are: some "Australian and African tribes." Radical democracy in America, thus, threatened to leave matters of policy up to not to the superior, but the ape-like.

In textbooks adopted by the Dallas school district, white supremacist lessons, with an implied warning about radical democracy, spanned the curriculum. A 1927 world history textbook told students that black men and women were "dark of skin . . . [and] even darker of mind, for the light of civilization had not yet reached them." These textbooks planted the idea in students' minds that the imagined gaps in civilization between whites and other racial groups stemmed from biology and raised questions as to whether African Americans, Latino/as, or Native Americans should qualify as citizens in a modern nation. No less than Dabney, Dallas school books questioned the wisdom of democracy and suggested that people of color could threaten social stability if armed with the vote.

Poor people should not vote either, if the school textbooks were to be believed. Texas students were also told that Founding Fathers like George Washington, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson abhorred granting the unqualified the franchise and intended the United States to be a republic ruled by financial, cultural and educational aristocrats. History texts insisted that the Founding Fathers saw wealth as a mark of character. Textbooks praised what authors described as the undemocratic nature of the American Revolution and the United States Constitution. Men like James Madison placed checks on popular will in the Constitution to prevent the horrors of "mob rule." The men who wrote the U.S. Constitution realized that men without property lacked the intelligence and the discipline to contribute as citizens and therefore wisely denied them the vote, according to the authors of the *Record of America* published in 1935 and adopted by the Dallas school board four years later, . The Revolutionary Generation, the Dallas text said, "had little faith in the ability of people as a whole to maintain self-control and wisdom in government. They had no confidence in the man without property . . . a man who had failed to [accumulate property] . . . would be regarded as shiftless, lazy, or incompetent, and not deserving a voice in the government of others." Founders like James Madison wrote the Constitution "to retain power in the hands of those who were least radical, and to set

obstacles in the way of radical mob action.”

School textbooks widely used in Texas also suggested other forms of government offered more attractive alternatives to what Robert Dabney had called “red republicanism.” The school text *Our World Today and Yesterday: A History of Modern Civilization* offered students nothing but kind words for such ruthless autocrats as Benito Mussolini and his fascist regime in Italy. By crushing labor unions, students were taught, Mussolini had brought calm to Italian society and launched an economic renaissance for the Southern European nation. “He [Mussolini] has chosen a ministry made up of capable men and has straightened up the badly demoralized finances of the country,” the textbook told its high school readership. “He and his followers are accused of suppressing liberty and downing the communists by violence. Nevertheless, he has done much to do away with strikes and to reestablish conditions as they were before the economic demoralization of the war [World War I] set in.”

The campaign against the reproduction of the unfit was seen as parallel and complimentary to disenfranchisement efforts, which would prevent the revolution and chaos the underman always threatened. Even generally left-leaning eugenics activists in Texas, such as Julian Huxley who taught at Rice Institute in Houston from 1913-1916, worried that democracy was, as Dabney put it, dysgenic. The wise management of society would require those of lesser intelligence to surrender political authority to their intellectual superiors. “I think it would be well if we asked ourselves whether our present brand of democracy is calculated to give us the best organs of social control and differentiation,” Huxley said during a series of talks he delivered as a guest lecturer at Rice Institute in September and October 1924. “The advantage of democracy is the raising of the condition of the mass of the people to a good average. The curse is the tendency to pull down what is above the average to the level of the average’s mediocrity. A democracy of material opportunity freely surrendering itself to the guidance of an aristocracy of thought -- that seems to me to sum up pretty closely the biological ideal for society.”

Throughout the teens and the 1920s, eugenicists did all they could to alert the public that time was running out to save the republic from savages. Eugenics supporters staged “Better Baby” contests across the country while the nation’s first “Fitter Family” competition was held in Topeka, Kansas in 1920. Often sponsored by groups like the

American Eugenics Society, the baby and family contests unfolded in Philadelphia and other cities nationwide. Display boards "revealed with flashing lights that every fifteen seconds a hundred dollars of your money went for the care of persons with bad heredity, that every forty-eight seconds a mentally deficient person was born in the United States, and that only every seven and a half minutes did the United States enjoy the birth of 'a high-grade person' . . ." Eugenicists used the Better Baby contests at the Texas State Fair to encourage the more prolific reproduction of the fit. At a 1914 State Fair contest in Dallas, parents willingly subjected 500 babies to a battery of tests, such as skull measurements, conducted by doctors. Eugenicists believed that skull size correlated to intelligence, i.e. that bigger heads indicated bigger brains, which in turn meant higher intelligence. (Actually, larger skulls generally correlate to body size.) Doctors also believed that skull shape provided evidence of a superior or inferior mind and character. Long, so-called dolichocephalic skulls, eugenicists believed, denoted high IQ and advanced evolution, while shorter, brachycephalic skulls marked stunted intellectual development. The search for biological perfection at such contests went beyond skull dimensions, however, with doctors documenting "the most minute defection physically or mentally as to even consider the finger dimensions and maturity of hair and the like . . ." at the Pure Food and Better Babies Exposition in Dallas in May 1914. It was unclear how the medical judges scientifically defined "maturity of hair." Even as the owners of "cattle, chickens and pigs" earned blue ribbons elsewhere on the fairgrounds, parents could win \$15 for having the "best" child, any class, and \$5 for the best twins and triplets.

The white, blond offspring of elite families who prevailed at the Better Baby contests at the Texas State Fair and similar competitions met eugenicists' Nordic profile and thus, by blood, earned the right to rule. Promoters of such contests claimed they could teach parents how to upgrade even defective children. As a column from *Mothers Magazine* reprinted by the *Dallas Morning News* put it, "The intention is to make the average parent realize that the observation of certain methods will enable to them to improve their babies, even when much below the standard, and they will be taught how to accomplish the improvement and to correct deficiencies." The writer, however, urged society to improve the human stock, presumably through

selective breeding, just as similar methods had produced faster race horses and cattle that produced more meat. "The Government has been very liberal in its expenditure of money . . . with the object of advancing the standards of our domestic animals . . . But until now the greatest National asset we have ever had or ever will have – the American child – has been utterly ignored in the Government campaign for 'better products.'" As a 1913 *Dallas Morning News* story promoting a Better Babies show in Fort Worth put it, these competitions were "a popular yet scientific movement to insure better babies and a better race." Eugenics was offered as a method towards that goal. A. Caswell Ellis, a University of Texas educational psychologist who long devoted himself to popularizing science, appeared at the 1914 Better Babies contest to rally those in attendance to the cause of selective breeding and the rest of the eugenics program. He opened by flattering the crowd, insisting that, "Texas babies are better babies than the babies of any other state," before he "lightly touched on eugenics."

Mary T. Watts of the National Eugenics Society, described by the *Dallas Morning News* as the founder of the "better babies" movement, arrived in the city to launch a "Fitter Families" contest during the State Fair in October 1924 to "interest people in racial betterment and stronger and more virile families. Physical and psychological tests would be administered by members of the Southern Methodist University psychology department while geneticists from Texas A&M College would make presentations on "inheritability and family trait features." During the Fitter Families Contest at the 1925 State Fair, organizers used guinea pigs to exhibit how traits were inherited in "both hybrids and pure bloods." Dr. H.L. Gosline, the Dallas Child Guidance Center's director and psychiatrist in chief, told a *Morning News* reporter that "Human characteristics are inherited in exactly the same manner and proportion as they are in guinea pigs . . . With this in mind, it is the aim of the fitter families contests to create interest in better quality children."

Intentionally or not, the Better Baby and Fitter Family contestants provided a sharp contrast to the "human oddities," who were often men and women of color, presented for entertainment at the Texas State Fair's "freak shows." From the early 1890s through the first decade of the twentieth century, African American conjoined twins (or as such individuals were called in that era, "Siamese twins") Millie and

Christine, alternately identified as "Millie Christine," drew crowds at the segregated fair. The women had four arms and four legs but shared a torso and amazed audiences as one twin spoke French and the other German. The twins accompanied each other, singing in alto and soprano simultaneously, and danced to polka music. Meanwhile, the 1907 State Fair featured a "freak captured in the hinterland of South Africa" with "a face in every detail similar to a monkey" and "feet and hands . . . long and monkey-like."

From the earlier days of the State Fair, black and brown people performed as primitive "savages" from around the world and were displayed like gorillas and chimpanzees in natural habitats. In 1894, a replica of a Dahomey Village drew visitors to the fair midway. "You can form some sort of idea of how they live in 'darkest Africa,' if you visit the Dahomey Village in the rear of the race course grand stand," a newspaper promised. Spectators could see Africans performing on "quaint and peculiar musical instruments" as they played "war songs . . . not so entrancing to the cultivated ear as a Straus waltz." Among the inhabitants of the temporary Dahomean Village was "the only cannibal child born in the United States," given the name of "Texas." Readers were told that the tribe deferred to local laws and did not nourish the youngster with human fluids but on chicken blood instead. The 1905 fair starred thirty-two members of the Bontoc Igorrote nation from the far northern part of the Philippines. Truman Hunt, a former physician turned entertainment entrepreneur, and another showman, Richard Schneidewind (like Hunt, a Spanish-American War veteran) brought competing bands of Igorrotes to the United States for exhibition, and had promised them handsome wages in return for them exaggerating their cultural practices. Instead, many of the Igorrotes ultimately ended up penniless and stranded. In Dallas, they dwelled in a duplication of a native village dubious in accuracy, and stood scantily clad. The Igorrotes practiced throwing spears and dined on dogs for their evening meal in front of fascinated and horrified white audiences. The *Dallas Morning News* left readers with the impression that Igorrotes were immune to new ideas. "It is said that the Igorrotes have made no progress in civilization since their arrival in America, the education advantages of the great land failing wholly influence them, and that they will appear at the State Fair in their original savage state, dog-eating custom and all." The Igorrotes' "savagery" extended to the homicidal. "In the party will

be three or four famous chiefs, each with a record as a head hunter," the *Dallas Morning News* promised when the "tribe" was scheduled to return to the city in 1907.

Beyond the State Fair, non-whites were offered as human oddities to ticket buyers. The Sells-Floto Circus toured across the United States and across Texas in the early twentieth century, including shows in Dallas. Late in the second decade of the twentieth century, a Texas railroad worker named Pasqual Pinon, billed as the "two-headed Mexican," joined the troupe. He appeared to have a second, smaller face with a nose and immobile eyes and a mouth growing out of his forehead. Carnival barkers told audiences that his second head at one point could speak but that the face eventually lost the ability to move. One writer contends that the second face was a large tumor outfitted with prosthetics and another that the entire "second head" was a fake."

The Dallas Morning News informed its readership that the savages on display at the fair did not measure up to eugenics ideals. A 35-year-old "Australian Wild Girl" exhibited in 1894 weighed only 35 pounds and had a "head smaller than any ordinary baby's." A "Professor Fowler" pronounced her "the missing link in Darwin's theory between man and brute creation." The Texas State Fair and similar extravaganzas routinely presented non-whites as Dabney's dangerous undermen -- savage, small-brained, deformed, impervious to progress and as headhunters and cannibals. Fair-goers were presented two alternatives: a world filled with the alleged human near-perfection at the Better Babies and Fitter Families contests, or the supposed human horrors on the Midway. The dangerous trend toward dysgenic democracy opened a gate to a biological flood: a rising tide of color against white world supremacy, as a leading eugenicist Lothrop Stoddard put it in the title of his 1920 bestselling book, with its attending wave of feeble-mindedness, deformity, and disability.

White eugenicists routinely demeaned African Americans, ranking them the lowest when comparing the intellects of racial groups. African American elites, however, often turned out to be surprisingly ambivalent about eugenics and about the role of the masses in leading society. In a 1903 essay, W.E.B. Du Bois, one of the pre-eminent intellectual forces of the twentieth century, and one of the most important leaders of the African American community for the next six decades, articulated his vision of how African Americans would rise from a past shaped by slavery, poverty, and white racial violence. In

his essay "The Talented Tenth," Du Bois embraced a decidedly elitist vision of racial uplift. A socialist, Du Bois abhorred revolutionary violence. He held decidedly mixed feelings about Soviet Union-style communism, and only joined the Communist Party USA in 1961 just days before his 93rd birthday as a protest against the American government's oppression of the left. Du Bois nevertheless did not envision the black freedom struggle triumphing at the behest of the masses. In his "Talented Tenth" essay, he declared, "The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education, then, among Negroes must first of all deal with the Talented Tenth; it is the problem of developing the Best of this race that they may guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the Worst, in their own and other races."

Later, Du Bois amplifies how he defined the ideal role of "The Talented Tenth: "[I]he college-bred Negro . . . is, as he ought to be, the group leader, the man who sets the ideals of the community where he lives, directs its thoughts and heads its social movements." Du Bois also saw the Talented Tenth as a bulwark against the "submerged tenth," which he demonized as "criminals, prostitutes, and loafers." Authors Gregory Michael Dorr and Angela Logan argue that Du Bois and prominent African American educator Thomas Wyatt Turner embraced "assimilationist eugenics . . . a perspective that viewed racial differences as being insignificant, but adopted more fundamental eugenic notions about distinctions between 'fit' and 'unfit' people." Men like Du Bois rejected the idea of white supremacy, but believed that society would be best served by increased reproduction on the part of the biologically and intellectually gifted of all races and reduced fertility among the eugenically degenerate to be found in all colors. Du Bois also believed that part of the African American race had been polluted by white rapists who had produced with their black victims mixed-race children who biologically carried the criminal tendencies of their fathers. If he rejected the existence of significant intellectual and moral differences between whites and blacks, he nevertheless accepted the eugenicist idea that biology to a large degree was destiny. As Du Bois put it, "some were fitted to know and some to dig." Partly in response to the better baby contests organized by white eugenicists, the NAACP's national field secretary William P. Pickens launched a campaign in the mid-1920s for local NAACP chapters to hold baby contests that would serve three major

purposes. Entry fees for the contests would fund a political effort to end the pandemic of lynching in the United States. Secondly, the contests would promote healthier care of babies in the black community. Third, the baby contests would encourage the Talented Tenth to raise larger families.

Leaders in the Texas African American community felt ambivalent about eugenics. *The Dallas Express*, an African American newspaper, regularly mocked Nordicism -- the idea popular among eugenicists that Nordics were superior not only to African Americans and other people of color but also to other Europeans. "The accident of color is not a God given barrier as worshippers of the Nordic would have it," said a 1925 *Dallas Express* editorial condemning black men and women who accommodated white racists. "Men used to be known by their location and citizenship, not by their race. Paul, the apostle, though a Jew, was a Roman citizen. Black men were also. It is only American prejudice that has made a god out of white, and race a thing to be worshipped."

In another 1925 story, *The Express* mocked Virginia Registrar of Vital Statistics Dr. W.A. Plecker who predicted that because of "miscegenation," in the year 2000 or 3000 "all of the inhabitants of America will be brownskinned." He called for strict laws against interracial marriage across the country. *The Express* pointed out that Nordic rapists of black women, during slavery and afterwards, had produced most of the United States' large mixed-race population. "[T]he freakish complexions and lightened skins of 'Negroes' . . . have resulted from the age long helplessness of the Negro woman and the attraction which they have seemingly held for the males of other bloods," the *Express* writer said. "It is not the fault of the Negro that the 'best blood' of America flows through the veins of so many of those who are now . . . classed [as black.] . . . [T]his problem like others, had its beginnings in the belief that black men and women had no rights that others were bound to respect . . . Let the laws protect black women as well as others and there will be fewer mulattoes." The fact that whites had so often transgressed racial boundaries, the *Express* said, contained "little that is complimentary to the Nordics."

The Dallas Express delighted in turning the racial hierarchy created by eugenicists upside down, sometimes suggesting there was scientific evidence of black superiority. An April 18, 1925 story pointed out that African American test subjects during World War I withstood

exposure to the poison gas “tetra-nitroaniline after NORDIC blonds and Jewish chemists had keeled over at a laboratory at Boundrock, N.J.” As the story noted:

Group after group of white men were tried and unable to withstand the action of the fumes. Finally, Negroes were ordered to make the experiments, and were found to be able to withstand the poisons.

It is said that the participants in the experiments were graded as to complexion to determine if the dark-skinned men could withstand the deadly fumes, and they did. It is said that the lightest skinned keeled over in a week, and were resuscitated with difficulty. It was found that the dark-skinned Negroes withstood the fumes and enabled the chemists to complete the experiment.

The *Express* believed the story punched holes in contemporary racial theories. “It is said that open confession is good for the soul and surely leading chemical experts of the country should feel much better now since they have gotten off their chests something about the ‘superiority’ of Negroes,” the newspaper said. The newspaper also delighted in using the language of eugenicists against them, employing the categories of mental disability coined by Henry H. Goddard to describe white criminals. “White Moron Admits Assault on Little Negro Girl,” screamed a banner headline in the October 3, 1925 issue. (In the IQ scale developed in 1910 by psychologist Goddard, so-called morons were those subjects with an IQ between 51-70 on the Stanford-Binet scale, “imbeciles” with an IQ between 26-50, and “idiots” an IQ score of 25 or below.)

Even if the newspaper rejected Nordic supremacism, however, eugenicist ideas sometimes crept into *The Dallas Express*, including the idea that the unfit might be breeding more rapidly than the fit. “[T]he number of persons confined in hospitals for the insane greatly exceeds the number of students enrolled in colleges and universities,” the *Dallas Express* reported, summarizing a New York speech by Dr. Fritz Patrick, president of the American Institute of Homeopathy. Patrick urged schools to test young students for signs of insanity and

to segregate those with signs of mental illness in institutions in order to prevent their reproduction.

Meanwhile, anxiety over black fertility became apparent in the pages of *The Dallas Express* in the early 1920s. African Americans shrank sharply as a percentage of the state population, from 20.4 percent of the total in 1900 to 15.9 percent in 1920, probably because of white and Latino/a migration into the state in those two decades. In an era of disenfranchisement, segregation, and lynchings in Texas, African Americans might have feared even greater political marginalization as their relative numbers in the state declined. Advertisements for doctors offering information on improving fertility filled the pages of the publication. One ad offered a free book by a "Dr. Burroughs, a graduate physician who has spent forty years treating women for diseases peculiar to their sex and in his book explains why so many married women have been denied the blessing of children – why they are broken down physically in early life." Another advertisement offered information on the fertility treatment "Steritone." The manufacturer insisted that, "Every woman who wants to live a normal happy home life with little ones around her should consider it her first duty to find out what Steritone is . . ."

Even before the NAACP promoted similar events, *The Dallas Express* started holding "Better Baby" contests "[i]n the interest of better bred and cared for Negro babies in Dallas . . ." In a contest the newspaper sponsored at the Pythian Temple from July 1-3, "a special corps of physicians and trained nurses will examine, weigh, and give instructions to mothers on the care and feeding of their babies." Mothers of "the healthiest, best developed babies" won prizes.

Some African American intellectuals in Texas, however, were concerned about which African Americans bore children, believing as did Du Bois in the early twentieth century that "among human races and groups, as among vegetables, quality and not mere quantity counts." Assimilationist eugenics and anxieties about the worth of and dangers posed by the underclass appear in the writings of two early twentieth-century African American writers from Texas, Sutton R. Griggs and Lillian B. Jones Horace.

A novelist, author, political polemicist, and preacher born on Juneteenth, 1872 in Chatfield, Texas and educated at Bishop College in Marshall, Griggs founded the American Baptist Theological Seminary in Nashville, Tennessee, and served as the school's first

president from 1925-1926. Griggs began his political life as an advocate of black separatism, articulated in his 1899 novel *Imperium in Imperio: A Study of the Negro Race*. In the novel, a secret African American society seeks to create an independent black republic within the boundaries of the current United States. Griggs gradually transformed into a Booker T. Washington-style accommodationist who accepted segregation as a means to convince whites to accept and support black economic progress. Though he spent little time in Texas during his prolific writing career, his ideas reflected attitudes held by some African American elites in the state during the early twentieth century.

Horace, born Lillian Bertha "Amstead" or "Armistead" on April 29, 1880, was a native of Jefferson but she grew up in Fort Worth which, as one biographer notes, she considered her hometown. An educator, like Griggs she attended Bishop College, in her case from 1898-1899. She also attended Prairie View Normal and Industrial College in the 1920s. She authored a black separatist novel of her own, *Five Generations Hence*, which she self-published in 1916. Much later, she penned a never-published novel, *Angie Brown*. Both of Horace's novels share the theme that black racial uplift could be achieved via education and economic independence from the outside white world. However, Karen Kossie-Chernyshev (the scholar who rediscovered the once-forgotten Horace and brought her literary career to light for modern audiences) noted that Horace tended to undermine "her commitment to uplift by focusing on black pathology."

Independent, thoughtful, and creative, both Griggs and Horace suffered at the hands of what the historian Carter G. Woodson once famously characterized in 1933 as the "miseducation of the Negro" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Woodson noted, black students suffered not only because of the segregated, underfunded, overcrowded, and poorly equipped nature of the public schools African Americans attended. Woodson also identified crippling problems with the curricula offered black students of the era. As Woodson pointed out, "the philosophy and ethics resulting from our education system have justified slavery, peonage, segregation, and lynching. The oppressor has the right to exploit, to handicap. Negroes daily educated in the tenets of such a religion of the strong have accepted the status of the weak as divinely ordained, and during the last three generations of their nominal freedom, they have done

little to change it." Woodson charged that American schools pushed African Americans into admiration of Western civilization while they were only rarely taught anything about African civilization or anything positive about African American history. Thus African Americans thus, like their lighter-skinned peers, were taught that only white people created technology and worthwhile culture and that blacks were at best apprentices at the feet of their smarter, more creative white superiors.

Such attitudes appear in both Horace's and Griggs' works. In *Five Generations Hence*, a prophetic dream startles the main character, Grace Noble. She foresees a nation in Africa founded by black immigrants from the United States, thriving and rising in greatness in the time span referenced. Throughout Horace's novel, black characters refer to the homeland as "darkest Africa," and fear that an African American missionary travelling there will be eaten, tortured by the natives, or die of some terrible disease. Africans are portrayed as ignorant and pre-modern. The novel assumes that blacks educated in the United States who immigrate to the African homeland will quickly assume leadership over natives. While Europeans were inventing the technology and culture that would conquer the world, Horace's character Noble believes, Africans continued to live in the Stone Age. Griggs, meanwhile, referred to one of his grandfathers, born in Africa, as a "savage."

Horace's and Griggs' skepticism about their African ancestors no doubt contributed to their doubts about the African American masses and their ability to govern themselves. At one point in *Five Generations Hence*, Horace's hero Grace Noble despairs as she contemplates the children she is teaching and sees in them the massive deficits she is convinced her people suffer. Reflecting on the state of black America, Noble "in her imagination saw an appalling, seething mass of millions of human forms groping in ignorance and superstition . . . Ignorance! most direful ignorance! intrepid monster! stalked a horrible reality among her people, and what was dismaying, his presence failed to intimidate the obstreperous rabble." Such a rabble would clearly have to be guided to a better life in Africa by thought leaders such as Noble and, once in their new African republic, the transported black masses might have to accept continued guidance by the intellectual elites. The revolution, in Horace's imagination, would be led from the top down, not the bottom up.

The black separatism Horace endorsed in *Five Generations Hence* and Griggs in *Imperium in Imperio* was, by definition, partly a eugenicist enterprise, providing not only an escape from white economic and political exploitation, but also sexual boundaries that would shield African American women from sexual pollution by the white criminal element. Poor whites – Dabney’s undermen – cast a villainous shadow in both writers’ works. In Horace’s unpublished 1948 novel, *Angie Brown*, a friend warns the title character about a sinister poor white neighbor. “. . . Been free all they life and ain’t got nothing. That’s the kind that hates you and me. They scared we’ll get what they want. Rich folks whole lots easier to get along with; they don’t mind us; we ain’t in they way. They so far ’bove us in having things they ain’t scared of us . . . but these poor ones can’t ever forgive us for being free. They got to beat us back out o’ the way.”

Griggs did not accept that poor white undermen had a monopoly on racial ill will and violence, or that rich whites were too disinterested in African Americans to be poisoned with racism. “We find three general categories of racists in Griggs’s fiction,” Griggs biographer Finnie Coleman observes. “[M]aniacal scientists or social theorists; hardheaded poor Whites; and the arrogant aristocrat . . . Of the three types, the arrogant aristocratic racist takes center stage in Griggs’s fiction . . . It was important for Griggs to show that White supremacy was not the province of any particular class of Whites or a function of education or political affiliation. White supremacy was not restricted to gender, nor was religion a factor.”

One of the more ominous white racists created by Griggs in any of his novels is essentially a mad scientist, a white eugenicist named Dr. Zackland who, in *Imperium in Imperio*, spies a brilliant African American, Belton Piedmont, at a train station and decides that he must study the body of the black man -- “a fine specimen of physical manhood” with “limbs . . . well formed and proportioned and . . . as strong as oak.” Zackland decides he can learn the most from this specimen by dissecting him, and he hopes to present parts of Belton to his medical colleagues as part of a lecture. Belton later survives a lynching attempt and Zackland, unaware that his victim is still alive, seizes his body. Belton awakens on the dissection table and overpowers Zackland, fatally stabbing him and making an escape.

In spite of this gruesome depiction of white racial science, Griggs accepts many premises of eugenicism. If he rejects white suprem-

acy, he still views many of the poor as dysgenic and wants the African American community to pursue assimilationist eugenics. Griggs' novels featured some characters who advocated various schemes of selective breeding, some calling for interracial breeding as a means of eliminating prejudice. Other Griggs characters, such as Letitia Gilbreath, a character in his last novel, *Pointing the Way*, encourage all African Americans to bear children with lighter skinned blacks in the hope of lightening the race. Gilbreath hopes this will reduce white prejudice. Griggs did not accept such ideas, but that does not mean he was not deeply concerned about both the black and white unfit.

He specifically rejected crossing the color line sexually. If he was less specifically concerned about color, he did advocate selective breeding for ability, believing that the path to a better future lay in the "better element" of the white population and "worthy" Negroes bearing larger families than the violent, lazy, immoral, and unintelligent of both races. He also seems to have supported the idea of restricting voting to the fit of both races. Griggs' novel *Pointing the Way* depicts a white politician, Seth Molair, the mayor of the fictional town of Belrose, getting converted to the cause of dropping voting restrictions aimed at African Americans by the argument that it's a racial insult to set a higher standard for blacks than for whites. Unqualified whites, including many in the lower class, should perhaps be disenfranchised, Griggs suggests. The novel argues that the way forward to a better tomorrow is for quality whites and blacks to make common cause against the unruly lower sorts. As critic Kenneth Warren suggests, Griggs seems to be arguing for an "interracial alliance of the better classes by making dead certain that there will be no challenge from below."

A cross-racial alliance of the better sort of white and black elites united in keeping the unruly masses under control did not evolve as Griggs hoped. The iron grip white elites in Texas held over ballot access eased after 1940 due to the African American and Latino/a civil rights movement and increasing pressure from the White House, the Congress, and the United States Supreme Court. Nevertheless, the anti-democratic discourse of the early twentieth century continued to shape Texas attitudes toward government and voting rights well into the twentieth century. Racism and eugenics stand as inherently anti-democratic concepts. Both imply that not all are fit for full participation in civic society, and that some are fitted for leadership by birth.

Both hold that societies are built not on shared values, but on shared blood. Such ideas reinforced a Texas commitment to limit voting to the fit long after eugenics came to be seen as toxic pseudo-science.

To this day, the Texas legislature has fought to limit voting rights. In 1944, the United States Supreme Court finally killed the so-called "white primary" for good, but a group of all-white party insiders still largely determined who won the Democratic Party nominations for public office. These primaries remained the only elections that mattered, for the most part, until the 1980s. In 1963, Texas voters turned down a state constitutional amendment that would have eliminated the poll tax, the electorate preferring to pay to cast their ballots rather than hand political power to supposedly unfit people of color. Elimination of the poll tax came only through outside force, in the form of an amendment to the United States Constitution in 1964. Texas resisted, claiming its poll tax did not violate the newly-ratified 24th Amendment, until the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the state levy in 1966. The Legislature responded that year with an onerous voter registration law that required reregistration annually, a requirement the high court did not throw out until 1971. From the 1970s, the state Legislature incessantly drew discriminatory state House and Senate as well as Congressional districts to suppress the voting strength of black and brown voters and to guarantee political victories for the ruling party, creating mostly pre-determined general election results that depress voter turnout. Finally, in 2011 the state passed one of the most restrictive voter identification laws in the country, requiring voters to present photo IDs such as a Texas driver's license, a U.S. passport, a military identification card or an election identification certificate in order to cast a ballot. Obtaining these IDs cost money, and critics charge they represent a new form of poll tax, address a problem that virtually doesn't exist (in-person voter fraud) and are designed to suppress voting by the poor and people of color. Implementation of the law has been repeatedly halted by federal courts.

Meanwhile, openly anti-democratic discourse can still be heard in Texas. In the 1960s, Dallas oil billionaire H.L. Hunt personally bankrolled a right-wing radio program, *LIFELINE*, hosted by former FBI agent Dan Smoot who once angered his patron by claiming in a broadcast that democracy was "a political outgrowth of the teachings of Jesus Christ." Hunt angrily confronted Smoot after the

show, insisted that democracy was Satan's handiwork and a "phony liberal form of watered down communism." Such attitudes did not disappear with the passage of time. A group that Hunt supported, the obsessively anti-communist John Birch Society, has experienced a recent growth in membership and presents lectures across the state that insist the United States is a "republic, not a democracy," as if a republican form of government intrinsically could not reflect democratic values. These ideas are not at the fringe. Former Texas representative and erstwhile repeated Libertarian and Republican presidential candidate Ron Paul wrote in 2012, "Democracy is majority rule at the expense of the minority. Our system has certain democratic elements, but the founders never mentioned democracy in the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, or the Declaration of Independence. In fact, our most important protections are decidedly undemocratic." Texas Republican Rep. Louie Gohmert of Tyler has even argued for a repeal of the 17th Amendment that gave voters the power to directly vote for their U.S. senators instead of having them appointed by state legislatures. Gohmert claimed in 2010 that the amendment ratified in 1913 constituted a violation of "states' rights."

More than a century of anti-democratic discourse appears to have had its intended effect. In 2008, the year of the presidential race between Democratic nominee Barack Obama and Republican John McCain, the voter turnout nationally was the highest in 40 years, but in Texas the turnout declined by one percent, from 57 percent in 2004 to 56 percent. In 2012, another presidential election year, Texas had the fifth-lowest turnout in the nation. Turnout in Texas during off-year elections is even more dreadful. Only 34.6 percent of eligible voters turned out to cast ballots in the November 2014 Congressional, state, and local elections. Texas ranked third-worst in voter turnout in the general election in 2016, with only 52 percent showing up on Election Day, even though nationally the turnout was the highest since 18-year-olds got the vote in time for the 1972 presidential election. Experts offer numerous explanations for why so few Texans exercise their right to vote. Voters there are disenchanted with both political parties. Heavy gerrymandering by Republicans, who have monopolized statewide office and held large majorities in the Legislature since 1995, has essentially predetermined the outcome of legislative and Congressional races in the state. No Democratic presidential candidate has carried the state since Jimmy Carter won there

in 1976. Meanwhile, Texas has not implemented reforms common in states with the highest voter turnouts, such as vote-by-mail advance ballots, and same-day or automatic voter registration and has, in fact, gone in the opposite direction with its voter ID law. In a 2015 study conducted by Rice University researchers examining voting patterns in Texas' 23rd Congressional District, almost 19 percent of Hispanic non-voters said that concerns that they lacked proper identification led them to not show up on Election Day. Texas is not governed by a biological aristocracy dreamed of by men like Robert and Meriwether Lewis Dabney or Julian Huxley. Yet even without the sterilization laws these eugenicists advocated, the state has not fallen to so-called "Red Republicanism." Nevertheless, fear of rule by the underman remains a potent force in Texas politics.

Notes

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² Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race or the Racial Basis of European History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), 12.

³ Victoria F. Nourse, *In Reckless Hands: Skinner v. Oklahoma and the Near Triumph of American Eugenics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2008), 132.

⁴ Edward H. Sebesta and Euan Hague, "The US Civil War as a Theological War: Confederate Christian Nationalism and the League of the South," in Euan Hague, Heidi Beirich, and Edward H. Sebesta, eds., *Neo-Confederacy: a Critical Introduction* (Austin: University of

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⁵ Robert Lewis Dabney, *A Defence*, 131, 154, 166.

⁶ Meriwether Lewis Dabney, *A Memoir and Letters*, ix, 12, 16-17, 22-24, 196.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 194.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 195-196.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹¹ Randolph B. Campbell, *Gone to Texas: A History of the Lone Star State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 326-328; A.C. Greene, Dallas, U.S.A. (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1984), 72.

¹² United States Bureau of the Census, Population Division, "Table 13. Nativity of the Population, for Regions, Divisions, and States: 1850 to 1990," <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0029/tab13.html>. Accessed July 13, 2011; Robert A. Calvert and Arnoldo de León, *The History of Texas* (Wheeling, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 1996), 186; Johnson, Revolution in Texas, 26; Terry G. Jordan, "A Century and a Half of Ethnic Change in Texas, 1836-1986," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 89 (April 1986), 418; and Robert McCaa, "Missing Millions: The Human Cost of the Mexican Revolution," Report by the University of Minnesota Population Center (2001), <http://www.hist.umn.edu/~rmccaa/missmill/mxrev.htm>. Accessed July 13, 2011.

¹³ Dabney, *A Memoir and Letters*, 104-106; David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 122-123.

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in 1926, and Cesar Lombardi, president of the A.H. Belo Corporation, parent company of the newspaper, established the Dallas Critic Club in 1908 to provide a private setting for key leaders in the city to discuss not just local issues but controversies facing the country and the world. See Michael V. Hazel, "The Critic Club: Sixty Years of Quiet Leadership," *Legacies: A History Journal for Dallas and North Central Texas* II, no. 2 (Fall 1990), 9-17.

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²⁷ *Ibid.*, 148.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 212.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 97-8.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 215.

³¹ Ibid., 215-217.

³² Ibid., 218.

³³ Ibid., 220-221.

³⁴ Ibid., 217.

³⁵ Ibid., 232.

³⁶ Ibid., 269.

³⁷ Davidson, *Race and Class in Texas Politics*, 21-23.

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