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A Short History of Eugenics Thought and Practice

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A Short History of Eugenics Thought and Practice

By Dennis Sullivan, MD, MA (Ethics)
Cedarville University

Sources

- Based on facts taken from:
 - www.eugenicsarchive.org
 - <http://bioethics.georgetown.edu/publications/scopenotes/sn28.htm>
- Special note of thanks to:
 - Joe W. Francis, Ph.D. (Masters College)

Introduction to Eugenics

- Eugenics: from the Greek “eugenes” for “good birth”
 - Underlying ideas quite ancient in origin
 - Plato argued that human baby production should be limited to people selected for desirable qualities
- Term coined in 1883 by Francis Galton
 - Englishman and cousin of Charles Darwin
 - Applied Darwinian science to heredity and “good birth”

Definitions

- The Encyclopedia of Bioethics:
 - “A science that investigates methods to ameliorate the genetic composition of the human race, a program to foster such betterment; a social movement; and in its perverted form, a pseudo-scientific retreat for bigots and racists.”
- Kevles:
 - “By 1935 eugenics had become hopelessly perverted into a pseudoscientific facade for advocates of race and class prejudice, defenders of vested interests of church and state, Fascists, Hitlerites, and reactionaries generally.”

The popularization of genetic science:

- Phrases used at the end of the 19th century:
 - “Survival of the fittest”
 - “Struggle for existence”
- Eugenics societies were created throughout the world

Social Origins of Eugenics

- Economic, social, and political context
 - The rapid growth of American industry
 - Increased mechanization of agriculture
 - Major migration away from farms
 - Cities expanded faster than adequate housing
 - Wholesale exploitation of labor created militant labor union organizations
 - Huge influx of immigrants from Europe in years before WWI

Social Darwinism

- Explained social and economic inequalities as the “survival of the fittest.”
 - Declining birthrate among the wealthy and powerful
 - Working class was reproducing at a faster rate
- Social philanthropy and religious institutions little help.
- Progressive reformers: faith in science as a “cure-all”

EUGENICS

EUGENICS IS THE
SELF DIRECTION

OF HUMAN EVOLUTION



LIKE A TREE
EUGENICS DRAWS ITS MATERIALS FROM MANY SOURCES AND ORGANIZES
THEM INTO AN HARMONIOUS ENTITY.

The New Social Engineering: Eugenics

- Genetically “selected” traits
 - pauperism, feeble-mindedness, alcoholism, rebelliousness
 - nomadism, criminality, prostitution
- All due to “defective germ plasm”
- Defective individuals should not reproduce – led to compulsory sterilization
- Some races more prone to defects – led to selective immigration restriction

THE BURDEN OF THE FEEBLE-MINDED

A CHILD WHO HAS HELPED TO LEAD THE WAY

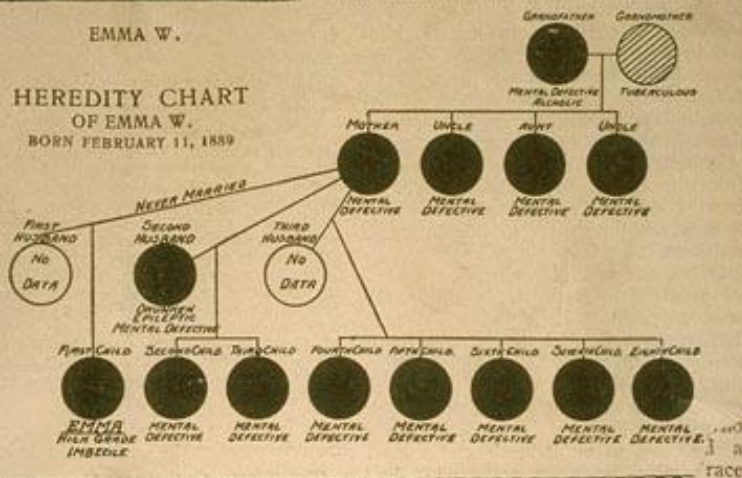


EMMA W.

IN the movement for more adequate provision for the feeble-minded, a place beside the scientists and physicians and educators and legislators must be made for this little half-witted girl. The facts of her heredity were published in the first annual report of Letchworth Village. They have done more than heavy tomes to convince people that it is bad policy to let the feeble-minded drift in and out of the almshouse; that it is but humanity and economy to segregate them, and to strike at the causes of mental defect.

Emma W. came to life in an almshouse, stamped with illegitimacy and feeble-mindedness. Her family's record reads: mother, two brothers, and a sister feeble-minded; mother's father feeble-minded and mother's mother tuberculous. When a second child was expected the mother was induced by well-meaning people to marry the father, who was a drunken epileptic. Two children were born. Still later the same well-meaning people aided her to get a divorce in order to marry the father of another child about to be born. Since then four more have been born. All of these children are feeble-minded. Entire family, with exception of the oldest child, is at large.

HEREDITY CHART OF EMMA W. BORN FEBRUARY 11, 1889



race

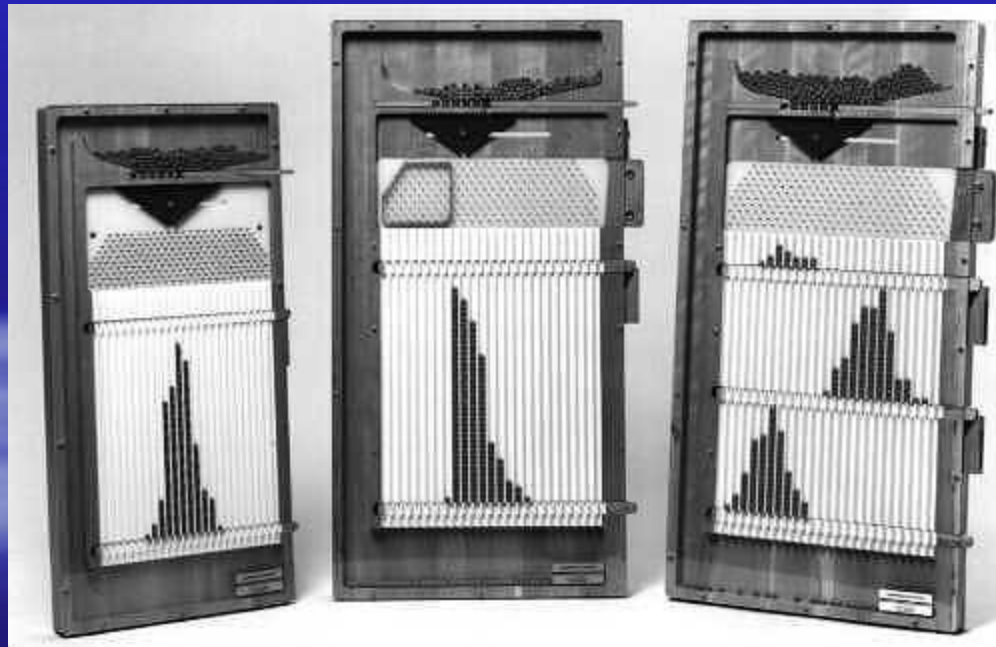
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Francis Galton

1822-1911

- English scientist, argued that genius and talent are inherited
- Advocated “positive eugenics”
 - Improving future generations by encouraging the “best” in society to have more children.
 - Contrast with “negative eugenics”
 - Culling defectives and degenerates from the population to promote and preserve the fittest
 - Eugenics movements in the United States, Germany, and Scandinavia favored the negative approach.

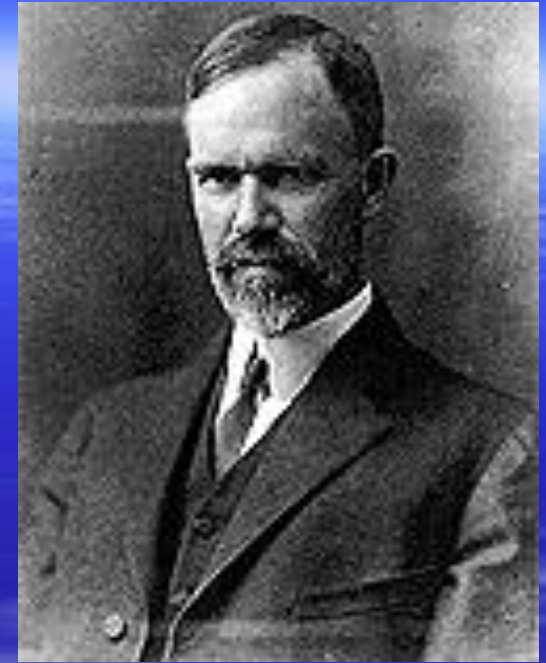
Sir Francis Galton 1822-1911



Other Eugenecists

- Charles Davenport
 - Established the Eugenics Record Office (ERO)
 - The ERO trained field workers to collect pedigrees of families with interesting traits
 - Wrote extensively on “pauperism,” criminality and “feeble-mindedness.”

Charles Davenport 1866-1944



Eugenics Research

- Example: “Naval officer”
 - An “inherited trait,” composed of subtraits for:
 - Thalassophilia: love of the sea
 - Wanderlust
 - Trait is unique to males.

EUGENICS RECORD OFFICE

ESTABLISHED OCTOBER 1, 1910

MRS. E. H. HARRIMAN, FOUNDER

BOARD OF SCIENTIFIC DIRECTORS •

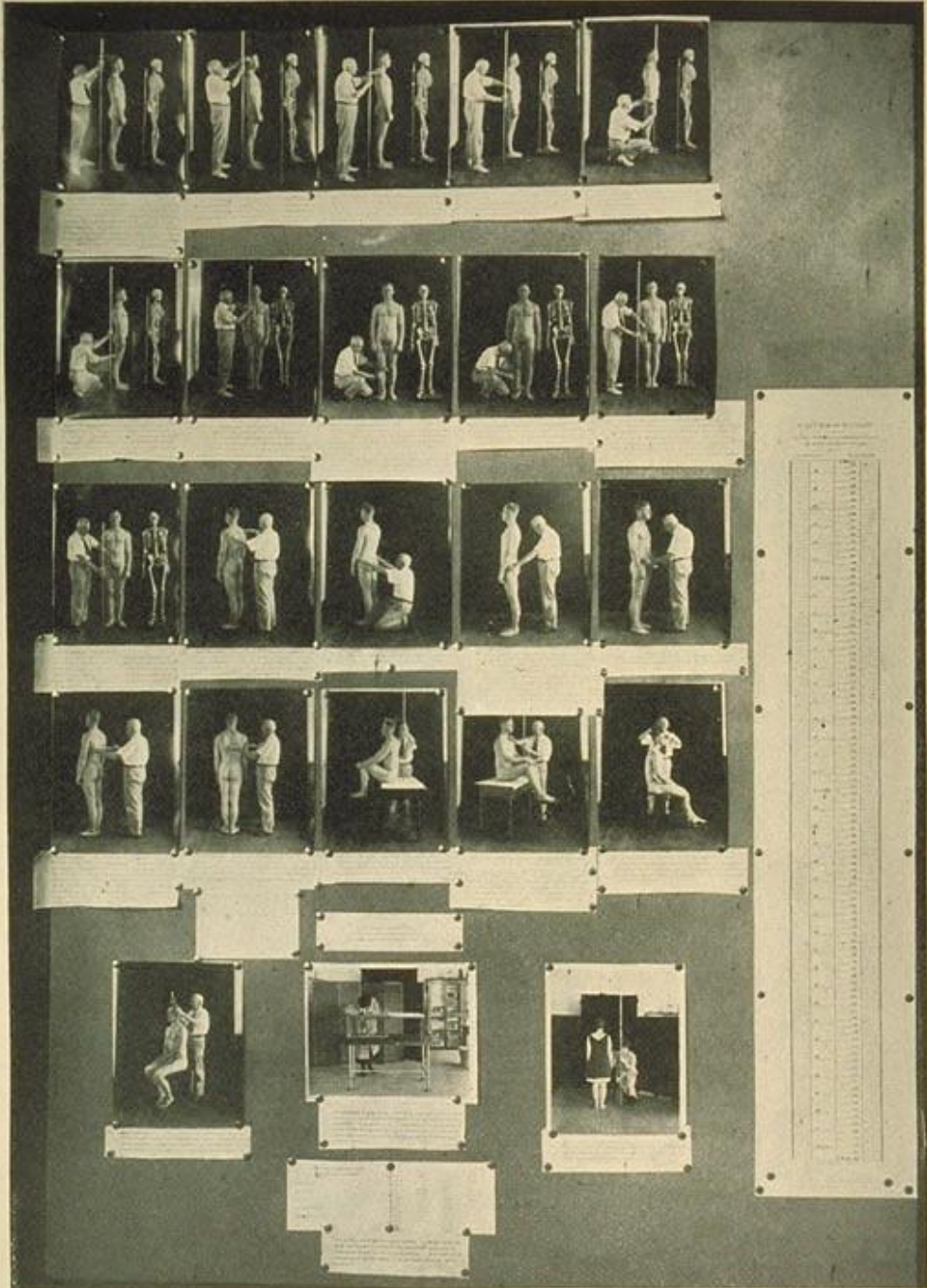
ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL, CHAIRMAN WILLIAM H. WELCH, VICE CHAIRMAN
LEWELLYS F. BARKER, IRVING FISHER, T. H. MORGAN, E. E. SOUTHARD

CHARLES B. DAVENPORT, SECRETARY AND RESIDENT DIRECTOR

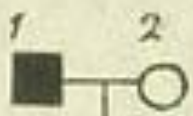
H. H. LAUGHLIN, SUPERINTENDENT

THE FUNCTIONS OF THE OFFICE ARE:

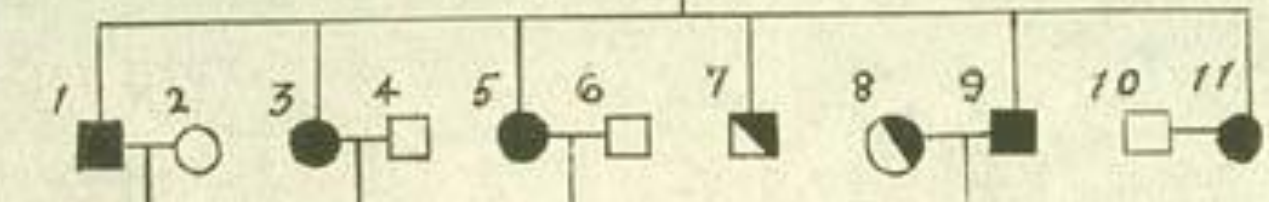
1. To serve eugenical interests in the capacity of repository and clearing house.
2. To build up an analytical index of the inborn traits of American families.
3. To train field workers to gather data of eugenical import.
4. To maintain a field force actually engaged in gathering such data.
5. To co-operate with other institutions and with persons concerned with eugenical study.
6. To investigate the manner of the inheritance of specific human traits.
7. To investigate other eugenical factors, such as (a) mate selection, (b) differential fecundity, (c) differential survival, and (d) differential migration.
8. To advise concerning the eugenical fitness of proposed marriages.
9. To publish results of researches.



I



II



III



pedigree showing inheritance of musical ability by W.C. Northrup

■ - Highly talented musically

◻ - Musically inclined

Harry Laughlin

- ERO's superintendent
- Ambitious promoter of laws:
 - to sterilize “hereditary defectives”
 - to restrict the inflow of “worthless” immigrants

Eugenics in the early 20th Century

- Positive Eugenics
 - 1920s: American Eugenics Society sponsored “Fitter Families Contests”
 - Based on an application and testing
 - Prize-winning families won fame and a medal



BETTER FAMILIES FOR FUTURE FIRESIDES

Eugenic and Health Exhibit

THE GREAT
CRYSTAL
EXHIBIT

THE GREAT
CRYSTAL
EXHIBIT

BIRTH RATE

THE GREAT
CRYSTAL
EXHIBIT

AMERICAN ILLITERACY
A COMPARATIVE STUDY

NATIVE BORN	ENTIRE POPULATION
49	17
LITERATE	LITERATE
ILLITERATE	ILLITERATE
FOREIGN BORN	NEGROES
1	1
LITERATE	LITERATE
ILLITERATE	ILLITERATE









Negative Eugenics

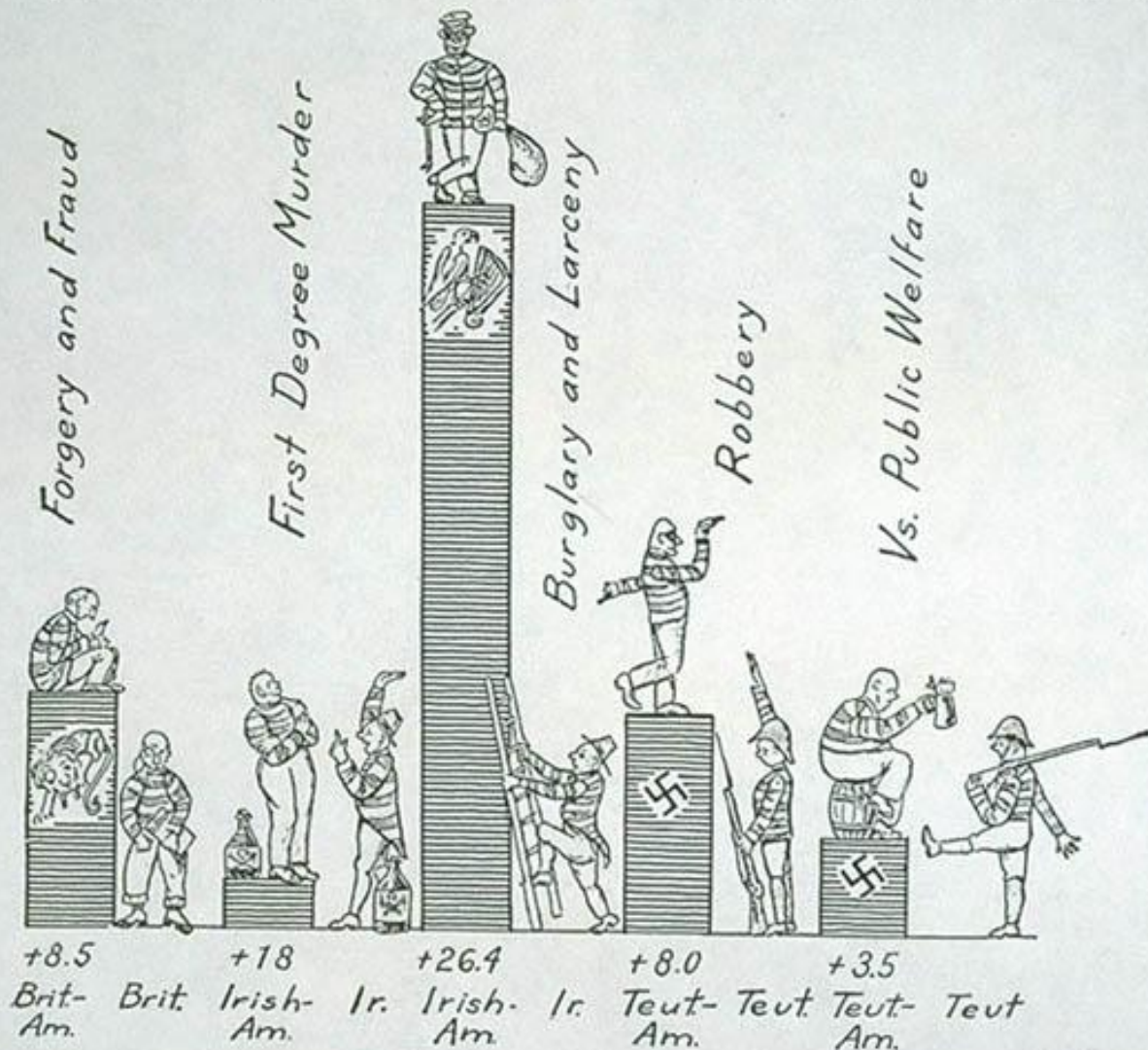
- “Degeneracy theory” dated from 1700s
 - Masturbation, cited in medical textbooks, first biological theory of the cause of degeneracy
 - Harry Clay Sharp (prison physician in Jeffersonville, Indiana) carried out vasectomies on prisoners beginning in 1899
- 1907 Indiana law mandating compulsory sterilization of “degenerates”
- First eugenic sterilization law in the United States.

1920s and 1930s:

- Margaret Sanger started Planned Parenthood with strong eugenics bias
- Many states passed sterilization laws
- 1920s: U.S. Congress required thousands of Americans to become sterilized so they could not pass on “inferior” traits

NEW AMERICAN CRIMINALS

Significant Offense Differences - Native Born and Foreign



BASED UPON OBSERVATIONS ON 455 WHITE AND 166 NEGRO SPECIMENS RANGING FROM THE 9th. TO THE 40th. WEEK OF PRENATAL DEVELOPMENT.

DR. ADOLPH H. SCHULTZ. CARNEGIE INSTITUTION OF WASHINGTON, DEPT. OF EMBRYOLOGY.

TABLE 6.
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE HEADS OF WHITE AND NEGRO FETUSES



TYPICAL HEAD OF WHITE FETUS OF 24 WEEKS X4
TYPICAL HEAD OF NEGRO FETUS OF 24 WEEKS X4

BRAIN-PART OF HEAD SMALLER, FACE-PART LARGER, AND NOSE SHORTER AND FLATTER IN THE NEGRO.

TABLE 7.
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE HEADS OF WHITE AND NEGRO FETUSES



TYPICAL HEAD OF WHITE FETUS OF 24 WEEKS X4
TYPICAL HEAD OF NEGRO FETUS OF 24 WEEKS X4

FACE HIGHER, NOSE BROADER, AND LIPS THICKER IN THE NEGRO. NOSTRILS DIRECTED TRANSVERSELY IN THE NEGRO, AND SAGITTALLY IN THE WHITE.



TYPICAL FOOT OF WHITE FETUS OF 30 WEEKS X4
TYPICAL FOOT OF NEGRO FETUS OF 30 WEEKS X4

FOOT OF NEGRO FETUS SLIGHTLY LONGER AND NARROWER THAN THAT OF WHITE FETUS.

TABLE 4.
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE FEET OF WHITE AND NEGRO FETUSES



TYPICAL HEEL OF WHITE FETUS.

TYPICAL HEEL OF NEGRO FETUS.

NOTE THE GREATER PROMINENCE OF HEEL IN NEGRO FETUS.

LONGEST TOE	3d MONTH		4th MONTH		5th MONTH		6th MONTH		7th MONTH		8th MONTH		9th MONTH		10th MONTH	
	WHITE	NEGRO	WH.	N.	WH.	N.	WH.	N.	WH.	N.	WH.	N.	WH.	N.	WH.	N.
I	—	—	17.1	5.5	15.5	5.9	22.7	10.0	39.4	11.7	53.3	22.2	53.4	25.0	77.3	50.0
I & II	3.9	—	43.4	5.5	44.0	20.6	39.4	35.0	36.4	47.1	26.7	44.5	33.3	40.0	13.6	19.2
II	90.2	100.0	39.5	89.0	40.5	73.5	37.9	55.0	24.2	41.2	20.0	33.3	13.3	35.0	9.1	31.8
II & III	5.9	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

TABLE SHOWING WHICH TOE IS LONGEST IN THE VARIOUS MONTHS OF PREGNANCY, EXPRESSED IN PERCENTAGES OF CASES.



TYPICAL HAND OF WHITE FETUS OF 30 WEEKS X5
TYPICAL HAND OF NEGRO FETUS OF 30 WEEKS X5

THE HAND IS RELATIVELY BROADER AND SLIGHTLY SHORTER AND THE THUMB RELATIVELY LONGER IN THE WHITE FETUS THAN IN THE NEGRO FETUS (SEE RELATIVE LENGTH OF THUMB ON TABLE 5).

TABLE 5.
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE HANDS OF WHITE AND NEGRO FETUSES

FINGERS	3d MONTH		4th MONTH		5th MONTH		6th MONTH		7th MONTH		8th MONTH		9th MONTH		10th MONTH	
	WHITE	NEGRO	WH.	N.	WH.	N.	WH.	N.	WH.	N.	WH.	N.	WH.	N.	WH.	N.
II & IV	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
IV > II	33.3	57.1	14.7	50.0	14.3	47.1	10.4	45.0	21.2	52.9	20.0	53.6	33.3	63.2	31.8	54.6
IV = II	64.7	42.9	69.0	50.0	64.3	52.9	74.6	53.0	66.7	47.1	66.7	44.4	53.4	36.8	54.6	45.4
IV < II	2.0	—	16.3	—	21.4	—	15.0	—	12.1	—	13.3	—	13.3	—	13.6	—

TABLE SHOWING RELATION IN LENGTH BETWEEN FINGERS II & IV IN THE VARIOUS MONTHS OF PREGNANCY, EXPRESSED IN PERCENTAGES OF CASES.



Buck v Bell:
U.S. Supreme Court, 1927

Buck v. Bell

U.S. Supreme Court, 1927

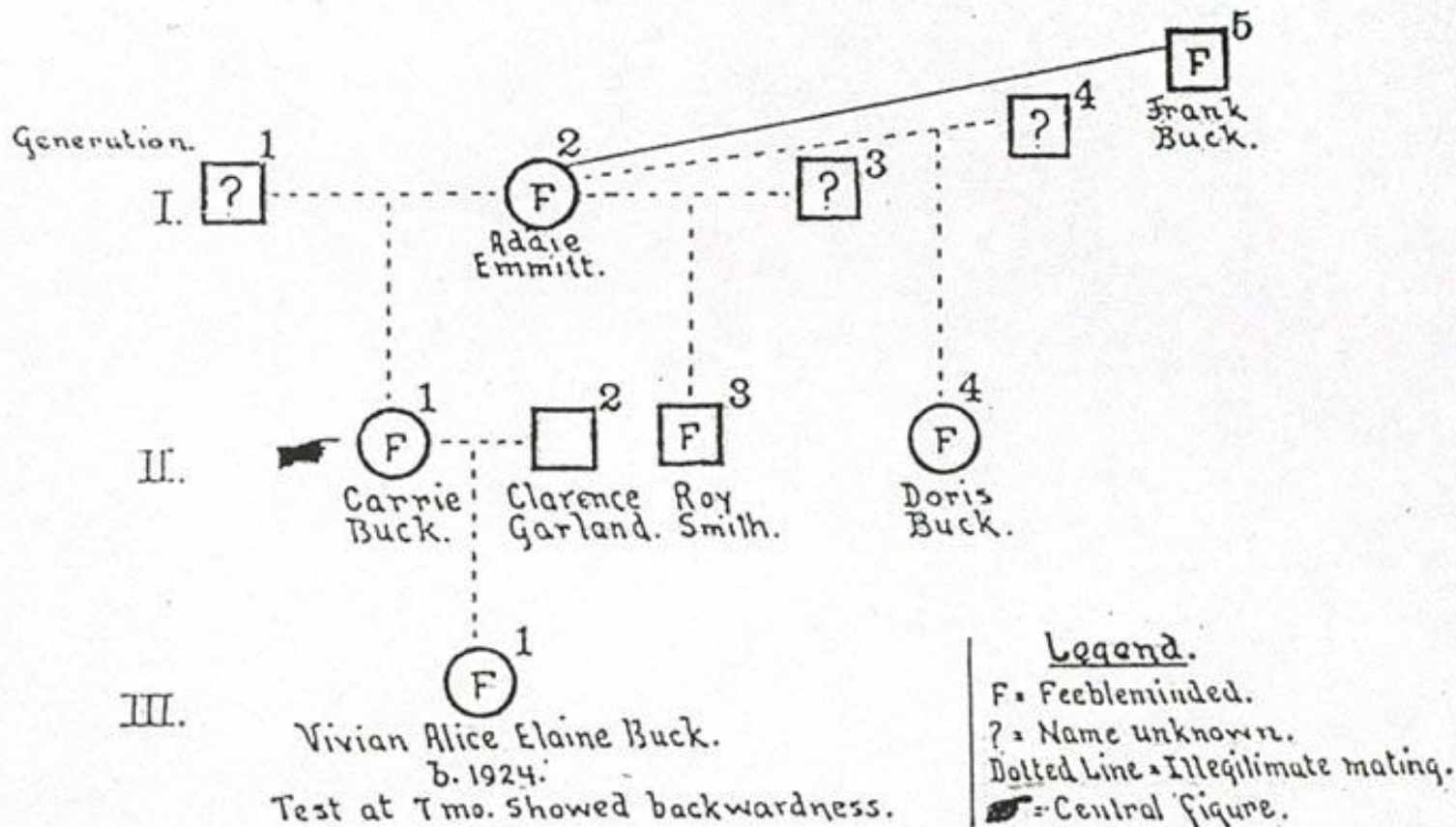
- Case overview

- Plaintiff: Carrie Buck
- Defendant: Dr. J.H. Bell, superintendent of the Virginia Colony for Epileptics and Feeble-Minded
- Appellants claim: Virginia's 1924 eugenic sterilization law violated Carrie Buck's constitutional rights.
- Decision: The court upheld as constitutional Virginia's compulsory sterilization of young women considered "unfit to continue their kind."

Case details

- Carrie Buck and her mother Emma:
 - Committed to the Virginia Colony in Lynchburg, Virginia
 - Judged “feeble-minded” and promiscuous, because they had both had borne children out of wedlock
 - Carrie’s child, Vivian, judged by an expert to be “feeble-minded” at seven months of age.
 - The “feeble-mindedness” was inherited
 - Based of antisocial conduct in Carrie and her mother, leading to criminality and pauperism
 - Lawyers claimed Carrie would cease to be a charge on society if sterilized

Most Immediate Blood-kin of Carrie Buck.
Showing illegitimacy and hereditary feeble-mindedness.



No. 1307 Subject. **CARRIE BUCK...**
ACE PHOTO SERVICE, Inc.
 JOHN F. SWEENEY & SON, New York City.

Arguments Pro and Con

- Defended by her lawyer who claimed protection of the 14th Amendment
- Compulsory sterilization likened to compulsory vaccination (for promotion of public health).
- Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes delivered the nearly unanimous opinion

Oliver Wendell Holmes:

- “Carrie Buck is the probable potential parent of socially inadequate offspring, likewise afflicted, that she may be sexually sterilized without detriment to her general health and that her welfare and that of society will be promoted by her sterilization . . . it is better for the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or to let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind. The principle that sustains compulsory vaccination is broad enough to cover cutting the Fallopian tubes. Three generations of imbeciles are enough.”
- Dr. Bell sterilized Carrie Buck on October 19, 1927.

Influence of the Buck v. Bell decision

- Virginia's law served as a model for similar laws in 30 states
- 50,000 U.S. citizens were sterilized without their consent.
- Buck v. Bell has never been officially reversed by the Supreme Court.

Influence of the Buck v. Bell Decision (cont.)

- Harry Laughlin, had been author of the “model sterilization act” of Virginia
- Made draft available to state and foreign governments
- Became Germany’s Hereditary Health Law of 1933
- Nuremberg war trials: Nazi lawyers cited Buck v Bell as acceptable precedent for the sterilization of 2 million people in its Rassenhygiene program.

Later U.S. Developments

- 1935: scientific committee found the work of ERO “without scientific merit”
- Abuses of the Nazis led to a decline in popularity of eugenics
- ERO closed on December 31, 1939.

Timeline of U.S. Eugenics

- 1899: Surgical treatment of Habitual Criminals, JAMA (April)
- 1900-14: 13 million people immigrate to U.S (avg. = 1 million/year)
- 1907: Indiana first state to adopt involuntary sterilization law
- 1913: 29 state laws forbid interracial marriage
- 1924: Harry Laughlin's Virginia law
- 1927: Buck v. Bell Supreme Court case
- 1930: 50,000 Americans sterilized by this time
- 1939: ERO closed, eugenics waning in popularity in U.S.
- 1942: Skinner v. Oklahoma reversed involuntary sterilization of criminals
- 1975: Sterilization of mentally ill continues: 60,000 Americans sterilized

Eugenics in Nazi Germany:

- Roots coincided with U.S. Eugenics movement:
 - 1896: Alfred Ploetz publishes a book to introduce concept of *Rassenhygiene* (racial hygiene) into German thought
 - 1913: Eugene Fischer publishes a book about mixed-blood people of Southwest Africa, arguing that they be offered minimal protection as “a race inferior to ourselves.”
 - 1917-1918: Wartime rationing leads to widespread deaths from starvation of psychiatric patients in German hospitals (they are clearly of low priority)

Eugenics in Nazi Germany (cont):

- 1920: Publication of book *Permission to Destroy Life Unworthy of Life*, Hoche and Binding
 - Argues that *lebensunwertes leben*, “life unworthy of life,” justifies medical killing
 - The right to life must be *earned*, not assumed
 - Justified negative eugenics in the German mind
- 1920-33: Widespread recognition of “minderwertig:” bad genes

Stepping up the pace:

- Genetics still in its infancy, DNA and molecular basis unknown
- Behavioral phenotype associated with inherited genotype
 - Most eugenics work based on pedigrees
 - Not the exclusive the domain of scientists
 - Pedigrees and racial analysis performed by social workers and bureaucrats
- Scientific/medical justification:
 - *Psychologists and psychiatrists* did testing
 - identifying traits were behavioral
 - *Lebensunwertes leben* as “Medical Therapy”
- Ultimately, used as stepwise justification for the “Final Solution.”

***A Short History of Eugenics
Thought and Practice***