



CONFRONT  
EUGENICS



OXFORD  
BROOKES  
UNIVERSITY

# Eugenic Iconographies and the Public Imagination:

Professor Marius Turda

vom  
14.7.33.



## Professor Marius Turda:

A Pioneering Scholar in Eugenics Research

Professor Marius Turda is a pre-eminent scholar whose extensive research focuses on the intricate history and profound impact of eugenics. His work is dedicated to unraveling the complex legacies of this controversial movement, aiming to raise public awareness of its persistent influence in contemporary society. With a keen understanding of how eugenics has shaped social policies and attitudes, Turda investigates its dark past as a global phenomenon that affected millions, particularly marginalised groups.

As a professor at Oxford Brookes University, Marius Turda specialises in the interrelated fields of eugenics, race, and scientific racism. He has authored numerous publications, including academic articles, books, and exhibition catalogues, establishing himself as a leading authority in the study of eugenics. His contributions to public history have made him a key figure in promoting critical engagement with this topic, encouraging discourse that challenges the ongoing ramifications of eugenic ideologies in today's world.

Professor Turda's commitment to public education is evident through his involvement in various exhibitions and outreach projects. He utilises these platforms to disseminate knowledge and foster informed discussions about the ethical implications of eugenics, particularly in light of advancements in genetics and biotechnology. By engaging diverse audiences, he highlights the importance of confronting historical injustices to prevent their recurrence.

In his digital exhibition, “Eugenic Iconographies and the Public Imagination,” Turda seeks to illuminate the multifaceted and often troubling history of eugenics. This movement, which aimed to “improve” human genetics through methods of reproductive control and exclusion, has left an indelible mark on societal structures and attitudes towards race, gender, and disability. Through a careful examination of its origins, dissemination, and legacy, the exhibition aims to engage viewers in critical dialogue about the implications of eugenics in contemporary society.

This digital exhibition serves as an invitation to explore the narratives, visual representations, and socio-political contexts that shaped the eugenics movement. It challenges viewers to reflect on how the ideologies of the past continue to influence current debates surrounding genetics, public health, and human rights. By encouraging this critical reflection, Turda aims to deepen understanding of eugenics' far-reaching impact and inspire meaningful conversations about its lessons for the future.

Ultimately, Professor Marius Turda's work is not just an academic pursuit; it is a call to action for all of us to engage with history, recognise its legacies, and advocate for a more equitable society. Through projects like this digital exhibition, he underscores the necessity of understanding our past to navigate the complexities of the present and future.

This digital exhibition was supported by the University of Oxford's ESRC Impact Acceleration Account (grant reference ES/X004511/1) as part of the Festival of Social Science 2024

# “We Are Not Alone”

## Legacies of Eugenics

Eugenics, a self-declared scientific movement that sought to ‘improve’ humanity's genetic ‘quality,’ aimed to control reproduction by determining who should or shouldn't have children. At its most extreme, eugenics propagated the notion that certain individuals—labelled ‘inferior’ by eugenicists—should be eliminated. Emerging in Britain and the United States during the 19th century, eugenics gained international traction by the 1920s, significantly influencing social policy and scientific thought worldwide. The movement targeted individuals from religious, ethnic, and sexual minorities, as well as those living with disabilities, subjecting them to confinement, forced sterilisation, and systemic discrimination.

In Nazi Germany, these eugenic ideas evolved into policies advocating racial ‘purity,’ leading to horrific acts that directly contributed to the mass murders of the Holocaust. Through propaganda, the Nazis normalised their programme by referencing eugenic policies already established in other countries. The chilling imagery used in this digital exhibition presents eugenics as a necessary defence of society, reinforcing a dehumanising narrative.

Drawing upon the extensive research of Professor Marius Turda, this digital exhibition explores the disturbing origins, global reach, and destructive legacies of eugenics. Although often regarded as a relic of the past, eugenic thinking continues to influence contemporary debates about reproductive rights and human value. Issues such as forced sterilisation and the devaluation of marginalised groups remain urgent public concerns, highlighting how eugenic ideologies can still shape modern discourse on who is deemed ‘worthy’ of rights and respect.

Understanding and confronting the history of eugenics is crucial for fostering a fair and just society. Continued education and active engagement with this dark legacy provide a

lens through which to examine and reject any resurgence of similar ideologies, ensuring that the mistakes of the past are neither forgotten nor repeated. In a widely disseminated poster, Nazi propagandists asserted that their programme of compulsory sterilisation was not unique but part of a broader trend, reflecting laws already enacted in countries such as the United States and Sweden, as well as those contemplated in Japan and various European nations, including Britain, Hungary, and Poland.

This poster depicted a man shielding his wife and child, emblazoned with the message: “The Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring” (14 July 1933). Its slogan, “We are not the only ones planning to eliminate ‘defectives’ from society!” sought to normalise these policies by appealing to a global support for eugenics.

This digital exhibition joins a growing movement that reckons with the past of eugenics. It explores the transnational nature of eugenic ideologies, illuminating how concepts of ‘human betterment’ and ‘purity’ adapted to fit national and international agendas throughout the twentieth century and beyond. By examining these shifting and layered meanings, we aim to foster a broader understanding of how such ideas influenced and were shaped by various cultural and political landscapes.



# British Eugenics

Wellcome Collection, London



## Francis Galton

Francis Galton (1822-1911), half-cousin to Charles Darwin, is considered the founder of modern eugenics. He coined the term in 1883, inspired by the Greek phrase meaning 'well-born.' Galton defined eugenics as "the study of agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations, either physically or mentally." Beyond eugenics, Galton made significant contributions to fields such as statistics, anthropology, psychology, forensics, and meteorology (the study of weather). He is also credited with introducing the concept of 'nature versus nurture.'

The Life, Letters and Labours of Francis Galton, ed. Karl Pearson, vol. 1, 1914, plate LXI, p. 242. Wellcome Collection, LondonFox Holm, Cobham (Surrey)



## Sybil Gotto

Social hygienist Sybil Gotto (1885-1955) was a founder of the Eugenics Education Society and served as its secretary until 1920.

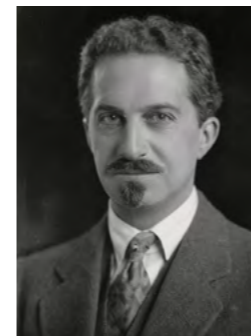
Wellcome Collection, London



## Edgar Schuster

Educated at New College, Oxford and University College London, Edgar Schuster (1879-1969) was the first Fellow in National-Eugenics at University College London, a position created in 1904 with an endowment from Francis Galton.

Edgar Schuster, *Eugenice*, 1912, frontispiece. Wellcome Collection, London



## Caleb Saleeby

Physician Caleb Saleeby (1878-1940) helped create England's Ministry of Health and, in *Parenthood and Race Culture* (1909), distinguished between "positive" (encouraging "worthy" parenthood) and "negative" eugenics.

National Portrait Gallery, London



Francis Galton with Karl Pearson at Fox Holm, Cobham (Surrey)

**APPLICATION FOR FELLOWSHIP**

As I am in general agreement with the aims of the Eugenics Education Society, I should be much obliged if you would enter my name as an applicant for Fellowship thereof. On my election I will forward the subscription.

Signed

*The Secretary,  
Eugenics Education Society,  
52 Upper Bedford Place, W.C.1.*

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or: Kindly enter my name as a member of the Eugenics Education Society,

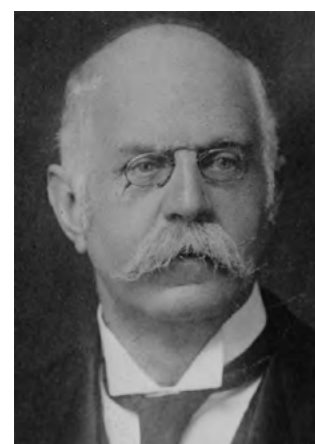
Address:

*The Secretary,  
Eugenics Education Society,  
52 Upper Bedford Place, W.C.1.*

## Application Form for Membership of the Eugenics Education Society

The Eugenics Education Society was established in London in 1907 with psychiatrist James Crichton-Browne (1840-1938) as its first president and Francis Galton as honorary president. This application form for membership was found in a copy of Leonard Darwin's book *The Need for Eugenic Reform* (1926), that was presented by the author to Frederick Mott (1853-1926), a psychiatrist associated with the Maudsley Hospital in south London.

Foyle Special Collections Library,  
King's College London



## Leonard Darwin

Major Leonard Darwin (1850-1943) was Charles Darwin's son. From 1911 to 1929 he was chairman of the British Eugenics Society presiding in this capacity over the First International Eugenics Congress. His books *The Need for Eugenic Reform* (1926) and *What is Eugenics?* (1928) covered many fields of popular interest, and were translated in foreign languages, including Romanian and Czech.

Library of Congress, Washington

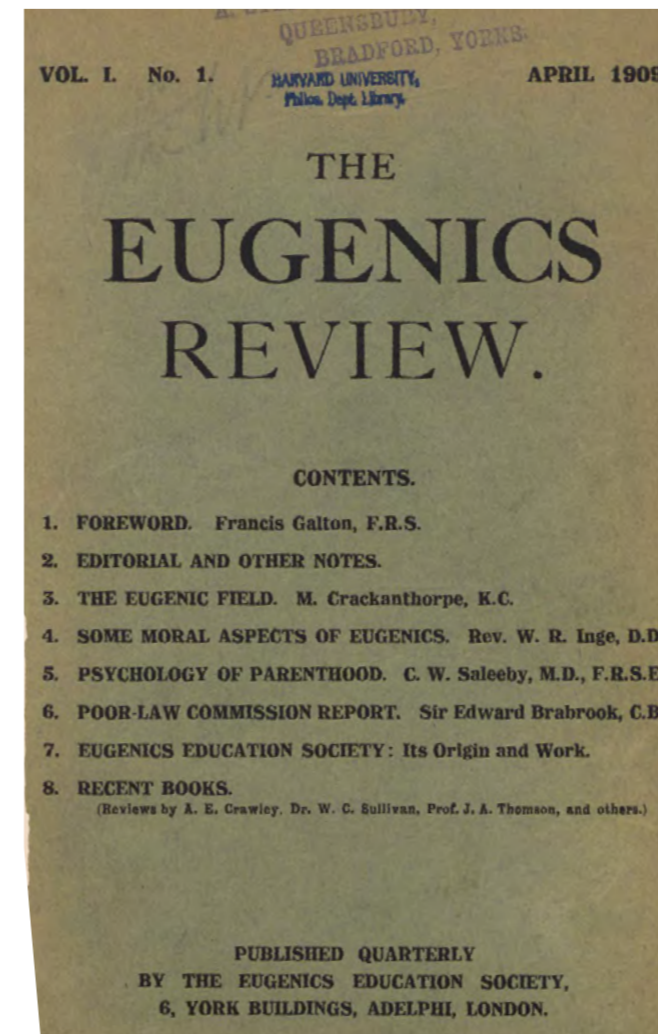


## Sydney and Beatrice Webb

Sydney and Beatrice Webb (1859-1947; 1858-1943) were well-known social reformers, socialists, early members of the Fabian Society (est. 1884) and co-founders of the London School of Economics and Political Science in 1895.

They advocated state intervention to control the reproduction of the lowest classes on account of their alleged social and biological degeneration.

London School of Economics Library



## The Eugenics Review (1909)

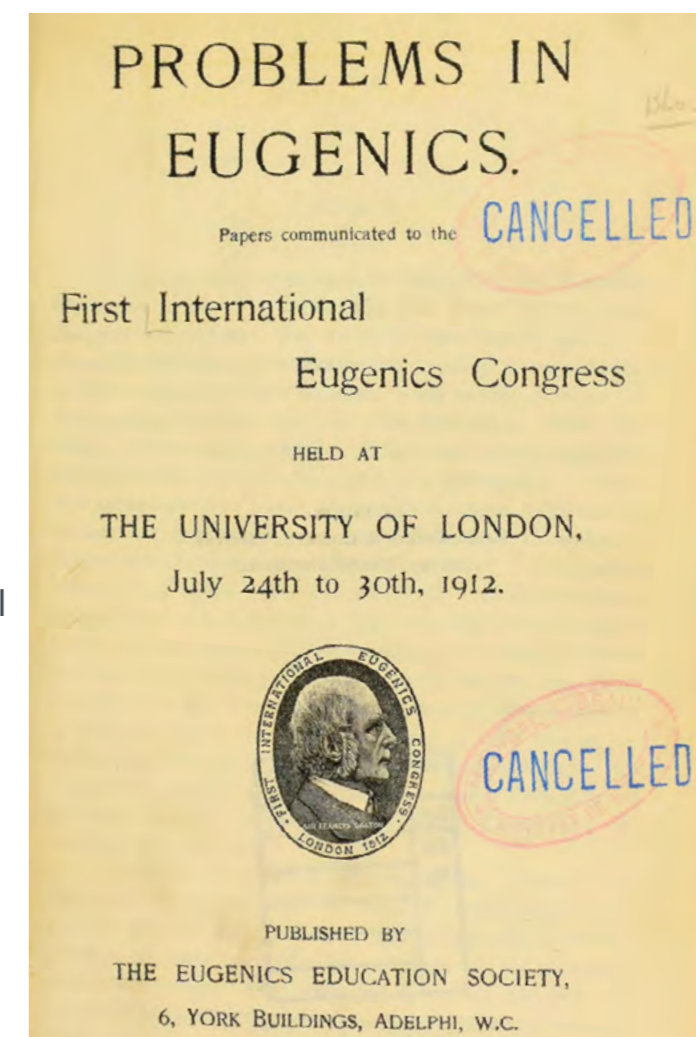
Founded in London in 1909, The Eugenics Review served as the Eugenics Education Society's official journal until 1963, promoting the so-called "betterment of the Human Race." The journal published articles advocating for selective breeding as a solution to social issues such as poverty, mental illness, and crime, presenting eugenics as a progressive, scientific response to societal challenges. By linking eugenics with patriotism and public health, The Eugenics Review influenced both public opinion and policy, leaving a complex legacy that reflects early 20th-century anxieties about heredity, race, and national strength.

Harvard University Library

## Problems in Eugenics

The First International Eugenics Congress, organised by the Eugenics Education Society, was held at the University of London from July 24-30, 1912. Bringing together over 400 delegates from multiple countries—including France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, and the United States—the Congress was a major event, showcasing eugenics as an international movement. It attracted significant press attention, with reports reaching diverse audiences as far as Romania, Hungary, Argentina, and Canada, thereby spreading eugenic ideas worldwide and establishing Britain as a central hub for the movement.

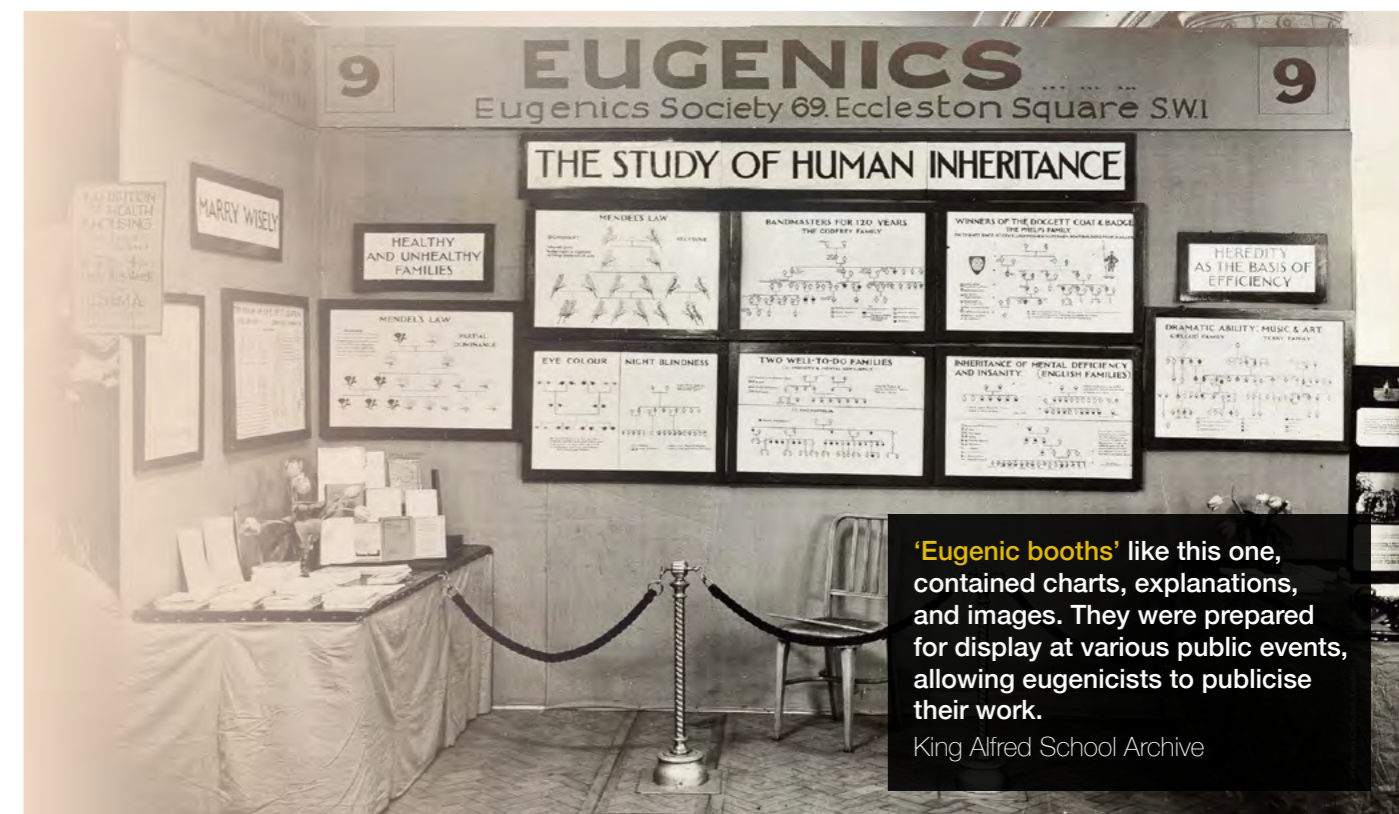
Wellcome Collection, London





# Education

John Russell in his office at  
King Alfred School, London, 1913  
King Alfred School Archive



'Eugenic booths' like this one, contained charts, explanations, and images. They were prepared for display at various public events, allowing eugenicists to publicise their work.

King Alfred School Archive

From its inception, the Eugenics Education Society in Britain aspired 'to further eugenic teaching at home, in schools and elsewhere'. Eugenics appealed to educationalists, school reformers, and feminists who advocated teaching children and the youth of the nation 'sound morals' alongside physical education and modern ideas of hygiene. The Eugenics Education Society provided teachers, social workers, and care workers with basic training in the fundamental principles of heredity and eugenics.



## Mary Dendy (1855-1933)

A prominent educationalist, Dendy connected eugenics with mental deficiency, advocating the segregation of children who had been labelled 'feeble-minded'. As secretary of the Lancashire and Cheshire Society for the Permanent Care of the Feeble-Minded, she played an important role in the establishment of Sandlebridge Colony in 1908, which is considered to be the first permanent residential care facility for children with disabilities in Britain.

Lancashire Faces & Places (January 1901): 10



## Margaret J. Tuke (1862-1947)

Margaret J. Tuke is mostly remembered today as the accomplished principal of Bedford College, University of London, a position she held from 1907 until her retirement in 1929. She was directly involved in the organisation of the Education Eugenics Conference in March 1913 and presented a paper titled *The Eugenic Ideal as a Factor in the Formation of Character*.

Lancashire Faces & Places (January 1901): 10

PRELIMINARY NOTICE.

# THE A.B.C. OF EUGENICS.

EVERY PATRIOT SHOULD RECOGNISE

1. That England must have children with naturally healthy minds and bodies in order to maintain and carry on her glorious traditions.
2. That the notoriously Unfit are, unfortunately, known to have larger families than those mentally and physically sound.
3. Therefore, efforts must be made NOW to encourage parenthood among the Fit.
4. The men who have fought and suffered for their Country have proved their moral and physical stamina, and everything must be done to prevent their wounds or any other result of their services at the Front from debarring them from marriage and parenthood.

HOW ARE THESE CONDITIONS TO BE PROVIDED?

COME to the Queen's Hall and hear what can be done, and how EUGENIC principles may affect the future of your Country.

**ADMISSION FREE.**

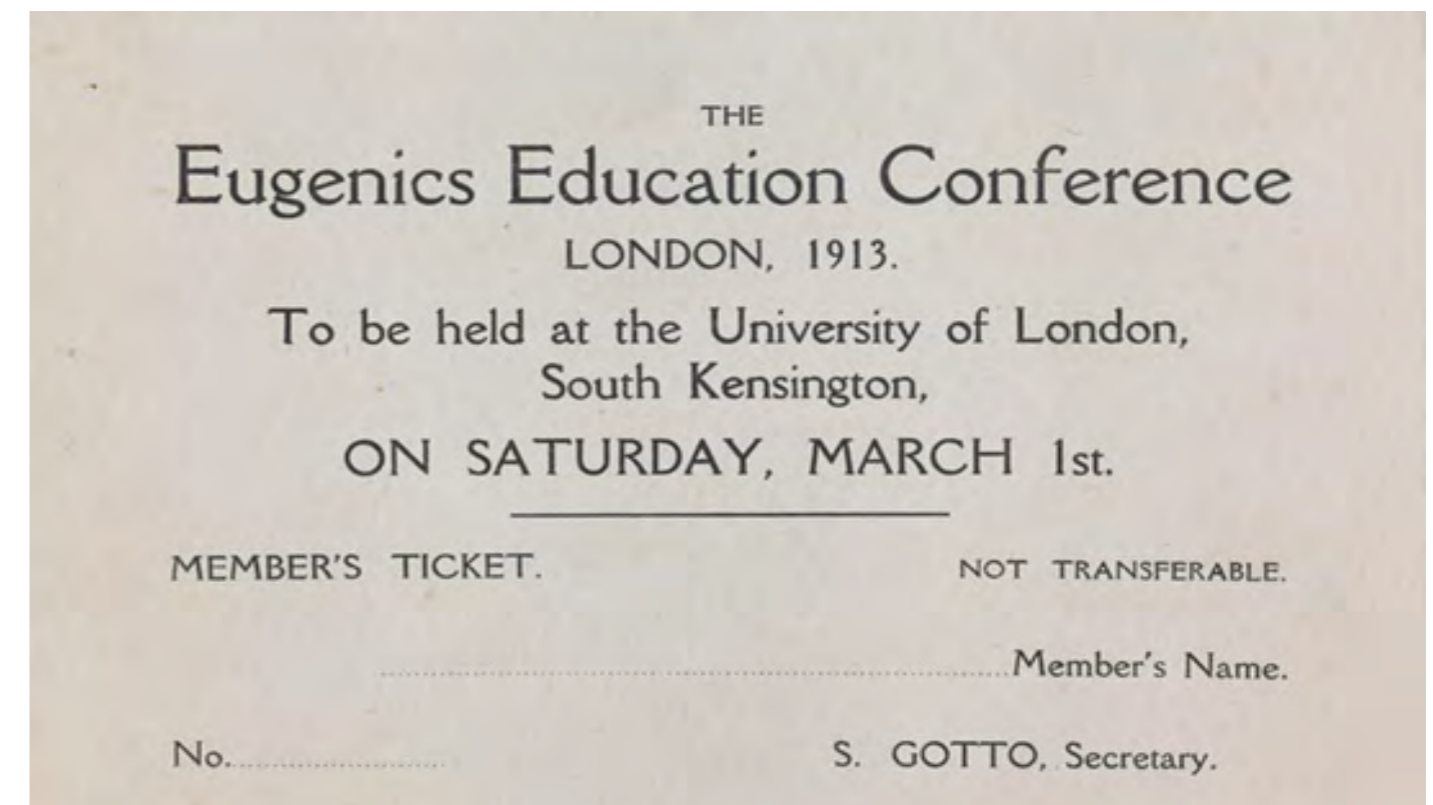
Full particulars from the **EUGENICS EDUCATION SOCIETY,**  
Kingsway House, Kingsway, W.C. Telephone: Regent 1890.

P.T.O.

## The ABC of Eugenics

The need for eugenic education and a sense of responsibility toward the future of the race became closely linked to ideas of empire and national survival, especially during and following World War I. This exhibit reflects another example of the Eugenics Education Society's efforts in public engagement, emphasising the impact of the First World War on the nation's 'racial stock' and advocating for the control of reproduction among the 'unfit' population. Arguments like these underscored the perceived importance of eugenics as a tool for social and biological control, aiming to promote a 'stronger' national population through selective breeding and policies restricting certain individuals from reproducing. The war intensified fears of racial degeneration, and eugenicists argued that maintaining the nation's vitality required proactive interventions in heredity and population management.

London School of Economics Library



### Member's Ticket, The Eugenics Education Conference, 1913

On 1 March 1913, the Eugenics Education Society organised a notable conference on education in London, attended by 900 headmasters and headmistresses from elementary and secondary schools, along with representatives from training colleges across Britain. This conference aimed to promote eugenic principles within the educational system, encouraging educators to consider the implications of heredity on the future of the nation. By engaging such a large audience of educational leaders, the Society sought to instil eugenic ideals into the fabric of British education..

Wellcome Collection, London

# TOWARDS RACIAL HEALTH

A HANDBOOK ON THE TRAINING OF BOYS AND  
GIRLS, PARENTS, TEACHERS & SOCIAL WORKERS

BY

NORAH H. MARCH, B.Sc., M.R.San.I.

WITH A FOREWORD BY

J. ARTHUR THOMPSON, M.A. LL.D.

PROFESSOR OF NATURAL HISTORY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF  
ABERDEEN

NEW AMERICAN EDITION

with an Introduction by

EVANGELINE W. YOUNG, M. D.



NEW YORK

E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

681 FIFTH AVENUE

**Norah March, *Towards Racial Health: A Handbook on the Training of Boys and Girls, Parents, Teachers and Social Workers*, 1919, cover.**

Norah H. March (1881-1946) was a prominent figure in the movement for sex education in London during the early twentieth century. Between 1915 and 1917, she lectured at the London Day Training College (now the UCL Institute of Education). She also served as the secretary of the National Baby Week Council and of the Health and Cleanliness Council, a private public health organisation established in the late 1920s. Her book, *Towards Racial Health*, which links eugenic activism with sex education and modern concepts of parenthood, was popular in both Britain and the United States, restricting certain individuals from reproducing. The war intensified fears of racial degeneration, and eugenicists argued that maintaining the nation's vitality required proactive interventions in heredity and population management.

First English edition, 1914, cover. University of California Library

A COURSE OF  
**FOUR LECTURES**  
ON  
**SEX EDUCATION**  
AND  
**EUGENIC TRAINING**

WILL BE GIVEN BY

NORAH MARCH B.Sc., M.R.San.I.

(Lecturer, L.C.C. Day Training College, Clapham)

AT

**HOLBORN ESTATE GIRLS' SCHOOL**

HOUGHTON STREET, ALDWYCH. W.C.

ON

March 20th, 23rd, 27th & 30th, 1914

at 5.30 p.m.

LECTURE I. Development of the child considered psychologically and physiologically in relation to sex instruction and eugenic education - supervision.  
LECTURE II. Factors leading to the demand for sex instruction and eugenic training.  
LECTURE III. Method of sex enlightenment.  
LECTURE IV. Sex education considered in conjunction with the eugenic ideal - a practical policy.

Tickets for the Course 5/- to be obtained from Miss Gruner, Secretary of the Association of University Women Teachers, 59 Cambridge Street, Hyde Park. W.

**'A Course of Four Lectures on Sex Education and Eugenic Training'**

Norah H. March's *A Course of Four Lectures on Sex Education and Eugenic Training* delves into her vision of sex education as a foundational element of public health and social progress. Delivered in the early twentieth century, the lectures explored themes of moral development, reproductive health, and the responsibilities of parenthood, all framed within the eugenic ideals prevalent at the time. March believed that educating young people on sexuality, reproduction, and hygiene could foster a generation more conscious of their health and civic duty. These lectures aimed to equip parents, teachers, and social workers with practical knowledge for guiding young people, in line with the broader goal of improving societal wellbeing through informed parenting and careful child-rearing practices.

Wellcome Collection, London

## Eugenics and the Social Purity Movement

Eugenics partly emerged from the social purity movement, which was popular in North America and Britain from the late 1860s onwards. Eugenicists followed social purists in presenting themselves as guardians of society's moral behaviour, promoting sexual control, cleanliness, the wellbeing of future generations, and the ideal of married life. Their ideas embraced both nature (good ancestry) and nurture (good environment). By the early 1910s, concepts of 'good' and 'bad' heredity had become familiar enough to be taken seriously by those contemplating marriage, and many couples adhered to such eugenic advice.

# Marriage, Family and Children

Doctorul nostru (14 October 1937)  
Central University Library, Bucharest



### Eugenic Victory

In February 1914, Benjamin R. Bell and Laura Van Slyke became the first couple in California to present medical certificates before marriage, proving they were both in good physical and mental health. Their daughter, Helen, is happily featured here alongside her proud parents in a local newspaper in Rockford, Illinois, in 1929.

The Rockford Daily Register-Gazette (30 May 1929). American Philosophical Society Library



### 'The Eugenic Wedding of the Future'

This cartoon by W. K. Haselden, created for the First International Eugenics Congress, satirises the eugenics movement's focus on heredity. It envisions a future where marriage requires scientific approval for genetic fitness, humorously critiquing the era's ideals of selective breeding.

Wellcome Collection, London





**'Eugenics Building' Kansas Free Fair, 1920**

The first Better Babies contest was held in 1908 at the Louisiana State Fair in Shreveport. It quickly became a popular event across the United States. At these contests, physicians assessed the health of babies between 6 and 48 months old.

American Philosophical Society Library

**UNFIT HUMAN TRAITS**  
 SUCH AS FEEBLEMINDEDNESS  
 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.**

**THE TRIANGLE OF LIFE**

**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**

**Charts of 'Fit and Unfit' Eugenic Marriages**

At the Kansas Free Fair in 1929, charts were displayed categorising 'fit and unfit' eugenic marriages and outlining so-called 'unfit human traits'. These exhibits aimed to promote public awareness of eugenic principles by encouraging selective mating based on health and hereditary factors.

American Philosophical Society Library



*1º Concurso de Eugenia  
 realizado pela Inspectoria de  
 Educação Sanitaria e  
 Centros de Saude a 24 de  
 fevereiro de 1929 em S. Paulo  
 por delegação da Sociedade de  
 Medicina de S. Paulo.*

**Eugenic Baby Prize Winner, São Paulo, 1929**

At the first National Congress of Eugenics organised in Brazil in 1929, the country's foremost health expert, Maria Antonieta de Castro (1892-1984), emphasised the need to improve the racial quality of future generations.

Museu Nacional, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro

**MARRIAGES.- FIT AND UNFIT**

1. PURE + PURE:-  
CHILDREN NORMAL
2. ABNORMAL + ABNORMAL:-  
CHILDREN ABNORMAL
3. PURE + ABNORMAL:-  
CHILDREN NORMAL BUT TAINTED;  
SOME GRANDCHILDREN ABNORMAL.
4. TAINTED + ABNORMAL:-  
CHILDREN  $\frac{1}{2}$  NORMAL BUT TAINTED  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  ABNORMAL
5. TAINTED + PURE:-  
CHILDREN:  $\frac{1}{2}$  PURE NORMAL  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  NORMAL BUT TAINTED
6. TAINTED + TAINTED  
CHILDREN: OF EVERY FOUR, 1 ABNORMAL  
1 PURE NORMAL. AND 2 TAINTED.

PURE - NORMAL AND TRANSMITTING ONLY NORMAL.  
 TAINTED - NORMAL BUT CAN TRANSMIT ABNORMALITY.  
 ABNORMAL - SHOWING THE ABNORMALITY.

**HOW LONG  
 ARE WE AMERICANS TO  
 BE SO CAREFUL FOR THE  
 PEDIGREE OF OUR PIGS  
 AND CHICKENS AND  
 CATTLE,- AND THEN  
 LEAVE THE ANCESTRY  
OF OUR CHILDREN  
 TO CHANGE, OR TO  
 "BLIND" SENTIMENT?**



### **Only Healthy Seed Must Be Sown.'**

The improvement of the nation's health was seen to begin with choosing one's spouse wisely. Posters like this one, issued by the Eugenics Society in London during the 1930s, were used to popularise idealised versions of white masculinity and femininity, promoting ideas about marriage, racial vitality, and motherhood.

Wellcome Collection, London

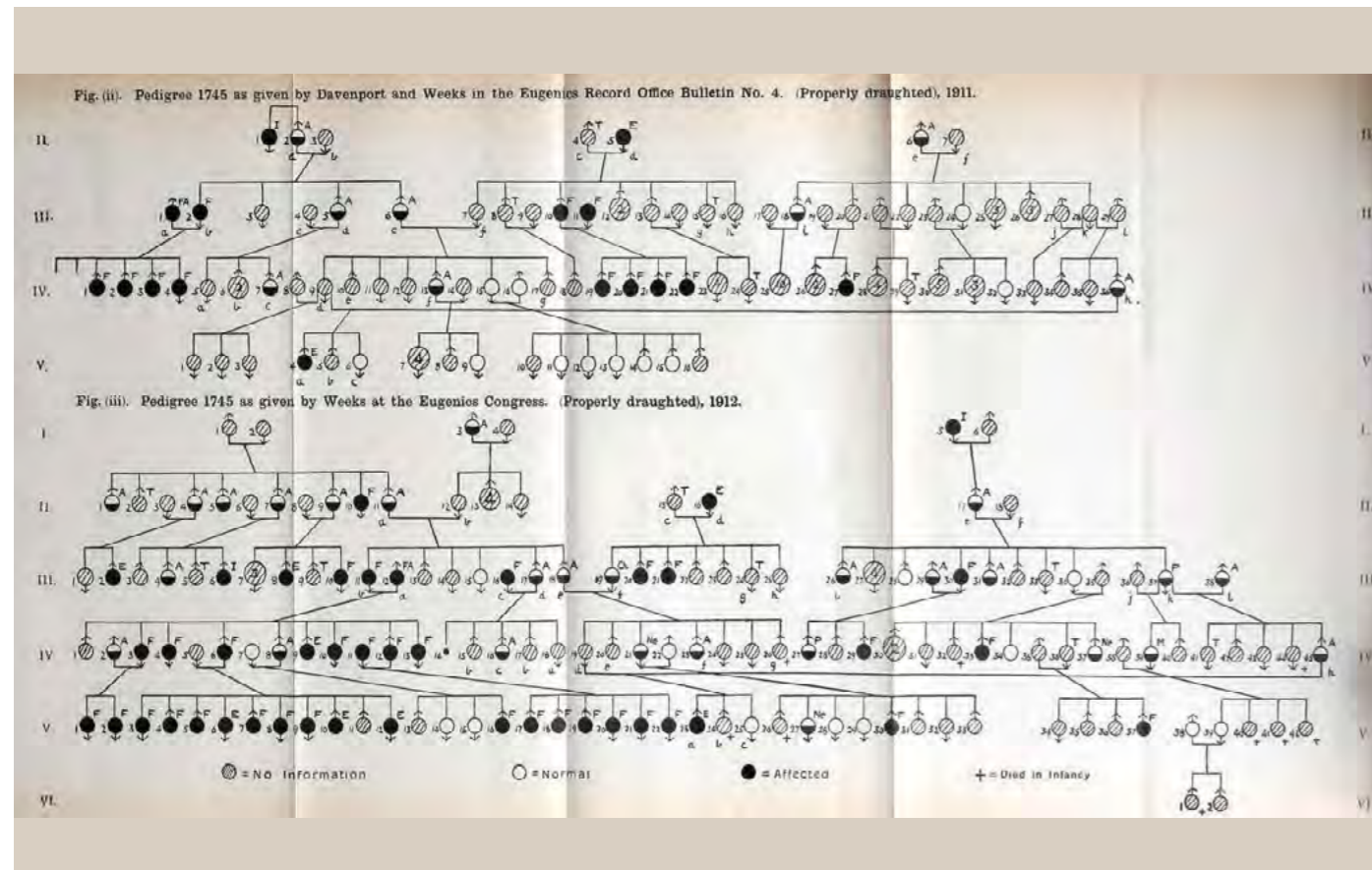


### **A six-year-old contestant receives a physical examination at the Louisiana State Fair in 1913**

Physician Florence Brown Sherbon (1869–1944) and educationalist Mary T. Watts (1864–1926) organised the first 'Fitter Family' contest at the Kansas Free Fair in 1920, promoting eugenics ideals of health and heredity.

University of Tennessee, Knoxville





## Pedigrees of ‘Defective’ Families: Tools of Charles Davenport and David F. Weeks, New Jersey State Village for Epileptics

According to some Mendelian eugenicists and proponents of ‘degeneration theory’, such as the American Charles Davenport, so-called ‘feeble-mindedness’ was inherited as a simple Mendelian recessive trait, resulting in ‘unworthy’ individuals. British statistician David Heron (1881–1969), the Galton Research Fellow in 1913, was one of the few in Britain who rejected Davenport’s Mendelian theory of mental defect. Heron claimed to show that ‘feeble-minded’ parents could have ‘normal-minded’ offspring, despite the fact that such children should not have existed if Davenport’s single-gene Mendelian recessive model were correct.

David Heron, *Mendelism and the Problem of Mental Defect*, 1913, p. 34/35



### Sir Charles H. Bond (1870–1945)

Sir Charles Hubert Bond was awarded the Medico-Psychological Association’s Gaskell Medal and Prize in 1898. Between 1903 and 1907, he served as medical superintendent of the Ewell Epileptic Colony and later became a senior commissioner of the Board of Control for Lunacy and Mental Deficiency (established in 1914). He was president of the Medico-Psychological Association from 1921 to 1922 and, after 1925, also acted as a consultant in mental disorders to the Royal Navy. He was one of the architects of the Mental Treatment Act of 1930 and was a member of the Council of the Eugenics Society.

Archives, Royal College of Psychiatrists



### Frederick W. Mott (1853–1926)

Sir Frederick Walker Mott was immensely influential as a neuropathologist, first at Claybury Asylum in Essex (established in 1893) and later at the Maudsley Hospital in London. He edited the *Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry* and conducted extensive research on the heredity of mental illness and its eugenic significance. He was a member of the Council of the Eugenics Society. In 1912, he presented a paper to the First International Eugenics Congress entitled “Heredity and Eugenics in Relation to Insanity,” and in 1914, he published *Nature and Nurture in Mental Development*. He served on the Council of the Eugenics Society and, in 1925, was President of the Medico-Psychological Association.

Thomas Bewley, *Madness to Mental Illness, A History of the Royal College of Psychiatrists*, 2008, p XI, plate 18



### Robert Armstrong-Jones (1857–1943)

Sir Robert Armstrong-Jones (1857–1943) was the first superintendent of Claybury Asylum (appointed in 1893). Previously, he had worked at Colney Hatch Asylum and the Royal Earlswood Institution. He also lectured at St Bartholomew’s Hospital and served as consulting physician in mental diseases to the military forces in London and Aldershot. In 1921, he became the Lord Chancellor’s Visitor in Lunacy and Gresham Professor of Physic (Medicine). He was also a member of the Council of the Eugenics Society.

Archives, Royal College of Psychiatrists



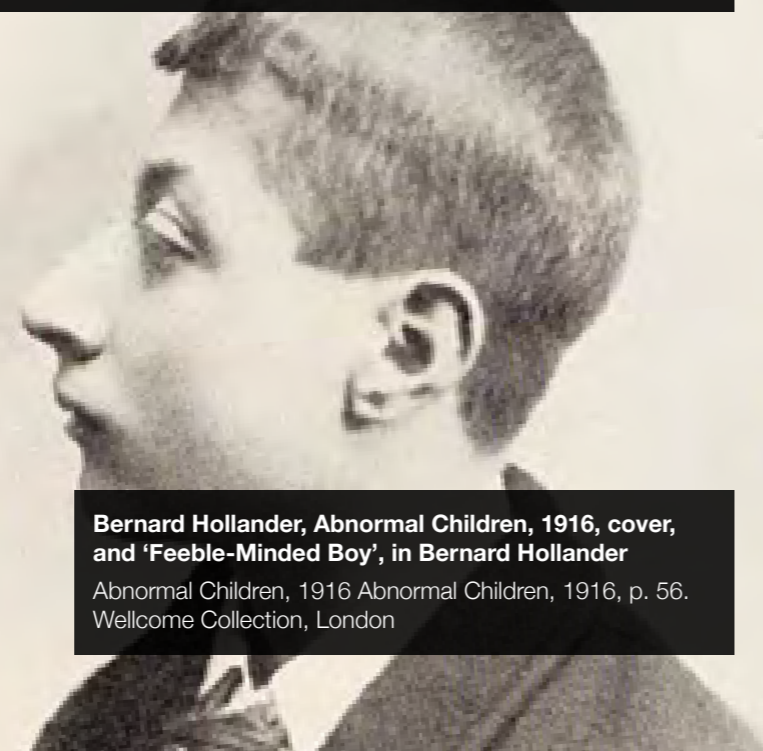
### Maudsley Hospital, London, ca. 1935

With financial support from Henry Maudsley (1835–1918), a new institution for the study and treatment of mental illnesses opened under the London County Council on 31 January 1923. Some of Maudsley’s psychiatrists, like Edward Mapother (1881–1940) and C. P. Blacker, supported Eugenics Society policies, including voluntary sterilisation, while others, such as Aubrey Lewis (1900–1975), were critical. Eliot Slater (1904–1983) joined the Maudsley in 1931 and the Eugenics Society in 1937. In 1934–35, Slater studied psychiatric genetics in Germany with Nazi racial scientists Ernst Rüdin and Otmar von Verschuer. He later became Director of the Medical Research Council Psychiatric Genetics Research Unit at the Maudsley, remaining ambivalent about eugenic sterilisation for many years.

London Metropolitan Archives



# 'Feeble-Mindedness' and 'Mental Deficiency'



Bernard Hollander, *Abnormal Children*, 1916, cover, and 'Feeble-Minded Boy', in Bernard Hollander

*Abnormal Children*, 1916 *Abnormal Children*, 1916, p. 56. Wellcome Collection, London

## Alarm and Control: The Eugenic Roots of the Mental Deficiency Act

Eugenicists were frequently alarmed by what they perceived as a rise in the number of people they labelled 'feeble-minded' — a term now regarded as highly offensive. They believed 'feeble-mindedness' and its associated 'mental deficiency' to be hereditary conditions that posed a significant threat to the health and progress of society. In Britain, after recommendations by the Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble-Minded, established in 1904, Parliament passed the Mental Deficiency Act in July 1913, which went into effect on 1 April 1914, aiming to manage and restrict those deemed 'deficient'.

### MENTALLY DEFICIENT CHILDREN

#### THEIR TREATMENT AND TRAINING

BY

G. E. SHUTTLEWORTH, B.A., M.D., &c.  
MEDICAL EXAMINER OF DEFECTIVE CHILDREN TO THE WILLESDEN EDUCATION COMMITTEE, AND FORMERLY TO THE SCHOOL BOARD FOR LONDON;  
CONSULTING MEDICAL OFFICER, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE FEEBLE-MINDED;  
LATE MEDICAL SUPERINTENDENT (NOW HON. CONSULTING PHYSICIAN), ROYAL ALBERT INSTITUTION FOR THE FEEBLE-MINDED OF THE NORTHERN COUNTIES, LANCASTER;  
FORMERLY ASSISTANT MEDICAL OFFICER, EARLSWOOD ASYLUM, AND MEDICAL EXPERT, M. A. B. INSTITUTION FOR IMPROVABLE IMBECILES, KALING

AND

W. A. POTTS, B.A., M.D., &c.  
CONSULTING MEDICAL OFFICER, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE FEEBLE-MINDED;  
CHAIRMAN OF THE AFTER-CARE COMMITTEE, AND MEMBER OF THE SPECIAL SCHOOLS COMMITTEE, BIRMINGHAM;  
LATE MEDICAL INVESTIGATOR TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON THE CARE AND CONTROL OF THE FEEBLE-MINDED;  
FORMERLY RESIDENT MEDICAL OFFICER, YORKSHIRE EAST RIDING LUNATIC ASYLUM

THIRD EDITION

PHILADELPHIA  
P. BLAKISTON'S SON AND CO.  
1012 WALNUT STREET

### G. E. Shuttleworth, *Mentally Deficient Children: Their Treatment and Training*, cover

Psychologist George E. Shuttleworth (1842–1928) served as Assistant Medical Officer at the Earlswood Idiot Asylum in Surrey and, from 1870 to 1893, as Superintendent of the Royal Albert Asylum in Lancaster. In 1895, he published this influential treatise on so-called 'mentally defective' children, outlining his proposals for their treatment, training, and education."

3d ed, 1910 Wellcome Collection, London



### Henry H. Goddard (1866-1957)

The American psychologist and eugenicist Henry H. Goddard (1866-1957) is credited with introducing the 'intelligence test' (later called the IQ test), produced by French psychologist Alfred Binet (1857-1911) and physician Théodore Simon (1873-1961), to the United States. From 1906 he was director of the Training School for Feeble-Minded Boys and Girls in Vineland, New Jersey. One of his most well-known works is *The Kallikak Family*, in which he aimed to prove the inheritability of 'feeble-mindedness'.

Wikipedia Commons



**Cyril Burt (1883–1971)**

Psychologist Cyril Burt (1883–1971) had a significant impact on the development of the British education system. A member of the Eugenics Society and Professor of Education at the University of London, Burt focused his decades-long research on the heritability of intelligence, as measured by IQ tests. He linked this concept to criminal behaviour among young ‘delinquent’ boys in his 1932 book, and later, in his 1952 book *Intelligence and Fertility*, he used it to argue that differential birth rates affected inborn mental characteristics.

University of Liverpool



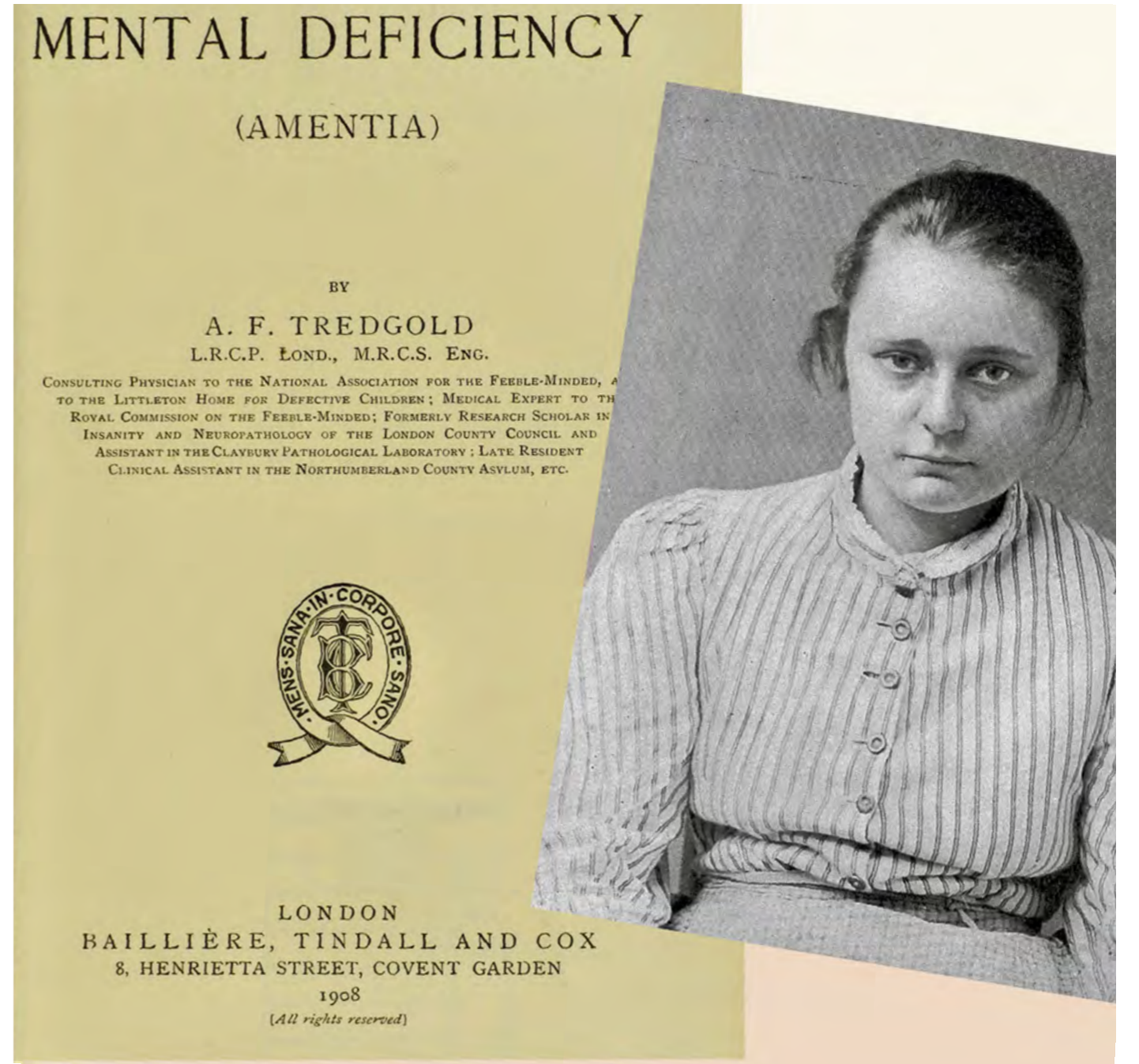
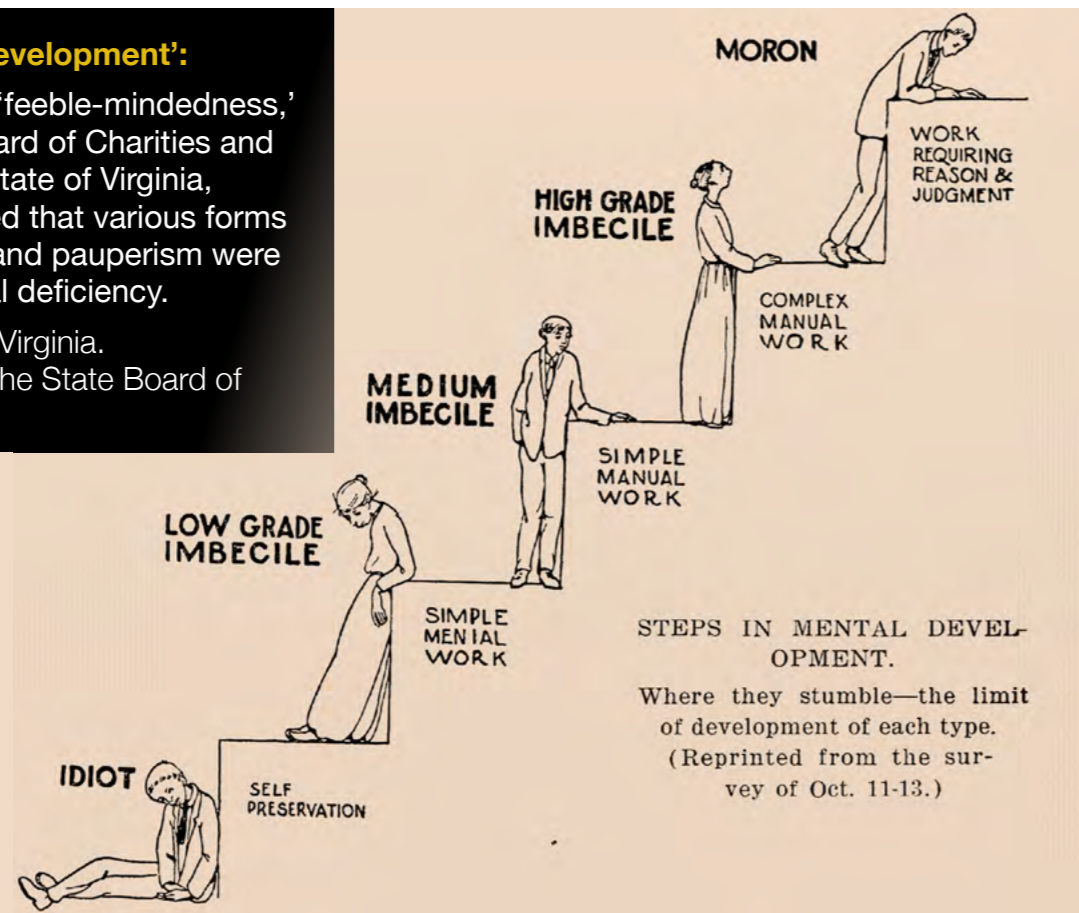
Burt’s analysis encompassed various dimensions of delinquency, including social environment, family background, and educational opportunities, highlighting how these factors interacted with innate characteristics. His work contributed to a prevailing belief in the early 20th century that intelligence was not only a measure of capability but also an indicator of moral and social behaviour. Through these publications, Burt played a crucial role in shaping contemporary attitudes toward intelligence, heredity, and delinquency, leaving a lasting legacy in both psychology and education.

UCL Institute of Education Library

**‘Steps in Mental Development’:**

The 1914 report on ‘feeble-mindedness,’ prepared for the Board of Charities and Corrections of the State of Virginia, categorically affirmed that various forms of disability, crime, and pauperism were connected to mental deficiency.

Mental Defectives in Virginia. A Special Report of the State Board of Corrections, 1915,



**A. F. Tredgold, *Mental Deficiency*, 1908, cover, and ‘A Feeble-Minded Girl’, in A. F. Tredgold, *Mental Deficiency*, 1908**

Alfred F. Tredgold (1870–1952) was an esteemed psychiatrist and an expert in ‘amentia’ (an older term for congenital mental disability). He was a member of the Eugenics Education Society and served as an expert on both the Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble-Minded and the Departmental Committee on Sterilization appointed by the Ministry of Health in 1932. His 1908 book on mental deficiency went through several editions until the 1950s and became one of the foundational texts for the training of both doctors and nurses, adding medical credibility to the then widely accepted view that ‘mentally deficient’ individuals were ‘useless’ and that society needed to be protected from them.

Welcome Collection, London

## The Rise of Eugenics in America

The American Breeders Association (renamed the American Genetic Association in 1913) established a Committee on Eugenics in 1906. In the same year, nutritionist John H. Kellogg (1852–1943) founded the Race Betterment Foundation in Battle Creek, Michigan. The Station for Experimental Evolution, established at Cold Spring Harbor, Long Island, New York, in 1904 with funding from the Carnegie Institute in Washington, was transformed into the Eugenics Record Office (ERO) in 1910. It soon became the leading eugenic organisation in the United States, attracting some of the nation's foremost scientists. The world's first sterilisation law was enacted in 1907 in Indiana, establishing a tradition of punitive and negative eugenic practices whose consequences are still felt today. Two international congresses on eugenics were organised in 1921 and 1932, confirming the United States' leadership in global eugenics.



### Charles B. Davenport (1860–1944)

Charles B. Davenport was one of the prominent figures in American eugenics. Between 1910 and 1944, he directed the Eugenics Record Office. Davenport was also one of the founders of the American Eugenics Society, the Galton Society, and the International Federation of Eugenic Organisations. He served as president of the Third International Congress of Eugenics held in New York in 1932.

American Philosophical Society

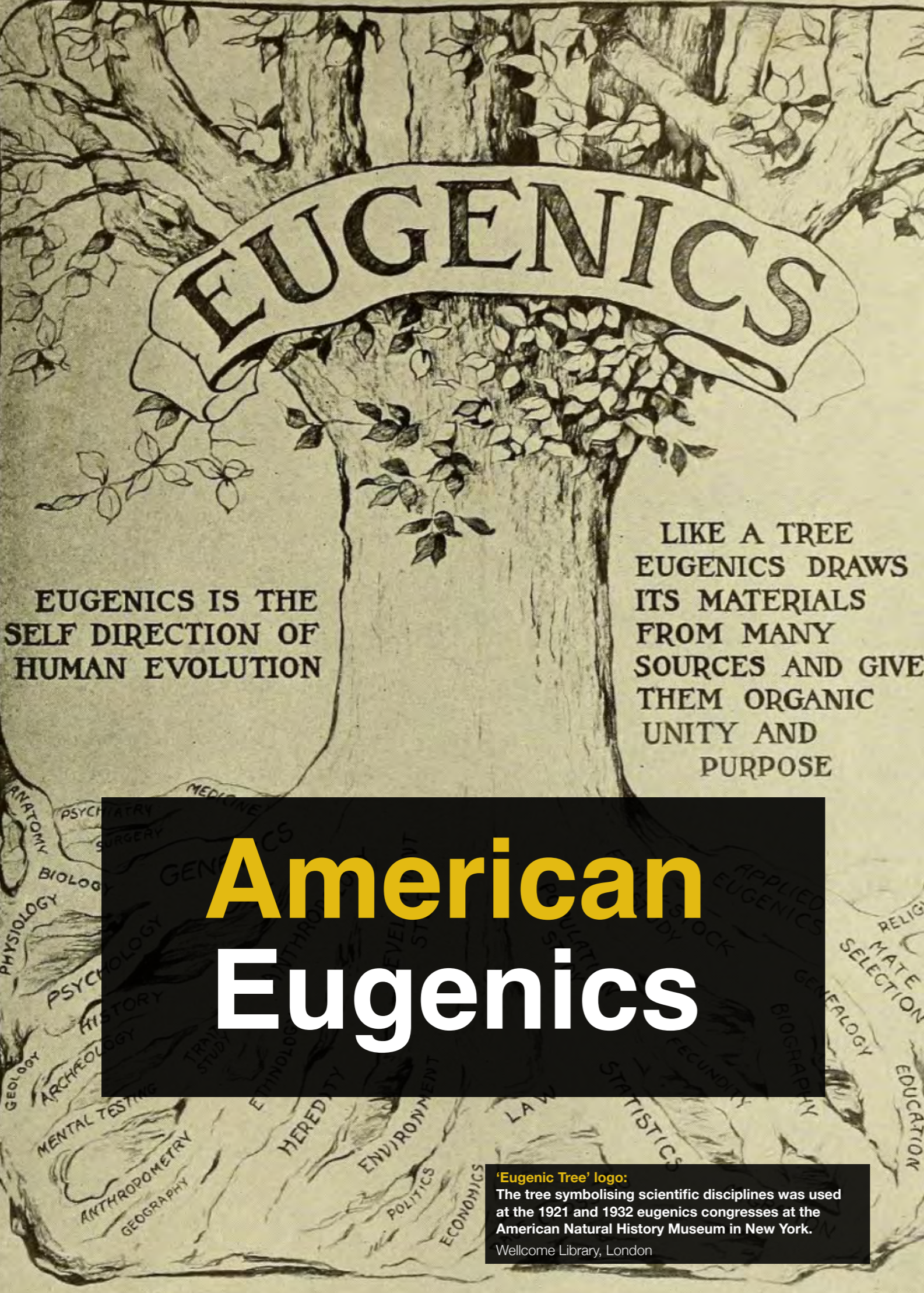


### Second Eugenics Fieldworker's Conference

So-called fieldworkers, primarily women, were offered summer training courses in heredity and eugenics at the Eugenics Record Office. They were taught to write biographical sketches and construct pedigrees on 'defective' families from home visits and personal interviews. After

completing their training, the fieldworkers attended conferences, such as the one shown here, held between 20 and 21 June 1913. More than 250 fieldworkers were trained in eugenic research between 1911 and 1924, when the programme ended.

Cold Spring Harbor, New York



EUGENICS IS THE  
SELF DIRECTION OF  
HUMAN EVOLUTION

LIKE A TREE  
EUGENICS DRAWS  
ITS MATERIALS  
FROM MANY  
SOURCES AND GIVE  
THEM ORGANIC  
UNITY AND  
PURPOSE

# American Eugenics

#### 'Eugenic Tree' logo:

The tree symbolising scientific disciplines was used at the 1921 and 1932 eugenics congresses at the American Natural History Museum in New York.

Wellcome Library, London



### Dinner of the Second International Eugenics Congress, Majestic Hotel, New York, 23 September 1921

The Second International Congress of Eugenics took place at the Museum of Natural History in New York from 22 to 28 September 1921. The ageing inventor Alexander Graham Bell (1847–1922) served as honorary president, with Henry F. Osborn as president. Opening addresses were delivered by Osborn, Charles B. Davenport, and Leonard Darwin. A major exhibition was organised alongside the conference by Harry H. Laughlin, which the museum hosted for a month. This eugenics exhibition collaborated with the museum's own 'Hall of the Age of Man', curated by Osborn, providing a detailed overview of human evolution.

Welcome Collection, London



### Henry Fairfield Osborn Henry F. Osborn (1857–1935)

Henry Fairfield as a palaeontologist and zoologist, was president of the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) from 1908 to 1935 and the New York Zoological Society from 1909 to 1925. A supporter of eugenic causes, his influence was crucial in hosting the Second and Third International Eugenics Congresses at the AMNH in 1921 and 1932.

American Museum of Natural History



### Harry H. Laughlin (1880–1943)

Harry H. Laughlin was known for his work on eugenic sterilisation and immigration. Between 1910 and 1921, he served as superintendent and later as a director at the Eugenics Record Office (ERO). From 1921 to 1931, he acted as eugenics expert for the House of Representatives Committee on Immigration and Naturalisation. He also served as president of the American Eugenics Society (1927–1928) and as secretary of the Third International Congress of Eugenics.

American Philosophical Society Library



### 'Eugenic Stand', the American Eugenics Society

The American Eugenics Society (AES) recognised the importance of effective public communication, as shown by this 'eugenic stand' displayed at the Sesqui-Centennial International Exposition in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1926.

American Philosophical Society Library



# From German to Nazi Racial Hygiene

Nur erbgesunder Nachwuchs  
sichert den Bestand des Volkes



Neues Volk (1 March 1936): 37.  
Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin

## The Rise and Impact of Germany's Racial Hygiene Movement

Aided by several political factors, including defeat in World War I and the rise of Nazism, the racial hygiene movement in Germany became the world's most extreme. Its consequences were devastating. After 1933, the movement became intertwined with racism and anti-Semitism, leading to the murder of thousands of people with disabilities through the T4 euthanasia programme and, ultimately, to the extermination of millions in the Holocaust. Nazi Germany's eugenic drive to 'purify' society of its 'undesired' members remains astonishing for its blend of sheer brutality, calculated planning, and public support.



### Alfred Ploetz (1860–1940)

Alfred Ploetz was a central figure in the history of German eugenics. His influential work, *Grundlinien einer Rassen-Hygiene* (The Foundations of Racial Hygiene), was published in 1895. In 1905, Ploetz established the world's first eugenics society in Berlin. He attended the First International Eugenics Congress in London, where he served as a vice-president and as one of the founding members of the Permanent International Eugenics Committee. In 1936, Ploetz was even nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for his research on the racial-biological effects of human warfare on the quality of human reproduction.

US National Library of Medicine



### Ernst Rüdin (1874–1954)

Psychiatrist Ernst Rüdin is best known for his involvement in Nazi eugenic programmes. Between 1917 and 1945, he served as the director of the Department of Genealogy and Demography at the German Institute for Psychiatric Research (Deutsche Forschungsanstalt für Psychiatrie) in Munich, which became the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Psychiatry in 1926. In 1932, he was elected president of the International Federation of Eugenic Organizations during the Third International Congress of Eugenics.

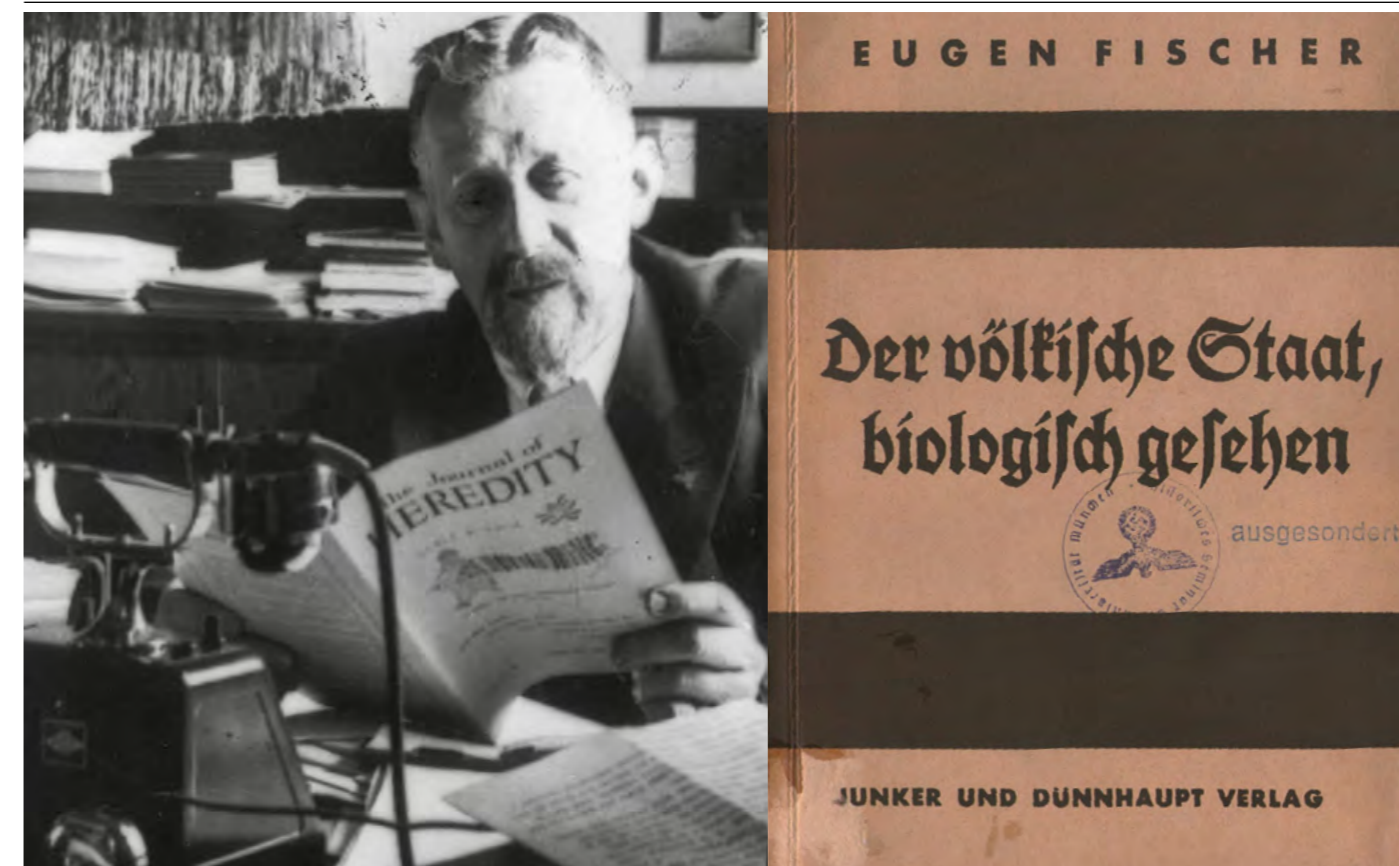
Schweizer Archiv für Neurologie und Psychiatrie, 1937



### Healthy Parents with Healthy Children Colour lithograph after F. Würbel, 1936

The Nazi regime prioritised the family in its demographic and eugenic programmes, promoting the marriage of healthy German men and women and encouraging families to have more healthy children. Family research and hereditary health were popularised through exhibitions like *Das Wunder des Lebens*, as well as in films, newspapers, and educational materials. This lithograph was prepared by teachers Friedrich Wecken (1875–1946) and Rudolf Moschkau (1886–1976).

Wellcome Collection, London



### Eugen Fischer (1874–1967)

Anthropologist Eugen Fischer served as the director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics from its establishment in 1927 until his retirement in 1942. In July 1933, following a nomination by the Nazi Party, he became rector of the Frederick William University of Berlin, and his inaugural speech was published as a book (see cover). Fischer also served as a judge on Berlin's Hereditary Health Court, reviewing cases submitted for sterilisation. He was the author of the influential 1913 work *Die Rehobother Bastards und das Bastardierungsproblem beim Menschen* (The Rehoboths and the Problem of Miscegenation in Man), considered a classic in racial science.

Wikipedia Commons



### Erwin Baur, Eugen Fischer, Fritz Lenz, Grundriss der menschlichen Erblchkeitslehre und Rassenhygiene, 1921, cover

In 1921, geneticist Erwin Baur, anthropologist Eugen Fischer, and geneticist Fritz Lenz published *Grundriss der menschlichen Erblchkeitslehre und Rassenhygiene* (Principles of Human Heredity and Racial Hygiene), hailed as a key work on heredity, racial hygiene, and eugenics. It was translated into English as *Human Heredity* in 1931.

Biodiversity Heritage Library



**Hereditarily Diseased.’ Panel 17. Part of the exhibition Das Wunder des Lebens, Berlin, 1935**

The exhibition *Das Wunder des Lebens* (The Wonder of Life), held in Berlin from 23 March to 5 May 1935, aimed to popularise eugenic ideologies among the public. Panels like *Hereditarily Diseased* highlighted the supposed threats posed by allowing ‘defective’ individuals to reproduce, presenting exaggerated and misleading claims about the social and economic costs of hereditary illnesses. Through these displays, the exhibition promoted ‘racial hygiene’ as a scientific and social necessity, aligning with the broader racial policies of the Nazi regime.

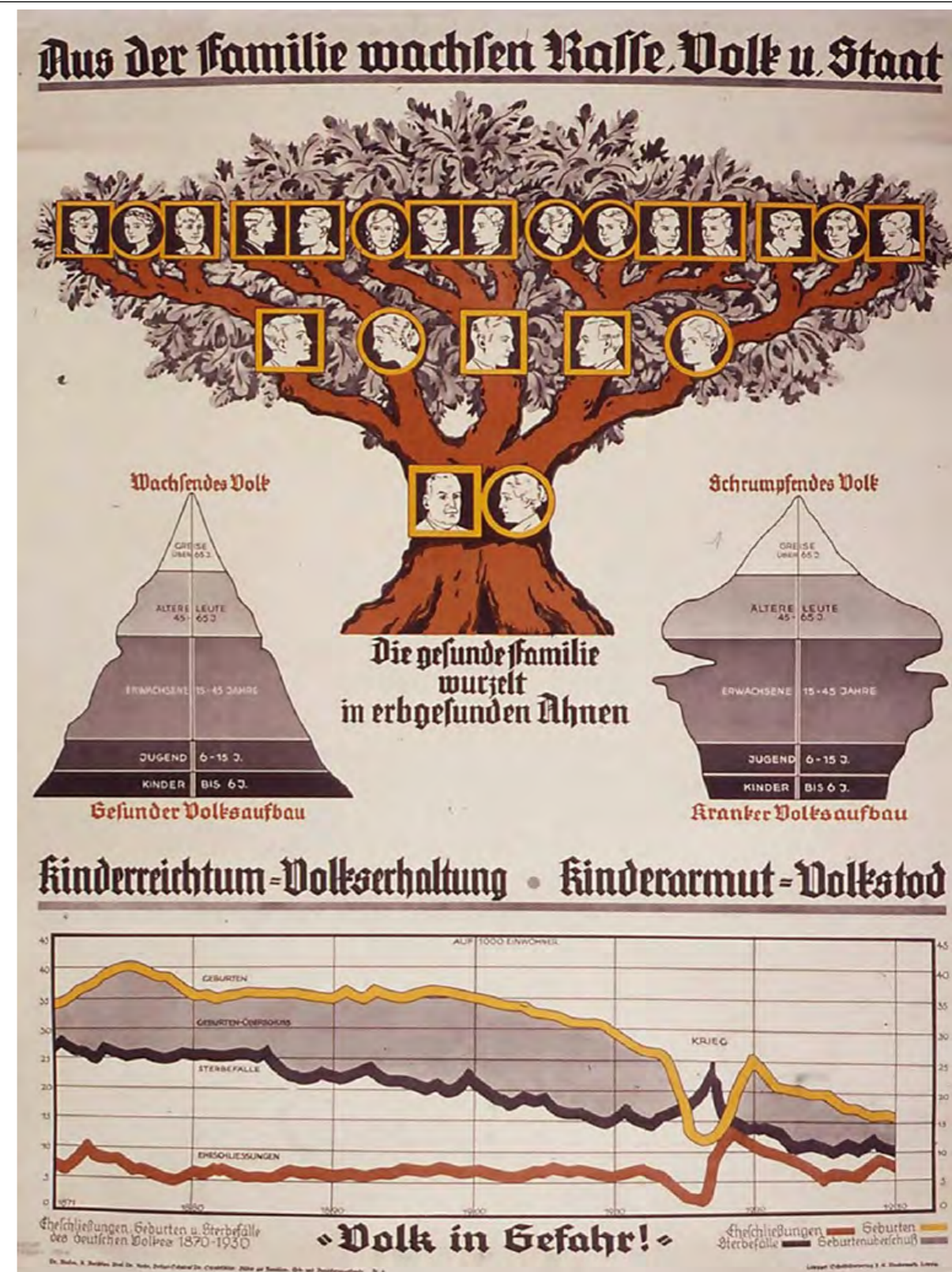
Library of Congress, Washington



**Panel 24. Part of the exhibition Das Wunder des Lebens, Berlin, 1935.**

The exhibition took place during a time when the Nazi regime was consolidating power and enacting policies aimed at eliminating those considered ‘undesirable.’ The eugenic ideology promoted in the exhibition was aligned with these broader racial policies and contributed to the justification of inhumane treatment of certain groups.

Library of Congress, Washington



**The Race, the Nation and the State grow out of families.’ In Friedrich Wecken and Rudolf Moschkau, *Bilder zur Familien- und Erbkunde (Pictures of Family and Heredity)*, 1933**

This book illustrates the eugenic ideology prevalent in early 20th-century Germany, emphasising the interconnectedness of race, nation, and family. Wecken and Moschkau argue that the strength and purity of the race depend on reproductive choices made within families, promoting ideas aligned with the eugenics movement and advocating for the control of reproduction to ensure ‘desirable’ traits.

Bibliothèque Nationale et Universitaire de Strasbourg

# Internationalisation



## The Development of Eugenic Movements Worldwide

Between the 1880s and 1950s, eugenic movements developed across Europe, North, Central, and South America, as well as in India, Japan, China, and Australasia. National eugenic societies had been established before World War I, and during the interwar period, they thrived. The Greek Eugenics Society only emerged during the early 1950s. Some of these societies collaborated within the International Federation of Eugenic Organisations, while others chose to establish an alternative International Federation of Latin Eugenic Societies. Each national context had its own model of eugenics, but eugenicists learned how to communicate efficiently across borders, exchange views, and inspire one another.

## Eugenikai és Öröklődéstanai Kiállítás, poster

This poster on the left is from the Exhibition on Heredity and Eugenics, organised in Budapest in November 1934. This exhibition brought together the Hungarian Psychological Society, led by psychiatrist László Benedek (1887-1945), and the Museum of Public Health, directed by hygienist György Gortvay (1892-1966). It followed from the display of Photographs and Charts showing Inheritance of Abnormalities, which Benedek had presented at the Third International Congress of Eugenics.

A György Gortvay, Népegészségügyi Múzeum Munkaja, 1935, p. 107. Wellcome Library, London



## Adolphe Pinard (1844-1934)

Adolphe Pinard (1844-1934) was France's foremost specialist in paediatric care. In his 1899 article *Preservation and Improvement of the Species*, Pinard proposed a programme of medical eugenics based on neo-Lamarckism and the concept of *puériculture*, which emphasises proper care for the pregnant mother and the child after birth. Pinard was also a founding member of the French Eugenics Society in 1913 and served as its vice-president. During the 1920s, he lobbied unsuccessfully for the introduction of an obligatory health examination before marriage, intending to attest to the absence of contagious diseases.

Wellcome Collection, London



### Heinrich Siegmund (1867-1937)

Heinrich Siegmund (1867-1937) was a respected German physician from Transylvania. In 1901, he published the seminal text *On Saxon Racial Hygiene*; in 1902, he founded the journal *National Health*, and in 1911, he joined Alfred Ploetz's International Society of Racial Hygiene.

Arhivele Nationale ale României, Sibiu



### Vladislav Růžička (1870-1934)

Biologist Vladislav Růžička (1870-1934) was one of the founders of the Czech eugenic movement. He served as vice-president of the Czech Eugenics Society, established in 1915, and was director of the Czechoslovak Institute of National Eugenics, founded in 1924. Together with another prominent Czech eugenicist, Ladislav Haskovec (1866-1944), Ruzicka attended the Second International Congress of Eugenics, where he presented 'A Motion for the Organization of Eugenic Research.'

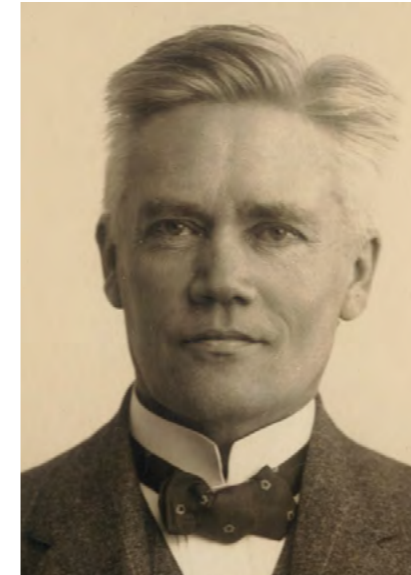
MLM Medical Museum Archives



### Corrado Gini (1884-1965)

Corrado Gini (1884-1965) achieved universal acclaim for his statistical and demographic work. In 1926, with Mussolini's support, he became director of the Central Institute of Statistics and presided over a very successful International Congress on Population, which was held in Rome in 1931. Gini attended all three international congresses of eugenics, was the vice-president and then president of the Italian Society of Genetics and Eugenics (established in 1919), and the president of International Federation of Latin Eugenic Societies.

Instituto Nazionale di Statistica, Rome



### Herman Lundborg (1868-1943)

When the world's first institute of racial biology opened in Uppsala in 1922, Swedish physician Herman Lundborg was appointed its director, a position he held until his retirement in 1935. He was a prominent member of the Swedish Society for Racial Hygiene, established in 1909, and was also very active in the International Federation of Eugenic Organisations. In 1921, Lundborg co-authored the highly regarded *Swedish Nation in Word and Picture*, a collection of studies on racial hygiene, anthropology, eugenics, and genetics.

Uppsala University Library



### Eugenesia, 1948, cover

The Mexican Eugenics Society for the Betterment of the Race was established in 1931, and its journal, *Eugenesia*, began publication in 1932. Physician Alfredo M. Saavedra (1893-1973), Mexico's leading eugenicist, served as its first president. Throughout its long existence (it dissolved in 1972), the Society promoted a neo-Lamarckist form of eugenics, based on puériculture, social hygiene, and biotypology.

Courtesy of Rachell Sánchez-Rivera



**'Regional Branches of the Polish Eugenics Society'**

The Polish Eugenics Society was established in Warsaw in 1923, with venereologist Leon Wernic (1870-1953) as its president—a position he held until 1939, and then again from 1945 to 1952. The Society's initial aims were to combat prostitution and promote education against venereal diseases. It quickly opened local branches in other major Polish cities. By 1935, the Society had established twenty branches across Poland, and by 1939, it claimed almost ten thousand members, making it the largest eugenics society in the world.

Ruch eugeniczny za granicą i u nas', W trosce o przyszłość, 1936, p. 5. Medical University of Lublin



**La Difesa della Razza, 1942, cover**

The Italian journal The Defence of the Race was founded in August 1938. It was edited by one of Mussolini's closest collaborators, journalist Telesio Interlandi, with significant contributions from anthropologist Guido Landra (1913-1980). The journal also attracted contributions from European eugenicists, including Eugen Fischer, Georges Montandon, Nicolae Minovici, Zoltán Bosnyák, István Milotay, and Ioannis Koumaris.

Courtesy of Francesco Cassata



## The Role of Expert Knowledge in the Promotion of Eugenics

Eugenics was continuously supported by expert knowledge and reinforced by scientific research from various sources, including institutes, universities, private and state organisations, and government agencies. The movement was not only bolstered by the work of prominent scientists but also by the institutional backing of established academic and medical bodies. These experts were often seen as authorities on issues of heredity, race, and social policy, and their advice on matters such as population control and sterilisation was widely praised as beneficial to society. As eugenics gained traction, its proponents—who included leading figures in genetics, psychiatry, and social policy—were heralded as pioneers working for the improvement of public health and the prevention of mental illness. Their influence played a significant role in shaping policies and attitudes during the early to mid-20th century.

### Left: Karl Pearson (1857–1936)

Karl Pearson (1857–1936) was one of the most respected statisticians of his time. He spent most of his career at University College London, having been appointed Chair of Applied Mathematics in 1885. Following the publication of Francis Galton's *Natural Inheritance* in 1889, Pearson became involved in eugenics. He became the protégé, disciple, and biographer of Francis Galton. Pearson ran both the Eugenics Record Office (established in 1904) and the Biometric Laboratory at UCL, which were merged in 1911 to form the Department of Applied Statistics. In the same year, Pearson was appointed the first Galton Professor of Eugenics at UCL, a position he held until 1933.

Wellcome Collection, London

# The Experts



### C. P. Blacker (1895–1975)

C. P. Blacker had a distinguished career as a psychiatrist. Between 1931 and 1953, he served as secretary of the Eugenics Society, where he played a key role in shaping the Society's activities. His influence was particularly notable in relation to issues affecting the poor and working class, including birth control, voluntary sterilisation, and the so-called 'problem families.'

*Guy's Hospital Gazette*, 7 July 1934, p. 285. Wellcome Collection, London





### Julian Huxley (1887–1975)

Julian Huxley is pictured here with a portrait of his grandfather, the celebrated English naturalist T. H. Huxley (1825–1895). He was the first Director of UNESCO, a founding member of the World Wildlife Fund, and president of the Eugenics Society (1959–1962). Although critical of race and racism, Huxley remained a eugenicist throughout his life, outlining his views in numerous books, articles, and films, such as *Heredity in Man* (1937). Huxley delivered the Galton Lecture twice, in 1936 and 1962.

Rice University Library



### Margaret Sanger (1879–1966)

In 1916, birth control activist Margaret Sanger (1879–1966), her sister Ethel H. Byrne (1883–1955), and artist Fania Mindell (1894–1969) opened the first birth control clinic in the United States, located in Brooklyn's Brownsville, a hub for European immigrants. The clinic lasted only two weeks before the women were arrested, leading to a widely publicised trial. The following year, Sanger launched the *Birth Control Review* and, in 1921, founded the American Birth Control League, which later became Planned Parenthood.

Library of Congress, Washington



### 6th International Congress of Genetics, Ithaca, 1932

The 6th International Congress of Genetics, held at Cornell University, Ithaca, from 24 to 31 August 1932, is an example of collaboration between eugenicists and geneticists. It took place immediately after the Third International Congress of Eugenics. Participants included C. C. Little (1888–1971), L. C. Dunn (1893–1974), T. H. Morgan (1866–1945), Robert C. Cook, and Charles Davenport.

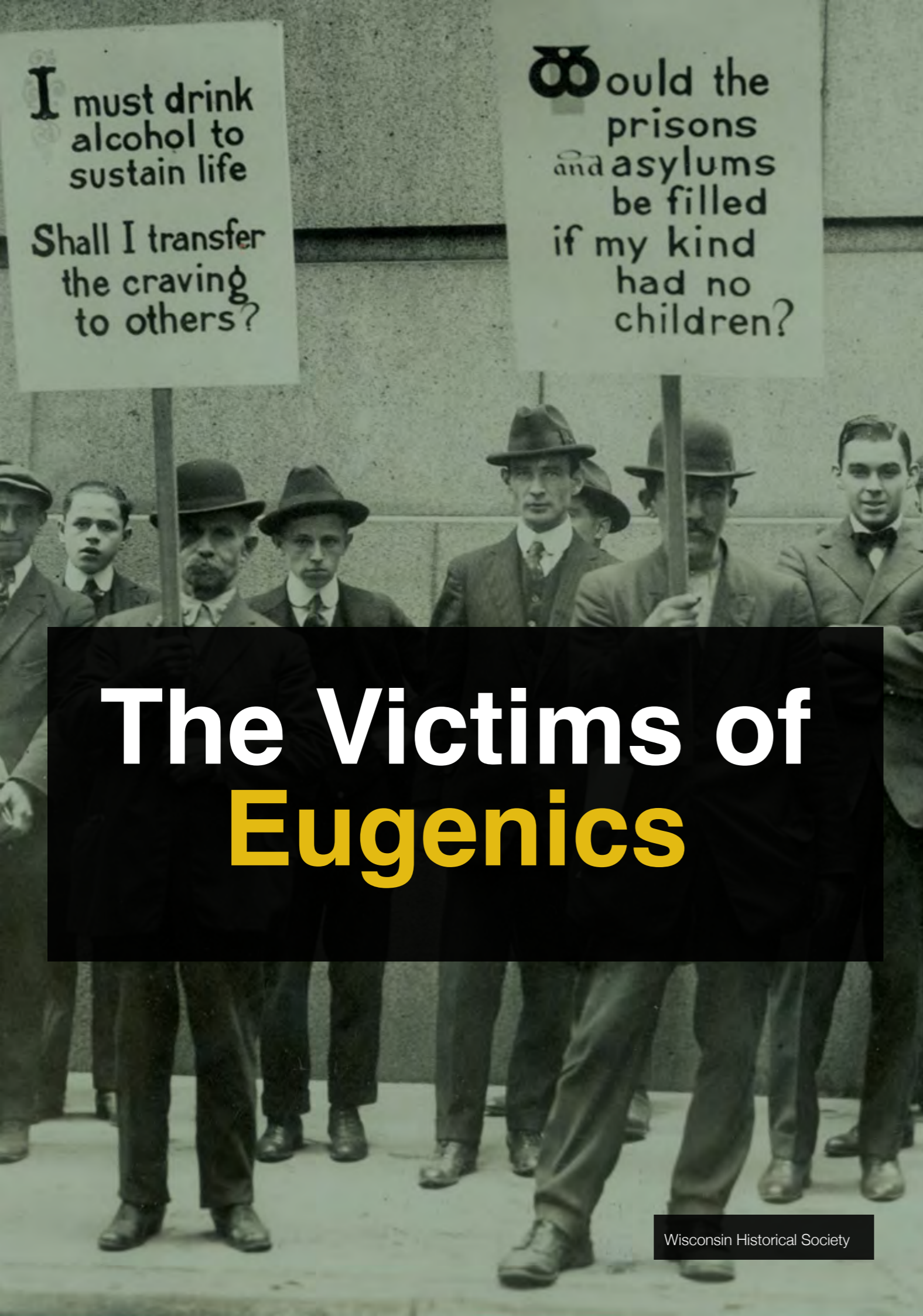
UCL Special Collections



### Annals of Eugenics, Cover

The journal *Annals of Eugenics* was established in 1925 at the Francis Galton Laboratory for National Eugenics. Its first editor was Karl Pearson, assisted by Ethel M. Elderton (1878–1954), a Galton Fellow at University College London. The journal aimed to provide ‘a scientific study’ of eugenics, in contrast to *The Eugenics Review*, which focused more on popularising the subject. Under its second editor, R. A. Fisher, the *Annals* shifted its focus to ‘the Genetic Study of Human Populations’. In 1954, it became *The Annals of Human Genetics* under its third editor, Lionel Penrose (1898–1972).

American Philosophical Society Library



# The Victims of Eugenics

Wisconsin Historical Society

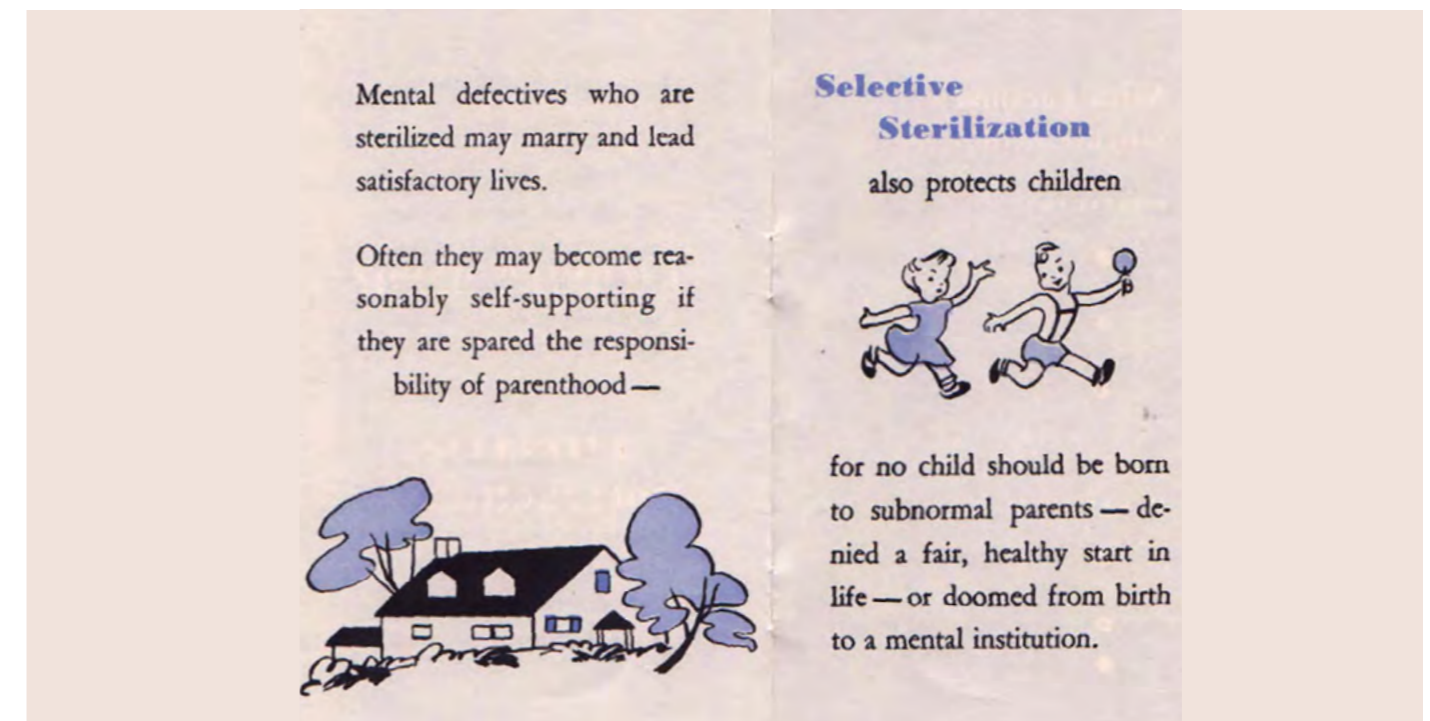
## Eugenics and the Perpetuation of Inequality

Eugenicists targeted individuals in society deemed 'sub-standard' due to physical or mental disabilities, or because their social and racial (non-white) origins placed them in less privileged positions. Discriminatory eugenic arguments were employed against these individuals, regardless of age and gender. In Nazi Germany, children were murdered, while Black and Hispanic women were sterilised in North America. Indigenous peoples worldwide were subjected to humiliating racial research to support claims of their assumed inferiority, a practice also extended to ethnic minorities such as the Roma in Europe. Racial, social, and cultural boundaries between 'eugenically valuable' individuals and those considered otherwise have been repeatedly reinforced through racist legislation, medical institutionalisation, and state-sanctioned policies of segregation and annihilation.

### 'Eugenics Demonstration on Wall Street', 1915

In their attempts to reduce the number of 'defectives' in society, eugenicists exploited various venues to spread their message to a wider audience. One early example occurred in October 1915, when the Medical Review of Reviews, a monthly publication from New York, hired four men to carry banners targeting various categories of individuals deemed 'undesirable' (see photo to the left).

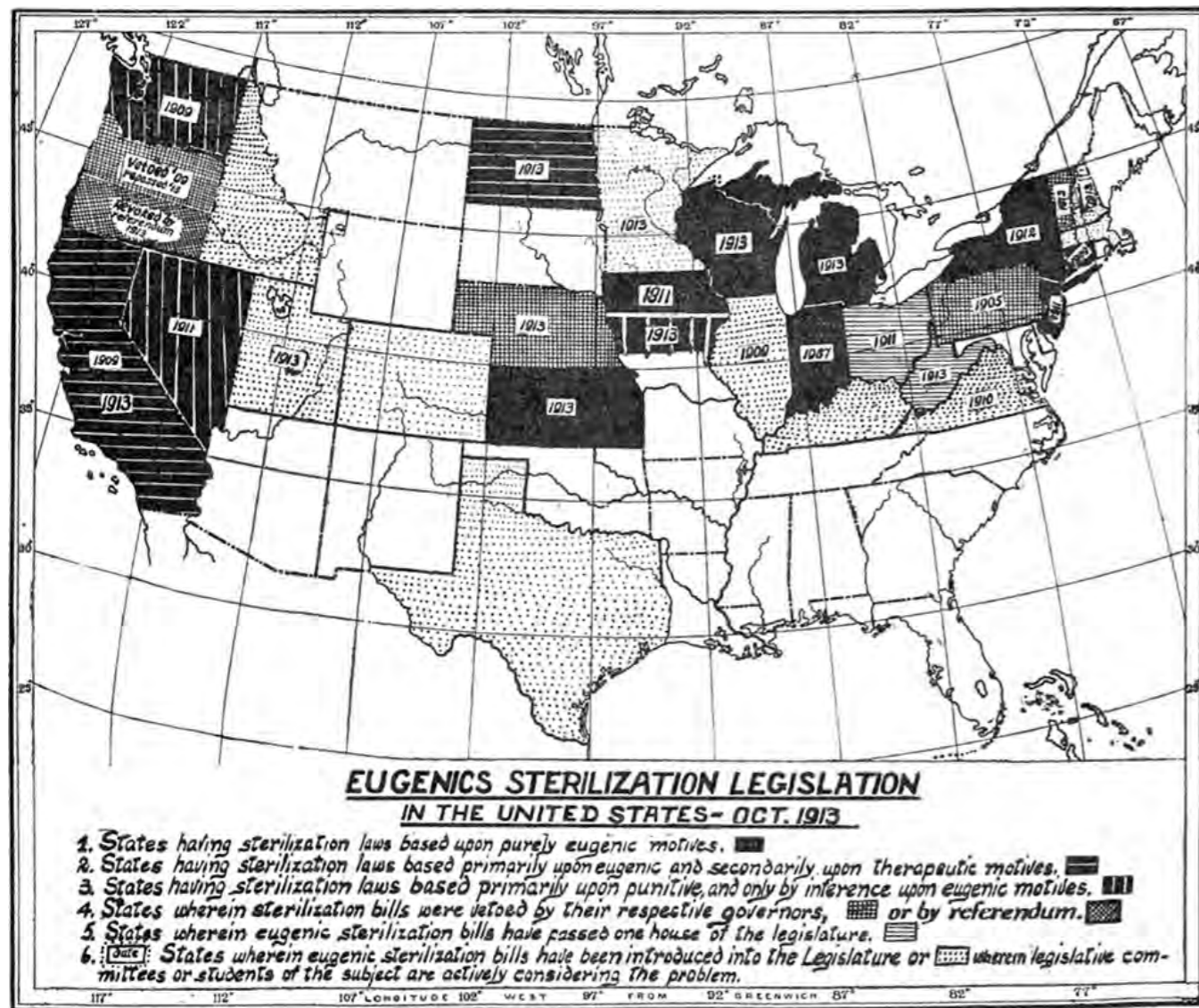
Wisconsin Historical Society



### You Wouldn't Expect... 1950

Sterilisation programmes continued post-Holocaust in the USA, Scandinavia, Japan, and Central America. In North Carolina alone, nearly 7,600 people, many Black Americans, were sterilised between 1929 and 1974.

State Library of North Carolina



**‘Eugenics Sterilization Legislation in the United States- Oct 1913’. In Harry H. Laughlin, *The Legal, Legislative and Administrative Aspects of Sterilization*, 1914, frontispiece**

The world’s first sterilisation law was enacted in Indiana in 1907, but the roots of eugenic sterilisation date back even further. From the 1890s, physician Harry C. Sharp (1871-1940), known as the ‘first eugenic steriliser,’ implemented vasectomies as a method to sterilise ‘criminals and the mentally defective’ held at the Indiana Reformatory in Jeffersonville. Sharp’s work inspired the 1907 Indiana law, which became a model for other states. By 1913, numerous states had followed Indiana’s example (illustrated on this map), each enacting laws aimed at preventing reproduction among those deemed ‘unfit’ or ‘defective’ according to eugenic principles. Such laws disproportionately targeted individuals with mental and physical disabilities, those of lower socioeconomic status, and racial and ethnic minorities. By the 1970s, around 80,000 individuals had been forcibly sterilised in the United States, many without their consent or understanding of the procedure. These policies reflected a broader trend within the eugenics movement to control populations and reshape society under the guise of public health and social improvement.



**Carrie and Emma Buck at the Virginia Colony for Epileptics and Feeble-minded, 1924**

Carrie Buck (1906-1983), shown here with her mother Emma, was among thousands of young women in North America who were forcibly sterilised during the twentieth century under eugenic laws. At the age of 18, Carrie was institutionalised at the Virginia Colony for Epileptics and Feeble-minded. In 1924, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. (1841-1935) sanctioned her sterilisation under Virginia’s Eugenic Sterilisation Act, deeming her ‘feeble-minded’ based on questionable hereditary grounds. In his ruling, Holmes famously justified the decision with the words, “Three generations of imbeciles are enough,” a phrase that has since become a lasting symbol of the injustices wrought by eugenic policies. Holmes’s decision targeted Carrie as a supposed risk to society, ignoring evidence that questioned the scientific basis for her diagnosis. Carrie’s case underscored how eugenics was often used to control and marginalise vulnerable individuals, impacting many who, like Carrie, were institutionalised simply for their socioeconomic status or social circumstances. The case set a precedent that led to the forced sterilisation of thousands in the United States and beyond, impacting those deemed ‘unfit’ by eugenic standards.



### 12-year-old Male Twins Undergoing Anthropometric Measurements by Otmar von Verschuer

In 1942, Nazi geneticist and anthropologist Otmar von Verschuer (1896-1969) succeeded Eugen Fischer as Director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Anthropology, Human Genetics, and Eugenics. One of his assistants in Frankfurt was Josef Mengele (1911-1979), infamously known as the 'Angel of Death' for his inhumane experiments at Auschwitz. Verschuer had gained international recognition for his research on twin heredity, as seen in this photograph, continuing work initially pioneered by Francis Galton. This image represents the disturbing use of anthropometric methods in eugenics, where twin studies were often conducted to support pseudo-scientific ideas of genetic superiority.

American Philosophical Society/Kaiser Wilhelm Institute



### Jon Alfred Mjøen Measuring the Sámi People, 1922

Throughout the early 20th century, Swedish and Norwegian racial scientists repeatedly conducted eugenic and anthropological research on the Sámi people, Europe's only officially recognised indigenous group. Norwegian racial anthropologist Jon Alfred Mjøen (1860-1939), who directed the Vindern Biological Laboratory in Oslo, was a leading figure in these studies. His work focused on the supposed genetic 'differences' between Norwegians and Sámi, which he described as 'harmonious and disharmonious crossings.' Mjøen presented his findings at the Second International Congress of Eugenics, where he promoted the belief that certain ethnic groups were genetically superior or inferior. This photograph captures Mjøen in the act of measuring Sámi individuals during one of his anthropological expeditions, illustrating the deeply intrusive nature of racial research aimed at classifying and controlling indigenous populations.

Courtesy of of Rune Sverre Fjellheim

**Robert Ritter Collects Data from a Roma Woman, Assisted by a Police Officer (1938)**

In 1936, psychologist Robert Ritter led the Racial Hygiene Unit, which labelled Roma and Sinti as racially inferior and prone to crime. This eugenic policy contributed to the murder of nearly half a million Roma and Sinti in the Holocaust.

BPK - Bildagentur



# Confronting Eugenics

JUSTICIA

SOMOS  
2074

Rosa Villafuerte/Demus 'Acción bordado'

## Healing the Wounds of Eugenics

Healing the deep wounds left by a century of eugenics requires public recognition of past injustices and an ongoing commitment to address present discrimination. While progress is slow, steps are being taken: victims of sterilisation in Japan, the Czech Republic, Peru, the United States, and other countries are finally receiving official apologies and financial compensation.

To ensure human reproductive rights are universally upheld, we must prevent any resurgence of eugenic discrimination against religious, ethnic, and sexual minorities, as well as those living with disabilities. Historically marginalised groups, such as the Roma, deserve empowerment, and all forms of racism must be unhesitatingly rejected. The lives of those harmed by eugenics must be remembered and their stories honoured.

A relevant example is the campaign for justice in Peru (see photo on the right), where a woman is calling for accountability on 17 September 2020 in Lima as part of the 'Somos 2074 y Muchas Más' ('We are 2074 and Many More') initiative. The sterilisation programme implemented by the government of Alberto Fujimori between 1996 and 2000 is one of the most brutal in recent times. According to official estimates, more than 270,000 women and around 22,000 men were irreversibly sterilised as part of Fujimori's family planning policies, disproportionately affecting indigenous populations in rural areas. Currently, 1,321 women, with help from their families and women's organisations such as DEMUS, are fighting for redress and Fujimori's accountability.



### Kita Saburō: A Demand for Justice

Kita Saburō (pseudonym) stands in his home in Nerima ward, Tokyo. In 1957, he was sterilised without his consent under the Eugenic Protection Law, which was in effect from 1948 to 1996. Although the law primarily targeted individuals with disabilities, Kita Saburō had none. In total, approximately 16,500 people were sterilised in Japan to prevent the birth of what were deemed eugenically inferior offspring and to protect maternal health and life. Kita Saburō is now calling on the Japanese state to take responsibility for this inhumane procedure and to issue apologies to him and other victims of sterilisation.

Photograph by Astghik Hovhannisyán. Courtesy of Kita Saburō



### Leilani Muir: A Voice Against Eugenics

Leilani Muir (1944-2016), seen here at about age 12 in 1955 at the Provincial Training School in Red Deer, Alberta, became a symbol of the anti-eugenics movement. Institutionalised with her mother's consent, she was sterilised at age 11 under Alberta's 1928 Sterilization Act, which saw 2,832 people sterilised before its repeal in 1972. In 1995, Muir sued the Alberta government for wrongful sterilisation and won. Her memoir, *A Whisper Past: Childless after Eugenic Sterilization in Alberta*, was published in 2014, recounting her story and the horrors of eugenics.

Courtesy of Douglas Wahlen



### Hungarian Children for the Homeland!

From the late 1890s to the 1950s, eugenicists heavily influenced demographic and family policies. In Hungary, echoes of interwar eugenic arguments on safeguarding the Hungarian nation have re-emerged, exemplified in Viktor Orbán's recent family planning incentives, such as CSOK1 (Family Housing Subsidy).

drMáriás



### Sterilize Cucumbers, Not Women

In August 2006, a group of women harmed by sterilization protested outside a hospital in Ostrava, Czech Republic. A 1971 directive in Czechoslovakia had allowed the forced sterilization of Roma women without consent as a form of birth control. Though the directive was repealed in 1993, forced sterilizations persisted, with the last documented case in 2007. After years of activism by Roma and non-Roma advocates, on 3 August 2021, Czech President Miloš Zeman signed a law, passed by the Senate on 22 July, granting compensation to all sterilized without informed consent between 1966 and 2012.

The European Roma Rights Centre



### 'Stop Forced Sterilization'

Poster by the San Francisco Poster Brigade, 1977. For decades, the forced sterilization of Black and Hispanic American women was hidden from the public by officials and institutions. These racialised sterilization programmes were a tool of control and subjugation, with the racial power structures they upheld only beginning to shift in the 1970s. Since then, protests by victims and their families have strengthened across the United States. In 2013, North Carolina became the first state to compensate forced sterilization victims, followed by Virginia and California.

Library of Congress, Washington

## China's Gene Giant Harvests Data from Millions of Women

This Reuters special report (7 July 2021) raises concerns about the potential for genetic manipulation of human traits. Unlike the early 20th-century eugenics focus on so-called "feeble-mindedness," today's eugenics discussions revolve around managing genetic diseases, often tied to chromosomal or single-gene mutations.

Catherine Taj/Reuters





## Echoes of Eugenics: A Legacy Unveiled and Lessons for the Future

**As the digital exhibition confronts the chilling history of eugenics, echoes of a movement long dismissed as pseudoscience continue to reverberate in modern debates on genetics, public health, and human rights.**

In a time when scientific advancements in genetics and biotechnology are challenging the ethical boundaries of medicine, a disturbing chapter from our past feels closer to the present than we may like to admit. A new digital exhibition on eugenics, led by Oxford Brookes University's Professor Marius Turda, has opened a long-overdue discussion on the movement's haunting legacy and its influence on contemporary social issues. It is a vivid reminder of how so-called "science" can become a tool for exclusion, discrimination, and even atrocity when wielded by those in power.

Rooted in Britain's 19th-century fascination with hereditary science, eugenics was a globally embraced ideology that sought to control and "improve" society's genetic make-up. Its methods ranged from advocating selective reproduction to enforcing sterilisations, and its targets included those deemed socially or biologically "unfit." From Nazi Germany's racial policies to forced sterilisations in early 20th-century America, eugenic ideology has left scars on societies worldwide. These discriminatory practices not only marginalised vulnerable groups but often reinforced social divides that persist today.

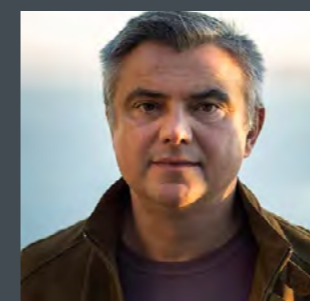
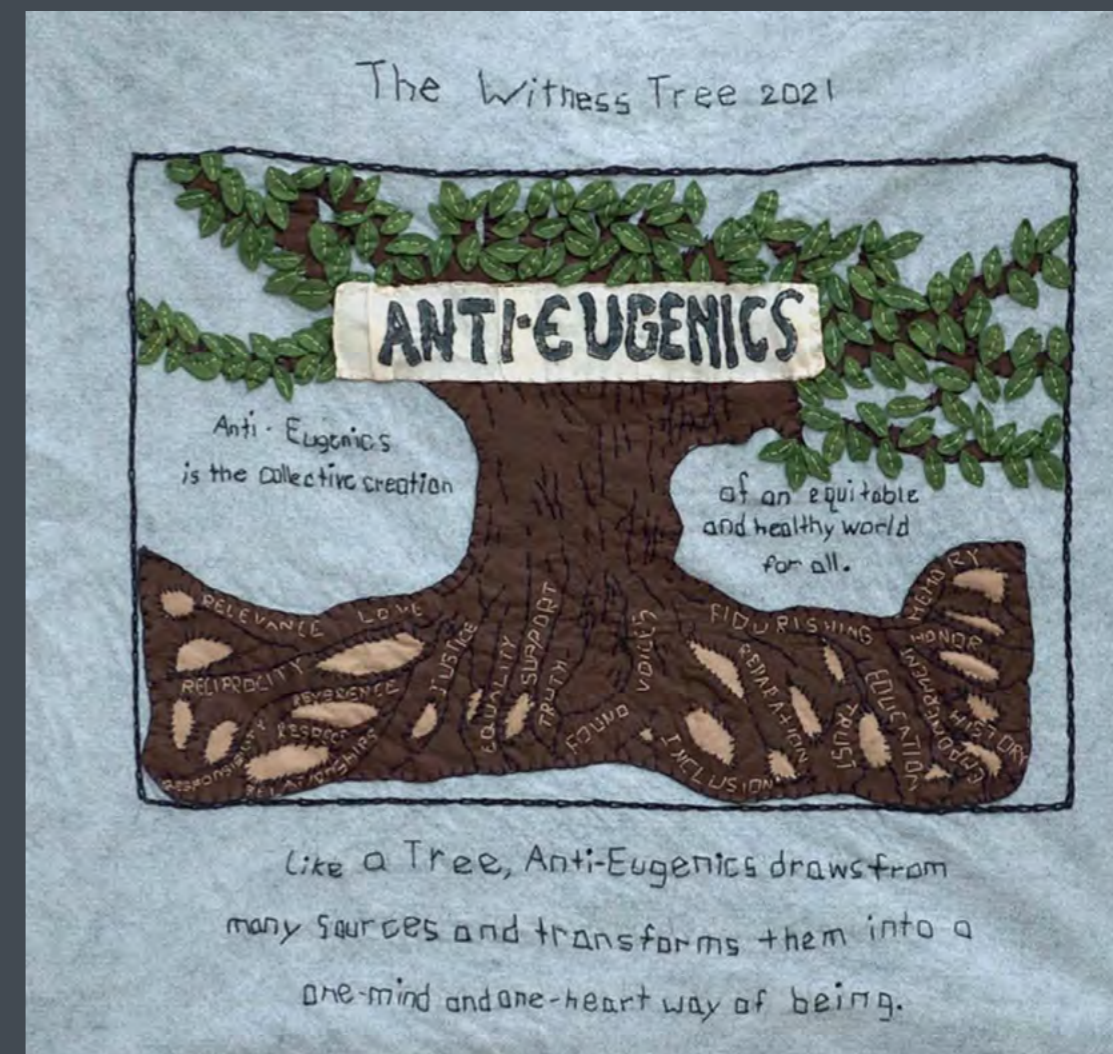
Professor Turda's work, which spans the visual iconographies and public propaganda of eugenics, illustrates how the movement shaped public opinion by presenting itself as progressive, even noble. Photographs, pamphlets, and educational material show a once-widespread belief that eugenics was society's moral responsibility—a "scientific" solution to poverty, illness, and perceived deviance. His exhibition shines a light on how eugenics embedded itself in state and educational systems, normalising biases that influenced social and health policies for decades.

Yet, the influence of eugenics does not simply belong to history. The exhibition points to how modern debates on genetic screening, reproductive rights, and social health policies still echo the same concerns about "fitness" and "value." As our knowledge of genetics grows, so too does our responsibility to remember the impact of using science to justify inequality.

Professor Turda explains, "This history is not merely an academic exercise but a necessary call to vigilance. We must confront the past to prevent any resurgence of such ideologies, especially as we continue to explore the frontiers of genetic science." The digital exhibition challenges viewers to reflect on the ethical boundaries of modern science. It asks whether the mistakes of the past have been fully reckoned with—or if we risk repeating them under new guises.

The question that remains is how we can champion scientific advancement while safeguarding human dignity. As Professor Turda's work powerfully illustrates, the cost of forgetting this dark legacy is high. The exhibition's images, documents, and first-hand accounts reveal not only the suffering inflicted by eugenics but also the resilience of those who challenged it. In remembering these histories, we honour those who endured eugenics and strengthen our collective resolve to advocate for inclusivity, respect, and equality.

The exhibition reminds us of a fundamental truth: safeguarding the rights of all individuals—regardless of race, ability, or social status—must be at the heart of every scientific, medical, and social policy we pursue. In an era where science continues to evolve rapidly, the lessons from eugenics are clear: we must remain vigilant, ethical, and unwavering in our commitment to humanity.



"What we ultimately need now is to create a sense of togetherness, of acceptance and inclusion. And we need to join our abilities to respond forcefully to any form of eugenics that is around the corner."

**Professor Marius Turda,**  
Professor in 20th Century Central and Eastern European  
Biomedicine

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