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# Exhibiting Prejudice: How Twentieth-Century Museums Promoted the Eugenics Movement

Anna Wachtel

State University of New York College at Buffalo - Buffalo State College, wachte01@mail.buffalostate.edu

### Advisor

Dr. Cynthia Conides

### First Reader

Noelle Wiedemer

### Second Reader

Dr. Lisa Marie Anselmi

### Department Chair

Andrew D. Nicholls, Ph.D. Professor and Chair

---

### Recommended Citation

Wachtel, Anna, "Exhibiting Prejudice: How Twentieth-Century Museums Promoted the Eugenics Movement" (2020). *Museum Studies Theses*. 24.

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State University of New York  
College at Buffalo  
Department of History

Exhibiting Prejudice: How Twentieth-Century Museums  
Promoted the Eugenics Movement

An Abstract of a Thesis in  
Museum Studies

By  
Anna Wachtel

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Master of Arts  
May 2020

## **ABSTRACT**

This research illustrates the impact museums have on social, political, and educational systems through the exploration of the eugenics movement in American museums. Museum professionals promoted racial hierarchies and eugenic ideologies at World's Fairs through the exploitation of "exotic" peoples and contests designed to judge and categorize racial differences based on an individual's physical and mental characteristics.

Following World's Fairs, museums began displaying eugenic themed exhibits. Prominent museum professionals and government officials of the early twentieth century used their position of authority to promote the eugenics movement in National and regional American museums through educational exhibits using approachable science-based exhibit techniques, photographs, and interactive displays.

As the eugenics movement gained momentum, its presence in politics became more frequent, as demonstrated by the passage of the Eugenic Sterilization Act and the Racial Integrity Act in the 1920s. The government's impact on vulnerable classes was extensive. Presented are two examples of forced sterilization to illustrate how the lessons taught in American museums can directly influence political policies.

The tumultuous political climate of the twenty-first century may be to blame for the re-emergence of similar attitudes. This re-emergence presents museums with the opportunity to redefine their role in a movement that they were once a proponent of and challenge them to speak out against the revival.

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Approved by:

Noelle Wiedemer, M.A.  
Professor of Museum Studies  
Thesis Advisor

Andrew D. Nicholls, Ph. D.  
Professor of History  
Chair of the Department of History

Kevin J. Miller, Ed. D.  
Dean of the Graduate School

## **THESIS COMMITTEE SIGNATORY**

Noelle Wiedemer, M.A.  
Professor of Museum Studies

Lisa Marie Anselmi, Ph. D., R.P.A.  
Chair and Associate Professor of Anthropology

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank:

Dr. Cynthia Conides, Director of Museum Studies, Buffalo State College, for encouraging me to pursue my interests and her steadfast confidence in me.

Noelle Wiedemer, Lecturer, Buffalo State College, for her unwavering support and faith in my abilities.

Dr. Lisa Marie Anselmi, Associate Professor and Anthropology Chair for her academic perspective and guidance.

Buffalo Museum of Science for granting access to their archives.

And my parents, Alan and Cathy, my fiancé, Dan, and my closest friend, Rayma, for their constant love and support.

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## CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

As public institutions, museums have a responsibility to provide unbiased truths to the communities they serve. People visit museums to socialize, find inspiration, explore, and learn. Museums are trusted to provide substantiated facts about the world we live in. But what happens when museums present information that marginalizes groups of people for the “betterment” of others?

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, museums and World’s Fairs began incorporating prejudiced ideologies into their exhibits. Whether it was statistical data attempting to prove that one race was inherently more intelligent than another or the blatant display of “exotic” people from “strange” far-away lands, museums actively participated in promoting the marginalization of anyone considered non-white.

With the help of high ranking museum staff like Henry Fairfield Osborn, American paleontologist and President of the American Museum of Natural History from 1908 to 1933, museums were able to propagate prejudicial ideologies. Using “scientific” data as evidence, museums incorporated the theory of eugenics, a philosophy that the human race can be improved upon by encouraging procreation between those who have “desirable” heredity while “breeding out” those with “undesirable” heredity through limited reproduction or forced sterilization, into their exhibits.

In addition to eugenic-based exhibits, the American Museum of Natural History hosted two international conferences on the study and progress of eugenics in 1921 and 1932, respectively. These conferences assisted in legitimizing eugenical “scientific” research which was used to bolster political legislation that lawfully defined who was “unfit” to reproduce and who was to be forcefully sterilized. By the 1920s, immigration

and sterilization laws were passed in several states, in part from the trust given to museums to share indisputable truths with the public.

Museums hold a significant amount of cultural and educational power. As informal learning environments, museums are an effective way to develop lifelong skills and values while encouraging a sense of curiosity that cannot be acquired as easily in the classroom.<sup>1</sup> They can act both as a driving force behind a society's belief system, as well as a mirror that reinforces existing beliefs. It is the responsibility of museum professionals to present an impartial narrative and remain transparent in their conclusions. The narratives museums present can have far-reaching, even devastating, consequences, as seen in the promotion of eugenics in twentieth-century American museums.

## **What Is Eugenics?**

Eugenics is a social construct backed by faulty science that aims to improve the human race through illegitimate “scientific” conclusions and carried out by force. Eugenicians believed that the human race could be scientifically improved through controlled breeding between people with “desirable” physical and mental characteristics, while those with “undesirable” characteristics were urged to refrain from reproduction or were sterilized altogether. People were discouraged from marrying outside of their racial, social, and intellectual class for fear of increasing the population of people with “defective” characteristics who were believed to be a strain on society. Eugenicians

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<sup>1</sup> Colleen Dilenschneider, “10 Reasons to Visit a Museum.” Know Your Bone. Accessed April 2019. <https://www.colleendilen.com/2009/07/31/10-reasons-to-visit-a-museum/>.

believed that this “scientific” theory would solve societal hazards by reducing crime and poverty while raising human intellect. Curiosity about a scientific theory that could explain and justify old customs and hierarchies caused general interest to climb.<sup>2</sup>

The term “eugenics,” derived from Greek meaning “good birth,” was coined by British scientist Francis Galton in 1883. He based his theory partially on the work of his cousin, Charles Darwin, who, through his study of evolution and natural selection, demonstrated that the strongest and best-adapted organisms are more likely to survive, reproduce, develop, and evolve. Galton felt that although natural selection was successful in nature, it failed when applied to humans because people interfered with the process. As a result, the fittest do not always survive. Thus, Galton consciously chose to develop a method to “improve” the human race.

Galton sought to improve Darwin’s theory of natural selection by applying it to humans, aiming to increase “positive” attributes through controlled breeding while decreasing “negative” attributes through sterilization. He described eugenics as “the study of the agencies under social control that may improve or repair the racial qualities of the future generations, either physically or mentally.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, Galton sought to eliminate “undesirable” characteristics in humans like epilepsy, alcoholism, and feeble-mindedness, which was defined as a person who was perceived to be intellectually delayed, to create a “pure and noble race of desirable people.”

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<sup>2</sup> Alan Stoskopf, "Race and Membership in American History: The Eugenics Movement." *Brookline, Mass: Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation* (2002).

<sup>3</sup> A. McLaren, *Our Own Master Race: Eugenics in Canada 1885-1945*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1990.

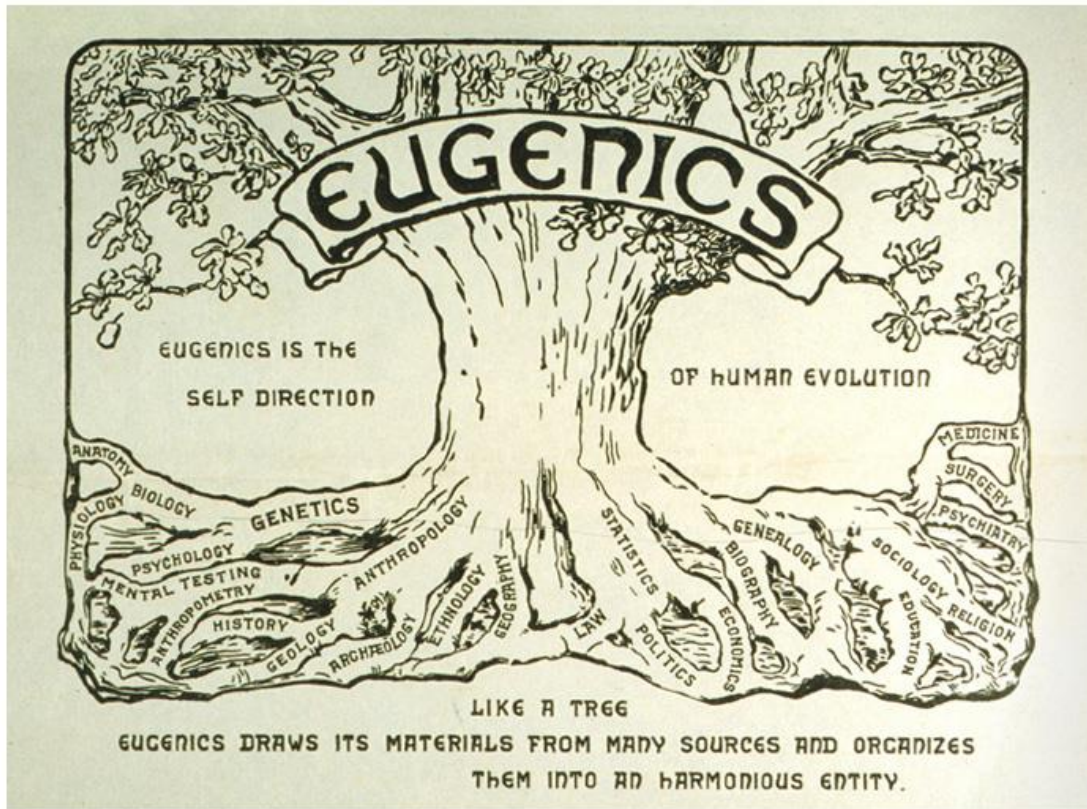


Figure 1: Logo of the Eugenics Tree seen at the Second International Congress of Eugenics. It reads, "Eugenics is the self direction of human evolution. Like a tree, eugenics draws its materials from many sources and organizes them into an harmonious entity."

Source: American Philosophical Society, Eugenics Record Office Records

"Undesirable" characteristics extended beyond physical traits and included mental dexterity and illness, as well as hereditary diseases. Those born with conditions such as asthma, alcoholism, schizophrenia, epilepsy, Down syndrome, deafness, or blindness were considered "less than desirable" and "unfit" to reproduce. Galton argued that poverty, criminality, and the aforementioned conditions were caused by inheritance rather than environmental causes. He believed in an alternative economic and financial solution to social welfare programs of the time, arguing that sterilization, not expanded

social welfare programs, was a cost-effective way to relieve society of the expense of caring for those deemed “defective” or “unfit.”<sup>4</sup>

Galton believed eugenics would “raise the present miserably low standard of the human race [by] breeding the best with the best.”<sup>5</sup> He sought for widespread sterilization of the “defective” classes to prevent births of “unfit” offspring. Research rooted in science was used to legitimize Galton’s theory and museums were intentionally chosen as a platform to reach the public in hopes to further educate health professionals and laypeople about race betterment.

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<sup>4</sup> Susan Currell and Christina Cogdell, eds, *Popular Eugenics: National Efficiency and American Mass Culture in the 1930s*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006. Accessed February 27, 2019. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Edward Shelly, "Transactions of the Seventh International Congress of Hygiene and Demography." (1892).

## CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

The theory of eugenics is rooted in the desire for race betterment: to increase the quality of human stock by weeding out the weak. The ideology spans across a wide range of subjects that includes history, politics, science, social class, culture, and race. Fortunately, as a science-based construct, the theory of eugenics and its corresponding research was well-documented and recorded throughout the twentieth century, providing an abundance of primary resources from which to study. As perspectives have shifted, the contemporary study of eugenics has begun exploring the effects on the aforementioned subjects, providing literature on a wide variety of topics. With this research focusing on museums as a conduit for spreading the eugenics movement throughout America, the majority of cited resources are museum centered. However, since the eugenic ideology is complex and far-reaching, additional subjects are also addressed.

*Race and Membership in American History: The Eugenics Movement* is a comprehensive resource book that explores the impact of the eugenics movement in America. An excellent introduction to eugenics, it breaks down the history, illustrates how the theory of eugenics impacts a wide range of subjects and asks tough questions on morality.<sup>6</sup> Written by the non-profit educational organization Facing History and Ourselves, *Race and Membership in American History* explores topics on evolution, democracy, immigration, racism, eugenics, and genetic research and includes

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<sup>6</sup> Alan Stoskopf. "Race and Membership in American History: The Eugenics Movement." *Brookline, Mass: Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation* (2002).

thoughtful questions at the end of each section that encourages readers to think critically about the presented topic.

Rydell, Cogdell, and Largent explore the history of eugenical displays in American museums and state fairs. The authors begin by describing the history of eugenical displays at state fairs, expositions, and the Second and Third International Congress of Eugenics. They discuss a specific exhibition titled *Eugenics in New Germany* that traveled from Germany to the United States, making stops along the West Coast and finding a permanent home at the Buffalo Museum of Science in Buffalo, New York. The authors analyze the idea of the exhibition, the partnerships needed for it to come to fruition, the public's reaction, its political messages, and its effect on state legislature. The chapter concludes with a description of the exhibit when it was incorporated into the Buffalo Museum of Science's collection in 1935. The authors argue that the nature versus nurture debate fell to the wayside as the eugenics ideology became more prominent with the help of museum institutions.

The authors' persuasive argument begins with an exploration of World's Fairs and expositions as the birth of the modern museum. With hundreds of thousands of people flocking to these events from around the country, it is clear why eugenicists began to take advantage of this mode of public communication to further their agenda. This resource is included to demonstrate how museums contributed to the eugenics movement in America throughout the twentieth century through the examination of World's Fairs and eugenic exhibits such as *Eugenics in New Germany*.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Susan Currell and Christina Cogdell, eds. *Popular Eugenics: National Efficiency and American Mass Culture in the 1930s*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006. Accessed February 27, 2019. ProQuest Ebook Central.

Authors Niquette and Buxton offer a unique perspective on how museums communicate to their audience through the use of layout, design, and narrative. They discuss the 1939 Rockefeller Foundation-funded survey designed to study museum exhibition displays in science museums. As part of the study, the Buffalo Museum of Science was highlighted throughout, with particular focus on its “narrative techniques” and the use of linear, didactic, and evolutionary representations. The authors argue that the “storyline technique” used by Carlos Cummings, curator of the Buffalo Museum of Science, is the primary method museums utilize as communicators and is an effective way to engage audiences in a meaningful way: “What was new about the storyline technique developed by museums such as the [Buffalo Museum of Science] was the conception of the *whole museum* as a story, and one might even say, as *a storyteller* – hence, as a communicator.” Niquette and Buxton delve into the layout of the museum, arguing that the use of a linear narrative successfully communicated the misguided science of eugenics within their galleries. Additionally, the use of interactive displays, visual posters, and three-dimensional display objects piqued visitor interest and served as strong communication devices.<sup>8</sup>

Niquette and Buxton’s text is included to highlight their theory that exhibit layout, design, and narrative affects the message received by the viewer which demonstrates how museum content is perceived and understood. Their argument that using the “storyline technique,” the Buffalo Museum of Science’s display of eugenic material

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<sup>8</sup> Manon Niquette and William J. Buxton, “*Sugar-coating the Educational Pill*”: *Rockefeller Support for the Communicative Turn in Science Museums*. In *Patronizing the Public: American Philanthropy’s Transformation of Culture, Communication, and the Humanities*. Edited by William J. Buxton. Lexington Books, 2009.



successfully promoted the eugenic movement. The success of the “storyline technique” underlines how important it is for museums to be cognizant of the content and the way it is presented as they are often regarded as educational authorities.

Stillwell’s research focuses on the history of eugenics and genetics, bioethics, and reproductive and disability rights. She argues that eugenical exhibits directly affected how people viewed cultural sterilization by “connecting particular eugenic principles to specific visual representations that were experienced in relation to binaries such as the artistically traditional and the modern, the classical and the grotesque, and the scientific and the spectacle (or the “freak” and the medical specimen).” In other words, Stillwell compares the exhibits displayed in the Third International Congress of Eugenics at the American Museum of Natural History in 1932 to the stylized ideal man featured in Greco-Roman busts.

Stillwell presents a compelling and convincing argument: that by providing visual representations of what is “fit” and “unfit,” the visitor is more easily able to draw conclusions that would be supportive of the eugenics movement. Her detailed description of the stylized exhibit drawing inspiration from Greco-Roman sculpture juxtaposed with images of “unfit” individuals and families is supported through her explanation that “the presence of the “classical” in various artistic media helped link the eugenic past to the future and promoted the possibility of American racial perfection.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Devon Stillwell, "Eugenics Visualized: The Exhibit of the Third International Congress of Eugenics, 1932." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 86, no. 2 (2012): 206-236. <https://muse.jhu.edu/> (accessed March 6, 2019). <https://www.ams-inc.on.ca/people/devon-stillwell/>.

Stillwell's research was selected to illustrate that eugenics was promoted in museums by using visual media as a learning tool. The comparison of the display of sculptures of eugenic leaders in a Greco-Roman "classical" style adjacent to exhibits of the "unfit" is unique and demonstrates the importance of how museums present their exhibits as well as how the viewers' understanding of the exhibit material can be shaped by how it is presented.

McLeary and Toon explore how the American Museum of Health attempted to popularize health education in the United States with the use of interactive and engaging exhibits, such as the display of the "Transparent Man" in the 1930s. The exhibit borrowed display techniques from the Deutsches Hygiene-Museum in Dresden, Germany with the intention to spark an interest in one's own body through never before seen displays of anatomy. However, the authors argue that the American Museum of Health's passive approach that offered little to no suggestions on how to handle that self-reflection caused a decrease in public interest, ultimately resulting in a failed exhibit on health education. McLeary and Toon "examine why and how American public health workers set out to adapt the German approach to visualizing health and consider what their efforts tell us about the development of health education and museum practice in the early-twentieth-century United States."

McLeary and Toon's argument that with the addition of German-influenced exhibits, health education would be integrated into museum practice is supported by numerous examples. They detail the journey of the Deutsches Hygiene-Museum's exhibit, *Eugenics in New Germany*, from Germany to America where it traveled for four months to various cities and universities, gaining public support throughout its tour.

They specifically cite that the American Museum of Health intended “to fulfill its mission of instilling wonder and to fully distinguish itself from these older approaches to exhibiting health [by] adopt[ing] the more inclusive, uplifting philosophy developed and enacted at the [Deutsches Hygiene-Museum].”<sup>10</sup>

McLeary and Toon’s examination of newly included health exhibits in museums illustrates how eugenic ideologies were easily incorporated alongside scientific anatomy displays. Their research is included to show how the content of museum displays evolve as new information comes to light.

DenHoed writes about Carrie Buck, the first female to be sterilized in the State of Virginia. She begins by explaining that Buck was raised in poverty and, after being raped and falling pregnant at seventeen, she was deemed mentally deficient by her guardians who committed her to an asylum. Buck’s sterilization and commitment to the asylum resulted in eugenic legislation being passed in Virginia, leading to thirty-two states to follow in its footsteps. DenHoed argues that although the eugenics chapter in American history hasn’t been ignored, it hasn’t been learned from: “. . . it seems that the collective forgetfulness is not a matter of some well of information remaining untapped but of our inability or unwillingness to soak up what is drawn out of it.”<sup>11</sup> DenHoed cites current political sentiments that align with eugenic ideology such as when a senator from Alabama declared, “we are coming to a pitiful pass in this great country when it is

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<sup>10</sup> Erin McLeary and Elizabeth Toon, "Here man learns about himself": visual education and the rise and fall of the American Museum of Health" *American journal of public health* vol. 102,7. Published July 2012. Accessed March 15, 2019. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3478034/>.

<sup>11</sup> Andrea DenHoed, "The Forgotten Lessons of the American Eugenics Movement." *The New Yorker*, April 27, 2016. Accessed April 2019. <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-forgotten-lessons-of-the-american-eugenics-movement>.

unpopular to speak the English language, the American language.”<sup>12</sup> DenHoed argues that this type of expression shouldn’t be so surprising; we’ve heard it before. What should be surprising is that we’re hearing it again.

DenHoed’s argument that as a nation we should be shocked to hear sentiments that align with eugenic philosophy gaining popularity is poignant. She successfully supports her theory by citing the current political climate: immigration issues, heated racial tensions, and financial inequality creating a class divide.<sup>13</sup> Her argument is highlighted because her comparison between the racial perspectives of the eugenic era and the recent rise in similar attitudes is unique and presents the possibility that the United States may find themselves on a similar path, once again.

West discusses how the American Museum of Natural History’s failed to acknowledge its past participation in the eugenics movement, particularly when they displayed their 2005-2006 exhibit on Charles Darwin, who was a supporter of Social Darwinism. West describes the exhibits and research presented at both the Second and Third International Eugenics Congress, which were held at the American Museum of Natural History in 1921 and 1932, respectively. He argues that although the American Museum of Natural History no longer supports eugenics, they continue to deny the institution's participation in the eugenics movement:

There is biting irony in the sanitized history of Social Darwinism presented by the new Darwin exhibit at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) . . . The Museum’s exhibit completely suppresses Darwin’s own views about social applications of his theory. But Darwin’s views aren’t the only things being suppressed at the exhibit. The AMNH also doesn’t acknowledge its own

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<sup>12</sup> Andrea DenHoed, “The Forgotten Lessons of the American Eugenics Movement.” *The New Yorker*, April 27, 2016. Accessed April 2019. <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-forgotten-lessons-of-the-american-eugenics-movement>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

shameful legacy as one of the chief scientific boosters for eugenics, including the hosting of an extensive pro-eugenics museum exhibit in the 1930s.<sup>14</sup>

West's argument that the American Museum of Natural History failed to recognize their past involvement in the eugenics movement is an important one that ties in with DenHoed's argument that similar sentiments are surfacing once again. In contrast to DenHoed's claim that the eugenics chapter in American history does not go ignored, West points to the American Museum of Natural History's inability to acknowledge their past participation as a direct act of disregard, which speaks directly to the argument presented in this thesis.<sup>15</sup>

Although West's observation illustrates the importance of transparency and acknowledgment in museums, it serves to note that his perspective has been criticized due to his position as a Senior Fellow at the Discovery Institute, an organization that promotes creationism and aims to discredit evolution from public schools in the United States.

Krisch writes about an exhibit at New York University's Asian/Pacific/American Institute titled, *Haunted Files: The Eugenics Record Office*. Krisch describes the exhibit as a dark room filled with sounds of a typewriter and shuffling papers to transport the visitor to 1924 during the height of the eugenics movement. He covers the inception of

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<sup>14</sup> John West. "Rewriting History: Museum Fails to Disclose Own Role in Social Darwinism." *Evolution News*, December 13, 2005. Accessed October 2019. [https://evolutionnews.org/2005/12/rewriting\\_history\\_museum\\_fails/](https://evolutionnews.org/2005/12/rewriting_history_museum_fails/).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

the Eugenics Record Office in Cold Spring Harbor, New York in 1910 and explains that “at the time, this was widely accepted as legitimate science.”<sup>16</sup>

Unlike West’s argument that the American Museum of Natural History would prefer to ignore their involvement in the eugenics movement, Krisch shines a light on how museums can change this narrative. His argument that museums are obligated to acknowledge the wrongdoings of the past promotes an understanding of human history. Krisch’s text is included to demonstrate how museums can address difficult and dark truths through their exhibits – the *Haunted Files* exhibit encourages visitors to question the role museums play in society and challenge the status quo rather than repeat similar, potentially devastating, mistakes.<sup>17</sup>

Spiro published a biography on Madison Grant in which he details Grant’s prolific career ranging from fighting ecologic decline and the founding of the Bronx Zoo to his advocacy of eugenics and how he influenced the passing of immigration exclusion legislation in the 1920s. Spiro demonstrates how Grant’s connections with politicians like Theodore Roosevelt bolstered the eugenics ideology within the government. Spiro argues that Grant used his position as an elite member of society to legitimize racism, intelligent breeding, and the need for a “pure” and “noble” race.<sup>18</sup> Spiro’s text was selected to bolster the argument that politics, political figures, and one’s position in society have great power over the masses – they are granted the

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<sup>16</sup> Joshua Krisch, “When Racism Was a Science.” *The New York Times*, October 13, 2014. Accessed April 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/14/science/haunted-files-the-eugenics-record-office-recreates-a-dark-time-in-a-laboratory-past.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Peter Spiro, *Defending the Master Race: Conservation, Eugenics, and the Legacy of Madison Grant* (Burlington, Vermont: University Press of New England, 2009).

ability to dictate procreation, marriage, and immigration, intentionally shaping a society that benefits them.

Hall offers a unique perspective on parenthood through the exploration of science and religion. She examines the relationship between Protestantism and the development of reproduction technologies such as genetic manipulation, prenatal screenings, and designer babies. Hall searches for the reasoning behind these issues, finding that Protestantism is complicit in the controversial development of biotechnology. Based on her analysis of family-centered advertisements from the twentieth century, Hall argues that Protestant middle-class families advocated for “responsibly planned procreation” which led to racially biased reproduction and offspring.

Hall encourages open dialogue within religious communities in hopes to redefine parenthood. She argues that with a new definition of parenthood within communities of faith, families will be able to inspire acceptance and diversity, making room for those previously deemed “unfit.”<sup>19</sup> Hall’s text on redefining parenthood to engender a diverse and accepting society is included to counter the idea of eugenic marriage that would lead to an increase of “fit” offspring.

These resources helped gather background information on significant contributors to the eugenics movement and offered unique arguments regarding how museums participated in its promotion. However, sources demonstrating how the participation and advocacy of museums in the eugenics movement impacted social,

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<sup>19</sup> Amy Laura Hall. *Conceiving Parenthood: American Protestantism and the Spirit of Reproduction*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008.

political, and educational systems could not be found. The presented research is intended to close that gap and asks museums to acknowledge their imperfections.



## CHAPTER 3 – EARLY MUSEUMS: WORLD’S FAIRS

The theory of eugenics came at a time of “exhibitionary culture,” a term coined by sociologist Tony Bennett to describe the increasingly popular phenomenon of expositions and World’s Fairs that attracted tens of thousands of attendees and often assisted in producing now-established museums such as Chicago’s Field Museum. Expositions were meant to be experienced as a form of museum that provides entertainment, as well as a way for the public to be introduced to groundbreaking research, inventions, and scientific discoveries. Graham Black, Professor of Museum and Heritage Management at Nottingham Trent University, theorizes in his article titled *Embedding Civil Engagement in Museums* that “museums are primarily institutions for public learning”<sup>20</sup> and as an educational resource, museums, and arguably expositions as well, can help enrich the lives of individuals and communities as a whole, encouraging positive cultural and societal growth. Eugenicists used the social and educational setting of expositions to inform the public of their agenda and to transfer the responsibility of social and cultural change onto the masses, who, based on their experiences at these expositions, came to believe that eugenics could secure a better future for themselves and their community.

Among exciting new inventions and striking art galleries, World’s Fairs exhibitions included displays of “exotic” people from around the world in enclosures designed to resemble their native habitats, commonly referred to as “human zoos.”

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<sup>20</sup> Graham Black, “Embedding Civil Engagement in Museums.” In *Reinventing the Museum: The Evolving Conversation on the Paradigm Shift*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., edited by Gail Anderson, 267-285. Lanham, MD.: AltaMira Press, 2012.

Thousands of visitors viewed these exhibits, eagerly gawking and pointing at those put on display. By building an exhibit and creating a space to display the “exotic” peoples, expositions created a dynamic of “us” versus “them.” The exhibited peoples quickly became “the other” – different, foreign, and inferior. Not only were they physically separated from the visitors through the use of fences, cages, or barriers, they were culturally and socially separated, which encouraged visitors to view them as “savage” or “inferior” and further promoted a hierarchical ideology which paved the way for eugenics.

The Midway Plaisance at Chicago’s 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition displayed a mile-long exhibition of “savage” races that included mock villages populated by Indonesians, Africans, Asians, and Native Americans. These living displays were arranged hierarchically, with the darker-skinned races furthest from the center of the exposition, indicating that they were the most inferior peoples.

Contemporary literary critic Denton J. Snider explained the hierarchy:

We descend to the savage races, the African of Dahomey and the North American Indian, each of which has its place at the far end of the Plaisance. Undoubtedly, the best way of looking at these races is to behold them in the ascending scale, in the progressive movement; thus we can march forward with them starting with the lowest specimens of humanity, and reaching continually upward to the highest stage [so that] we move in harmony with the thought of evolution.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Alan Stoskopf, "Race and Membership in American History: The Eugenics Movement." *Brookline, Mass: Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation* (2002).

Furthermore, the “savage” races were advertised as dangerous creatures. Visitors were warned that “the [Dahomey] women are as fierce if not fiercer than the men and all of them have to be watched day and night for fear they may use their spears for other purposes than a barbaric embellishment of their dances.”<sup>22</sup>

Anthropologist Lee Baker surmises that “the stern warning reinforced many Americans’ fears that African Americans could not be trusted and were naturally predisposed to



Figure 2: Congolese men performing for an audience at the St. Louis World's Fair, July 1904. Note “Pygmies” handwritten in the lower right hand corner.

Source: Missouri Historical Society

<sup>22</sup> Lee D. Baker, *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896-1954*. Univ of California Press, 1998.

immoral and criminal behavior and thus kept away from white people through segregation.”<sup>23</sup>

The 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair exhibited people from the Congo, demeaningly referred to as “pygmies” due to their short stature. Adding to the humiliation, the native peoples were forced to perform in dances, mock battles, and contests that were designed to portray them as though they were biologically inferior to whites. Groups like these were thought to be at the bottom of the evolutionary hierarchy. Anthropologist William McGee compared them to monkeys and apes, even claiming they were subhuman. McGee hypothesized that “pygmies” were the “missing link” between humans and apes drawn from Darwin’s theory of evolution.<sup>24</sup>

### **Fitter Families for Future Firesides & Better Baby Contests**

By the 1920s, two key players in the American eugenics’ movement, Charles Davenport, and Harry Laughlin, along with women’s health advocates Mary Watts and Florence Brown Sherbon, took advantage of the opportunity that fairs and expositions provided in reaching the masses to further their message of immigration reform, optimal health care, and race betterment. They “developed a plan to inject eugenics exhibits into state fairs under the guise of improving health care for rural

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<sup>23</sup> Lee D. Baker, *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896-1954*. Univ of California Press, 1998.

<sup>24</sup> *Eugenics*. Human Zoos. Accessed March 2019.  
<https://humanzoos.org/category/explore/eugenics/>.

women and their children.”<sup>25</sup> They created events rewarding “genetically superior” families, couples, and babies with medals and public praise in newspapers. These events, dubbed “Fitter Families for Future Firesides” and “Better Baby” contests, required detailed psychological and physical exams by teams of doctors who assigned individuals and families overall letter grades of eugenic-health based on physical and mental performance. Sherbon claimed that the event would help in the “strengthening of the family as the organic racial and social unit.”<sup>26</sup> Eugenicist Alfred Wiggam believed that the presence of these events was essential to their movement:

“If we can, by beauty contests, by baby shows, by teaching art in our schools, by teaching children the certainty and beneficence of the laws of heredity; if we can by these means elevate our ideals of human beauty, it follows . . . that we shall also raise the level of intelligence and human excellence all along the line.”<sup>27</sup>

Access to families and young children provided the means to persuade the public’s perspective on “proper” heredity.

Eugenic advocates worked to prime the public for radical political change through the use of exhibits at state fairs and expositions all over the country. They did this by creating a stark divide between race and intellect through rewarding those deemed “fit” and disparaging those deemed “unfit.”

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<sup>25</sup> Susan Currell and Christina Cogdell, eds, *Popular Eugenics: National Efficiency and American Mass Culture in the 1930s*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006. Accessed February 27, 2019. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>26</sup> Laura L. Lovett. *Conceiving the Future: Pronatalism, Reproduction, and the Family in the United States, 1890-1938*. Univ of North Carolina Press, 2009.

<sup>27</sup> Albert Edward Wiggam. *The Fruit of the Family Tree*. Garden City, NY, Garden City Pub, 1924.



Figure 3: Contestants for the Fitter Families contest at the Georgia State Fair, 1924.

*Source:* Courtesy of American Philosophical Society, Eugenics Record Office Records.

In their continued search for support, eugenicists formed the American Eugenics Society and began to participate in fairs as much as possible. To argue their case, they presented themselves as an educational resource “based upon scientific findings . . . [pertaining] to humanity’s betterment.” In a letter to assorted fair associations requesting exhibit space for educational purposes, the American Eugenics Society equated themselves to charitable institutions like the Public Health Department and the Red Cross:

There is no place where the public can be met and dealt with to greater advantage along this line than at the fairs. We are therefore requesting you for particulars regarding space for the exhibit which is a part of the educational plan . . . We have in the past exhibited side by side with the Public Health Department, the Red Cross and others of like character, and like these have paid no ground rent because, we sell nothing and receive nothing, the whole is for the

benefit and happiness of humanity and is supported exclusively by charity. Do you feel that you can also be charitable for so great and good a cause and contribute the needed space for our use?<sup>28</sup>

## **Panama Pacific International Exposition**

In 1915, San Francisco hosted a World's Fair that included an award-winning eugenics exhibit titled "Race Betterment." The exhibit was organized by the Race Betterment Foundation, an organization that sponsored conferences and publications concerning eugenics and race hygiene. Located in the exposition's Palace of Education, the exhibit displayed charts warning against interracial marriages, then known as mixed-race breeding, images illustrating eugenic differences between races, literature explaining the importance of eugenic-based legislation that supported the sterilization of the "unfit" and limited immigration, and plaster busts of Greek gods depicting what was thought to be the pinnacle of the human form. At the time, eugenics was an accepted practice in California that had significant effects on criminals and Asian immigrants. The "yellow peril" theory blamed "disease-ridden" Asian immigrants for soiling the State, strengthening the belief in Anglo-American superiority.

Articles on the exhibit claim it was "in almost constant attendance to give information and advice,' with some exceptionally interested visitors returning multiple times."<sup>29</sup> The success of the exhibit didn't go unnoticed. It became the model for the

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<sup>28</sup> Letter from Field Secretary, American Eugenics Association to Fair Associations asking education exhibit space, Circa 1930. American Philosophical Society, AES, AM3, 575.06, circulars. [http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/eugenics/view\\_image.pl?id=704](http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/eugenics/view_image.pl?id=704).

<sup>29</sup> "The Race Betterment Booth: An Intimate Look at California's Eugenic Legacy on the Centennial Anniversary of the PPIE." Another State, March 5, 2015. <https://anotherstate.wordpress.com/2015/03/05/the-race-betterment-booth-an-intimate-look-at-californias-eugenic-legacy-on-the-centennial-anniversary-of-the-ppie/>.

Second and Third International Eugenics Congress which inspired eugenic-based exhibitions to spread across America over the next quarter-century.

Eugenicists understood early on that fairs and expositions were being accessed in the same way as museums – as educational, cultural, and social institutions that are trusted to provide accurate information to its visitors. By infiltrating expositions, eugenicists were able to secure a foothold in the education system, proving “that cultural institutions which provide positive images, even at the expense of other groups, can have a definite and major influence on the education of its people.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Rowena Stewart, “The Empowerment of African American Museums” in *The Museum in America*. By Edward Alexander. AltaMira Press, 1997.



## CHAPTER 4 – THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY: HOST OF TWO EUGENICS SYMPOSIUMS

Borrowing from World's Fairs and expositions, museum professionals began to incorporate eugenic-based exhibits within their museums, often conducting and presenting their own research. When the theory of eugenics and its research were still in its infancy, a conference to share eugenic progress was created by the Eugenics Education Society, a British organization whose aim was to promote the research and education of eugenics. Scholars from around the world gathered to attend the International Congress of Eugenics, the first of which was held in 1912 in London, followed by the Second and Third International Congresses of Eugenics in 1921 and 1932, which were held by the American Eugenics Society at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City.

### **The Second International Congress of Eugenics**

The purpose of the Second International Congress of Eugenics was to continue the pursuit of scientific and social research that supported the eugenic theory of race betterment through the elimination of the “unfit” and the encouragement of procreation within “superior” lineages. The Congress included presentations and papers from statisticians, anthropologists, and sociologists from all over the world. Programs included “The Field for Eugenic Reform” and “Race among Mixed Populations.”<sup>31</sup> In

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<sup>31</sup> C.C. Little, *The Second International Congress of Eugenics*, Carnegie Institute of Washington. <http://belmont.bme.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/377/2018/02/2-The-Second-International-Congress-of-Eugenics.pdf>.

addition to the presented research, the Congress was accompanied by a eugenics exhibition that supported eugenic-based legislation and further educated the public on what was considered to be an economically beneficial theory of eugenics.

The exhibits incorporated displays from the American Museum of Natural History's anthropological and biological collections as well as from over one hundred international private lenders.<sup>32</sup> Exhibits and displays were composed of racial casts



Figure 4: Second International Congress of Eugenics exhibition hall on the first floor of the American Museum of Natural History, 1921.

*Source:* A Decade of Progress In Eugenics

<sup>32</sup> Devon Stillwell, "Eugenics Visualized: The Exhibit of the Third International Congress of Eugenics, 1932." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 86, no. 2 (2012): 206-236. <https://muse.jhu.edu/> (accessed March 6, 2019).

and models, photographs, pedigree charts, biological family histories, material illustrating the principles of heredity in plants, animals, and humans, comparative studies of racial characteristics, analysis of mental measurements, and books on genetic and eugenic subjects.<sup>33</sup>

Displays used persuasive language intended to convince the viewer of the importance of the eugenic philosophy. For example, a panel focusing on the benefit of selective marriage claimed that

unfit human traits such as feeble-mindedness, epilepsy, criminality, insanity, alcoholism, pauperism and many others, run in families and are inherited in exactly the same way as color in guinea pigs. If all marriages were eugenic, we could breed out most of this unfitness in three generations. You can improve your education and even change your environment but what you really are was all settled when your parents were born. Selected parents will have better children. This is the great aim of eugenics.

This display instructs the reader how to make “correct” choices when selecting a mate to breed out “unfitness,” thus encouraging the reader to actively participate in the creation of a “better” future through the practice of eugenics.

The Congress concluded within seven days, but the exhibit remained open for several weeks, attracting a variety of visitors, including teachers and students; between five and ten thousand guests attended. Due to the high volume of attendees, museum officials deemed the Congress a success, praising it as one of the most notable scientific symposiums to be hosted by the natural history institution.<sup>34</sup> Leonard

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<sup>33</sup> Harry Laughlin, *The Second International Exhibition of Eugenics...An Account of the Organization of the Exhibition, the Classification of the Exhibits, the List of Exhibitors, and a Catalog and Description of the Exhibits*. Baltimore, MD: Williams and Wilkins, 1923.

<sup>34</sup> Devon Stillwell, "Eugenics Visualized: The Exhibit of the Third International Congress of Eugenics, 1932." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 86, no. 2 (2012): 206-236. <https://muse.jhu.edu/> (accessed March 6, 2019).

Darwin, son of Charles Darwin, was so impressed with the exhibit that he anticipated a growing popularity. Upon the closing of the exhibit, he stated, “we may be sure that the seed sown in New York will spring up in many distant cities.”<sup>35</sup>

### **The Third International Congress of Eugenics**

In 1932, the Third International Eugenics Congress was held at the American Museum of Natural History once again. Eugenecists were eager to celebrate the achievements of the past decade: the implementation of sterilization legislation in thirty states and the 1924 Immigration Act, which used eugenics to influence immigration laws.

The Congress opened with the Presidential Address by Charles Davenport, American biologist and a leader in the eugenics movement. Davenport expressed his desire for eugenics to be incorporated into the mainstream educational curriculum:

Now it is hoped and expected that human genetics will . . . be placed on a basis, not of opinion but of fact, like the facts of animal breeding. When that time comes . . . writers of textbooks or the schools or writers of books for general reading will have presented the facts and even drawn immediate deductions from them.<sup>36</sup>

The three-day Congress, viewed by more than fifteen thousand people, included exhibits that were incorporated into the American Museum of Natural

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<sup>35</sup> Susan Currell and Christina Cogdell, eds, *Popular Eugenics: National Efficiency and American Mass Culture in the 1930s*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006. Accessed February 27, 2019. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>36</sup> *A Decade of Progress in Eugenics; Scientific Papers of the Third International Congress of Eugenics, held at American Museum of Natural History, New York, August 21-23, 1932*. Baltimore, MD: Waverly Press, Inc. Williams and Wilkins, 1934. [Accessed March 2019] <https://archive.org/details/decadeofprogress00inte>.

History's permanent collection, further illustrating that museums viewed the research as legitimate and worthy of conservation and display. The purpose of the exhibit was

to take stock of man's present knowledge about the inborn element in human qualities, physical, mental and spiritual, and about the control of such qualities in family-stocks, in races and in national populations, in their turnover from generation to generation. More briefly this exhibit is about improvement in the breed of man.<sup>37</sup>



Figure 5: Third International Congress of Eugenics exhibit at the American Museum of Natural History, 1932.

Source: Truman State University.

<sup>37</sup> *A Decade of Progress in Eugenics; Scientific Papers of the Third International Congress of Eugenics, held at American Museum of Natural History, New York, August 21-23, 1932.* Baltimore, MD: Waverly Press, Inc. Williams and Wilkins, 1934. [Accessed March 2019] <https://archive.org/details/decadeofprogress00inte>.



Figure 6: Entrance to the exhibition hall displaying stone busts of Charles Darwin and Francis Galton, 1932.

Source: A Decade of Progress in Eugenics.

The exhibit entrance featured busts of Charles Darwin and Francis Galton resembling the “ideal man” seen in Greco-Roman sculptures alongside photographs and charts of those deemed “unfit.” Greco-Roman aesthetics emphasize eugenically desirable traits and promote a relationship between physical appearance and inner worth, directly fitting into eugenical ideology. Eugenicist Alfred Wiggam argued that beauty correlates with one’s intelligence and moral character:

“. . . on the general average the intelligent active and energetic are more beautiful than lazy, ignorant and stupid. And since . . . intelligence is quite



closely associated with sound moral character . . . it follows therefore, that good-looking people are better morally, on the average, than ugly people.”<sup>38</sup>

The placement of the Greco-Roman inspired busts of the founding fathers of eugenics near “inferior” people created a dichotomy of “us” and “them.” This juxtaposition played a significant role in how those viewing the exhibit perceived the message of eugenic ideology – that certain people and groups are harming society as a whole and eugenics is the solution to the greater good.<sup>39</sup>



Figure 7: Flashing light exhibit at the Fitter Families Contest, 1926.

Source: American Philosophical Society, American Eugenics Society Records.

The museum used engaging displays to illustrate its argument. One particular exhibit used flashing lights to present “facts” about American births and criminality. A portion of the display read, “Learn about Heredity. You can help to correct these

<sup>38</sup> Albert Edward Wiggam. *The Fruit of the Family Tree*. Garden City, NY, Garden City Pub, 1924.

<sup>39</sup> Devon Stillwell, "Eugenics Visualized: The Exhibit of the Third International Congress of Eugenics, 1932." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 86, no. 2 (2012): 206-236. <https://muse.jhu.edu/> (accessed March 6, 2019).

conditions.” This statement offers the viewer an opportunity to actively participate in the practice of eugenics. It continues, emphasizing the financial burden “inferior” people have on individuals within society: “This light flashes every 15 seconds. Every 15 seconds \$100 of your money goes for the care of persons with bad hereditary such as the insane, feebleminded, criminal, and other defective.” This display was an effective means to demonstrate the importance of eugenics through the use of persuasive language and was designed for the visitor to walk away with a specific understanding and interpretation of how eugenic ideology would lead to a “better” future.

The museum displays compared different races, classes, and intellects to bolster the eugenic agenda. Panels displaying wealthy Caucasian families, like the Galton-Darwin-Wedgwood lineage whose pedigree was characterized by outstanding capacities in philosophy, science, and art, sat nearby a panel with crude drawings depicting physical features believed to be common among criminals and the insane, such as shorter, broader, higher heads, thicker eyebrows, and higher eye sockets. A panel featuring photographs attempting to link appearance with crime by displaying features believed to be common among violent convicts failed to list the specific traits or the reasoning behind the linkage between those physical features and violent crimes. While some may not want to leave room for interpretation, this omission requires the viewer to arrive at their own conclusions about the link between appearance and crime. Perhaps the curator’s confidence in the museum’s educational authority outweighed their ability to provide hard evidence connecting physical appearance and criminality.

Henry Fairfield Osborn, respected paleontologist and president of the American Museum of Natural History, was instrumental in advancing the eugenics movement



within the museum field. He contributed to the Congress with his paper “Birth Selection Versus Birth Control,” in which he argued that birth selection is preferable to birth control. Birth selection refers to “positive eugenics,” which encourages people of the “eugenic element” or “high stock” to reproduce while discouraging people of the “dysgenic element” or “low stock” to reproduce. Osborn believed birth control was “largely negative and death-dealing rather than positive and birth-encouraging”<sup>40</sup> due to the suppression of births among the “fit” as well as the “unfit.” Osborn’s belief that “positive eugenics” is preferable to birth control resulted in a concern in over-population. His paleontology work sent him all over the world, exposing him to millions of people who he believed were of the “dysgenic element.” His solution to over-population lay in eugenics. Upon returning from abroad, Osborn believed that “not more but better and finer representatives of every race” was essential to a successful society. He maintained that Americans, specifically of Nordic and Scandinavian descent, were preferable, and that the population of dysgenic Americans act as “dragnets or sheet-anchors on the progress of the ship of state.” Osborn demanded, “not more but better Americans.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *A Decade of Progress in Eugenics; Scientific Papers of the Third International Congress of Eugenics, held at American Museum of Natural History, New York, August 21-23, 1932.* Baltimore, MD: Waverly Press, Inc. Williams and Wilkins, 1934. [Accessed October 2019] <https://archive.org/details/decadeofprogress00inte>.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 5 – HENRY FAIRFIELD OSBORN

The American Museum of Natural History's role in the eugenics movement can be largely credited to Henry Fairfield Osborn, museum president, who volunteered to host the Second and Third International Congresses of Eugenics at the museum. Osborn's prestigious upbringing, which gave him access to an abundance of wealth, higher education, and the plethora of privileges white men so often benefited from, as well as his career as an American paleontologist, ultimately fueled his eugenical beliefs. While earning his Doctor of Science at Princeton, Osborn studied under Professor T. H. Huxley, a renowned anthropologist known as "Darwin's Bulldog" because of his staunch advocacy of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. Huxley introduced Osborn to Francis Galton, the British scientist who coined the term "eugenics," and they became fast friends.<sup>42</sup>

Osborn's growing connections with the scientific community influenced his research and career. As a respected professor of zoology at Columbia University and a trusted Curator for the Department of Vertebrate Paleontology at the American Museum of Natural History, Osborn's authority enabled him to influence a diverse audience of scholars and museum visitors. In 1908, Osborn was promoted to President of the American Museum of Natural History, where he worked to expand the

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<sup>42</sup> William K. Gregory, *Biographical Memoir of Henry Fairfield Osborn, 1857-1935*. Washington: National Academy of Sciences, 1938.  
<http://nasonline.org/publications/biographical-memoirs/memoir-pdfs/osborn-henry-f.pdf>.

museum's publicity department and contributed to its status as the world's leading museum of natural history.<sup>43</sup>

Osborn traveled abroad thanks to institution-funded paleontology exhibitions where he collected and studied animal and human bones. He began to compare the size and structure of human skeletons, particularly skulls, from around the world with animal bones. He drew conclusions indicating levels of intelligence based on skeletal evolution.

Osborn's belief that skeletal size and structure indicate levels of intelligence was reinforced with the "discovery" of the Piltdown Man, a hoax created in the early twentieth century to support the racist theory that the human lineage couldn't be derived solely from Africa. The Piltdown Man was created from the discovery of a human cranium near Piltdown Village, England with further discoveries of teeth and a jawbone nearby. Archaeologists suggested the teeth and jawbone fragments resembled those of apes yet belonged to the same specimen as the cranium, which was believed to be human, demonstrating the transitional stage in evolution between ape and human. They estimated the fragments dated as far back as 500,000 years, further supporting the theory of the "missing link" – that man evolved from apes. The discovery of the "missing link" in England provided evidence that different ethnic groups had distinct biological origins, legitimizing the theory of "superior" and "inferior" races.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Michon Scott, "Henry Fairfield Osborn." Rocky Road: Henry Fairfield Osborn. Accessed October 2019. <https://www.strangescience.net/osborn.htm>.

<sup>44</sup> Encyclopedia.com, Henry F <https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/science-and-technology/geology-and-oceanography-biographies/henry-fairfield-osborn>.airfield Osborn. Accessed October 2019.

While the claim that humans evolved from apes is not entirely incorrect, Osborn used this evidence to demonstrate his theory of evolution. He used the Piltdown Man as primary evidence to illustrate how hereditary forces determined evolutionary changes, intelligence, and the racist notion that not all humans originated from Africa.<sup>45</sup>

Using the Piltdown Man as evidence, Osborn began using institutional funding to develop educational material on his theory of evolution. He commissioned three sculpted busts based on authentic fossilized skulls of the Java Man, Neanderthal man, and Cro-Magnon man to be displayed alongside a bust of the Piltdown Man at the American Museum of Natural History where visitors would learn about human evolution regardless of scientific accuracy. Osborn freely issued copies of his educational research and visual materials to the press and textbook publishers in an effort to spread his theory. The textbook industry did not question Osborn's research due to his authority as the President of the American Museum of Natural History and status as a well-respected paleontologist and academic. This racialized theory of evolution remained in high school and college textbooks well into the 1970s, not only dramatically shaping students' concept of evolution but of race and equality, as well.<sup>46</sup>

Some forty years later, it was discovered that the Piltdown Man was a hoax. Microscopic studies of the bones revealed that the teeth and jawbone were of ape origin, while the cranium was human and could not have belonged to the same

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<sup>45</sup> Gavin Foster, "Homo naledi, Piltdown and a lesson in African prehistory", Thought Leader, Mail & Guardian, 2019. Accessed October 2019, <https://thoughtleader.co.za/gavinfoster/2015/11/19/naledi-piltown-and-a-lesson-in-african-prehistory/>.

<sup>46</sup> Ronald Ladouceur, "Henry Fairfield Osborn and the Tragic Legacy of Piltdown Man," Textbook History, 2019. Accessed October 2019, <https://textbookhistory.com/henry-fairfield-osborn-and-piltdown-man/>.

individual. Additionally, it was discovered that the teeth and jawbone were chemically treated to appear aged, as well as intentionally scuffed and worn to appear human. Furthermore, scientists were able to date the remains to approximately 50,000 years, eliminating “the possibility of the Piltdown Man being the missing link between humans and apes as at this point in time humans had already developed into their *Homo sapiens* form.”<sup>47</sup>

Osborn’s belief in the Piltdown Man discovery further supported his racist perspective towards “inferior” races – he viewed Australian Aborigines as primitive and compared sub-Saharan Africans to apes. In 1906, as a committee member of the Bronx Zoo, Osborn participated in the exhibition a twenty-three-year-old Congolese man named Ota Benga in a zoo enclosure called The Monkey House, where he was expected to perform with an orangutan. Osborn felt his research supported his belief that people from “primitive” races, like Ota Benga, were comparable to monkeys and apes while Caucasian races demonstrated civilized intelligence. Ota Benga’s presence in the “Man and Monkey” exhibit was widely accepted by “educated” white audiences due to Osborn’s authority as a museum professional and university professor. Museums are trusted institutions that are expected to present the unbiased truth to their visitors. As such, museum professionals are responsible for presenting current research backed by tangible evidence. If the research is incomplete or the evidence is questionable, they are obligated to be transparent by communicating this to their audience. Likewise, university professors are often considered experts in their field who devote their time to

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<sup>47</sup> “Piltdown Man,” Natural History Museum, 2019. Accessed October 2019, <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/our-science/departments-and-staff/library-and-archives/collections/piltdown-man.html>.

scholarly research. As a curator at the American Museum of Natural History and a zoology professor at Columbia University, Osborn's authority was trusted.

In 1916, Ota Benga could not bear to stay in America any longer. After a failed attempt to secure passage home to the Congo, he committed suicide at the age of thirty-two. Ota Benga's untimely death demonstrates how the exploitative treatment from white eugenicists affected his sense of well-being and the chance to live a happy, meaningful life.

Osborn continued to create diagrams illustrating the evolutionary pathways of various races from "the dawn of man," with Caucasian intelligence rising to the top. He used his research as evidence to support the eugenic theory, claiming that some races are inferior to others, even going as far as to divide humans into categories based on racial differences:

We now subdivide *Homo sapiens* into three or more absolutely distinct stocks, which in zoology would be given the rank of species, if not of genera; these stocks are popularly known as the Caucasian, the Mongolian, and the Negroid. . . . The European variety of man . . . includes three very distinct subtypes, races, or stocks, namely, the Scandinavian or Nordic, the Alpine or Ostro-Slavic, and the Mediterranean, each distinguished by racial characters so profound and ancient that if we encountered them among birds or mammals we should certainly call them species rather than races.<sup>48</sup>

Osborn used his position as President at the American Museum of Natural History to promote the research and education of eugenics by hosting the International Congress of Eugenics in 1921, and again in 1932, at the museum. In his book *Man Rises to Parnassus*, Osborn expresses his view on eugenics and his support for the Congress: "Care for the race, even if the individual must suffer — this must be the

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<sup>48</sup> H. F. Osborn, Sr. (1927) quoted in Michael Ruse, *Monad to Man: The Concept of Progress in Evolutionary Biology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 268.

keynote of our future. This was the guiding principle which underlay all the discussions of the Second International Congress of Eugenics in 1921.”<sup>49</sup>

Similar to how the museum community feels today, Osborn felt museums hold a responsibility to their community in presenting the facts and providing educational content to its visitors:

There are certain obligations resting upon the curators of metropolitan museums from which curators of university museums should enjoy a grateful immunity. These mainly involve the difficult undertaking of arousing interest and spreading accurate information among a very large class of inquisitive but wholly uninformed people. If these obligations are unfulfilled the metropolitan museum fails in its purpose and deserves the withdrawal of public support.<sup>50</sup>

Osborn’s view of what defines accurate scientific information was undoubtedly colored by his racial bias which he applied to his findings as a research paleontologist. With these beliefs firmly in place, Osborn incorporated the displays from the 1932 Eugenics Congress into the American Museum of Natural History’s permanent collection, further illustrating that Osborn viewed the research as legitimate and worthy of conservation and display in a national museum.

Osborn used his research on human evolution as evidence of racial inequality and eugenics. In his paper *Problems in Evolution and Heredity*, Osborn presents his study on human evolution, comparing minute skeletal differences among races such as teeth and muscular development. His study further claims that differences in skull development indicates intelligence: “[Skull development] seems to be another region where the white and colored races present reversed conditions; the early closure and

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<sup>49</sup> Henry Fairfield Osborn, *Man Rises to Parnassus: Critical Epochs in the Prehistory of Man*. Princeton, University Press, 1927.

<sup>50</sup> Amy Laura Hall, *Conceiving Parenthood: American Protestantism and the Spirit of Reproduction*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008.

arrest of brain development in the negroes is well known; the later closure among the whites is undoubtedly an adaptation to brain growth." Osborn cites Galton's research on Cambridge students. He claimed that white students' brains continue to grow beyond the expected age due to their access to higher education: "[Although] the brain ceases to grow after the age of nineteen, or even earlier, it is by no means the case with university students. In high honor men head growth is precocious, their heads predominate over the average more at nineteen than at twenty-five."<sup>51</sup> Modern science explains that brain development continues into early adulthood, which thoroughly debunks Galton's theory that Caucasian brain and skeletal development has the advantage over non-white peoples. Additionally, many non-white peoples were not permitted to attend higher educational institutions which excluded them from participating in such a study, resulting in inaccurate and biased data.

With Osborn's help, eugenics became a prevalent ideology throughout museum organizations. As eugenic theory gained acceptance, more museums incorporated such exhibits in their museums, proudly promoting what was believed to be a scientifically proven fact.

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<sup>51</sup> Henry Fairfield Osborn. *Present Problems in Evolution and Heredity*. 1893.



## CHAPTER 6 – EUGENIC EXHIBITS

Despite progress and steady victories, the eugenics movement faced scrutiny. As some geneticists, scholars, and Catholic clergy began to question the moral and scientific legitimacy of eugenics, eugenicists began looking for ways to strengthen public support. Eugenics advocates in the American Public Health Association looked to Germany for help.

### ***Eugenics in New Germany***

In 1934, with the support of the German government, the American Public Health Association partnered with the Deutsches Hygiene-Museum in Dresden, Germany, to bring the exhibit *Eugenics in New Germany* to the United States. The exhibit was “intended to educate the public about contemporary health knowledge and concerns through highly engaging, interactive exhibits.”<sup>52</sup>

In September of 1934, the *Eugenics in New Germany* exhibit made its debut at the American Public Health Association’s annual convention in Pasadena, California. The exhibit consisted of fifty translated displays focusing on issues in sterilization and legislation efforts, race hygiene, and hereditary disease. Newspapers reported that the exhibit was well received by Pasadena residents. Due to significant media attention and public demand from the city of Los Angeles, the exhibit was extended from one month to two. Additionally, a representative from the Los Angeles Health who viewed the

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<sup>52</sup> Susan Currell and Christina Cogdell, eds, *Popular Eugenics: National Efficiency and American Mass Culture in the 1930s*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006. Accessed February 27, 2019. ProQuest Ebook Central.

exhibit requested to display it at the Los Angeles County Museum. With growing interest in the museum community, the *Eugenics in New Germany* exhibit traveled along the west coast, where it continued to receive high praise. An article by the *Stockton Record* “encouraged the public to attend for free, especially high school and college students” with an interest in biological and social science.<sup>53</sup> American advocates of health education believed it “was an essential tool for achieving a healthy future, a future where the combination of medical progress, public health work, and personal health practices would defeat disease and make optimal health the standard.”<sup>54</sup>

Oregon received the exhibit in 1935. The state was well versed in sterilization laws, the first of which was passed in 1917 and supported by the first female medical doctor in the Pacific Northwest, Bethenia Owens-Adair. As a strong supporter of eugenic sterilization as a means of economic and financial growth, Owens-Adair stated:

The greatest curse of the races comes through our vicious criminal and insane classes, and to my mind this is the lament that should be dealt with, not by chloroform or strangulation, but by the science of surgery, for if their power to reproduce themselves were rendered null a tremendous important step in advance would have been taken, not only without injury to life, but often with positive benefit to the victims themselves.<sup>55</sup>

Oregon was experiencing financial uncertainties and economic hardships throughout the 1930s, which resulted in increased support of the eugenics movement, due to the

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<sup>53</sup> Susan Currell and Christina Cogdell, eds, *Popular Eugenics: National Efficiency and American Mass Culture in the 1930s*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006. Accessed February 27, 2019. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>54</sup> Erin McLeary and Elizabeth Toon, "Here man learns about himself": visual education and the rise and fall of the American Museum of Health” *American journal of public health* vol. 102,7. Published July 2012. Accessed March 15, 2019 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3478034/>.

<sup>55</sup> Susan Currell and Christina Cogdell, eds, *Popular Eugenics: National Efficiency and American Mass Culture in the 1930s*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006. Accessed February 27, 2019. ProQuest Ebook Central.

theory that forced or coerced sterilization would bring about lower welfare and institutional costs.<sup>56</sup>

The *Eugenics in New Germany* exhibit traveled throughout Oregon for four months making stops at higher educational institutions such as Willamette University where students visited the exhibit as a part of their curriculum. When the *Oregon Statesman* asked S.B. Laughlin, a Willamette University sociologist, about the exhibit, he reported that it was “very valuable and of great interest in Oregon now.” Reed College also displayed the exhibit, reporting approximately forty thousand attendees. *Eugenics in New Germany* strategically spent some time in the state’s capital, Salem, which may have directly impacted the outcome of state legislation as it arrived just as Oregon was considering revisions to their sterilization statute.

### **The Buffalo Museum of Science**

Upon the conclusion of the west coast tour, it was intended for the *Eugenics in New Germany* exhibit to be incorporated into the New York Academy of Medicine’s permanent displays. However, the directors declined the exhibit due to its design supporting a “political conviction [rather] than to illustrate natural law.”<sup>57</sup> Dr. Carlos Cummings, Director of the Buffalo Museum of Science, saw it differently and eagerly accepted the exhibit. An announcement in *Museum News*, a museum community magazine, quoted Cummings as saying:

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<sup>56</sup> Susan Currell and Christina Cogdell, eds, *Popular Eugenics: National Efficiency and American Mass Culture in the 1930s*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006. Accessed February 27, 2019. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

As a matter of public interest, without endorsement, the Museum will display in the Central Hall, throughout this final quarter of 1935, a set of fifty-one posters and charts, a gift from the Deutsche Hygiene Museum of Dresden, which gives Americans a graphic explanation of German's campaign to rear in posterity 'a new race nobility.'<sup>58</sup>

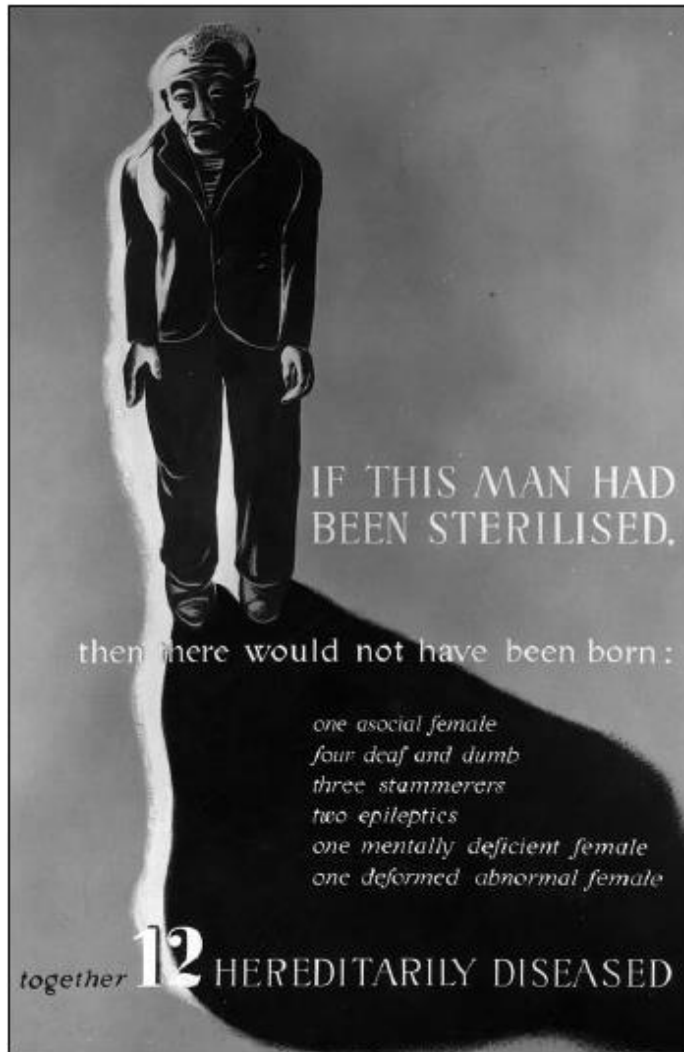


Figure 8: Exhibit panel from the Buffalo Museum of Science eugenics exhibit describing the outcome of proper sterilization. It reads, "If this man had been sterilized then there would not have been born: one asocial female, four deaf and dumb, three stammerers, two epileptics, one mentally deficient female, one deformed abnormal female. Together 12 hereditarily diseased."

Source: Buffalo Museum of Science

The arrival of *Eugenics in New Germany* in Buffalo was significant. The Buffalo Museum of Science was reported as "one of the most alert and progressive institutions

<sup>58</sup> Susan Currell and Christina Cogdell, eds, *Popular Eugenics: National Efficiency and American Mass Culture in the 1930s*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006. Accessed February 27, 2019. ProQuest Ebook Central.

of its kind in the country,” primarily due to Cummings’ research evaluating visitors’ reactions and experiences within museums to develop “methods for making museums ‘into more effective educational centers.’”<sup>59</sup> Cummings’ groundbreaking research revealed that the design of an exhibit directly influences the visitor’s attitude and overall understanding of the content displayed. Cummings developed an exhibit design technique, referred to as “the storyline technique,” that sequentially presented exhibits to tell a continuous, fluid narrative. At the time, Buffalo Museum of Science visitors entered the Hall of Physics and Chemistry and the Hall of Astronomy, which told the story of the formation of chemical compounds and minerals. They moved on to the Hall of Life and the Hall of Invertebrates, Plant Life and Vertebrate Life, which told the story of the creation of Earth. These halls were followed by the Hall of Evolution and Genetics, where depictions of “primitive man” were displayed and where the eugenics exhibit was integrated. The final exhibit was the Hall of Civilization, where the story of the development of “modern civilization” was told. By weaving the eugenics exhibit into the Hall of Evolution and Genetics, Cummings injected his political agenda based on faulty pseudo-science into the institution of authority that the Buffalo Museum of Science withheld. Chauncy Hamlin, President of the Buffalo Museum of Science and member of the American Eugenics Society,<sup>60</sup> supported Cummings’ theory:

What we are doing is to try to write and illustrate the whole fascinating story of modern science in our document – our museum – chapter by chapter, in our various exhibit halls, each exhibit leading naturally into the next, and each

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<sup>59</sup> Manon Niquette and William J. Buxton, “Sugar-coating the Educational Pill”: *Rockefeller Support for the Communicative Turn in Science Museums*. In *Patronizing the Public: American Philanthropy’s Transformation of Culture, Communication, and the Humanities*. Edited by William J. Buxton. Lexington Books, 2009.

<sup>60</sup> American Eugenics Society – Members, Officers and Directors Database. Accessed April 2019. <https://archive.org/details/AMERICANEUGENICSSOCIETYMEMBERS>.

forming a part of a logical whole. We start the story with an account of the essential unity of different forms of matter and conclude it with a demonstration of the final goal of civilization, the essential unity of mankind in our interdependent complex of modern life.<sup>61</sup>

A *Buffalo Evening News* article dated September 27, 1935, reported that upon the installation of the exhibit “museum officials . . . made it clear [that the Buffalo Museum of Science] does not imply endorsement of the eugenics program.” However, the persuasive nature of the exhibit’s content which was founded on pseudo-science, along with key eugenicist Harry Laughlin’s statement in 1913 that “the public should learn that those branches of science which deal with family-stocks and breed improvement in the several races and had been organized and integrated into a definite science,”<sup>62</sup> should be taken into consideration. Because the Buffalo Museum of Science was seen as “primarily a museum of ideas” whose “exhibits aim above all to give visitors a concrete exemplification of principles and influences,”<sup>63</sup> their ability to impact and persuade their visitors through their highly praised display technique must be evaluated when considering the museums' endorsement of the eugenics movement.

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<sup>61</sup> Manon Niquette and William J. Buxton, “Sugar-coating the Educational Pill”: Rockefeller Support for the Communicative Turn in Science Museums. In *Patronizing the Public: American Philanthropy’s Transformation of Culture, Communication, and the Humanities*. Edited by William J. Buxton. Lexington Books, 2009.

<sup>62</sup> *A Decade of Progress in Eugenics; Scientific Papers of the Third International Congress of Eugenics, held at American Museum of Natural History, New York, August 21-23, 1932*. Baltimore, MD: Waverly Press, Inc. Williams and Wilkins, 1934. [Accessed March 2019] <https://archive.org/details/decadeofprogress00inte>.

<sup>63</sup> Manon Niquette and William J. Buxton, “Sugar-coating the Educational Pill”: Rockefeller Support for the Communicative Turn in Science Museums. In *Patronizing the Public: American Philanthropy’s Transformation of Culture, Communication, and the Humanities*. Edited by William J. Buxton. Lexington Books, 2009.

In addition to the panels from the *Eugenics in New Germany* exhibit, the Buffalo Museum of Science created its own exhibits on heredity. Hamlin designed an interactive exhibit meant “to show the reactions of good and bad environment on an individual who is either gifted with a splendid heredity background, an average heredity background, or who unfortunately has a poor heredity background.” His environmental classifications included proper food and a balanced diet, proper home surroundings, exercise, fresh air, and education. The exhibit used levers that released balls, causing them to drop into a slot indicating one of the three types of heredity: good, bad, or average. In his design plans, Hamlin includes text for a label that reads, “Your social worth depends upon the response of your heredity to your environmental opportunities.”<sup>64</sup> Although this statement is not unreasonable on its own, Hamlin’s belief that certain racial or ethnic groups suffer disproportionately from poor heredity demonstrates his eugenic understanding of where he believes social worth originates.

Furthermore, the Buffalo Museum of Science maintained correspondence with Harry Laughlin, secretary of the Second and Third International Congresses of Eugenics. The presence of communication reveals the museum's enthusiastic assistance and participation in the Eugenics Congress. In a letter addressed to Laughlin in May of 1932, Hamlin wrote:

We will be very glad to cooperate to the extent of our facilities in the preparation of such an exhibit . . . We are very much interested in the meeting of the Eugenics Congress and have already prepared one exhibit which is to be on display there and our staff will be represented at the Congress.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Buffalo Museum of Science, Manuscript on file, Folder A-042 (3) F3.

<sup>65</sup> Buffalo Museum of Science, Manuscript on file, Folder A-042 (3) F12.

Correspondence with Laughlin demonstrates the museum's eugenic advocacy because of Laughlin's robust resumé of participation in the eugenic field, such as President of the American Eugenics Society from 1927-1928 and associate editor of the *Eugenical News* from 1916 to 1939.<sup>66</sup>

A couple of months later, in July of 1932, Cummings confirmed the shipment of “the framed panels constituting our Museum Exhibit for the International Congress of Eugenics.”<sup>67</sup> The panels included photographs from the Buffalo Museum of Science Genetics Room and Hall of Heredity and Environment. The exhibits explained the transmission of hereditary factors using rabbits and plants. In addition to these panels, the Hall of Heredity and Environment featured an interactive exhibit that demonstrated the association between heredity and environment. Paul Burkholder, Buffalo Museum of Science's Curator of Biology, suggested that the exhibit illustrated “that a person with

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<sup>66</sup> “Biography of Harry H. Laughlin,” Pickler Memorial Library, Truman State University, 2019. Accessed October 2019, <http://library.truman.edu/manuscripts/laughlinbio.asp>.

<sup>67</sup> Buffalo Museum of Science, Manuscript on file, Folder A-042 (3) F12.



poor heredity can never attain the maximum social worth which can be reached by an individual who starts with excellent heredity.”<sup>68</sup>

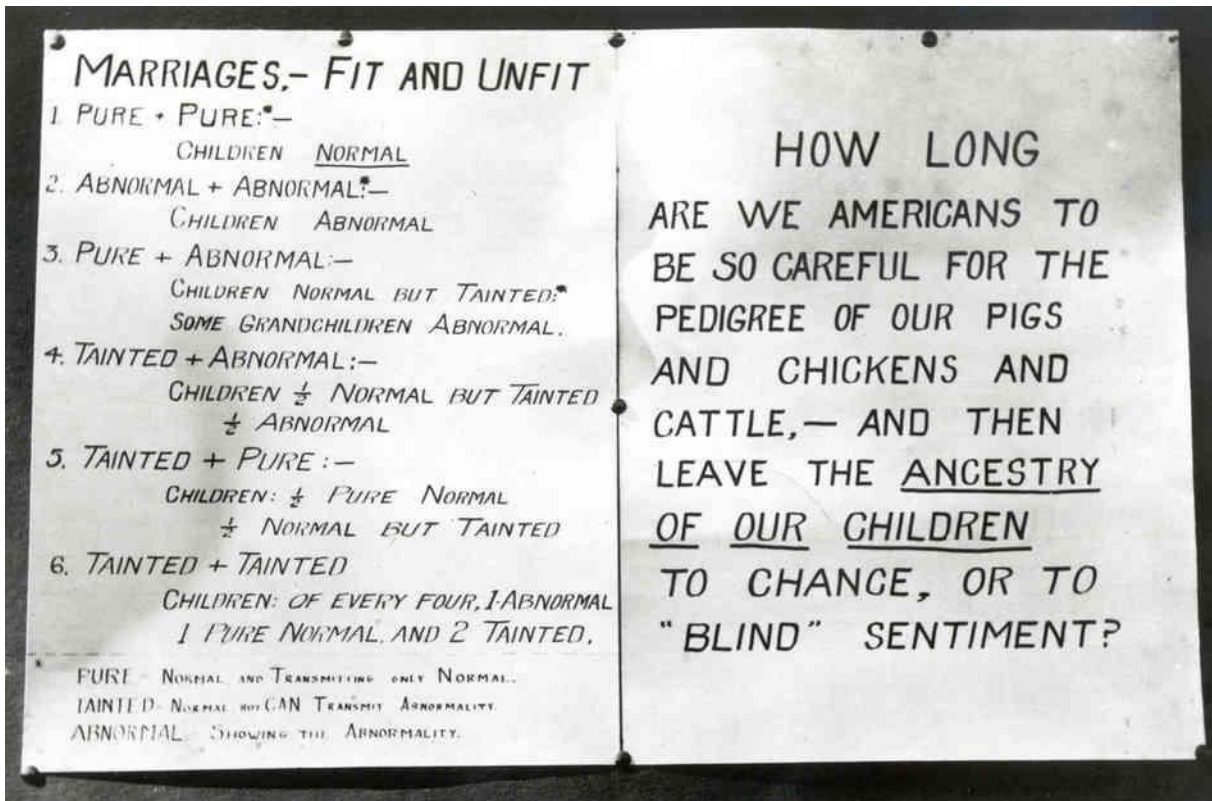


Figure 9: Exhibit panel from the Kansas State Fair illustrating “fit” and “unfit” marriages.

Source: American Philosophical Society, American Eugenics Society Records.

Burkholder published a summary of the exhibit in an article from the museum’s magazine, *Hobbies*. Burkholder suggested falling “in love intelligently.” He argued that humans must be aware of their genetic makeup and intentionally choose whether or not to reproduce based on their heredity – people of “good heredity” should choose to marry others with “good heredity” to ensure proper offspring.

<sup>68</sup> Buffalo Museum of Science, Manuscript on file, Folder A-042 (3) F12.

He compared the lineage of two New York families, the “respectable” Edwards Family and the “melancholy” Jukes Family, to support his argument. Burkholder included a description of the Edwards lineage, taking the time to highlight an extensive list of “successful” descendants, many of whom were college graduates, professors, doctors, lawyers, or politicians and produced people such as,

Aaron Burr, Vice-President of the United States; Winston Churchill, novelist; Robert Treat Paine, a signer of the Declaration of Independence; M.W. Bigelow, former Chief Justice for the Supreme Court; George Vincent, head of the Rockefeller Foundation; Grover Cleveland, one of America’s greatest presidents; Ulysses S. Grant, renowned general and president.<sup>69</sup>

In contrast, Burkholder’s description of the Jukes family is vague and lacks evidence to substantiate his claim that the Jukes lineage was “defective.” He briefly mentioned that of over one thousand Jukes descendants many died in infancy, were criminals or “wrecked by disease,” in an attempt to correlate criminality and poverty with social value. Burkholder illustrated his belief that marrying and reproducing with “unfit” partners creates a lineage of criminals whose inevitable burden on society is unacceptable. Burkholder believed that the Jukes lineage was a “social scourge [that] has cost the government millions of dollars for asylums and prisons, and the end is not yet.”<sup>70</sup>

Burkholder’s belief that the human race must be improved upon and can be done so through intentional and “intelligent” breeding supports the eugenic agenda. His position at the Buffalo Museum of Science was an ideal platform to educate the

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<sup>69</sup> Buffalo Museum of Science, Manuscript on file, Folder A-042 (3) F12.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

community on race betterment as he encouraged visitors to participate in the movement by choosing a mate “intelligently.” Burkholder explains:

The new findings of science teach young men and women the immense bearing of a wise or unwise marriage upon the health, happiness, and intelligence of their children . . . Human heredity can be improved only by a wise selection of parents for the next generation. You can improve the human race by falling in love intelligently.<sup>71</sup>



Figure 10: A young “physically perfect” couple marries, declaring, “This is going to be a perfect example of eugenic marriage.”

Source: The Day Book, Chicago, Illinois, March 3, 1914.

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<sup>71</sup> Buffalo Museum of Science, Manuscript on file, Folder A-042 (3) F12.

Hamlin and Cummings saw an increase in museum attendance and attributed this success to the addition of the eugenics exhibit gifted by the Deutsches Hygiene-Museum. The exhibit became part of Buffalo Museum of Science's permanent collection and remained popular throughout the 1930s. However, with the rise of fascism and Hitler coming to power in Germany, museum officials felt the eugenics exhibit was no longer appropriate and called for its removal. In 1942, the Buffalo Museum of Science sought permission to destroy the majority of the exhibit. However, Cummings cites bulky charts that take up valuable storage space as the reason for destruction rather than the questionable content.<sup>72</sup> Cummings's reluctance to subscribe to society's emerging concern with fascist sentiments in Europe underlines his belief in the eugenic method of race betterment.

Although the Buffalo Museum of Science sought for the destruction of the *Eugenics in New Germany* exhibit in the 1940s, it wasn't until 1969 that the Hall of Heredity officially closed for renovations. *The Courier-Express* announced the closure explaining that "the closing was necessary because the exhibits are out of date. The explosion of scientific knowledge in the last few years has left them obsolete."<sup>73</sup>

As an educational and social authority, the Buffalo Museum of Science has a responsibility to provide non-biased, evidential information to its community. R.E. Goodin argues in *Reflective Democracy* that as democratic institutions museums "are supposed to act responsibly, taking due account of the impact of their actions and

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<sup>72</sup> R. E. Goodin, *Reflective Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

<sup>73</sup> Dave Prizinky, "Some Museum of Science Exhibits in Disrepair," *Courier Express* (Buffalo, NY), May 12, 1969.

choice on all those (here or elsewhere, now or later) who will be affected by them.”<sup>74</sup>

Although the faulty science of the eugenics movement may have gone undetected, the impact museums have as an educational and societal authority on its visitors is undeniable.

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<sup>74</sup> R. E. Goodin, *Reflective Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

## CHAPTER 7 – EUGENICS IN POLITICS

With help from museums, it didn't take long for the eugenic ideology to enter the political realm. As the movement gained popularity, politicians became eugenicists, and eugenicists became politicians. Political involvement meant eugenics was securing a foothold in American legislation.

In 1921, shortly after the Second International Congress of Eugenics ended, Harry Laughlin, Secretary of the Congress and Superintendent of the Eugenics Records Office was appointed the "Expert Eugenics Agent" for the House of Representatives Immigration Committee. He testified before the House of Representatives Committee on Immigration and Naturalization numerous times, presenting flawed statistics to persuade the Committee that immigrants possessed "all types of social inadequacy" including insanity, feeble-mindedness, and criminalistic behavior.<sup>75</sup>

Additionally, Laughlin installed exhibit panels on immigration from the Eugenics Congress in the hall where U.S. congressional representatives held hearings discussing immigration restrictions in the United States. Influenced by Laughlin's testimonies and "educational" immigration panels, congressional representatives drafted the Immigration Act of 1924 which limited the number of immigrants allowed entry to the U.S. by restricting "visas to two percent of the total number of people of

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<sup>75</sup> "Minutes of meeting of Committee on Immigration of the Eugenics Research Association," February 25, 1920, Eugenics Archive. Accessed February 2020. <http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/html/eugenics/index2.html?tag=504>.

each nationality in the United States . . . [and] completely [excluding] immigrants from Asia.”<sup>76</sup> The Immigration Act of 1924 remained intact for over forty years.

Eugenic-based legislation, such as the practice of forced sterilization, had been passed in several states prior to the Immigration Act of 1924, with Indiana being the first in 1907. In 1914, Laughlin drafted the Model Eugenic Sterilization Law: “an Act to prevent the procreation of persons socially inadequate from defective inheritance, by authorizing and providing for the eugenic sterilization of certain potential parents carrying degenerate hereditary qualities.”<sup>77</sup> In short, the law proposed government-sanctioned sterilization of the “ ‘socially inadequate’ – people supported in institutions or ‘maintained wholly or in part by public expense’ . The law encompassed the ‘feeble-minded, insane, criminalistic, epileptic, inebriate, diseased, blind, deaf; deformed; and dependent.’” Upon publication of the Model Eugenic Sterilization Law, twelve states passed sterilization laws.<sup>78</sup>

The push for such a solution gained popularity in the 1920s, in part by Laughlin’s community outreach through public exhibitions which highlighted the financial burden thrust on society to care for the “feeble-minded” and “insane.” By 1924, roughly three-thousand people had been forcefully sterilized in America. That same year, Virginia passed the Eugenic Sterilization Act, asserting that “heredity plays an important part in the transmission of insanity, idiocy, imbecility, epilepsy and crime . . . .” It focused on

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<sup>76</sup> “Immigration Act of 1924 (The Johnson-Reed Act). The Office of the Historian. Accessed March 15, 2019. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/immigration-act>.

<sup>77</sup> Alan Stoskopf. “Race and Membership in American History: The Eugenics Movement.” *Brookline, Mass: Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation* (2002).

<sup>78</sup> Paul Lombardo, “Eugenic Sterilization Laws.” *Social Origins of Eugenics*. Accessed April 2019. <http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/html/eugenics/essay8text.html>.



"defective persons" whose reproduction represented "a menace to society."<sup>79</sup> By 1935, over twenty-one thousand sterilization operations were completed with thirty-eight states participating in sterilization laws.

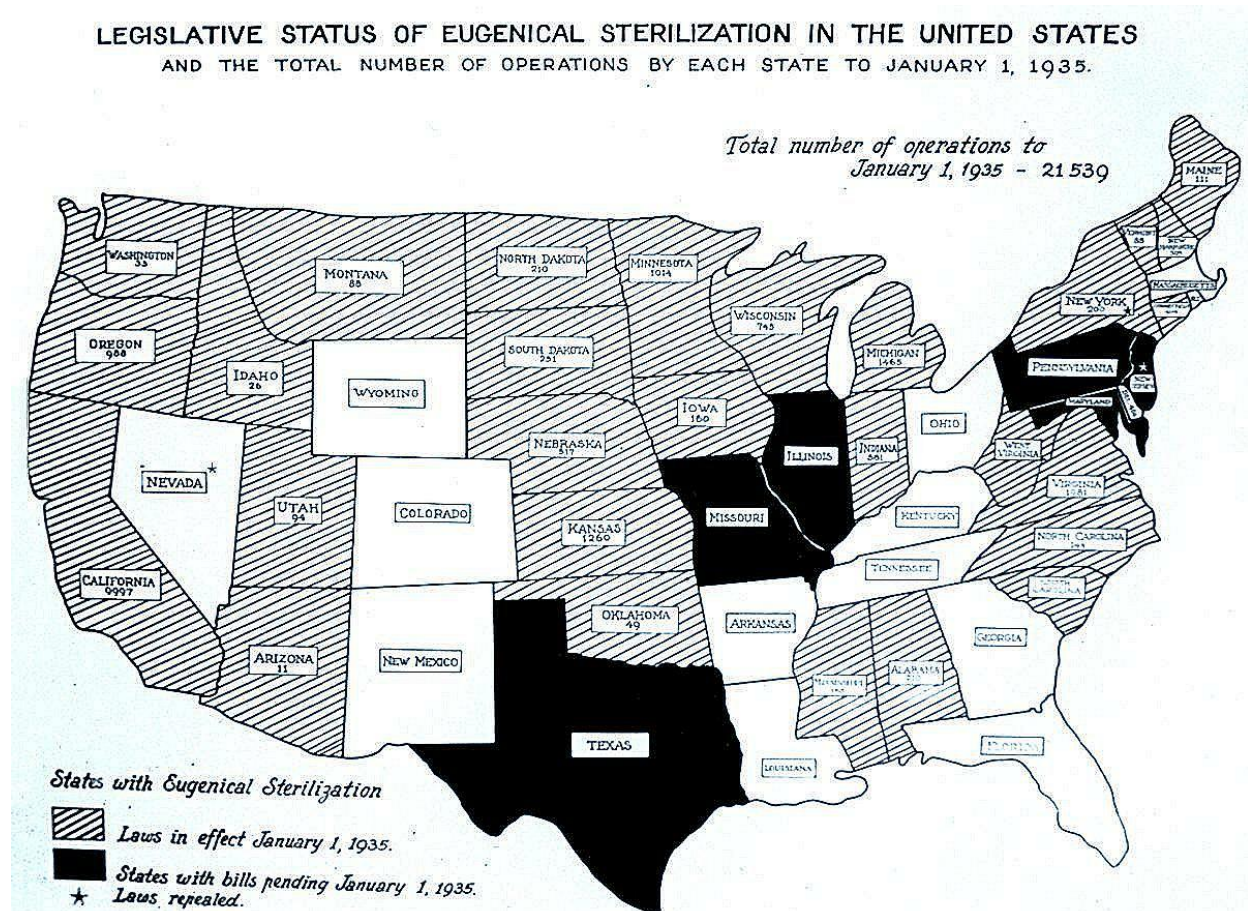


Figure 11: A map illustrating the legislative status of sterilization throughout America in 1935, with 21, 539 operations completed. The shaded states have sterilization laws effective January of 1935 and the black states have bills pending, leaving only twelve of the fifty states not participating in sterilization laws.

Source: Truman State University

<sup>79</sup> Paul Lombardo, "Eugenic Sterilization Laws." Social Origins of Eugenics. Accessed April 2019. <http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/html/eugenics/essay8text.html>.



In addition to the Eugenic Sterilization Act, Virginia passed the Racial Integrity Act in 1924 which required one's race, classified as either "white" or "colored," to be included in all birth and marriage certificates. The act outlawed interracial marriages and defined all non-whites, including Indigenous populations, as "colored." White people were determined as a person "who has no trace whatsoever of any blood other than Caucasian."<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, Section 20-59 of the Virginia Code stated that should a mixed-race couple leave the state of Virginia to marry with the intention of returning to reside, they shall be found guilty of committing a felony and face jail time of not less than one year or more than five years.<sup>81</sup>

Walter Ashby Plecker, head registrar of the Virginia Bureau of Vital Statistics and a leading member of the white supremacist organization, the Anglo Saxon Clubs, agreed with the Act, believing that "the only law worthy of consideration is one defining a white person as one with no ascertainable non-white heritage, and classifying as negro one with any ascertainable trace of the negro."<sup>82</sup>

The Third International Congress of Eugenics included Plecker's research on racial purity with his essay *An Effort to Preserve Racial Integrity* in which he advocated for race separation and discussed the importance of maintaining accurate race records to prevent miscegenation. He revealed how, through the use of marriage

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<sup>80</sup> "Racial Integrity Act Documents," *Library of Virginia*, accessed January 29, 2020, <https://lva.omeka.net/items/show/128>.

<sup>81</sup> Alan Stoskopf. "Race and Membership in American History: The Eugenics Movement." *Brookline, Mass: Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation* (2002).

<sup>82</sup> *A Decade of Progress in Eugenics; Scientific Papers of the Third International Congress of Eugenics, held at American Museum of Natural History, New York, August 21-23, 1932*. Baltimore, MD: Waverly Press, Inc. Williams and Wilkins, 1934. [Accessed March 2019] <https://archive.org/details/decadeofprogress00inte>.

records, tax records, and census reports, his department was able to determine when people misclassified themselves to “pass” as a “superior” race and reap the benefits, such as interracial marriage, specifically to a white person, or the ability to send their children to a white school.

As the head registrar of the Virginia Bureau of Vital Statistics, Plecker’s job was to maintain accurate birth, marriage, and death records of the citizens of Virginia. As a self-proclaimed eugenicist, Plecker was an avid supporter of racial purity and felt that “absolute separation is the only safeguard against ultimate amalgamation,”<sup>83</sup> meaning he was strictly against interracial marriage and procreation. According to the Racial Integrity Act, a person’s race determined who they could or could not marry. With the passing of the Act, Plecker gained control over how one’s race was recognized and legally recorded which gave him the power to determine who could marry who. He threatened officials with jail time if he felt they were incorrectly classifying people and altered documents when he felt a person was trying to “pass” as white.<sup>84</sup>

Plecker targeted those who identified as Native American, believing they were changing their race classification to hide evidence of “negro blood.” When a noticeable change in census records was discovered, a “comb test” was administered to determine one’s pedigree. Plecker explains:

In some cases some members of a family can pass the [comb] test, while the hair of other members is too kinky to allow the comb to pass through in standard manner. It is possible that the actual comb may not be used, but it is true that the

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<sup>83</sup> *A Decade of Progress in Eugenics; Scientific Papers of the Third International Congress of Eugenics, held at American Museum of Natural History, New York, August 21-23, 1932.* Baltimore, MD: Waverly Press, Inc. Williams and Wilkins, 1934. [Accessed March 2019] <https://archive.org/details/decadeofprogress00inte>.

<sup>84</sup> Alan Stoskopf. "Race and Membership in American History: The Eugenics Movement." *Brookline, Mass: Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation* (2002).

texture of the hair receives greater consideration than the family pedigree and greater than color and facial characteristics.<sup>85</sup>

The Eugenic Sterilization Act and the Racial Integrity Act are responsible for the forced sterilization of “inferior” and vulnerable Americans throughout the 1920s and 30s. They perpetrated racist ideologies promoted by museums which are trusted institutions of educational and cultural value. As respected scholars and government officials of the time, Laughlin and Plecker participated in and contributed to eugenic museum exhibits, ultimately leading to the forced sterilizations of thousands of individuals due to their race, physical characteristics, or perceived mental capacity.

### **Carrie Buck**

One of the most famous cases that came from the Eugenic Sterilization Act occurred in 1927. A seventeen-year-old Charlottesville mother, known under the pseudonym Carrie Buck, was chosen as the first person to undergo forced sterilization in Virginia. It was believed that Carrie was “genetically inferior” due to her mother’s commitment to the Virginia Colony for the Epileptic and the Feebleminded. Although many believed that “feeblemindedness” was passed on genetically, a legal case known as *Buck vs. Bell* was organized on Carrie Buck’s behalf to validate the legitimacy of the sterilization law. At trial, witnesses provided evidence of Carrie’s “defects,” with Colony Superintendent Dr. Albert Priddy testifying that the Buck family “belong to the shiftless, ignorant, and worthless class of anti-social whites of the South.” Carrie’s pedigree was

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<sup>85</sup> *A Decade of Progress in Eugenics; Scientific Papers of the Third International Congress of Eugenics, held at American Museum of Natural History, New York, August 21-23, 1932.* Baltimore, MD: Waverly Press, Inc. Williams and Wilkins, 1934. [Accessed March 2019] <https://archive.org/details/decadeofprogress00inte>.

illustrated in an attempt to provide evidence of hereditary diseases such as “feeble-mindedness” and “promiscuity.” Although Laughlin never met the Buck family, he sent a written letter declaring “feeble-mindedness” and “moral delinquency” as evidence supporting the sterilization of the young mother.<sup>86</sup>

Carrie Buck’s infant daughter, Vivian, was also examined in court. A Red Cross nurse concluded that she was “below average” and “not quite normal.” This “evidence” resulted in the judge finding Carrie fit for sterilization to prevent the birth of other “defective” children. However, recent research has suggested that Carrie’s lawyer

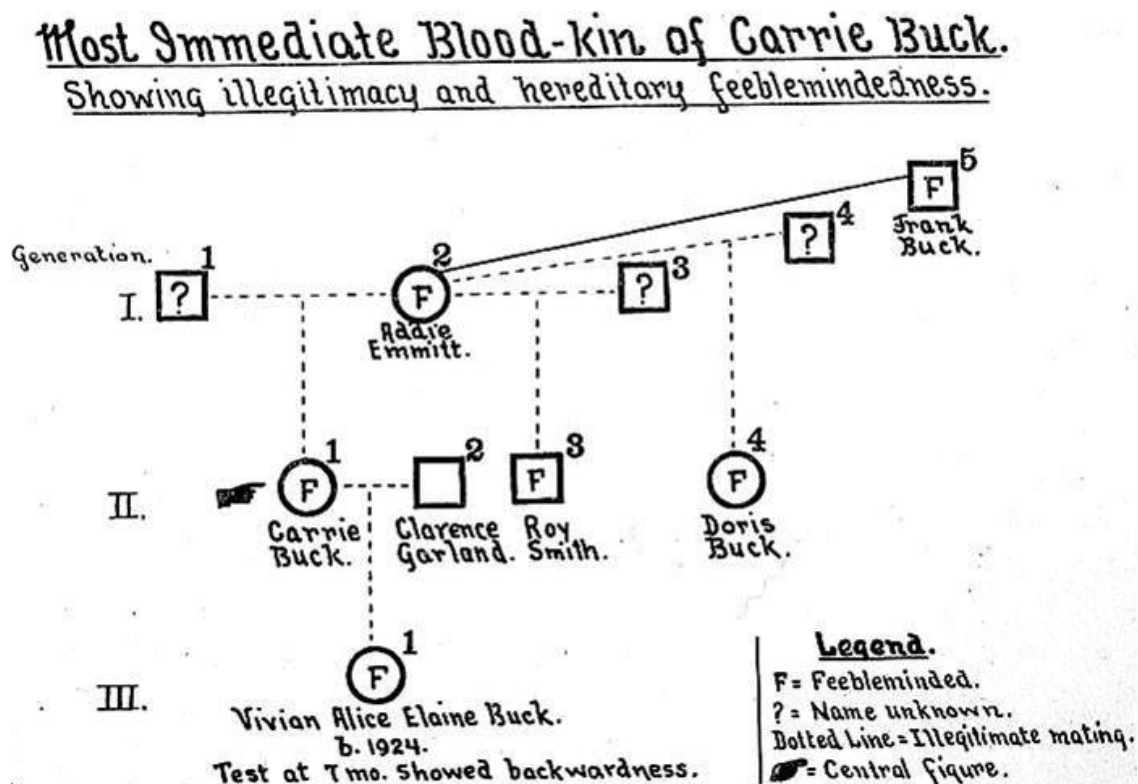


Figure 12: A pedigree chart illustrating Carrie Buck’s “illegitimacy” and “feeble-mindedness” offered by Harry Laughlin as evidence of Buck’s “defective” heredity.

Source: Truman State University

<sup>86</sup> Paul Lombardo, “Eugenic Sterilization Laws.” *Social Origins of Eugenics*. Accessed April 2019. <http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/html/eugenics/essay8text.html>.

conspired with the State of Virginia by providing a false diagnosis to uphold the sterilization law. Although Carrie's daughter was deemed "not quite normal," later testing proved her intelligence to be above average. Even so, the court's decision to sterilize Carrie Buck further propagated eugenic ideology throughout the state, resulting in the sterilization of over eight thousand Virginians. Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., spoke of Carrie's sterilization: "It is better for all 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 . . . Three generations of imbeciles are enough."<sup>87</sup>

### **Elaine Riddick**

Unfortunately, forty years later women continued to be subjected to forced sterilization based on unsubstantiated claims by the government. In 1968, fourteen-year-old Elaine Riddick was raped by a neighbor and fell pregnant. While giving birth by Caesarean section, she was sterilized without her knowledge due to North Carolina state officials labeling her "feebleminded" and "unfit" to procreate.

Riddick engaged in a forty-year legal battle with the State of North Carolina seeking justice for the unfair and cruel treatment she endured as a child. It became apparent throughout the battle that the North Carolina Eugenics Program held extreme racial and gender bias. Of the seventy-six thousand victims sterilized in North Carolina,

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<sup>87</sup> Brendan Wolfe, "*Buck v. Bell* (1927)." *Encyclopedia Virginia*. Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, 4 Nov. 2015. Accessed April 2019. [https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/buck\\_v\\_bell\\_1927](https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/buck_v_bell_1927).

eighty-five percent were female. By the 1960s, ninety-nine percent of those sterilized were female. Blacks represent sixty percent sterilized, of whom twenty-five percent were deemed mentally ill and seventy percent deemed mentally deficient. Overall, females account for over seventy-five percent of sterilizations.<sup>88</sup>

In 2003, the state of North Carolina issued an apology to the victims and their families, offering health and education benefits as restitution. To many, including Riddick, this was not enough. A petition for monetary reparations of \$20,000 to each victim was drafted but never granted. Government officials cite budget gaps as the reason for prolonging restitution. Riddick's horrific experience in 1968 demonstrates the lasting effects the eugenics movement has on American belief and culture due to the propagation from museum authorities.

### **Theodore Roosevelt**

The eugenics movement gained momentum, in part, from political endorsements throughout the early twentieth century. Former President Theodore Roosevelt emphatically supported eugenics and criticized upper-class families for their low birth rate, which he believed was "a capital sin, the cardinal sin, against the race and against civilization." He referred to this movement as "race suicide." Roosevelt was fearful that if the upper and middle classes limited their household, then society would be overcome with degenerates from the ever-growing lower class, eventually

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<sup>88</sup> Lutz Kaelber, "North Carolina." Eugenics: Compulsory Sterilization in 50 American States, 2012. <http://www.uvm.edu/~lkaelber/eugenics/NC/NCold.html>.

extinguishing the “superior race.” Exasperated at society’s inability to understand the crisis, Roosevelt lamented:

They seem unable to see that it’s simply a question of the multiplication table. If all-out nice friends in Beacon Street, and Newport, and Fifth Avenue, and Philadelphia, have one child, or no child at all, while all the Finnegans, Hooligans, Antonios, Mandelbaums and Rabinskis have eight, or nine, or ten – it’s simply a question of the multiplication table. How are you going to get away from it?<sup>89</sup>

As a political figure, Roosevelt was able to influence a large audience. He promoted racist literature, such as *The Passing of the Great Race* by Madison Grant, and, in a 1913 letter to Charles Davenport, President of the Third International Congress, expressed his concern for the increase of dysgenic peoples:

. . . society has no business to permit degenerates to reproduce their kind. It is really extraordinary that our people refuse to apply to human beings such elementary knowledge as every successful farmer is obliged to apply to his own stock breeding. Any group of farmers who permitted their best stock not to breed and let all the increase come from the worst stock, would be treated as fit inmates for an asylum. Yet we fail to understand that such conduct is rational compared to the conduct of a nation which permits unlimited breeding from the worst stocks, physically and morally . . . Some day we will realize that the prime duty, the inescapable duty, of the good citizen of the right type is to leave his or her blood behind him in the world; and that we have no business to permit the perpetuation of citizens of the wrong type.<sup>90</sup>

Roosevelt’s racist sentiments are often overlooked. More often than not, he is held in high regard as a well-respected politician and conservationist. As such, his memory is commemorated throughout the United States with statues and portraits. His legacy is taught in schools and museums. The Sagamore Hill National Historic Site in

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<sup>89</sup> Jonathan Peter Spiro, *Defending the Master Race: Conservation, Eugenics, and the Legacy of Madison Grant* (Burlington, Vermont: University Press of New England, 2009), 99.

<sup>90</sup> Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, T. Roosevelt letter to C. Davenport about “degenerates reproducing.” Source: DNALC.EA, ID: 11219, <https://dnalc.cshl.edu/view/11219-T-Roosevelt-letter-to-C-Davenport-about-degenerates-reproducing-.html>.

Oyster Bay, New York, glorifies his political influence with an exhibit curated to “celebrate the presidency and legacy of Theodore Roosevelt, who is often considered the first modern president. TR led the nation into the 20th century – a time of rapid technological advancement and societal changes that required a leader to be innovative, energetic, and media-savvy.”<sup>91</sup>

Similarly, the American Museum of Natural History celebrates the Roosevelt family and is proud of its historic association, as Roosevelt’s father was one of the Museum’s founders.<sup>92</sup> The museum honors Theodore Roosevelt with a bronze statue, erected in 1931, placed prominently at its front entrance. The memorial depicts Roosevelt valiantly atop his horse, flanked on either side by a semi-clothed African man and Native American man on foot. Many argue that the monument is a representation of white supremacy – that it glorifies racism and promotes colonialism. The statue’s location outside a national museum suggests that colonialism is acceptable. For the past four years, a group of political artists and activists known as Decolonize This Place have gathered outside the museum in protest, urging the city to rename Columbus Day “Indigenous Peoples Day,” and calling attention to the museum’s racist depictions of non-European peoples throughout its galleries.

Additionally, the group implores the removal of the Theodore Roosevelt memorial statue from the front of the museum. Each year, the group attempts to block the sight of

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<sup>91</sup> Susan Sarna. “Sagamore Hill Announces New Exhibit For 2019: ‘Theodore Roosevelt, A Man for the Modern World.’” National Parks Service. U.S. Department of the Interior, December 14, 2018. <https://www.nps.gov/sahi/learn/news/sagamore-hill-announces-new-exhibit-for-2019-theodore-roosevelt-a-man-for-the-modern-world.htm>.

<sup>92</sup> “Addressing the Statue,” American Museum of Natural History. Accessed November 2019, <https://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/addressing-the-theodore-roosevelt-statue>.



the Roosevelt Statue due to its symbolism in white supremacy. In 2016, the statue was draped in black, and in 2017 the view was obstructed by three large banners reading, “We Heal.” A few weeks later, the statue was splashed with red paint, resembling spilled blood.

Because the statue sits on city-owned land, activists must plead with the City of New York for action. More than one-hundred-twenty artists and academics signed a letter to the city asking for the removal, not destruction, of the monument:

. . . We see the outcome of the Commission not as destroying heritage, let alone the purported erasure of history, but as the beginning of an exciting new set of possibilities for public art and museums in New York City, one finally devoted to an inclusive and reparative vision of the difficult histories of settler colonialism and the Indigenous peoples of this land.<sup>93</sup>

Amin Husain, an organizer for Decolonize This Place, emphasizes the educational value museums have on society and urges them to reflect on how their content impacts future generations:

What we’re trying to tell museums is that what you’re exhibiting allows these kind of things to happen today because it’s furthering an ideology in children,” Husain says, which, for future generations, “isn’t just about history but what history is being told and for what purpose . . . [we are] amplifying the messages that we want other people to hear: that this museum is our museum, and it shouldn’t be showing these kind of exhibits in this way that further a colonizing narrative.

As Decolonize This Place continues to strive for equal representation, they work to widen their impact. They urge museums to create more community-focused

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<sup>93</sup> “More Than 120 Artists and Academics Urge NYC to Remove Public Monuments”, ArtForum, December 4, 2017. Accessed November 2019, <https://www.artforum.com/news/more-than-120-artists-and-academics-urge-nyc-to-remove-public-monuments-72723>.

programs and engage with local activists, artists, and minorities to encourage an inclusive cultural institution.<sup>94</sup>

Due to the on-going tension, the American Museum of Natural History has addressed the controversy in a statement explaining the statue's original purpose and Roosevelt's connection to the museum. The museum believes that

to understand the statue, we must recognize our country's enduring legacy of racial discrimination—as well as Roosevelt's troubling views on race. We must also acknowledge the Museum's own imperfect history. Such an effort does not excuse the past but it can create a foundation for honest, respectful, open dialogue.<sup>95</sup>

In an effort to cultivate an “honest, respectful, open dialogue,” the museum has created an exhibition that includes perspectives from academics, minorities, and visitors alike, and encourages the public to share their views on the controversy using an online submission form.

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<sup>94</sup> Michelle Chen, “Some of the Exhibits at the Museum of Natural History Are...Not...Good...”, *The Nation*, October 19, 2016. Accessed November 2019, <https://www.thenation.com/article/some-of-the-exhibits-at-the-museum-of-natural-history-are-not-good/>.

<sup>95</sup> “Addressing the Statue,” American Museum of Natural History. Accessed November 2019, <https://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/addressing-the-theodore-roosevelt-statue>.

## CHAPTER 8 – WHERE ARE MUSEUMS NOW?

Unfortunately, some museums fail to amend out of date exhibits and labels that are riddled with racist rhetoric and depict non-Western groups in an inferior light. The American Museum of Natural History continues to display antiquated dioramas in their “Man in Africa Hall,” now known as the “Hall of African Peoples.” One diorama features small groupings of mannequins among free-standing thatched structures meant to represent an African village. The loosely woven structures are the only depiction of traditional shelter in the Hall, insinuating that Africans live harmoniously with nature and are incapable of building permanent homes, towns, or cities.<sup>96</sup> Dioramas present a static image of an unchanging, by-gone culture resulting in the perpetuation of the racial stereotypes used to bolster the theory of eugenics.

Labels and exhibit location remain problematic as well. A label for a diorama of the Mbuti peoples uses the derogatory term “pygmies” in an attempt to educate the visitor: “The Mbuti pygmies of the Ituri forest typify both physical and sociological adaptation. Their small stature (4’6” maximum) and light skin color help them move about easily and unnoticed, their economy requires few tools, with no animal or plant raising.”<sup>97</sup> The halls of the “Plains Indians” and “Eastern Woodlands Indians” are

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<sup>96</sup> Enid Schildkrout and Jacklyn Grace Lacey. “Shifting Perspectives: The Man in Africa Hall at the American Museum of Natural History at 50.” *Anthropology Now*, October 14, 2017. <http://anthronow.com/print/shifting-perspectives-the-man-in-africa-hall-at-the-american-museum-of-natural-history-at-50>.

<sup>97</sup> Susan Harding and Emily Martin. “Anthropology Now and Then in the American Museum of Natural History.” *Anthropology Now*, December 13, 2016. <http://anthronow.com/print/anthropology-now-and-then-in-the-american-museum-of-natural-history>.

adjacent to the “Hall of Primates” which features taxidermied mammals. The proximity of the exhibits is problematic because it conflates a living group of people and their culture with animals, the majority of which are extinct. This association leads to the misconception that Native Americans are an inferior, dying culture.<sup>98</sup> Additionally, the name of three halls, “Plains Indians,” “Eastern Woodlands Indians,” and “Northwest Coast Indians” are questionable. The term “Indian” is controversial as it is regarded as derogatory; the term “Native American” or “Indigenous” is accepted in its place.

Museums must be cognizant of how they present their exhibits. Word choice, exhibit location, and accurate, current information are vital to convey unbiased perspectives. By using archaic language and placing exhibits in questionable locations, museums are promoting racial stereotypes and hierarchies reminiscent of the eugenic movement.

### **Acknowledging Eugenics**

Given that the eugenics movement in America gained its popularity with help from museums, it begs the question, do contemporary American museums acknowledge the theory of eugenics within their exhibits?

The short answer is yes, some contemporary museums do acknowledge eugenics in their exhibits. A few examples include the Museum of disABILITY in Buffalo, New York, whose staff works daily to counter the previous role museums occupied in the eugenics movement with a permanent exhibition explaining the history of eugenics

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<sup>98</sup> Penelope Heilbrun Duus, "From Archetypes to Actors: The Impact of the Repatriation Movement on Museum Displays of Native America" (2017). Senior Capstone Projects. 645. [http://digitalwindow.vassar.edu/senior\\_capstone/645](http://digitalwindow.vassar.edu/senior_capstone/645).

and its impact on those perceived “defective.” Curated by the American Anthropological Association, the Science Museum of Minnesota displayed the exhibit *RACE: Are We So Different?*. The exhibit explores why people look different, how those differences have been both a source of strength, community, and personal identity, as well as a source for discrimination and oppression. The exhibit looks to “[help] visitors understand what race is and what it is not. It gives them the tools to recognize racial ideas and practices in contemporary American life.”<sup>99</sup> The Disability History Museum, an exclusively online museum, provides worldwide access to digitized records and artifacts to assist in research relating to the history of people with disabilities and their communities.<sup>100</sup> And New York University’s Asian/Pacific/American Institute curated an exhibit meant to replicate the Eugenic Record Office during the 1920s. This exhibit lends a unique perspective to the history of eugenics in museums by challenging museums to recognize their participation in the movement. Acknowledging the wrongdoings of the past, as this exhibit strived to do, promotes an understanding of human history and encourages the visitor to reflect and learn rather than repeat similar, potentially devastating, mistakes.

The work the aforementioned museums are doing is commendable, however, their exhibits do not acknowledge or address the historic role contemporary American museums played in the promotion of eugenics. While many exhibits that educate visitors on eugenical history and its impact can be found in American museums, exhibits

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<sup>99</sup> *Race: Are We So Different?* Science Museum of Minnesota. Accessed March 2019. <https://www.smm.org/race>.

<sup>100</sup> Disability History Museum. Accessed March 2019. <https://www.disabilitymuseum.org/dhm/index.html>.

that acknowledge the role museums played in the promotion of eugenics from within their institution are not. What does this absence say about American museums? Are museum professionals aware of the role museums played in the eugenics movement? If so, what is preventing this story from being told? Perhaps there is a fear of a negative public reaction or that museums will be redefined as institutions of prejudice causing the foundation of trust that museums depend on to crumble. Or perhaps there is a level of denial that must be overcome before a museum's dark truths can come to light.

Rationale aside, how history is presented and told matters. What we put into our museums, our cultural institutions, affects our narrative as a society. Museums are expected to provide objective information and, because their institutional authority is rarely questioned, the information they provide is often accepted as irrefutable truth. Although museums no longer promote eugenic ideologies, recognizing that they played a significant role in its advancement is vital to understand their impact on political, educational, and cultural systems. If museums are to be trusted as honest and impartial institutions, they must be held accountable for their past transgressions.

## CHAPTER 9 – CONCLUSION

Throughout the twentieth century, museum professionals aided in the advancement of the eugenics movement in America. As a form of museum, World's Fairs participated in degrading displays of "exotic" peoples causing visitors to view those put on display as "inferior" and non-human, further strengthening the existing rift between races. Additionally, the Fitter Families for Future Firesides and Better Babies contests were a popular and engaging activity among exposition attendees who may have been curious about how their own genetics fared. The popularization of the eugenic ideology by museum professionals, who are trusted members of the community, demonstrates the impact museums have on influencing the public's cultural and political perspective.

Museums may be partially to blame for the introduction of eugenics in politics and the development of sterilization laws throughout America. The Second and Third International Congresses of Eugenics, held at the American Museum of Natural History, encouraged worldwide eugenic research and collaboration. As a result, an abundance of "scientific" data was produced which could be used by the government as evidence in the conception and implementation of sterilization, immigration, and racial laws.

Museums are a powerful way to disseminate information to the public. They are regarded as educational institutions that help shape our understanding of the world. As such, museum professionals have an obligation to the public to present unbiased information with the evidence to support it, as well as the responsibility to acknowledge outdated information and amend the exhibits in light of new information. Maintaining transparency is essential to maintaining trust.

It is hard to know if the museum professionals of the early twentieth century understood the morality behind the eugenic movement. Did they believe that the “scientific evidence” was proof that race betterment would improve society? Did they believe they were presenting accurate and just information? Or did the “scientific evidence” simply back up pre-existing notions of white supremacy? It is easy to assign blame with over a hundred years to separate us, but how much better are museums today if they do not acknowledge the mistakes of their predecessors?

By failing to acknowledge their past transgressions, museums are ignoring the victims of the eugenics movement – those who were sterilized by force, discriminated against, refused medical treatment for mental or physical illness, or misunderstood and shunned from society. The victims were silenced then and they are being silenced now. By taking ownership of their participation, museums can, at long last, give the victims a voice, a chance to tell their story.

As similar ideologies and attitudes re-emerge, museums have an opportunity to acknowledge their role in encouraging the growth of the eugenics movement throughout the twentieth century, and, at the same time, publicly address these difficult topics and encourage conversations amongst their visitors. By engaging their audience with questions on morality, transparency, and inclusiveness museums are able to demonstrate how the information they present can have real-world consequences. As forums where ideas and philosophies develop, museums have an opportunity to nurture an environment to help create an accepting society rather than a discriminatory one.



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