

Defending the Last Frontier:  
Eugenic Thought and Action in the State of California, 1890 - 1941

by

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B.A., Simon Fraser University 1991

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS  
in the Department  
of  
HISTORY

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY  
August 1993

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## Abstract

Until relatively recently the orthodox position in the historiography of American eugenics was that both hereditarian thought and action ground to a halt in the early 1930's. These assessments were based on careful analyses of those records maintained by key leadership figures within the American eugenics movement. While such studies revealed a great deal about the creation and transmission of hereditarian ideology, they also served to obscure vital differences between the hereditarian thinkers within the leadership cadre and those actively undertaking eugenic solutions. Based on their assessments of notable hereditarians, numerous historians argued that when eugenics fell from favour in university science and social science departments, the movement became moribund and eugenic action ceased. Moreover, it was argued, the horrors of Nazi eugenics stifled even the most adamant supporters of similar American programs

Recent scholarship has revealed, however, that those committed to eugenic solutions and eugenic action did not abandon such doctrines merely because they had fallen from academic fashion. By focusing on the records maintained by those implementing eugenic solutions, such as medical superintendents of state hospitals and other members of the mental health community, it rapidly became apparent that eugenic action continued for decades after strict hereditarianism was banished from academia. While eugenic thinkers had articulated the ideology of their creed, it was state hospital superintendents who answered the call for eugenic action. These superintendents stubbornly refused to cease their eugenic initiatives well after eugenic thought fell from favour, <sup>other countries</sup> and the horrors of Nazi Germany were revealed. Indeed, in the state of California alone, more than 13,000 persons were sterilized without their consent in the four decades after eugenic thought was rejected among those who had originally formulated its doctrines.

The focus of this study is the eugenic program implemented in the state of California during the first decade of the Twentieth Century. Nowhere in North America were eugenic solutions accepted and acted upon as they were in California. Begun with involuntary sterilization legislation in 1909, and buttressed by the addition of a deportation agency in 1915 and further revisions to the sterilization statute, California's eugenic program was still going strong as America entered the Second World War. Moreover, it was only with the retirement and removal of hereditarian superintendents that eugenic action ceased, leaving several institutions operating sterilization regimens into the 1960's. In California the sterilization legislation placed the

authority to "asexualize" squarely in the hands of the individual medical superintendents, and it was they who daily decided who would be sterilized. Hence, there were those superintendents who did not accept eugenic solutions even at the height of the hereditarian ascendance, while a small cadre of hereditarian superintendents performed the vast majority of California's nation-leading sterilization totals. Driven by a few zealous proponents of eugenic solutions, California continued to sterilize for decades after hereditarian ideology had fallen from fashion.

This study was based largely on the records of the various California institutions compiled and maintained by the State Commission in Lunacy, the State Board of Charities and Corrections and the State Department of Institutions.

## Acknowledgements

I would very much like to thank my family, friends and fellow graduate students for their support and encouragement of my academic ventures. I would also like to thank my Senior Supervisor, Don Kirschner for his time and consistent good humour; his comments and criticism on the hundreds (or so it seemed) of drafts of this thesis he viewed; and, most of all, for his books. You helped put "action" to my "thought", Don thank you. As well, Robin Fisher, Hannah Gay, Jack Little and Chris Morris were all invaluable critics of my work and ideas.

I would also like to thank Brent Thompson and the staff of the California State Archives for their time and expertise. Sincere thanks as well to Jim Ross and the staff of the Simon Fraser University Archives for a place to work which offered the flexibility necessary for me to maintain my "priorities".

Perhaps most of all, I would like to thank Al Van Esch for selling me the 1972 VW van which transported me to California and back. As well, a hearty thanks to Brian Giesbrecht for drawing my pictures.

This thesis is dedicated to William Biller and the memory of Robert Foyle, whose names I bear.

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## Introduction.

The historical study of eugenics in the United States has, thus far, been limited and broad in focus. Historians have been concerned primarily with analyses of the practical and ideological connections between progressive reformers and the eugenics movement; with the key leadership figures within the eugenics movement in the early Twentieth Century; with the linkages between traditional nativist fears and the scientific racism which shrouded the eugenics movement; and with theories explaining the so-called decline of eugenics in the early 1930's. While each of these approaches offers a particular insight into specific facets of the eugenics movement, many questions surrounding the rise and persistence of hereditarian orthodoxy remain unanswered. The ensuing study will seek to answer several of these questions as they pertain to eugenic initiatives undertaken in the state of California between 1890 and America's entry into the Second World War.

My exploration of the California eugenic agenda that evolved in the early Twentieth Century fills a particular niche in the historiography of American hereditarianism. I begin with an historiographic assessment of the field and the place this study will occupy within it. The subsequent chapter, "The Foundations of California Eugenics," will establish the intellectual and historical context for California's eugenics program, with particular emphasis placed on the reform of state mental-health administration, the growth of experimental eugenics, and the subjective basis of much hereditarian theory.



Chapter Three, "Three Generations of Imbeciles are Enough: The Implementation and Operation of California's Eugenic Agenda," outlines the operation of the two most prominent eugenic initiatives undertaken in California: the State Deportation Agency and the involuntary sterilization program. Motivated by the restrictionist spirit of the time and the xenophobic fear that outsiders would overwhelm and degrade California's native-born society, the Deportation Agency worked steadily to remove the non-resident insane from the state. Yet it was sterilization that represented the most aggressive attack on California's perceived bad heredity. The analysis of the operation and persistence of sterilization reveals the tremendous importance of the professional opinion of the individual superintendents of state hospitals regarding eugenic population control, for it was they who ultimately decided whether the institution should or should not undertake such measures. It is the contention of this study that around the turn of the Twentieth Century circumstances conspired to convince state legislators to sanction eugenic solutions and, in effect turn several prominent California state mental health facilities into laboratories for eugenic experimentation.

As well, this analysis reveals the vital differences between eugenic thought and eugenic action. That is to say: while Harry Laughlin may have been the most noteworthy of America's sterilization advocates, he did not perform a single operation. Lesser known, but equally significant figures such as F.O. Butler of the Sonoma Home for Feeble-Minded Children transformed Laughlin's thought into action, sterilizing thousands of persons. When Laughlin continued to expound hereditarian doctrine after such ideas had fallen from favour, he was branded a loon. When Butler continued to sterilize through the 1930's, 40's and 50's no one really noticed. This

vital difference between eugenic thought and action, combined with the vast differences in the implementation of sterilization between institutions in California form the core of this study.

## Chapter One: The Historiography of American Eugenics.

Among the first fascinations of historians drawn to the study of eugenics in the United States was the connection between progressive reformers and the eugenics movement. Beginning in the late 1940's and early 1950 's historians began to question if there was indeed a place for eugenic initiatives, such as involuntary sterilization and immigration restriction, in the pantheon of progressive reforms. Although, he argued that the fascination with eugenics was fleeting in America, Richard Hofstadter was among the first prominent historians to present tangible connections between eugenics and progressivism.<sup>1</sup> Hofstadter argued that such measures as immigration restriction and the control of the feeble-minded population were at their base motivated by the fears and prejudices of the middle class. He argued that middle-class "warnings about the multiplication of morons at the lower end of the social scale, and their habit of speaking of the 'fit' as if they were all native [-born], well-to-do, college-trained citizens, sustained the old belief that the poor were held down by biological deficiency instead of environmental conditions."<sup>2</sup> Hence, it was those members of society who felt their position in society to be most threatened by the blights of the day -- that is the middle class -- who became active in both progressive reform and the eugenics movement.<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, argued Hofstadter, progressivism was far too complex to

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1 Richard Hofstadter. Social Darwinism in American Thought. (Boston: Beacon Hill, 1944).

2 Ibid, p.163.

be explained as mere altruism. While he might well have developed the connections between eugenics and progressivism to illustrate the fearful, almost paranoid underside of progressivism he wished to expose, Hofstadter chose instead to use the implementation of prohibition as a powerful example of the reformist instinct overwhelmed by the desire to forcibly eradicate perceived social ills. ↘

Contemporary with Hofstadter, John Higham developed an economically based model to explain the rises and falls in American nativist agitation, including the drive for immigration restriction, which had great support among eugenicists. Beginning with his 1952 article, "The Origins of Immigration Restriction, 1882 - 1897: A Social Analysis," Higham consistently argued that nativism was the primary factor in the creation of restrictionist legislation.<sup>4</sup> Having argued for the preeminence of nativism among the factors motivating immigration restriction, Higham thereafter sought to explain the origins of the nativist impulse. He argued that "the springs of American nativism lay in the social and economic problems of an urban-Industrial world," and that the fear of economic dislocation was the primary impulse toward restriction among middle and working class Americans.<sup>5</sup>

Higham's analysis, however, left little room for the consideration of non-economic factors in the formation of a restrictionist and nativist ideology. Indeed, Higham's

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3 The argument that the middle class was the most fearful of losing its precarious status in a rapidly changing American society was put forth in Richard Hofstadter. The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955).

4 John Higham. "The Origins of Immigration Restriction, 1882 - 1897: A Social Analysis," Mississippi Valley Historical Review. (Vol.39, June 1952), pp.77-88.

5 John Higham. Strangers in the Land: Patterns in American Nativism, 1860 - 1925. (New York: Atheneum, 1966), p.98.

argument hinged upon the acceptance of his premise that periods of economic stagnation or depression brought on the most vigorous nativist outcry against "foreigners" and "outsiders" entering the United States. While Higham acknowledged the existence of eugenics and fears of "race suicide", he greatly minimized the importance of the xenophobic and paranoid messages disseminated by hereditarians and their sympathizers. While he suggested that, "from the eugenicists' point of view, the immigration question was at heart a biological one, and [that] to them admitting 'degenerate breeding stock' seemed one of the worst sins the nation could commit against itself," Higham ultimately concluded that "the importance of eugenics was transitional and preparatory," and without long-term importance.<sup>6</sup>

Higham's discounting of the eugenicists' impact on public policy ignored numerous important instances where hereditarians provided arguments, documentation and testimony which ultimately influenced legislators, the judiciary and the public at large. Examples of hereditarian influence abound, such as the acceptance of involuntary sterilization and eugenic population control as constitutional by Chief Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, jr. in 1927, or the important contributions of Laughlin and other representatives of the Eugenics Records Office to the passage of the restrictionist and discriminatory Immigration Act of 1924.<sup>7</sup> Charles Davenport, Laughlin and other

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pp. 151 - 152.

<sup>7</sup> Most prominent in the eugenicists' battle for restrictionist quotas on immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe was Harry Laughlin. Of particular importance were his presentations of evidence suggesting an over-representation of recent immigrants in America's asylums and state hospitals at various professional conferences and before the Dillingham Commission (est. 1907) on immigration policy. For example see: Harry Laughlin. "Nativity of Institutional Inmates," Eugenics in Race and State: Scientific Papers of the Second International Congress Company, 1923), pp. 402 - 406.

eugenicists were key to the eventual passage of immigration restriction quotas, through their seemingly scientific arguments regarding the potential degradation of America's racial stock through continued immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe. The contributions of eugenicists and other scientific racists to the creation of a restrictionist ethos were ultimately much more important than Higham acknowledged.

The 1960 's brought the first concerted efforts to understand the complex ideological and practical linkages between progressivism and eugenics. Prominent among these studies was Rudolph Vecoli's "Sterilization: A 'Progressive' Measure ?". Vecoli, himself a resident of Wisconsin, was perplexed by the rapid acceptance of eugenic solutions, most prominently involuntary sterilization, in the very bastion of progressivism. Ultimately, Vecoli sought "to unravel the apparent paradox of the Wisconsin Progressives who, while renowned for their institutional reforms, nevertheless adopted a eugenic measure for dealing with the socially inadequate."<sup>8</sup> Vecoli argued that a faith in science and in the scientific management of human affairs animated progressive reform of all sorts. "Science" was, in effect, presented as a panacea, or cure- all for the ills of American society among many progressive reformers. For many, only science and the scientific management of society held the potential for the regeneration of a decayed and degenerate America. Moreover, argued Vecoli, it was this faith in scientific solutions to social problems that ultimately led many progressives to support the eugenic solutions of the early Twentieth Century. "The Progressive reformer," argued Vecoli, "with his faith in 'Science' as a means to

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<sup>8</sup> Rudolph Vecoli. "Sterilization: A Progressive Measure ?," Wisconsin Magazine of History. (Spring, 1960), p.193.

his humanitarian ends found the eugenic teachings convincing and congenial, particularly since he was preoccupied with the purpose of preventing social problems."<sup>9</sup>

Vecoli's work also raised important questions about the role of eugenicists in constructing a definable, biologically deficient subclass outside of so-called "mainstream" society. "The eugenic idea that there were fundamental biological differences dividing the human race reflected and justified the social distance which existed between the well-to-do reformers and the socially inadequate," argued Vecoli. Completing this thought, he argued that "the concept of 'defective classes' enabled the reformer to place a portion of mankind outside the pale of normal human sympathy."<sup>10</sup> Essentially, eugenic arguments facilitated the objectification of thousands of poor and working-class Americans, those with physical and mental disabilities, and recent immigrants as somehow less than human and dangerous to the genetic integrity of the United States. In this manner the "in group", composed primarily of middle class, native-born Americans, was able to objectify those of the "out group" as "inherently dangerous" and "biologically sub-human", and, thereby, justify taking drastic measures against them.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, by denying the humanity of the "out group", all usual moral and ethical limitations on coercive actions could be

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p.201.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p.193.

<sup>11</sup> For a strong discussion of the creation of "in- group" - "out- group" dichotomies, see: John Dollard. "Hostility and Fear in Social Life," Race, Class, and Power, ed. Raymond Mack. (New York: American Book Company, 1968), pp.114- 126. In particular, pp.116- 117.

set aside in favour of much more stern measures, such as deportation, the restriction of marriage and involuntary sterilization. If one accepted the basic eugenic ideal, the "idea that a segment of the population was composed of biological degenerates,"<sup>12</sup> it was just a short step to demand that the populations of such "degenerates" be somehow controlled, or even eliminated. Wisconsin senator W.S. Main took this logic to its extreme, suggesting in 1890 that "if all these [hereditary defectives] could be marshalled into one great camp and with a mill stone around each of their necks, cast into the midst of the sea the people would be relieved of their weightiest burden and the pathways of coming generations brightened with hope as never before."<sup>13</sup> It is worth noting that the "in group" in this statement were viewed as "people", while the humanity of the "out group", or "burden", was denied.

Picking up Vecoli's work on the linkages between progressivism and eugenics in Wisconsin, Donald Pickens attempted to generalize about eugenics and progressivism on a national scale.<sup>14</sup> Although largely focused on the missionary zeal common to both eugenics and progressive reform, Pickens also argued that the reliance on scientific fact which animated eugenics made it an attractive option for many progressives. As well, Pickens noted that eugenicists and progressive reformers shared numerous key elements in their social backgrounds. For example, each group was largely comprised of native-born, middle and upper middle class, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, white-collar professionals, such as educators, doctors, scientists, lawyers,

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12 Vecoli, p.193.

13 W.S. Main, as quoted in: Vecoli. "Sterilization: A 'Progressive' Measure ?," p.193.

14 Donald Pickens. Eugenics and the Progressives. (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968).



scholars, legislators and journalists. This, argued Pickens, provided both groups with a similar and congruent world-view, and allowed for a fluid cross-over of ideas and personnel.

The desire to understand and explain the practical and ideological connections between eugenics and progressivism has persisted as a nagging preoccupation amongst historians. "Eugenicists shared the progressives' concern with moral intangibles," wrote Kenneth Ludmerer. "To most eugenicists, the movement was not just a social crusade but a moral crusade as well."<sup>15</sup> Ludmerer goes further to suggest that the progressives "so venerated science and the scientific method that they came to regard the acceptance of eugenic programs as a religious duty imposed by the theory of evolution."<sup>16</sup> Moreover, like Hofstadter, Vecoli and Pickens, Ludmerer made note of the security that many middle and upper class Americans found in the eugenic assertion that socio-economic condition was governed by rigid biological laws of relative fitness, and not the vagaries of social advantage. Ludmerer argued that "even Charles Davenport, Director of the Eugenics Records Office and the acknowledged leader of American eugenicists, equated the lower class with inferior genes; and others went so far as to eulogize the upper classes, claiming that these groups were responsible for virtually all of human progress."<sup>17</sup>

Assessing the constituent aspects of the eugenics movement, Mark Haller has

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<sup>15</sup> Kenneth Ludmerer. Genetics and American Society: A Historical Appraisal. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1972), p.17.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p.20.

argued that the American eugenics movement contained two distinct elements, which need differentiation. Haller has suggested that "despite the conservative implications of hereditarian thought, eugenics at first was closely related to the other reform movements of the progressive era..., [beginning] as a scientific reform in an age of reform."<sup>18</sup> However, he argued, "many strands of eugenic thought were a scientific disguise for conservative, often harsh, indictments of classes and races, and eugenics became, for a time, predominantly a conservative creed."<sup>19</sup> In this fashion Haller pointed out important differences among the members of the eugenic coalition, which was comprised of a diverse cross-section of middle class society, from would-be progressive reformers with their faith in the scientific improvement of society, to those elements of the scientific community whom Stephen Jay Gould has aptly titled scientific racists and sexists.<sup>20</sup>

Vecoli, Pickens, Haller and Ludmerer were all conscious of the process by which native-born, middle and upper-class Americans objectified those outside their social and ethnic compact as dangerous or inferior, but each remained focused on the ideas of key leadership figures within the progressive and eugenics movements. In this fashion, these historians failed to grapple with the front-line operation of eugenic measures across the United States. While they have offered much insight into the writings and personal ideologies of Edward Ross, Charles Davenport, Harry Laughlin and other

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<sup>18</sup> Mark Haller. Eugenics: Hereditarian Attitudes in American Thought. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1963), p.5.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, pp.5-6.

<sup>20</sup> For a full discussion of scientific racism and the prevalence of racial bias in early biological science, see: Stephen Jay Gould. The Mismeasure of Man. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1981).

leaders of the eugenics movement, these historians shed little light on the duties and influence of America's numerous eugenic field workers, and completely ignored the important role of mental health administrators in the execution of eugenic measures. Indeed, eugenic field workers, deportation agents and asylum superintendents formed the very front-line in the eugenicists' war on bad heredity, and it was they who decided on a daily basis who would or would not become subject to eugenic solutions. Davenport and Laughlin were certainly the apostles of the movement, but it was willing disciples such as California superintendents Edward Hatch and F.O. Butler who carried the eugenic creed to its farthest extreme in America.

Despite the many strengths of Haller's and Ludmerer's work on the American eugenics movement, however, their analyses of the decline and fall of eugenics in America has proven quite flawed. Ludmerer postulated that eugenics declined from the mid-1920's into the 1930's, becoming an intellectually marginalized and insignificant collection of cranks and Nazi sympathizers.<sup>21</sup> This decline, he argued, was triggered initially by a revision of the strict hereditarian formulations for human inheritance among the professional scientific and social scientific communities, and a general acquiescence to the important role of "nurture" in human development. Eugenics solutions were ultimately abandoned in the United States, concluded Ludmerer, in response to the abuses of eugenics reported from Nazi Germany in the 1930's. Ludmerer's analysis, however, was solely focused on the attitudes of professional scientists, in this case geneticists, and these were not the people operating the eugenic

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<sup>21</sup> Kenneth Ludmerer. "American Geneticists and the Eugenics Movement: 1905 - 1935," Journal of the History of Biology. (Vol.2, No.2, Fall 1969), pp.337 - 662.

programs across the United States. In this manner, Ludmerer inferred a correlation between the ideas of the movements' leaders and the behaviour of its diverse membership.

Like Ludmerer, Haller also made no effort to differentiate between ideas and actions. He argued that the American eugenics movement consisted of three distinct epochs, roughly covering the period 1870 through the early 1930's. The first period, approximately 1870 to 1905, was marked by progressive positivism, ie., a desire to rationally apply eugenic solutions to America's social problems. In this period eugenics was charged with the reformist zeal of the progressive movement, and was characterized as a "reform" movement by Haller. The years 1905 through the late 1920's, argued Haller, saw the movement acquire "a racist tone when many, fearing that the influx of 'inferior' races imperiled the innate capacity of the American people, found in eugenics the arguments to buttress their case for immigration restriction."<sup>22</sup> Despite the proliferation of marriage restriction and involuntary sterilization laws during this arbitrary epoch, Haller remained primarily fixed on the eugenicists role in the passage of national immigration restriction legislation. The second stage concluded with the repudiation of eugenics among professional scientists and social scientists, as the importance of "nurture" was reasserted. The third stage, Haller suggested, saw the movement collapse under the weight of Nazi abuses abroad. The horrors of Nazi eugenics and the scientific repudiation of strict hereditarianism, argued Haller, "stripped the eugenics movement of its trappings of science and disclosed that it had

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<sup>22</sup> Haller, pp.6 - 7.

been based upon often careless and inaccurate research, that it was permeated by a virulent nativism without basis in fact, and that it frequently mirrored the conservative and reactionary social philosophies of its adherents."<sup>23</sup> Thus, by the early 1930's, suggested Haller, eugenics was effectively a dead letter in the United States.

While the efficacy and legitimacy of eugenic solutions to social problems had been consolidated, however briefly, by the eugenically minded scientific community in the early Twentieth Century, by the 1920's the control of specific eugenic programs was far beyond their control. By the 1920's eugenic decision-making had devolved to the individual asylum superintendents, and it was they, along with staff physicians, psychiatrists and field workers, who governed who would or would not be sterilized or deported. Thus, when Ludmerer asserted that American "geneticists, alarmed by the movement's participation in the vitriolic debates over immigration restriction and by its apparent endorsement of the race theories of Nazi Germany, reacted against the movement by renouncing [sic] it,"<sup>24</sup> he completely overlooked what was actually happening with eugenic sterilization in the state of California or the United States in general.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, from the mid-1920's through the 1940's the state of California maintained an active agenda of surgical intervention centred in and around three particular institutions. Despite the renunciation of eugenic solutions among academics

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p.7.

<sup>24</sup> Ludmerer. "American Geneticists and the Eugenics Movement," p.339. Ludmerer reiterated this conclusion again in Genetics and American Society. "Though many geneticists (and anthropologists) renounced the eugenics movement in the 1920 's, the movement survived until the 1930 's when the social atmosphere created by the Depression and the rise of Hitler finally made former eugenic sympathizers hostile to doctrines of racial superiority" (p.204).

<sup>25</sup> For a graphic display of the impact and persistence of eugenic sterilization in California and the United States, see: Chart One, p.105.

and scientists, these eugenically-minded superintendents remained confident of the efficacy of such methods and continued their sterilization regimes into the 1950's.

The historians attracted to the study of eugenics, such as Ludmerer, Vecoli and Mark Haller, have largely come out of the genres of intellectual history and the history of science. These historians have generally been concerned with the intellectual and political leadership of the eugenics movement, thereafter extending their arguments to encompass all those involved in the operation of eugenic initiatives. Although the final decision to sterilize ultimately lay with an asylum superintendent, historians of eugenics have thus far dedicated little effort to the study of the superintendents place in the eugenics movement. Thus far the reconstruction of the roles of the superintendent and of the asylum, has been done almost exclusively by historians of mental health policy and institutional historians. Over the last several years, historians of mental health policy have fallen, broadly, into two schools of thought: one venerated heroic doctors and applauded psychiatric reform; the other viewed custodial care as little more than thinly veiled social control of those objectified as dysfunctional and unproductive in a modern society. Whether a veneration of "reform", or a castigation of "social control", these historiographic positions dominate the field, and define the parameters of the debates within the history of mental health and incarceration policy.

While a teleological focus on the scientific movement towards cures and reforms dominated the historiography of mental health policy in its formative years, when the discipline was largely comprised of physician historians, the idea of social control has grown to represent the most substantial revisionist position in the field. Assessing the

hostility and tension between these two historiographic positions, David Rothman argued that "it has become fashionable of late to talk of two camps: those depicting the programs and policies as reformist, humanitarian and progressive, against those who now present them as a triumph, in that key phrase, of 'social control'."<sup>26</sup>

Among the pioneers in the field of mental health history, Albert Deutsch in 1937 argued strongly for a focus on the progressive and positivist factors in the history of America's mental health policies. Asserting that the creation of asylums and mental hospitals represented a particular manifestation of the progressive reformist ethos, Deutsch extolled the virtues of those "psychiatric researchers and experimenters in the supporting sciences," who were "striving manfully to tear apart this mantle [of mental disability], to bring light upon the nature of mental disease, so that we might better grapple with it."<sup>27</sup> It was ultimately this tendency towards teleological interpretations of the march of scientific progress which numerous scholars found too constraining.

Historians of social control have suggested that American mental health policy was geared toward little more than the warehousing of the insane in custodial institutions from the late nineteenth-century onwards, and, hence, that such a policy cannot be

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26 David Rothman. "Social Control: The uses and Abuses of the Concept in the History of Incarceration," Rice University Studies. (Vol.67, 1981), p.9.

27 Albert Deutsch. The Mentally Ill in America: A History of their Care and Treatment. (New York: Doubleday Books, 1937), p.518. For other examples of the teleological point of view in mental health history, see: Gerald Grob. The State and the Mentally Ill: A History of the Worcester State Hospital in Massachusetts, 1830 - 1920. (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1966); Gerald Grob. Mental Illness and American Society, 1875 - 1940. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983); Samuel Hamilton. "The History of American Mental Hospitals," One Hundred Years of American Psychiatry, ed. J.K. Hall et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944), pp.72 - 90; Henry Hurd, et al. The Institutional Care of the Insane in the United States and Canada (Four Volumes). (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1917).

justified as "reformist".<sup>28</sup> Acknowledging the importance of progressive ideology in the formulation of social control measures at the turn of the century, Rothman has argued that the faith in scientific solutions held by such "innovators"<sup>29</sup> allowed for an easy acceptance of state-sponsored "management" of the insane and mentally disabled. Rothman asserted that, for America's progressive reformers "the state was not a behemoth to be chained and fettered, but an agent capable of fulfilling an ambitious program." Therefore, he concluded, "a policy that called for the state's exercise of discretionary power was, at its core, progressive."<sup>30</sup> The proponents of widespread institutionalization of the insane and feeble-minded, pointed to the social and financial benefits which could be realized through such a program. In the context of the social control of the mentally deficient, Angus McLaren has argued that "institutionalization offered double benefits. It prevented the feeble-minded from harassing society; even

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28 The proliferation of social control models in the historiography of Euro-American mental health policy was largely inspired by: Michel Foucault. Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965). Foucault eschewed arguments for benevolent concern as the primary motivation in the creation and "reform" of asylums. He suggested, instead, that such institutions were created as repositories for those deemed unproductive in a burgeoning capitalist society based on a perception of their mental inferiority. In the wake of Foucault, numerous historians have adopted and refined arguments for state-sponsored social control of the mentally disabled and insane. For historiographic overviews of the use of social control models, see: Richard Fox. "Beyond 'Social Control': Institutions and Disorder in Bourgeois Society," History of Education Quarterly. (Vol.16, 1976), pp.201-211; Rothman. "Social Control: The Uses and Abuses of the concept in the History of Incarceration," pp.21-41; Andrew Scull. "Humanitarianism or Control?: Some Observations on the Historiography of Anglo-American Psychiatry," Rice University Studies. (Vol.67, 1981), pp.9-20.

29 Although he argued in Conscience or Convenience that his goal was not "to denigrate or applaud the would-be reformer but to analyze the strengths of the movement," (p.9) Rothman felt the word "reform" was best replaced with "innovation". Innovation, Rothman argued was not as deterministic or positivist a classification as reform, and was therefore more applicable.

30 David Rothman. Conscience or Convenience: The Asylum and its Alternatives in Progressive America. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980), p.60.



more importantly, it prevented them from reproducing."<sup>31</sup>

Historians of social control have argued that by the first decades of the Twentieth Century, America's asylums and mental health facilities had lost the ability to provide care for the insane and so-called feeble-minded in any meaningful way.<sup>32</sup> As asylum populations outstripped the superintendent's ability to provide individual care and the state's ability to fund expensive treatment regimens, such facilities rapidly devolved into repositories and warehouses for the mentally disabled. As mental testing, and the endeavors of eugenic field workers and other state mental health officials revealed ever greater numbers of persons deemed mentally deficient, the state was forced to discover more cost-effective measures for dealing with the "menace of the feeble-minded".

It was in this context of the state's ability, or inability, to pay the ever-escalating costs of institutionalization, that legislators became aware of the financial benefits they could realize through eugenic measures. Eugenic solutions, particularly the deportation of the alien insane, marriage restriction among the biologically unfit, and involuntary sterilization of asylum inmates, appeared to present practical solutions to the expansion of America's "unfit" population. "Since there existed for the moment no cure for most forms of mental deficiency," argued McLaren, "the choice was between society's carrying ever higher institutional costs or taking a preventative measure that would both

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31 Angus McLaren. Our Own Master Race: Eugenics in Canada, 1885-1945. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990), p.40.

32 For examples of such arguments see: Richard Fox. So Far Disordered in Mind: Insanity in California, 1870-1930. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); McLaren; David Rothman. Conscience and Convenience. Again, however, it must be stressed that the argument for the "warehousing" of the insane ultimately owes its academic legitimacy to Foucault's Madness and Civilization.

limit the reproduction of the subnormal and lower the cost of their care by allowing some to be released."<sup>33</sup> When viewing the recourse to eugenic solutions, particularly involuntary sterilization in California, Richard Fox has argued that it was this "program which carried the asylum's social control function to a new extreme."<sup>34</sup> In California, the necessity to lower costs and still maintain control over the reproduction of the so-called "unfit", saw the creation of a parole program predicated on involuntary sterilization. Between 1909 and 1931 his program facilitated the sterilization of one in six inmates prior to their release.<sup>35</sup>

Social control, however, has limitations as a theoretical tool. Perhaps the most damning criticism of social control is that the lion's share of all commitments were made not by doctors or other agents of the state, but by family members. Gerald Grob's analysis of mid-nineteenth-century commitment records showed that fully "75 percent of all commitments to the Utica State Lunatic Asylum were begun by family and only 20.6 by public authorities."<sup>36</sup> As well, Richard Fox's analysis of California's state commitment records from 1870 through 1930 revealed that "eighty percent of the native [-born] Californians [being committed] received affidavits from relatives, as did 70 percent of the Irish and approximately one-half of the Germans, Italians, and native-born non-Californians."<sup>37</sup> Most families, particularly among the working and underclasses, could plainly not contend with the financial strain of

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33 Ibid, p.97.

34 Fox. So Far Disordered in Mind, p.27.

35 Ibid.

36 Grob. Mental Illness and American Society, p.9.

37 Fox, p.97.

maintaining mentally or physically disabled dependents in the home. This was particularly true where dependents required specialized and expensive treatment measures, such as surgical intervention or hydrotherapy. In the norm, as Richard Fox postulated, "State institutions to which the old or unproductive or delinquent could be committed undoubtedly appeared to [poor and working class] families - - though perhaps not to the deviants themselves - - as regrettable but indispensable necessities."<sup>38</sup>

Beyond the preponderance of family commitments, social control has still other limitations. Critics of the blanket application of social control models, notably Richard Fox and Andrew Scull, have raised serious questions about the objectives of the social controllers. Both Fox and Scull have suggested that the social control perspective must be balanced with an appreciation of other motivations for the expansion of institutions, lest it degenerate into an "abstract conflict between a group of controllers and their victims."<sup>39</sup> Arguing for balance in the analysis of mental health policy, Scull suggested that while "one source of the drive to institutionalize the insane has been anxiety, fear of the threat the mad posed to life, property, and the orderliness of social existence," this fear was tempered by the "new-found conviction about the redemptive power of the institution, and [an] insistence upon extending the benefits of treatment to an ever-larger proportion of the mad."<sup>40</sup> Thus, while one must recognize that institutionalization was coercive and authoritarian by nature, it must also be recognized

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38 Ibid, p.11.

39 Ibid, p.15.

40 Scull. "Humanitarianism or Control ?," p.132.

that in many instances asylum reforms represented a drastic improvement in living conditions within state institutions. The improvement of state institutions was the primary focus of many progressive reformers who sought to segregate the insane from the criminally insane, from the mentally disabled, from epileptics and from inebriates. While numerous legislators and "reformers" were perhaps interested in little more than lowering state costs through more effective warehousing of the insane and mentally disabled, others were undoubtedly interested in the improvement of both material and treatment conditions within America's asylums.

Historians of science have also suggested that comparative studies of different eugenic programs in various countries could reveal aspects of these programs, which might otherwise go unnoticed.<sup>41</sup> Comparative history offers the historian an opportunity to gauge such things as popular reactions to eugenic initiatives; the operation of similar measures, like sterilization, in different countries; and the differing ideological backgrounds among each country's eugenics movement. In his In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Heredity, Daniel Kevles presented a "comparative history of eugenics in the United States and Britain from the late nineteenth century to the present day, giving attention to its expressions elsewhere, especially in Germany, insofar as they affected Anglo-American developments."<sup>42</sup>

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41 For a historiographic assessment of the various comparative works on eugenics, see: Mark Adams. "Eugenics in the History of Science," The Wellborn Science: Eugenics in Germany, France, Brazil, and Russia, ed. Mark Adams. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp.3-8. Adams edited this collection with an eye towards revealing key aspects of various eugenics programs through the monographic essays.

42 Daniel Kevles. In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), p.x.

Kevles pointed out numerous differences between American and British eugenicists, from their theoretical models to their relative political influence. In the United States, Kevles argued, eugenicists enjoyed much more success in gathering support for the passage of eugenic laws, than did their counterparts in England. Kevles suggested that the British parliament, whose jurisdiction eugenic legislation fell within, was unwilling to pass such laws for the entire nation. American state legislatures, meanwhile, were more easily swayed by eugenic "experts". The deferral to scientific experts was the "hallmark of good reform government" in America's progressive states which implemented measures "modeled after the 'Wisconsin idea', ...of drawing upon experts in the state university for advice in complicated policy areas like taxes, agriculture, regulation and public health."<sup>43</sup> As state governments increasingly deferred to experts, hereditarians were able to find political allies in their war on bad heredity. British eugenicists were never able to broker nearly that influence on their national stage.

Beyond Kevles' work, however, numerous historians have written about the differences and similarities of the American and British eugenics movements. Comparisons between the United States and Germany are not so common. Although her "Race Hygiene Movement in Germany, 1904 - 1945" was not a strictly comparative work, Sheila Faith Weiss sheds new light on the impact of American eugenicists on German eugenic policy.<sup>44</sup> It has frequently been noted that American

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Sheila Faith Weiss. "The Race Hygiene Movement in Germany, 1904 - 1945," The Wellborn Science, pp.9 - 68.

eugenicists like Harry Laughlin bemoaned the fact that Nazi Germany ultimately implemented a more aggressive sterilization agenda than did the United States, but historians had not inquired too deeply into the role American eugenicists played in the development of German eugenic policies. For example: in 1932 the Weimar government drafted sterilization legislation that was ultimately passed and executed by the Nazis. The definition of sterilization powers in this legislation was modelled upon those found in Indiana's 1907 sterilization law. As Weiss and others have noted, from 1907 into the 1930 's American eugenicists were the world 's pre-eminent authorities on the passage and operation of eugenic laws. In 1922, for example, Harry Laughlin went so far as to draw up a "Model Eugenic Sterilization Law," complete with annotated instructions for prospective operators to follow.<sup>45</sup> The international influence enjoyed by American eugenicists into the 1930's has thus far been understated by historians, but a renewed focus on comparative studies may more fully reveal the impact of American eugenicists, such as Davenport and Laughlin, on the eugenic thinking of countries beyond the United States.

The place of eugenics in academic science departments has also been an important area of study in recent years. Philip Pauly studied the gradual acceptance of biology as a core discipline in American university science departments in the late Nineteenth Century, and argued that biology became an umbrella discipline covering all life sciences outside the medical curriculum. Biology, argued Pauly, became "a catchword describing the sum of efforts in the life sciences", and included such prominent

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<sup>45</sup> Harry Laughlin. "Model Eugenic Law," Eugenical Sterilization in the United States, A Report of the Psychopathic Laboratory of the Municipal Court of Chicago. (Chicago: Municipal Court of Chicago, 1922), pp. 446 - 461.

subdisciplines as ecology, embryology, ethology, eugenics, genetics and taxonomy.<sup>46</sup> Pauly noted that "in the late 1890's and early 1900's a large number of biologists, trained in the techniques of cytology and embryology, began to move into new and more relevant areas of work."<sup>47</sup> Pauly noted as an example, that Charles Davenport had begun his teaching career in the biology department at Harvard before achieving world-wide fame as a eugenicist. The very recognition of eugenics and other life sciences as legitimate fields of scientific inquiry, argued Pauly, was predicated on the earlier acceptance of biology into the academic science curriculum.<sup>48</sup>

The great difficulty with studies like Pauly's, however, is that they only reveal the academic and intellectual discourse of a select few scientists and academics. Like many other works in the history of eugenics, these only inform us about the boundaries of intellectual and professional acceptability, and reveal only those persons who rose to prominence within the field.

The desire to analyze the academic discourse relating to the so-called "nature - nurture" schism among professional scientists and social scientists has not subsided, as recent studies still search for that key date when hereditarianism and eugenics were

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46 Philip Pauly. "The Appearance of Academic Biology in Late Nineteenth-Century America," Journal of the History of Biology. (Vol.17, No.13, Fall 1984), pp.369 - 370.

47 Ibid, p. 394.

48 As well as Pauly, other historians have undertaken studies relating to the academic, intellectual and scientific expansion of the life-sciences. For examples, see: Toby Appel. "Jeffries Wyman, Philosophical Anatomy, and the Scientific Reception of Darwin in America," Journal of the History of Biology. (Vol.21, No.1, Spring 1989), pp. 69 - 94; Peter Bowler. The Mendelian Revolution: The Emergence of Hereditarian Concepts in Modern Society. (London: Athlone Press, 1989); Hamilton Cravens. The Triumph of Evolution: American Scientists and the Heredity - Environment Controversy, 1900 - 1941. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978).

abandoned. The desire to illuminate a rubicon in the "nature- nurture" debate clearly animated Carl Degler's recent analysis of the oscillations between the theories for explaining human inheritance during the 1920's and 1930's. Degler pronounced that he would reveal why and when "students of human nature - - social scientists - - made the momentous shift from believing that biology explained some human actions to seeing culture or human experience - - history, if you will - - as the primary if not the sole source of the differential behaviour of human beings."<sup>49</sup> Degler sought to pinpoint those moments in the oscillations of social theory, where the debate was in the process of swinging between points of view, while simultaneously revealing the ideological backdrop for those shifts. His analysis is particularly strong in these regards, but like so many other works, Degler's provided no tangible connection between academic hereditarianism and that of its everyday practitioners. Moreover, Degler, like so many of his predecessors, argued that eugenics was abandoned in the early 1930's. His reasons for the collapse of academic eugenics were familiar: strict hereditarianism could not stand up against more advanced and sophisticated theories of human development, and the abuses of the Nazis' caused even the most dogged defenders of the discipline to recoil from its defence. Ultimately, argued Degler, "even last - ditch defenders of eugenics began to recognize the enormity of the Nazi program as it escalated into the murderous horror of the holocaust."<sup>50</sup> While this was possibly the case among academics, Degler's assertion that "during the 1930's and 1940's

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49 Carl Degler. In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.vii.

50 Ibid, p.203.



concepts and terms like 'heredity,' 'biological influences,' and 'instinct' dropped below the horizon," cannot be substantiated beyond academia.<sup>51</sup>

Hailed as "the first critical history of involuntary sterilization in the United States,"<sup>52</sup> Philip Reilly's The Surgical Solution: A History of Involuntary Sterilization in the United States represents the first serious historical analysis of the operation of America's various state sterilization agendas. While Reilly's study suffered from a tendency towards a summary of key figures, events, and developments in its early chapters, he reached the important conclusion that eugenics persisted on the ground long after it had perished in academic circles. "Revulsion over Germany's racist policies did little to curtail American programs before or after World War Two," argued Reilly.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, Reilly pointed out the increase in America's sterilization totals into the 1950's and 1960's to substantiate these claims. Although he spent little time discussing the actual day-to-day operation of America's sterilization programs, Reilly's work is important for revealing the persistence of eugenic practices in the United States after the Second World War.

As the corpus of relevant literature grows, and the historiography of American eugenics develops, historians are beginning to ask new questions and express new research agendas. For example, in recent years Daniel Kevles has explored the possibilities inherent in a limited psychohistorical analysis of the eugenics

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51 Ibid.

52 Nicole Hahn Rafter. "Review of: The Surgical Solution: A History of Involuntary Sterilization in the United States," American Historical Review. (Vol., No., June 1992), pp.944-945.

53 Philip Reilly. The Surgical Solution: A History of Involuntary Sterilization in the United States. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1992), p.95.

movement;<sup>54</sup> Mariana Valverde has sought to deconstruct meaning from the literature and symbols common to the eugenics movement;<sup>55</sup> while Philip Reilly revised the field's orthodox position on the collapse of the eugenics movement, documenting the persistence of eugenic sterilization into the mid-Twentieth Century. The realization that sterilization continued into the 1940's - 1950's, has prompted a reconsideration of the connections between eugenic thought and eugenic action. That is to say, although Harry Laughlin, Charles Davenport, and others fell out of favour among academics and professional scientists in the late 1920's and early 1930's, this rejection of eugenic theory did not necessarily imply a rejection of eugenic action (ie: sterilization or the restriction of marriage).

This study will be largely focused on the passage, operation, and persistence of a specific eugenic agenda within the state of California. The sophisticated net of eugenic measures developed in California during the first decades of the Twentieth Century included a deportation agency to remove so called "defective aliens" from state institutions and, most prominently, the involuntary sterilization of inmates of the state hospitals to prevent procreation and facilitate parole. Following the creation of the State Commission in Lunacy in 1896, California's mental health administration became more complex and rigidly managed. Animated by a supreme faith in scientific methods to solve human problems, California mental health officials sought to study the causes of

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54 Kevles speculates about "the psychodynamics" of American eugenic thought, and its preoccupation with human reproductive organs throughout In the Name of Eugenics. In particular see, pp. 101- 112.

55 Mariana Valverde. "When the Mother of the Race is Free: Race, Reproduction, and Sexuality in First-Wave Feminism," Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History, eds. Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), pp.3 - 26.

insanity and mental disability, so as to cure them. Swelled with positivist zeal, the university-trained medical and psychological professionals operating California's institutions sought a cure for insanity, which would thereafter serve as the badge of their professional legitimacy.

Californians did not, however, invent eugenics; nor did they implement eugenic measures in a vacuum. California was responding to the same perceived genetic imperative which affected other American states, and nations worldwide. Because they did acquire much of their hereditarian thought from outside the state, it is important to establish a national and international context for California's eugenic program. This will illustrate the similarities in thought shared by California eugenicists and those from elsewhere in the hereditarian community. More importantly, the persistence of California's eugenic agenda into the mid-Twentieth Century illustrates the gulf which existed between eugenic thought and eugenic action. Historians, based on the academic and professional renunciation of eugenic thought which began in the late 1920's, prematurely pronounced the American eugenics movement dead in the early 1930's. It is my contention that eugenic programs, particularly involuntary sterilization, persisted much longer than has previously been postulated, and that this persistence was guided not by the movement's former intellectual leaders, but by local mental health officials empowered to enact eugenic solutions.

Ultimately, in California, it mattered very little how well Harry Laughlin's theories were surviving the scorn of his peers. What truly mattered were the opinions regarding eugenic sterilization, deportation and psychosurgery held by individual asylum

superintendents, for it was they who decided the surgical fate of almost 18,000 Californians between 1909 and 1946.<sup>56</sup> I will argue that the individual asylum superintendents each held opinions on the efficacy of sterilization, and as such some had little use for sterilization even during the peak years of eugenic thought between 1909 and 1925, while others implemented sterilization regimes that operated well into the mid-Twentieth Century. The personal ideology of each superintendent, tempered as they were by considerations of economy, the restrictions on space and finance, hereditarian dogma, and the quest for a cure for mental illness, was ultimately the most important factor in determining which institutions accepted and implemented involuntary sterilization. In revealing the vast discrepancies between institutional sterilization regimes this study will rely most heavily on the records maintained by the individual institutions and compiled within the Biennial Reports of the California State Commission in Lunacy, California State Department of Institutions and the California Board of Charities and Corrections for the years 1900 through 1940.

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<sup>56</sup> Human Betterment Foundation. Sterilizations Reported to January 1, 1946 (Publication Number One). (New York: Human Betterment Association of America, 1946).

## Chapter Two:

### Foundations of California Eugenics.

"It is hard to imagine any state of society in which health, intelligence, and efficiency will not be more valuable than disability, ignorance, and ineptitude. The various qualities tend to go together. Eugenic reforms are directed towards raising the level of the race, and toward producing on the whole a wider distribution of health, intelligence, and efficiency, and a lesser amount of the present level of disability, mental defect and incapacities." - Paul Popenoe, Human Betterment Foundation, Pasadena, California, 1933.

The intellectual origins and formative development of American eugenics are much the same as those of Canada, England, or the Soviet Union. In America, as elsewhere, eugenics and hereditarian thought ultimately owed much of their legitimacy to Darwin's theory of organic evolution through the natural selection of adaptive characteristics. "Natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being," wrote Darwin, and thus "all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress toward perfection."<sup>1</sup> The positivism and teleological determinism implicit in Darwin's discussions of variation within domesticated species such as pigeons convinced numerous observers of the potential for manipulation within human populations. Convinced of the hereditary acquisition of characteristics, Darwin, in 1859, predicted that in the "distant future" natural selection would "open fields for far more important researches" than his limited studies of domesticated animals.<sup>2</sup> By

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1 Charles Darwin. The Origin of Species By Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Existence (1859), ed. J.W. Burrows. (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), p.459.

2 Ibid, p.458.

studying the acquisition of hereditary traits from one generation to the next, Darwin proclaimed, "light will be thrown on the origin of man and his history."<sup>3</sup> America's fledgling life science community, particularly those persons working at Harvard with Asa Gray and Jeffries Wyman, rapidly accepted Darwinian evolution and helped turn many of America's universities into bastions of support for both natural selection and organic evolution in the latter Nineteenth Century.<sup>4</sup>

The international movement towards an explicit application of biological and statistical theory to the human species was largely spawned by Darwin's own cousin, Francis Galton. In the mid-1860's Galton began to ponder the mechanisms by which the human species acquired new characteristics from generation to generation, and how these mechanisms might then be manipulated to produce a consistent pedigree. "If everybody were to agree on the improvement of the race of man being a matter of the very utmost importance," wrote Galton in 1865, "and if the theory of the hereditary transmission of qualities in men was as thoroughly understood as it is in the case of our domestic animals, I see no absurdity in supposing that, in some way or other, the improvement would be carried into effect."<sup>5</sup> Largely ignoring environmental considerations such as living conditions, socio-economic class and the opportunity to

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3 Ibid.

4 For discussions of the scientific reception of Darwin and natural selection in the United States, see: Toby Appel. "Jeffries Wyman, Philosophical Anatomy, and the Scientific Reception of Darwin in America," Journal of the History of Biology. (Vol.21, No.1, Spring 1988), pp.69-94; Edward Pfeifer. "United States," The Comparative Reception of Darwin, ed. Thomas Glick. (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1974), pp.168-206; Michele Aldrich. "United States: Bibliographical Essay," Ibid, pp.207-226.

5 Francis Galton. "Hereditary Talent and Character," Macmillan's Magazine. (Vol.12, No.71, 1865), p.320.

receive suitable education, Galton argued for the strict acquisition of all characteristics. Hence, the poor were impoverished because their parents had been so, and not because of socio-economic and educational disadvantage. Galton listed hundreds of characteristics which he believed were strictly transmitted from parent to progeny. These included "a craving for drink, or for gambling, strong sexual passion. a proclivity to pauperism, to crimes of violence, and to crimes of fraud."<sup>6</sup> Galton perceived much deviant behaviour, from mental or physical disability to pauperism and vagrancy, to be strictly acquired from previous generations. \_\_\_\_\_

Galton, and later Karl Pearson, argued that through statistical projection it was possible to predict the range of variation between generations.<sup>7</sup> Galton put forth that characteristics were acquired in strictly circumscribed proportions from one's ancestors: half from the parents, a quarter from the grandparents, and incrementally backwards. Galton and his biometrician peers applied then current methods of statistical analysis and argued that species remained static until environmental changes spurred mutation and the acquisition of new characteristics. Sexual selection could improve the species by encouraging the breeding of its fittest members, but it could not permanently alter the species.<sup>8</sup>

As well, Galton argued that natural selection had favoured certain races,

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> For a more complete discussion of Galton, Pearson and the growth of the English biometrical school of eugenics, see: Peter Bowler. Evolution: The History of an Idea. (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1989), 253-255, 292-294.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p.254.

particularly Anglo-Saxons in the transmission of favourable traits. That is to say, some races were morally and biologically inferior because they had not reached the same level of evolutionary development as had Anglo-Saxon society. This suggestion that specific racially-defined characteristics were strictly transmitted, allowed Galton, and those who followed him to create and perpetuate racial stereotypes as though they were biologically determined fact. Examples of such stereotyping abound throughout Galton's work. "The conscience of the negro is aghast at his own wild, impulsive nature, and is easily stirred by a preacher," suggested Galton, "but it is scarcely possible to ruffle the self-complacency of the steady-going Chinaman."<sup>9</sup> Even in its earliest formulations, the emerging discipline of eugenics harbored a variety of class, gender and racially based prejudices, which were to animate the movement throughout its existence.

In addition to the predilection towards theory based on prior prejudice, eugenic thought after Galton was also animated by the positivism that marked Darwin's work. Darwin was unable to perceive how the understanding of natural selection could not necessarily lead to progress towards human perfection. From the species' very rise out of the ooze, argued Darwin, it had steadily progressed and evolved toward a higher order of life. Galton accepted Darwin's teleology, arguing that "the sense of original sin would show, according to my theory, not that man was fallen from a high estate, but that he was rapidly rising from a low one."<sup>10</sup> This argument that the human race was marching ceaselessly towards perfection animated eugenic thought, indeed much

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9 Ibid, p.327.

10 Ibid.



scientific thought, from the 1870's onward.

Scientific positivism and eugenics achieved wide currency in the United States during the first decades of the Twentieth Century, as new discoveries in the burgeoning fields of biology, embryology, genetics and zoology allowed American scientists to undertake leadership roles in international research within the life sciences. With the rediscovery of Mendel's genetic laws (originating around 1865) in 1900, the international life science community became consumed with recording generational change and mutation in a laboratory setting.<sup>11</sup> In this regard American scientists rapidly rose to the forefront, particularly following Thomas Hunt Morgan's successful illustration of Mendelian inheritance in his 1910 experiments with the *Drosophila melanogaster*, or common fruit fly.<sup>12</sup>

Morgan was not however, a "Darwinist". That is to say, he did not accept natural selection as the mechanism by which characteristics were acquired and transmitted between generations.<sup>13</sup> Contrary to the attributing of partial characteristics through statistical projection, which so marked the English school of biometry, Mendelianism allowed American scientists to demonstrate the transmission of biological

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11 For a complete assessment of the tremendous impact of mendelian genetics upon the international life science community, particularly in the United States and Great Britain, see: Peter Bowler. The Mendelian Revolution: The Emergence of Hereditarian Concepts in Modern Science and Society. (London: Athlone Press, 1989); Peter Bowler. The Non-Darwinian Revolution: Reinterpreting a Historical Myth. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1988).

12 Thomas Hunt Morgan, et al. The Mechanism of Mendelian Heredity (1915), ed. Garland Allen. (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1972).

13 For a more comprehensive assessment the reception or rejection of natural selection among geneticists, see Chapters 6 through 9 in Bowler. The Non-Darwinian Revolution, pp.131-204. As well the section entitled "Anti-Darwinism" (pp.90-104) reveals the deep misgivings of numerous geneticists towards Darwinism and natural selection.

characteristics as complete units over several generations.<sup>14</sup> The acceptance of this manner of transmission gave forth to the argument that inferior characteristics, such as feeble-mindedness or criminality, were the product of single genes. Therefore, it appeared feasible to locate and remove these faulty genes from circulation.<sup>15</sup>

The university sponsorship of American natural scientists allowed them the unique opportunity to break new research ground and disseminate their findings among colleagues and students. When Morgan began his experiments in the fly room at Columbia University during 1907, he belonged to a small, intimate community of researchers interested in mendelism, natural selection and genetics. By the time of his retirement from the California Institute of Technology genetics faculty in 1928, however, Morgan was only one of hundreds of life science researchers across the United States. By 1928 the natural science faculty at Columbia University alone featured twenty-four members who had written doctoral dissertations with Morgan, and who had entered the profession since 1914.<sup>16</sup>

Samuel Holmes was among the numerous biologists, embryologists, geneticists and zoologists enticed to California universities by the lavish promises of Ida Wheeler and David Starr Jordan. While at the University of California, from 1919 through 1933, Holmes taught courses with eugenic content, published course texts featuring eugenic theory, and wrote articles in popular magazines proclaiming the "eugenic

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, pp.97-98; Bowler. Evolution, p.294.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p.294.

<sup>16</sup> Cravens, p.163. For an account of the development of genetics and biology as "big science," see: Ibid, pp.162-163.

imperative". The preface of Holmes' 1921 text, The Trend of the Race: A Study of Present Tendencies in the Biological Development of Civilized Mankind, stated that the book was the "outgrowth of a course of lectures which has been given for several years in the University of California."<sup>17</sup> The Trend of the Race exhibited language and theory typical of the eugenics movement as a whole. Discussing the "natural character" of the "feeble-minded" woman, Holmes wrote that she had "a distinct gait, smile, leer; she is lazy, unveracious, pleasure-loving, easily led, fond of liquor, heedless of the future, and usually devoid of moral sense."<sup>18</sup> To substantiate these claims, Holmes cited that Dr. Davis of the Bedford Reformatory for Women in Portland, Oregon discovered that "out of the 2,500 prostitutes in Portland, 25-30 per cent were mentally defective."<sup>19</sup> The poor, Holmes argued, were so largely due to inherited biological inferiority. "The pedigrees of paupers, so far as they have been studied," argued Holmes, "show a large percentage of mental defect."<sup>20</sup> Recent immigrants were also branded inferior, as Holmes suggested that "it has seriously been doubted if the great mass of Greeks, Southern Italians, Portuguese, Syrians and Turks measure[d] up to the ground intellectual level of the peoples of Nordic stock which constituted the great bulk of our population of a couple of decades ago."<sup>21</sup> Eugenic

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<sup>17</sup> Samuel Holmes. The Trend of the Race: A Study of Present Tendencies in the Biological Development of Civilized Mankind. (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1921), unnumbered preface, p.1.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p.89.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, pp.88-89.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p.93.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p.353.

solutions, it was said, particularly immigration restriction, intelligence testing and involuntary sterilization, were necessary to "relieve society of an immense burden."<sup>22</sup>

As the life sciences grew increasingly specialized and compartmentalized in the early Twentieth Century, new research agendas were adopted within the growing sub-disciplines of biology, genetics, embryology and eugenics. Crucial to the expansion of experimentation and study within these youthful fields were university science departments, which allotted space, the assistance of graduate students, and other resources.<sup>23</sup> Enterprising university presidents sought to increase the reputation and professional standing of their respective institutions through the acquisition of the best and the brightest among the scientific community. In this regard President Ida Wheeler of the University of California at Berkeley was no exception. In 1902, following the lead of universities such as Johns Hopkins, Wisconsin and the University of Chicago, Wheeler lured several prominent scientists to California through the promise of well-funded research facilities, adequate space and an ample supply of graduate students. Boasting the likes of physiologist Jacob Loeb, California's natural science department made a mercurial rise to national prominence in the years following 1902.<sup>24</sup> Not to be outdone, President David Starr Jordan of Stanford acquired the services of Edward Ross and Lewis Terman.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p.381.

<sup>23</sup> Cravens, p.162.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p.27.

<sup>25</sup> Kevin Starr. Americans and the California Dream, 1850-1915. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973). In particular see Chapter 10, "Life Among the Best and Truest: David Starr Jordan and the Founding of Stanford University," pp.307-344.

Along with Samuel Holmes and Ida Wheeler at the University of California, California's university community also featured other prominent hereditarians. Stanford University boasted the likes of Edward Ross and Lewis Terman among its hereditarians, while the California Institute of Technology was the centre for much of Thomas Hunt Morgan's later work. Yet it was Stanford administrator David Starr Jordan who most succinctly stated the position of California hereditarians. Prominent in the American peace movement as well as among hereditarians, Jordan was a vocal advocate of biologically determined Anglo-Saxon superiority. For Jordan, "the essential source of Californianism [lay] in heredity."<sup>26</sup> Beyond cultural and social differences between people, argued Jordan, it was "blood" which defined what one was, and heredity which defined persons as fit or weak.<sup>27</sup> In the early 1900's Jordan vehemently argued that "the survival of the unfittest is the primal cause of the downfall of nations," and that California and the United States needed to measures to check the population of "those whose descendents are likely through incompetence and vice to be a permanent burden on our social or political order."<sup>28</sup>

While Terman, Holmes, Jordan and Ross were California's leading hereditarians, the national eugenic community also relied heavily on data generated by university research, and found its leader on the campus of Harvard. A biology professor by trade, Charles Davenport was instrumental in the organization of the first professional

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<sup>26</sup> David Starr Jordan, as quoted in: *Ibid*, p.310.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p.311.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p.310.

associations designed to promote eugenic research in the United States, the Committee of Eugenics of the American Breeders Association and the Eugenics Records Office. Under Davenport's tutelage the Committee of Eugenics organized ten subcommittees on the heredity of feeble-mindedness, insanity, criminality and a variety of other afflictions in 1909, while the Eugenics Records Office became the primary non-academic centre for American genetic research until the end of World War One.<sup>29</sup> As well, then current trends in hereditarian theory were carried to America's professional eugenicists and interested members of the broader scientific community regularly through the Journal of Heredity (1910) and the countless other professional journals which appeared after the turn of the century.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, the Human Betterment Foundation of Pasadena reported in 1936 that "the Brush Foundation (1928) of Cleveland, the Galton Society of New York (1918), the Scripps Foundation for Population Research (1922), at Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, and the National Committee on Maternal Health (1923), with headquarters in New York have all promoted research in the field of eugenics."<sup>31</sup> The Human betterment Foundation itself was begun under the tutelage of E.S. Gosney in 1929, citing as its first task "a study of California's eugenical sterilization law and a publication of its results."<sup>32</sup> As well

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<sup>29</sup> For a full discussion of Charles Davenport's role in the foundation of the Eugenics Records Office, the Committee of Eugenics and the Journal of Heredity, see: Ludmerer. Genetics and American Society, pp.48-50.

<sup>30</sup> For an assessment of the growing number of journals presenting theory and data from the sub-disciplines of the life sciences after 1900, see: Cravens, pp.29-31.

<sup>31</sup> Roswell Johnson and Paul Popenoe. Applied Eugenics. (New York: Macmillan Company, 1933), p.351.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

the Human Betterment Foundation, and its east-coast counterpart, the Eugenics Records Office, served as transmitters of hereditarian dogma through a variety of publications, lectures and bulletins. Paul Popenoe of the Human Betterment Foundation explained the importance of a place on campus for eugenic thought in the 1933 edition of Applied Eugenics. "The amount of research, and the number of courses of instruction dealing with eugenics, in American colleges and universities, have increased steadily from year to year,"<sup>33</sup> which, argued Popenoe, greatly assisted in the proliferation of eugenic thought. Moreover, the universities could count on the Human Betterment Foundation to help "with the task of public education," which was further delegated to "many organizations in allied fields, such as social hygiene, mental hygiene, and birth control."<sup>34</sup>

While there was little consensus on specific research projects in America's fledgling eugenic community, all were focused on the improvement of the human species through selective breeding. Most American eugenicists perceived the fit to be those of the middle and upper classes, native birth and Northern European origin, while the unfit masses were comprised of the insane, mentally or physically disabled, recent immigrants from eastern and southern Europe, the poor, the working classes and anyone else perceived as different or dangerous.<sup>35</sup> Drawing on analogies from the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> For prominent examples of the objectification of those persons "other" than native-born, middle-class, Anglo-Saxon Americans as "unfit", see: Madison Grant. The Passing of the Great Race. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916); Warren Thompson. "Race Suicide in the United States," Scientific Monthly. (Vol.5, July 1917), pp.22-35; Francis Walker. "Immigration and Degradation," Forum. (Vol.11, August 1891), pp.639-644. Good sources on the suggestion of "like breeds like" among the poor, criminal-minded and insane

sphere of animal husbandry, America's eugenicists argued from the outset that the fit should be encouraged to expand their numbers, while those classified as unfit should have strict limits placed on their numbers. In this regard David Starr Jordan suggested in 1914 that to "have really good children, the parents must be of good stock themselves. Bad fruit is born mainly by bad trees, and the inheritance of badness springs from inherent tendencies."<sup>36</sup> As with the rest of the United States, California was gripped with anxiety about declining birth rates among native-born middle class women of Anglo-Saxon origins. The legions of feeble-minded progeny believed to be produced among the poor and labouring classes, recent immigrants, and other groups deemed inferior were supposed by eugenicists to be overwhelming the nation. Statistics and intelligence test scores were used to illustrate the magnitude of this calamity.<sup>37</sup>

The calm, calculated, and apparently scientific arguments of America's eugenicists appealed to a wide variety of popular prejudices and found numerous supporters. Eugenicists, with their intelligence tests and statistical analyses, did not speak with the

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include: Richard Dugdale. The Jukes: A Study in Crime, Pauperism and Heredity. (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1910; Henry Goddard. The Kallikak Family: A Study in the Heredity of Feeble-mindedness. (New York: Macmillan Company, 1912).

<sup>36</sup> David Starr Jordan. "Prenatal Influences," The Journal of Heredity. (Vol.5, 1914), p.39.

<sup>37</sup> Literature on the fear of the legions of the feeble-minded and of potential race suicide through a dilution of native-born stock abounds. For good examples see: Fredrick Crum. "The Decadence of the Native-American Stock: A Statistical Study of Genealogical Records," Publications of the American Statistical Association. Volume 14, September 1914, pp.218-219; Warren Thompson. "Race Suicide in the United States," Scientific Monthly. Volume Five, July 1917, pp.22-35; Francis Walker. "Immigration and Degradation," Forum. Volume 11, August 1891, pp.639-644.



harsh, emotional, almost hysterical voices of the nativists and more overt racists; instead, they spoke in the calculated and rational language of professional scientists. In his work on the Kallikaks, for example, Henry Goddard supported his arguments for the strict heredity of feeble-mindedness with intricate family histories, intelligence scores and statistical analyses. Goddard sought to amass and correlate data regarding the genetic inheritance of America's feeble-minded population to reveal the origins of the disability. "Upon the basis of this information," wrote an enthusiastic Goddard in 1910, "we prepared charts of the children, which were truly remarkable in what they revealed as to the etiology of feeble-mindedness."<sup>38</sup> Galton, Goddard, Davenport and other eugenicists argued that it was within the ability of professional eugenicists to locate hereditary taint among humans, isolate it, and take measures to remove it through sound scientifically orthodox methods. Yet, this focus on a "like breeds like" inheritance of supposed macro-traits had little to do with mainstream genetics, whose membership argued strongly that genetic manipulation in human populations was well beyond the competence of the discipline. Indeed, not only was human genetics considered by many to be too complex, but it was also not a lucrative field of endeavour. Plant and animal genetics, hence, assumed centre stage within the field of genetics for most of the Twentieth Century.<sup>39</sup>

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The hereditarian interpretation of mental disorder was well received throughout the

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<sup>38</sup> Henry Goddard. "Heredity of Feeble-Mindedness," American Breeders Magazine. (Vol.1, No.3, 1910), p.165.

<sup>39</sup> See, Chapters 7, 10 and 11 in: Peter Bowler. Evolution: The History of an Idea. (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 176-205, 266-316.

American mental health community. In this regard California was no exception, as the First Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy for California observed that the "most prolific causes of insanity" were "heredity, excessive use of alcohol and other toxic agents, poverty and disease."<sup>40</sup> The authors of the commission reasoned that heredity was a primary factor in the transmission of retrograde characteristics. Hence, it was those "descendants with a weakness engrafted upon them" who were "liable to become victims of nervous disease or insanity when exposed to causes which the man without inherited weaknesses would resist."<sup>41</sup> From the point of view of the professional mental health community, it was their responsibility to locate the causes of mental illness and strive to cure them, using all means available to them at any given time.

Heredity offered a root cause for the transmission of alcoholism, insanity and feeble-mindedness, which, if the mechanisms were fully understood, could be used to map out undesirable traits and stock. Natural selection could be manipulated by preventing the procreation of "unfit" stock, thereby, eliminating the transmission of characteristics predisposing persons toward insanity or feeble-mindedness. Here again, it is important to note that the early geneticists were most often not advocates of natural selection. Instead they argued that natural selection was unnecessary for evolution, since mutation on the Mendelian model and heredity would suffice to explain change between generations. The Ninth Biennial Report of the State

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<sup>40</sup> First Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy for the Two Years Ending June 30, 1898. (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1899), p.26.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p.27.

Commission in Lunacy suggested that "those who study the subject closely realize that mental defectiveness is the foundation upon which is gradually built up much of our mental troubles, much of our crime and delinquency, much of the retrogression from sober, law-abiding citizens into shiftless ne'er-do-wells, into inebriety and dependency."<sup>42</sup> The commissioners concluded that those cursed by hereditary taint would be "unable to manage their affairs with ordinary prudence; unable to exercise that self-control which is necessary to live a moral life;" and ultimately were "unable to compete with their fellows in the struggle for existence."<sup>43</sup> Moreover, argued the State Board of Charities and Corrections, mental health professionals needed to "make it [their] business to awaken the people to a realization of the fact that it is as foolish to permit human defectives reproduce themselves as to permit defective domestic animals to beget offspring."<sup>44</sup>

Eugenicists deemed aggressive intervention into the mechanism of natural selection as both necessary and prudent. From the late 1890's, mental health officials and various state commissions across the United States began to call for ever stronger measures to control the so called "unfit" population. Wisconsin's State Board of Control concluded in 1896 that "the day may possibly come when public opinion shall demand that the pruning knife be applied in order that the taint of degeneracy may not

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<sup>42</sup> Ninth Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy for the Two Years Ending June 30, 1914. (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1915), p.14.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p.15.

<sup>44</sup> Sixth Biennial Report of the State Board of Charities and Corrections of the State of California From June 1, 1912 to June 30, 1914. (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1915), p.62.

affect the entire body politic."<sup>45</sup> The perceived burden posed by the growing numbers of unfit Americans was a rallying point for state mental health officials well into the Twentieth Century, as they sought to lower institutional costs and remove "defectives" from the reproductive pool. "If this source of contamination could be cut off, the beneficial effects would begin to show in a single generation," suggested the members of California's Commission in Lunacy, as the "failure to prevent reproduction of defectives is now [in 1914] entailing upon society an economic loss amounting to billions of dollars and misery beyond calculation."<sup>46</sup>

The rational management and reordering of mental health administration often was closely linked to broader reform agendas, as in the case of California. In 1900 California was growing rapidly, which greatly taxed the state's poorly developed administrative and governmental infrastructure. Begun around the turn of the century, and accelerated by the rise of Hiram Johnson, a nationally renowned progressive, to the governorship in 1910, the expansion and reform of California's public administration and state facilities were given a high priority. Efficiency and economy were the key expressions used by California legislators when they discussed state mental health policy. California's State Hospitals were to provide the best possible care with the least possible state expenditure. "Our aim is to get value received for the state for every dollar spent," reported the the authors' of the 1904 Commission in Lunacy. "Make every dollar count. Stop waste. Pay proper wages and demand results equal to

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<sup>45</sup> Third Biennial Report of the Wisconsin State Board of Control for the Two Years Ending June 30, 1896. (Madison, Wisc.: Wisconsin State Printing Office, 1896), p.33.

<sup>46</sup> Fourth Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy, p.16.

those wages. This is economy."<sup>47</sup> Animated by the belief that the state was not only capable, but also responsible, for the maintenance and repair of California society, the progressives pushed government regulation and administration on a wide-front. Hiram Johnson and the California Progressives focused primarily on breaking up railway trusts and other similar regulatory actions, but numerous other "reforms" were also initiated between 1900 and World War One.<sup>48</sup>

Mental health policy was but one area which California's legislators sought to reform around the turn of the century, but the changes were dramatic. Prior to 1897 California's five asylums ran largely independent of one another, each receiving state funds but with little government regulation. If mental disorder were to be conquered and the growing numbers of insane persons cured, argued California reformers, insanity would have to be rigorously and rationally analyzed to reveal its root causes. Hence the Commission in Lunacy was established to administer this reform. It was to be comprised of relevant experts from within the mental health community, with a conscious attempt made to balance the interests of the medical superintendents and hospital administrators. Hence, patient and family records, detailed commitment statistics illustrating gender, economic class, nativity and illness types were all brought together from the various institutions for detailed analysis by one regulatory body capable of advising state legislators on matters of mental health policy. "In April,

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Good discussions of the rise and decline of Hiram Johnson and the California Progressives are found in George Mowry. The California Progressives. (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1951); Michael Paul Rogin and John Shover. Political Change in California: Critical Elections and Social Movements, 1890-1966. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing, 1969).

1897, a uniform law for all State asylums was put into operation. Asylums became State hospitals, and the Lunacy Commission was given a confirmatory power over the actions of the State hospital management."<sup>49</sup>

After 1898, California's state hospitals were equipped with the latest scientific amenities, such as laboratory equipment and operating theatres; their superintendents were made familiar with the most modern treatment techniques and professional discourse; and the Commission in Lunacy managed state hospital administration with an eye towards revealing cost-effective measures. Moreover, such facilities were placed in the hands of university trained professionals, fluent in the discourse of their profession and dedicated to the eradication of mental disorder. The modern state hospital "receives its funds from the state government and is thereby enabled to equip itself in the most effective manner," wrote Yale University Medical School Assistant Clinical Professor of Psychiatry and Mental Hygiene George Pratt in 1935. "Furthermore, while the salaries of its staff are often lower than those of private sanatoria, the progressive scientific spirit permeating the whole atmosphere and the opportunity to use adequate equipment tend to attract to it the better medical men and women in the psychiatric field."<sup>50</sup> This belief that scientific research and experimentation, undertaken by highly trained experts must necessarily lead to human progress animated much of the professional discourse from the 1890's forward. "Let us make haste slowly," wrote L.S. Hinckley on the prospects of the ideal state hospital

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<sup>49</sup> First Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy, p.7.

<sup>50</sup> George Pratt. "Nervous and Mental Disorders," Modern Home Medical Adviser: Your Health and How to Preserve It, ed. Morris Fishbein. (New York: F.P. Collier and Son, 1935), p.847.

in 1894, "for science does not advance by the spasmodic leaps of revolution, but by the sturdy march of evolution."<sup>51</sup>

In California, great emphasis was placed on the regulatory and administrative functions of the State Commission in Lunacy. "The old system of bookkeeping was not uniform," argued the author's of the First Commission in Lunacy, which promoted inequalities in the appropriation of funds and services.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, the "Commission endeavored to have formulated a uniform system of books and accounts" to fulfill a twofold purpose: "First , the expenditures of cash in detail, and the disbursements of supplies and utilization of services bought with that cash, should be made so clear that any hospital steward could quickly, from his books, tell what the institution was costing, what departments were costing, where supplies were going, and how much stock should be on hand."<sup>53</sup> The second benefit derived from a more uniform method of bookkeeping would be "to show the movement of patients, their history, their possessions in the hospital, the register of wards, sick reports; in fact, a general history of the house, its inhabitants and their belongings, must be provided for."<sup>54</sup>

The members of California's first Commission in Lunacy demanded a more

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<sup>51</sup> L.S. Hinckley. "Difficulties Which Prevent the Realization of Doctor Mitchell's Ideal Hospital for the Insane," Journal of Nervous and Mental Deficiency. (Vol.21, 1894), p.604.

<sup>52</sup> First Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy, p.7.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p.37.

rigorous and uniform record-keeping process, which would be both fiscally frugal, revealing areas of waste and the duplication of services, and therapeutically progressive. With this balance in mind, the Commission in Lunacy standardized commitment forms, ensured that a uniform and revealing set of questions was asked of each new inmate, and demanded that detailed commitment and personal records were maintained in each institution for each inmate admitted. The commission's authors reported in 1898 that "these clinical records are now on trial at the different hospitals," where they could be utilized in the "continued study of [insanity], and investigation (physical, chemical and microscopical) of the patient, and a close inquiry into probable predisposing and existing causes."<sup>55</sup> By 1902, the commission was able to declare that "it can be said with perfect truth that the care of the insane in our hospitals is being made more of a study, that more individual attention is given to the patients, and that the standard of care is being raised all along the line."<sup>56</sup>

From 1900 onward, the treatment of insanity and feeble-mindedness became increasingly specialized, employing psychologists, social workers, laboratory scientists, and other experts in the quest for a cure. The importance of specialized medical personnel was well established in California's mental health community by the conclusion of the first decade of the Twentieth Century. In 1910, the Board of Managers of the State Commission in Lunacy reported that "the theory in the past has been that a physician and surgeon of ordinary attainments and education who was conscientious and upright, could fill the positions upon the medical staff."<sup>57</sup> This

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<sup>55</sup> Third Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy fo the Two Years Ending June 30, 1902. (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1902), p.7.

<sup>56</sup> First Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy, p.27.



had changed by 1910, however, and the Board suggested that its "recent investigations and experience have demonstrated that the objects for which the institution is maintained will be better served if physicians having specialized qualifications and fitness for the treatment of mental and nervous disorders [were] employed."<sup>58</sup> The State Hospital was envisioned as more than a mere custodial institution; it was to be an advanced research facility where various experts in the treatment of mental disability could experiment in search of the cure for insanity.

The specialized scientific management of California's mental health administration was entrenched during the first decades of the twentieth-century. In 1914, Superintendent of State Hospitals F.W. Hatch boasted that California's hospitals were "under scientific management" and had "become the center of education for physicians."<sup>59</sup> California mental health professionals sought to improve the management of state hospitals through the application of scientific solutions. Among mental health professionals, scientific research was perceived to be the conduit through which insanity would be understood and cured. Hence, in 1924 the State Department of Institutions advised that "doctors must learn new and progressive [means of] handling mental material, and where can better opportunity be found than in hospitals for the insane where are seen the most severe forms of psychopathic

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<sup>57</sup> Seventh Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy fo the Two Years Ending June 30, 1910. (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1910), pp.63-64.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ninth Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy, p.27.

disease."<sup>60</sup> Moreover, it was suggested that "observations gathered by psychiatrists on mental disease must be the way of greater enlightenment of the problem of criminals, as well as that of the insane, and the laboratory is the state hospital."<sup>61</sup> The State Hospital was to be the centre for the scientific investigation of mental disorder, and as such each was "equipped with the best and most modern appliances, with the idea in view of doing research work."<sup>62</sup> Each of California's State Hospitals had functioning surgical theatres and laboratory facilities by 1910, and each had a "consulting staff" of relevant specialists.

As the research function of the State Hospitals developed, a variety of treatments were tested on their inmates. Although the Department of Institutions ensured that "knowledge of mental processes, like that of any science, is established by research, and thoroughly tested laws,"<sup>63</sup> it did not outline the types of "tests" and "research" undertaken in such facilities. For California's mental health community the end of curing insanity justified a variety of coercive means, such as surgical interventions and the use of chemical and electrical shock. "The object is to make the patient conscious of a new life and mental viewpoint by whatever means best serves, whether it be reeducation of will and reason - or electricity."<sup>64</sup> As well, the scientifically accepted

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<sup>60</sup> Second Biennial Report of the State Department of Institutions for the Two Years Ending June 30, 1924. (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1912), p.75.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Eighth Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy for the Two Years Ending June 30, 1912. (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1912), p.71.

<sup>63</sup> Second Biennial Report of the State Department of Institutions, p.75.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

means of legitimating new methods and treatments was to substantiate the ability to provide relief from insanity through rigorous testing and replication. The testing of various new treatment agendas, from hydrotherapy and work therapy, to electroshock, lobotomy and sterilization, was carried out on the inmates of California's State Hospitals throughout the first half of the Twentieth Century. The testing was involuntary, and often inconclusive, although this did not necessarily lead to discontinuance. For example, the Commission in Lunacy reported that early applications of sterilization as a means of alleviating the conditions of insanity produced only mixed results. "We have found," the commissioners reported, "that [sterilization] does many patients much good, while in others there has been little effect on the mental condition," yet the continuation and expansion of the program was still advised.<sup>65</sup> In this fashion, the inmates of California's State Hospitals became so many guinea pigs in the experiments of the state's mental health specialists, including eugenicists.

The use of language common to all the life sciences and the appropriation of scientific technique gave eugenics a strong air of legitimacy in the public mind, despite an absence of conclusive evidence for the primacy of heredity in human development. Using the tools and trappings of orthodox science, eugenicists presented circumstantial arguments for the biological inferiority of various elements of American society and the strict transmission of characteristics from generation to generation. By America's entry into the First World War the prevailing position within the California mental health


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<sup>65</sup> Eighth Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy, p.21.

community was that heredity was the key to understanding and curing insanity. In 1916, the State Board of Charities and Corrections suggested that California's superintendents were, "without exception, capable and conscientious men" dedicated to the discovery of "better methods for bringing about the recovery of the curable and the alleviation of the sufferings of incurable patients committed to their care."<sup>66</sup> Moreover, the Board suggested that there was "no difference of opinion" among these "scientific men" as to the origins of mental disorder: all were "agreed that mental defects are due to hereditary causes as certainly as are physical characteristics, such as the length of limb or color of the hair."<sup>67</sup> From 1900 into the early 1930 's eugenicists and the hereditarians position dominated California mental health policy.

Eugenic arguments were often based, however, on the misrepresentation of data to support preconceived and otherwise indefensible positions on the biological integrity of certain elements of American society. Assessing the research skills of eugenicists and other scientific racists, Stephen Jay Gould observed that it was most commonly "prior prejudice, not copious documentation [which] dictate[d] conclusions" among hereditarians.<sup>68</sup> Gould's assertion is clearly borne out in the writings of many prominent eugenicists, where one finds combinations of groundless class-based prejudice, sexism and racism interwoven with seemingly scientific theorizing. Defending marriage restrictions designed to prevent miscegenation, Charles Davenport argued that "the biological basis for such laws is doubtless an appreciation of the fact

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<sup>66</sup> Sixth Biennial Report of the State Board of Charities and Corrections, p.61. 

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, pp.61-62.

<sup>68</sup> Gould, p.80.

that negroes and the other races carry traits that do not go well with our social organization."<sup>69</sup> Continuing, Davenport concluded that "the Ethiopian has not undergone that selection that in Europe weeded out the traits that failed to recognize property rights, or that failed to give industry, ambition and sex control."<sup>70</sup>

In this fashion, eugenicists and members of the mental health community tagged numerous groups of definable "others" as the root sources for a wide spectrum of social ills and supposed deficiencies. For example, California's Third Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy noted that "nowhere else in the United States [was] the abuse of opium, morphine, cocaine, etc., so prevalent as on the Pacific coast - and particularly in California."<sup>71</sup> In the same breath California's Commissioners deferred responsibility for the outburst of drug abuse away from native- born Californians by arguing that it was the foreign "Orientals [who] have planted the pernicious habit in our soil."<sup>72</sup> Moreover, while simultaneously championing the expansion of America's imperial possessions in the late Nineteenth Century, the authors of the commission reported unhappily that this would "increase rather than diminish" the number of foreign-born inmates in state asylums through additions from "the Sandwich Islands, Guam, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico."<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Charles Davenport. "Marriage Laws and Customs," Problems in Eugenics: Papers Communicated to the First International Eugenics Conference, July 24-30, 1912. (London: Eugenics Education Society, 1912), p.155.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Third Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy, p.75.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, pp.74-75.

In 1918 the authors of the Eleventh Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy reported that plans had been drafted "to permit the Mexican peon to enter the United States in order to relieve the shortage of common labour."<sup>74</sup> Charles Waymire of the Deportation Bureau (formerly Deportation Agency) noted that California was sure to receive a large number of Mexican laborers, and should, therefore, prepare its public institutions to "care for those who fall by the way."<sup>75</sup> Waymire warned that "the Mexican does not make a good eleemosynary charge. He will not work and is sullen and surly."<sup>76</sup> Unlike native-born, middle-class Californians of Anglo-Saxon stock, argued the commissioners, the Chinese, Philipino, Mexican, Southern and Eastern European immigrants did not have the innate benefit of a biologically transmitted tendency towards hard work, frugality and sobriety.

Sidney Webb, writing for America's Popular Science magazine, clearly enunciated the latent sexism of the eugenics and euthenics movements in his 1906 article "Physical Degeneracy or Race Suicide?". Webb suggested that euthenics, or "positive eugenic," incentives aimed at spurring the procreation of the "fit" were as important to the maintenance of America's racially integrity, as were negative eugenic measures designed to curtail the expansion of the "unfit" population. The key to any euthenic initiative was to encourage the best parents, that is those from the middle classes, who

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<sup>74</sup> Charles Waymire. "Report of the Deportation Agency," Eleventh Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy for the Two Years Ending June 30, 1918. (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1918), p.37.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

were of native-born Anglo-Saxon stock, to commit to the rearing of large families, thereby offsetting any expansion in the "unfit" population. The central figure in the eugenics ideology was the patriotic Anglo-Saxon woman, who dutifully remained at home and submitted to becoming the "mother of the race."<sup>77</sup> Indeed, among eugenicists the highest function a woman could serve in her society was the perpetuation of her race through the raising of a large and healthy family. "To the vast majority of women,.. especially to those of the fine type," suggested Webb, "the rearing of children would be the most attractive occupation, if it offered economic advantages equal to those, say, of school teaching or service in the post office."<sup>78</sup> In tandem with the belief that women were the mothers of their race, Webb believed, as did most American eugenicists, that the emancipation of women from the home would result in a drop in the native-born birth-rate and possible race suicide. In their quest to keep American women in the home reproducing the race, eugenicists found numerous prominent supporters. Theodore Roosevelt, in an article entitled "Eugenics from the Positive not the Negative Side," argued that "a race is contemptible if its men cease to be willing and able to work hard, and, if necessary, fight hard, and if its women cease to breed freely."<sup>79</sup>

Eugenics had numerous and widely varied supporters in the United States, but perhaps the most persistent advocate of birth control and the limitation of procreation

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<sup>77</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of the symbolic meaning of the historical figure "the mother of the race" see Valverde, pp.3-26.

<sup>78</sup> Sidney Webb. "Physical Degeneracy or Race Suicide," Popular Science Monthly. (Vol.69, December 1906), p.529.

<sup>79</sup> Theodore Roosevelt. "Eugenics from the Positive, not the Negative Side," quoted in Haller, p.79.

was Margaret Sanger. Eugenic research, argued Sanger, "demonstrates, not in terms of glittering generalization but in statistical studies of investigations reduced to measurement and number, that uncontrolled fertility is universally correlated with disease, poverty, overcrowding and the transmission of hereditary taints."<sup>80</sup> Sanger suggested that America's rapid urban- industrial growth had produced an overcrowded tenement landscape, blighted with poverty and hereditary defect. This, in turn, created what Sanger labelled "cradle competition" between the nation's "fit" and "unfit" mothers. "The most responsible and most intelligent members of society are the less fertile; ...the feeble- minded are the more fertile," argued Sanger. "Herein lies the unbalance, the great biological menace to the future of civilization."<sup>81</sup> America's euthenists, argued Sanger, needed to increase the birth-rate among the "fit" population "by education, by persuasion, by appeals to racial ethics and religious motives," lest the nation collapse into "extreme poverty, recklessness, deficiency and delinquency."<sup>82</sup> The United States was a democracy which granted rights to all of its citizens; if that democracy was to maintain its integrity America's "fit" parents needed to procreate more vigorously before the balance of political power was "bestowed upon the lowest elements of [its] population."<sup>83</sup>

While eugenics focused on the important role to be played by America's "fit"

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<sup>80</sup> Margaret Sanger. Pivot of Civilization. (New York: Brentano's Publishing, 1922), p.174.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, pp.175-176.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p.179.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p.178.



mothers, the eugenicists image of the unchaste, "unfit" and promiscuous woman was equally common. In 1914 the California State Board of Charities and Corrections reported that "the number of sub- normal women who belong to the criminal classes, particularly those who are engaged in prostitution, amounts to 50 per cent."<sup>84</sup> Moreover, because the feeble-minded had no sexual control or sense of morality, it was argued, "the stigma of social disgrace to womanhood is removed," facilitating an easy slide into prostitution and other criminal activities.<sup>85</sup> Cases abound which clearly provide the eugenicists' vision of the "unfit" woman. A thirty- six year old Mexican single mother was characterized as having "led an immoral life for several years past although [she had] three small children," while a twenty- three year old Rumanian- born divorcee was castigated by her examiner for being "lazy, slovenly, careless of personal appearance" and for staying "away from home for days, neglecting self and consorting with men."<sup>86</sup> Psychiatric and eugenic analysts tended to focus most heavily on an assessment of the woman's moral character, particularly her sexual history, which provided little insight into her mental health condition. Unlike men, a woman's mental health status was more regularly linked to her sexual character. "It is clear," argued Richard Fox, "that many more women than men were committed on the sole grounds of sexual promiscuity."<sup>87</sup> When the appropriate

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<sup>84</sup> Sixth Biennial Report of the state Board of Charities and Corrections, p.33.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Transcripts of San Francisco Commitment Assessments quoted in Fox, pp.145-146.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, p.146.

women were sexually active in monogamous relationships, they were deified as "mothers of the race"; when inappropriate women were sexually active and had children they were labelled cacogenic and measures were taken to restrict their reproduction.<sup>88</sup>

Mentally disabled and insane women were characterized by the mental health community as immoral and promiscuous. With regards to the sexual control exhibited among the mentally disabled, the members of the State Board of Charities and Corrections suggested that "it seems characteristic of the mind to grow weaker and passions to grow stronger and thus they become a prey to all of the unmentionable evils of lust that can be enumerated."<sup>89</sup> An absence of sexual control was accepted as a natural characteristic of mental instability, particularly among women. Fearing such deviant behaviour, the author's of the 1914 report of the Commission in Lunacy suggested that the sterilization of women in California institutions would "have a tendency to increase prostitution" through the large-scale release of feeble-minded women into the community.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, the State Board of Charities and Correction reported that a large number of California's unwed, and therefore unfit, mothers were feeble-minded. "Of the group of unwed mothers" surveyed by the board between 1916 and 1918, "41.6 per cent were [classified] feeble-minded."<sup>91</sup> The feeble-

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<sup>88</sup> For a full assessment of the objectification of women as "mothers of the race" or cacogenic, see: Valverde. "When the Mother of the Race is Free," pp.5-12. Also for a first hand account of the supposed "cradle competition" between "fit" and "unfit" mothers, see: Sanger, pp.172-185.

<sup>89</sup> Sixth Biennial Report of the state Board of Charities and Corrections, p.36.

<sup>90</sup> Ninth Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy, p.95.

<sup>91</sup> Eighth Biennial Report of the State Board of Charities and Corrections of the State

minded woman lacked self-control and sexual control, and therefore, through her potential progeny, represented a serious threat to the genetic vitality of California society.

Eugenicists also argued that hereditary disorder was most prevalent among the men and women of the working and underclasses, largely because it "was reassuring for the well-to-do to think that their place in society rested on biological laws, not on social advantage."<sup>92</sup> In California, eugenicists and the members of the mental health community argued that the ranks of the feeble-minded were comprised of "vagrant tramps, the repeaters in the houses of corrections, the petit thieves, the alcoholics, and many murderers."<sup>93</sup> The feeble-minded, argued the State Board of Charities and Corrections, were not "able to compete with their normal fellows [and became] objects of charity, or adopt[ed] criminal careers."<sup>94</sup> Numerous mental health officials accepted simple biology as an explanation for the increasing numbers of persons being incarcerated in California's jails and state hospitals in the early twentieth-century. Natural selection and strict heredity provided convenient explanations for pressing social problems, such as urban overcrowding, crime, substance abuse, and unemployment. The poor and homeless were in such conditions because they were biologically "unfit" to compete against the "fitter" members of California society; "they

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of California From June 1, 1916 to June 30, 1918. (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1918), p.52

<sup>92</sup> Vecoli, p.202.

<sup>93</sup> Sixth Biennial Report of the State Board of Charities and Correction, p.33.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

are generally unemployed because unemployable."<sup>95</sup> University of California zoologist Samuel Holmes, a eugenic advocate of national prominence, suggested that it was "this kind of heredity" that was "responsible for much of our pauperism, vagrancy and crime."<sup>96</sup>

In the first decades of the twentieth-century, the legitimacy of such arguments went largely unchallenged and received wide currency. California's first state Commission in Lunacy concurred with the assertion that the lower classes showed a markedly greater tendency towards insanity than did those of the middle and upper classes. In 1898 the commissioners reported that "the largest percentage of patients" were from "the labouring or working classes,"<sup>97</sup> which strict hereditarians interpreted as clear evidence of the genetic inferiority of those classes. The 1918 report of the state Board of Charities and Correction bluntly stated that "the relation between occupational status correlates the lower occupational with the lower mental status."<sup>98</sup> Moreover, the board reported that those of so-called "lower mental status" were clearly perpetuating their deficient stock. "In most cases," the board declared, feeble-minded "children have come from poor homes."<sup>99</sup>

From 1896 through 1920, members of the various boards and commissions reporting on the state's mental health and corrections policies pointed in dismay to the

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Samuel Holmes. "Eugenics Vital to the Human Race," Current History. (Vol.25, No.2, November 1926), p.350.

<sup>97</sup> First Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy, p.32.

<sup>98</sup> Eighth Biennial Report of the State Board of Charities and Correction, p.51.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, p.53.

perceived over-representation of the working and under-classes in California's custodial institutions.<sup>100</sup> During the hereditarian ascendance in the early Twentieth Century, the preponderance of poor and working-class persons was easily explained by eugenicists: poor people were of poor genetic stock, and therefore more likely to succumb to mental disorder. Yet, upon closer examination, one notes that working class families were more likely over-represented in asylum populations because economically marginal households could not support unproductive members requiring regular, specialized and expensive care. Walter Fernald's 1917 state-by-state survey of the provisions for the care of the mentally disabled, reported that the so-called "lower classes of idiots... [could not] be given suitable care at home." Moreover, Fernald concluded that there was "no greater burden possible in a home or neighbourhood," and that "the home care of a low-grade idiot consume[d] so much of the working capacity of the household that often the entire family [became] marginalized."<sup>101</sup> This was further exacerbated in California, where numerous working class and working poor families depended upon seasonal work in citrus and fruit orchards. Such work was characterized by prolonged periods of unemployment, poor wages and the necessity of mobility among the workers. Under such trying conditions family and personal instability cannot be considered unusual.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> For a breakdown of California commitments by socio-economic class see Chart Number Two, p.106.

<sup>101</sup> Walter Fernald. "The Growth of Provision for the Feeble-Minded in the United States," Mental Hygiene. (No.1, January 1917), p.41.

<sup>102</sup> For a concise assessment of the California economy and its growth in the early Twentieth Century, see: Mowry, pp.4-11.

In addition to the class, gender and racial biases implicit in most eugenic thought, eugenicists and mental health officials also complained of supposedly high proportions of recent immigrants in the nation's asylums and mental hospitals during the boom years of American immigration. In an attempt to empirically gauge the relative totals of America's "socially inadequate," Harry Laughlin, on behalf of the Eugenics Records Office, conducted a survey in 1922 regarding the nativity of institutional inmates. Laughlin found that, "as a whole, the foreign born population of the United States is contributing to our institutions one and one-third its quota, while our native stock is contributing only nine-tenths its percentage allowance."<sup>103</sup> Based on these conclusions, Laughlin argued that "in order to prevent further deterioration of the American racial values, through undesirable immigration, it is necessary to sort out our immigrants on the basis, not only of personal examination, but also on the basis of family stock."<sup>104</sup>

Laughlin and other eugenicists argued that the Stanford-Binet and other recognized tests of relative intelligence were clear and unbiased appraisals of mental competence, and should form the basis of any immigration restriction program. Ignoring, or perhaps failing to recognize, the socio-cultural biases implicit in intelligence testing, eugenicists argued that through such testing unsuitable immigrants could be culled, thereby preventing the unnecessary propagation of the "unfit" in America. In 1923

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<sup>103</sup> Harry Laughlin. "Nativity of Institutional Inmates," Eugenics in Race and State: Scientific Papers of the Second International Conference of Eugenics, September 22-28, 1922, Volume Two, eds. Charles Davenport, et al. (Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins Company, 1923), p.406.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

Henry Osborn suggested that intelligence testing revealed, beyond doubt, "the lack of intelligence in our country, and the degrees of intelligence in different races who are coming to us, in a way which no one can say is the result of prejudice."<sup>105</sup> Indeed, intelligence testing served as a convenient means of diverting criticism away from the race, class and gender based biases implicit in the eugenics movement, while simultaneously providing seemingly empirical data supporting the eugenic case for hereditary deficiency.

Based on statistical projections of the potential numbers of the "unfit" in America, intelligence testing, and his analysis of recent immigrant's family histories, Laughlin demanded that America's "laws should be modified in order to permit the deportation of aliens who become public charges" and to restrict the immigration of the racially and genetically unfit into the United States.<sup>106</sup> In this regard, Laughlin was himself mirroring a popular dissatisfaction with American immigration policy, which was perhaps most acutely felt among the nation's asylum superintendents. In California, the First Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy reported that "in several cases parties have been sent to this state from the east who were confined in insane asylums in Europe before their arrival in this country, and who, if the United States immigration laws had been carefully enforced by the eastern authorities at the ports, would never have been permitted to land at all."<sup>107</sup>

Stereotyping based on class, gender, ethnicity and race was implicit in eugenic

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<sup>105</sup> Henry Osborne quoted in Gould, p.231.

<sup>106</sup> Laughlin, p.406.

<sup>107</sup> First Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy, p.32.

thought and the mental health assessment process in California and across the United States. The preconception that "types" perpetuated themselves guided most eugenic research undertaken within the mental health establishment. Interpretations and theories of heredity were used to vindicate prior prejudices and further entrenched a number of false assumptions about various social groups. The mercurial rise of academic biology, eugenics, genetics and zoology in California universities provided a steady stream of hereditarian policy advice to California legislators. Touched with the same positivist perspective as Darwin and Galton, and guided by the findings of university researchers, several state hospital superintendents sought to utilize the increasingly sophisticated expertise and equipment found within California institutions to aggressively field test particular eugenic solutions. In the interests of experimental science and public economy California turned to eugenic solutions to the growing problem posed by the growth in the numbers of the insane and feeble-minded.



### Chapter Three: The Implementation and Operation of California's Eugenic Agenda.

"It is not a question of the establishment of an inquisitorial body which will send its spies out through the population to catch those who do not conform to some standard laid down by the ruling powers, and to drag them protestingly under the knife. The great majority of the sterilizations performed [in California] are not only done with full consent, but with the earnest desire, of those most deeply affected."

- Paul Popenoe and Roswell Johnson. Applied Eugenics (1933).

A tendency in California public policy to discriminate against non-Californians coalesced with hereditarian fears for the genetic integrity of the state in California during the early Twentieth Century. The product of this synthesis was an official, legislated sanction to the creation of a restrictionist and interventionist agenda for dealing with those persons deemed dangerous or deficient, and "outside" of so-called normal society. State legislators, seeking to lower the state's custodial "burden", were active supporters of measures designed to remove, or asexualize and release inmates in state hospitals. Strongly influenced by budgetary considerations and a quest for economy, the State Commission in Lunacy and the California Legislature acquiesced to coercive measures that would remove thousands from state custodial institutions. Legislators provided the legal sanction to carry out sterilization and deportation programs,<sup>1</sup> but did not provide the legislation with safeguards against overusage

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<sup>1</sup> California's sterilization and deportation statutes were implemented, strengthened and augmented by a series of state governments from 1909 through 1917. Prominent among these state governments was Hiram Johnson's Progressive administration, which implemented the state's parole and deportation initiatives. Ironically, among the key factors in the collapse of California Progressivism was the split between Johnson and the state's anti-war

and abuse. These programs were virtually self-policing, with superintendents solely monitored by the Commission in Lunacy and other similar bodies, all of which were comprised of mental health professionals. Hence, if a superintendent was impressed by the necessity to sterilize or deport there were no *de jure* limits on his ability to do so. Indeed, the only limitation on the numbers of persons sterilized and deported was the superintendent's opinion on the efficacy of such measures.

Nowhere in North America was the attempt to translate eugenic thought into eugenic action more vigorous than in California. More specifically, the Norwalk, Patton and Stockton State hospitals, combined with the Sonoma Home for Feeble-Minded Children to account for almost one-half of the sterilizations performed in the United States between 1909 and 1929. This chapter will discuss the operation of California's various sterilization regimens and the state Deportation Agency, which removed more than 5,500 non-Californians to their home state or country between 1915 and 1932. The great discrepancies between institutional sterilization totals illustrate clearly the great latitude enjoyed by state medical superintendents in the creation of their respective treatment regimens. Indeed, the persistence of sterilization

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movement led by David Starr Jordan. For a complete analysis of the rise, collapse and policies of the California Progressives, see: Mowry. The California Progressives. In particular, pp.270-273 discuss the break with Jordan and the state peace movement at the outbreak of World War One. Also for an analysis of state voting patterns and election results, see: Michael Paul Rogin and John Shover. Political Change in California: Critical Elections and Social Movements, 1890-1966. (London: Greenwood, 1969). Chapter Two and Chapter Three ("Progressivism and the California Electorate" and "The Progressives and the Working Class Vote") are particularly informative regarding the makeup of California's Progressive constituency.

in California must largely be attributed to a mere handful of state hospitals, while several others never undertook programs of mass sterilization. Thus, while facilities such as the Mendocino and Agnews state hospitals were performing few sterilizations, even during the very height of hereditarian ideology, institutions such as the Stockton state hospital and the Sonoma Home for Feeble-Minded Children rapidly accepted the procedure and maintained active sterilization programs into the 1940's.

By the turn of the Twentieth Century, California had a well-established tradition of legislated intolerance for outsiders, whether from other countries or other parts of the United States. This was true on a state-wide basis, and for many individual counties and cities as well. Take for example, Humboldt County, where on March 9, 1882 the citizens of Eureka urged measures to curb "the hordes of Mongolian paupers, criminals and prostitutes flooding [their] shores."<sup>2</sup> Eureka's citizens further proclaimed that their "civilization was almost subverted and [their] children driven from all avenues of honorable labor by aliens, foreign to [their] tongue, religion, customs, laws, and social relations."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, following the murder of City Councilman Dave Kendall "at the hands of a Mongolian highbinder" on February 7, 1885, Eureka enacted an ad hoc "expulsion of the Chinese from the city limits, and so far as [the citizens] were aware no Chinaman has lived within them for twenty-four hours since that date."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Weekly Humbolt Times. (March 11, 1882), quoted in Lynwood Carranco. "The Chinese in Humboldt County, California: A Study in Prejudice," Journal of the West. (Volume 12, Number 1, January 1973), p.159.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Eureka Weekly Times-Telephone. (January 16, 1886), quoted in Lynwood Carranco. "The Chinese in Humboldt County, California: A Study in Prejudice,"

Thereafter, "it was the duty of a committee of fifteen citizens to see that none of the Mongols be allowed to return, and that from the 7th day of February, 1885, no new ones coming over should be allowed to locate within the limits of Eureka."<sup>5</sup> By 1886, all of Humboldt county had succumbed to prejudice, with any dissenters tarred as "traitors to the white race."<sup>6</sup> As late as 1941 Section 190 of the Charter and Revised Ordinances of the City of Eureka, published by order of the mayor and council, read, "No Chinese shall ever be employed, either directly or indirectly, on any work of the city, except in punishment for a crime. Nor shall any provisions, supplies, materials, or articles of Chinese manufacture or production ever be used or purchased by or furnished to the city."<sup>7</sup>

As early as 1875 the state of California enacted legislation refusing entry to criminals and prostitutes whose sentences had been commuted elsewhere on the condition that they depart. In 1882 this law was expanded to include the foreign-born insane, disabled and all others likely to become public charges. Also in 1882, Dennis Kearney and the California Workingmen's Party brought forward legislation proposing a twenty year suspension of Chinese immigration into California. Kearney's restrictionist law was vetoed, however, as President Chester A. Arthur declared that it

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p.160.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Charter and Revised Ordinances of the City of Eureka, quoted in Lynwood Carranco. "The Chinese in Humboldt County, California: A Study in Prejudice," p.161.

violated the 1868 Burlingame Treaty, which granted China most-favoured-nation status in its dealings with the United States.<sup>8</sup> In 1920 California instituted a special \$10.00 poll tax and registration program for adult male aliens, only to have these measures declared unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court.<sup>9</sup> As well, beyond official public policy, restrictionist ideas and nativist sentiments also found expression through a variety of extra-governmental organizations.<sup>10</sup>

Much of the anxiety felt by native-born Californians resulted from the sense that the state was being overwhelmed by dangerous, deficient and generally different outsiders. From the late Nineteenth Century onward into the Twentieth Century, California was perceived by many to be a land of potential where they would find better lives. California did hold vast potential, largely based on the immense diversity within its economy and its favorable climate. Beyond agriculture, the state's largest industry by 1900, California boasted a host of extractive industries, such as mining,

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<sup>8</sup> For a brief outline of California's nativist and xenophobic impulses in their national context, see George Brown Tindall. America: A Narrative History, Volume Two. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984), pp. 800, 828-829; Higham. Strangers in the Land, pp.73-75. An excellent work on the enforcement of anti-Chinese immigration laws in California is Lucy Salyer. "Captives of Law: Judicial Enforcement of the Chinese Exclusion Laws," Journal of American History. (Volume 76, Number 1, June 1989), pp.91-117.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p.260.

<sup>10</sup> For an overview of the growth of organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan, American Protection Association (APA), and Immigration Restriction league in California see: Mary Coolidge. Chinese Immigration. (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1909); Alan Kraut. "Chapter Five: Nativism and the End of Unlimited Entry," The Huddled Masses: The Immigrant in American Society, 1880-1921. (Arlington Heights, Ill.: Harlen Davidson, 1982), pp.148-178; Kenneth Jackson. The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

lumbering and the drilling of oil, while the growing cities of San Francisco and Los Angeles offered varied opportunities. This potential drew new immigrants into California at a dizzying pace. For example, the eleven counties south of the Tehachapi Mountains<sup>11</sup> grew from 350,000 residents in 1900 to an astounding 1.4 million by 1920.<sup>12</sup> The city of Los Angeles, alone, tripled its population from 102,479 in 1900 to 319,198 in 1910.<sup>13</sup> This flood of newcomers overwhelmed the natural increase of native-born Californians so completely that "in 1910 native-born Californians were still as much of a minority in the population as they had been when the state was first organized."<sup>14</sup> The fear of ethnic and racial dilution of California's native stock prompted California legislators in 1875 to pass legislation voiding "marriage of white persons with Negroes, Mongolians or Mullattoes."<sup>15</sup> In acknowledged instances of miscegenation, "the county clerk [was] forbidden to issue a license for marriage between such persons."<sup>16</sup> Thus, as the state's population exploded in the early Twentieth Century, many native-born Californians grew increasingly agitated and

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<sup>11</sup> The Tehachapi Mountains are located roughly halfway between Bakersfield and Los Angeles. In essence this growth indicates the mercurial rise of Los Angeles and its surrounding counties in the early Twentieth Century.

<sup>12</sup> Mowry, p.7.

<sup>13</sup> Margaret Romer. "The Story of Los Angeles: The Twentieth Century Dawns," Journal of the West. (Volume 3, Number 1, January 1964), p.1.

<sup>14</sup> Mowry, p.11.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Davenport. "State Laws Limiting Marriage Selection Examined in the Light of Eugenics," Eugenics Records Office, Bulletin No. 9, (Cold Spring Harbour, N.Y.: Eugenics Records Office, 1913), p44.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

militant in their attitudes towards outsiders, particularly poor migrant workers and those not of Anglo-Saxon stock. "Mr. White American," warned an anonymous handbill posted in San Francisco in 1914, "If you have any race pride or patriotism, you will organize for the protection of your race."<sup>17</sup>

California mental health officials argued that the stress and trauma of relocation often caused recent immigrants, many of whom were believed to carry hereditary predispositions towards insanity, to become mentally ill. The authors of the Second Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy reported that, while both the native and foreign-born suffered from bad heredity, for those of foreign-birth "this original defect or weakness is made more active, is assisted in outward expression, by conditions which affect newcomers in a country to a greater degree than those who have well-settled homes here with family ties and who are surrounded by friends."<sup>18</sup>

Popular attitudes toward outsiders were hardened by the assertions of eugenicists, journalists and mental health officials, who argued that the greatest burden on California's state-funded mental health facilities was the rising number of foreign-born insane. A San Francisco newspaper editorial charged in 1903 that California had become "the land of lunatics," largely due to the influence of "immigrants from the old world."<sup>19</sup> From the first Commission in Lunacy in 1898, state hospital superintendents joined this chorus and decried the burden of the foreign-born insane.

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<sup>17</sup> "Anonymous Pamphlet," quoted in Higham. Strangers in the Land, p.186.

<sup>18</sup> The Second Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy, p.34.

<sup>19</sup> "Insanity in California," San Francisco Call. (Nov.27, 1903), p.6.

Responding in 1902 to the question, "Is there more insanity in California than in other states?", the Commission in Lunacy reported that "a large proportion of the people committed [there were] temporarily sojourning in [that] state on account of their health, or [were] from the high seas, which cannot be legitimately credited to California, and another large proportion float[ed] in from the arid states and territories."<sup>20</sup> Just two years previous, in 1900, the Commission had warned that the state's asylums were becoming little more than the "receptacles for all forms of human wreckage,"<sup>21</sup> and demanded measures be undertaken to quell the influx of the foreign-born "unfit".

In 1918, the State Board of Charities and Corrections administered Stanford-Binet intelligence tests to controlled groups of adult delinquents, children in orphanages and children in schools. Thereafter, the Board announced that with "language difficulties being circumvented" their study discovered that "of the total group of feeble-minded children 75.7 per cent had foreign born parents."<sup>22</sup> In this regard, California superintendents were greatly assisted in the identification and classification of the feeble-minded by their close proximity to the University of California and to Stanford, both of which were on the cutting edge of intelligence testing and research.<sup>23</sup> The ties

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<sup>20</sup> Third Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy, p.74.

<sup>21</sup> Second Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy, p.60.

<sup>22</sup> Eighth Biennial Report of the State Board of Charities and Corrections of the State of California From July 1, 1916, to June 30, 1918. (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1918), p.51.

<sup>23</sup> References to the work of Lewis Terman at Stanford and William Palmer Lucas at the University of California abound from 1912-1914 onwards. For example, in 1916 the "Report of the General Superintendent" of the Ninth Report of the State Commission in Lunacy detailed the assessment of the population of the Sonoma State Home by "Dr. William palmer Lucas... and Professor Terman of the



to Stanford and the University of California were strong and reciprocal. California's general superintendent F.W. Hatch boasted in 1924 that "three or four classes from the universities visit [the institution] each year in order to obtain the benefits of our clinics which are held for them and also to view our operations for sterilization."<sup>24</sup> Hatch proudly proclaimed that thereafter "all these young men and women [had] gone away as missionaries for the operation."<sup>25</sup>

California's state institutions became control groups in the relative study of intelligence during the first decades of the Twentieth Century. Beginning with a study of 341 delinquent boys in St. Charles Illinois, George Ordahl rapidly compiled an impressive collection of data on the heritability of delinquency and feeble-mindedness.<sup>26</sup> In conjunction with Ordahl, J.H. Williams of the Whittier State School for Boys in California undertook intelligence testing of its resident population.

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Stanford University" (p.15). In 1916 the Tenth State Commission in Lunacy proclaimed that "Binet tests [were] being made on every new patient admitted as well as on those already [there] who [had] not already been tested" (p.108), while in 1918 the Ninth Report of the State Board of Charities and Corrections cited findings from Terman's study of unselected school children (p.52). For accounts of Terman's prestige and influence within hereditarian circles see Henry Minton and Chris O'Neil. "Kimball Young's Social Psychology: A Precursor of Social Constructionism," Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin. (Volume 14, Number 3, September 1988), pp. 554-564; Gould, pp.174-192.

<sup>24</sup> Second Annual Report of the Department of Institutions of the State of California, Two Years Ending June 30, 1924. (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1924), p.103.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> For complete discussion of George Ordahl's work in St. Charles, at the Whittier State School, and the Sonoma Home for Feeble-Minded Children up to 1921, see: Holmes. The Trend of the Race, pp.90-92.

When Ordahl and Williams proclaimed 32 percent of the Whittier boys feeble-minded, a grave problem appeared to have been uncovered.<sup>27</sup> In 1918 Ordahl became the consulting psychologist at the Sonoma Home for Feeble-Minded Children, where he remained until 1932. Like Ordahl, Terman, and a host of other university and mental health intelligence testers, Dr. C.H. Parker of the Stanford University Department of Education presented findings which suggested that a massive number of the state's criminals, vagrants and paupers were feeble-minded. According to Parker, "the Department of Education at Stanford University tested two hundred unemployed of the migratory labor class, and almost an even 25 per cent were found to be feeble-minded."<sup>28</sup> Parker felt confident in his results because "Binet tests made in 1913 by the Economics Department of Reed College, Portland, covering 107 cases taken from the unemployed army showed the percentage of feeble-mindedness to be 26."<sup>29</sup> Intelligence testing showed such researchers time and again that recent immigrants, poor and working persons, and criminals were so because of an inherited lack of intelligence, and not any environmental deprivation.

State superintendents saw the over-representation of the foreign-born insane as both a burden to the tax-payer and a hindrance to the recovery of the state's own insane population. The authors of the First Report of the State Commission in Lunacy argued

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<sup>27</sup> J.H. Williams. "Intelligence and Delinquency: A Study of 215 Cases," Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology. (Volume 6, 1916), p.699.

<sup>28</sup> C.H. Parker. "The California Casual and His Revolt," Quarterly Journal of Economics. (Volume 30, Fall 1915), p.110.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p.112.

that "to improve the health of the patients, as well as to relieve the tax- payers of this state from the burden of caring for so many aliens, the majority of whom are not tax- payers and have paid nothing toward the support of the state government, the Commission has been actively engaged in trying to arrange their return to the countries whence they came."<sup>30</sup> After weighing the relative costs of deporting or maintaining the foreign-born insane, the Commission in Lunacy announced that the "expense of caring for [the alien insane] for one year will be more than enough to return those whose homes are the most distant."<sup>31</sup>

The response to these recommendations came in September of 1915 when the State Commission in Lunacy, acting on its authority to "arbitrarily decide" on measures deemed to be "advisable for the best interests of the state," created the Office of the Deportation Agent.<sup>32</sup> Although ad hoc deportations had occurred previously,<sup>33</sup> the establishment of the State Deportation Agency under the direction of Charles F. Waymire institutionalized the procedure. As a matter of purpose the State Deportation Agency sought to "get the facts regarding the time of residence.., and when a patient was found who had not gained a residence in California, to obtain the consent of the

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<sup>30</sup> First Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy, p.30.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p.31.

<sup>32</sup> Second Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy for the Two Years Ending June 30, 1900. (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1901), p.5.

<sup>33</sup> For example, in 1914 the Ninth Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy recounted the deportation of 125 Chinese inmates, which, in lieu of funds specifically for such a project, was paid for with "hospital support funds" (p.11).

state in which he lived and to take charge of his return."<sup>34</sup> In the first year of this program, it was reported that 153 inmates had been returned to their home states and countries at an average cost of just under \$94.00 each.<sup>35</sup> The benefits of such a policy were clear to both mental health officials and legislators, both of whom were eager to expand the deportation program following its rather limited early success.

The intensification of the deportation program saw 5,559 non-Californians deported to their country or state of origin between 1915 - 1932. Although numerous persons were deported to homelands in Asia and Europe, the vast majority were returned to points of origin within the United States.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, after 1924 Waymire reported that there was a "lesser number of aliens committed to [their] institutions, which he suggested was, in large part "due to the so-called 'Quota Law'."<sup>37</sup> As conditions toughened in California through the 1930's it was the deportation of fellow

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<sup>34</sup> Tenth Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy for the Two Years Ending June 30, 1916. (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1916), p.12.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> **Deportations From California: September 1915 - June 1932.**

Nonresidents Returned to their Home State:	4,168
Aliens Deported by Federal Authorities:	993
Chinese Returned to China:	251
Japanese Returned to Japan:	71
Philipinos Returned to the Philipines:	76
Total Persons Deported:	5,559.

**Source:** Sixth Biennial Report of the Department of Institutions of the State of California for the Two Years Ending June 30, 1932, (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1933), p.10.

<sup>37</sup> Sixth Biennial Report of the Department of Institutions of the State of California, Two Years Ending June 30, 1932. (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1932), p.9.

Americans from out of state which occupied the majority of the Deportation Agent's energy.

People fleeing the dustbowl of the Midwest and industrial stagnation of the East increasingly looked to California and the West Coast for a chance to start anew. This influx of desperate, hungry people into the state glutted the market for unskilled agricultural labour, and reduced the average family of itinerant farm workers to subsisting on \$289.00 per year, less than half the amount state authorities assessed to be minimum subsistence earnings.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, such labourers were usually unemployed and homeless throughout the winter. By the end of the 1930's, more than "a million migrants, penniless nomads in endless caravans of overburdened jalopies bursting with half-clad tow-headed children, had overrun small towns in Oregon and Washington and pressed into the valleys of California."<sup>39</sup> The migrants were touched with a desperation born of untold hardships, while native-Californians, acutely aware of the enormity of the migration, sought to disrupt and halt it where-ever possible. The intensity of this struggle was perhaps best captured by John Steinbeck in his 1939 classic, The Grapes of Wrath. "California's a big state," wrote Steinbeck.

"It ain't that big. The whole United States ain't that big. It ain't that big. It ain't big enough. There ain't room enough for you an' me, for your kind an' my kind, for rich and poor together all in one country, for thieves and honest men. For hunger and fat. Whyn't you go back where you come from?"<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Ralph Roske. Everyman's Eden: A History of California. (New York: Macmillan Company, 1968), p.504

<sup>39</sup> William Leuchtenburg. Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940. (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), pp.138-139. See also, Richard Neuberger. "Refugees From the Dustbowl," Current History. (Volume 50, Number 4, April 1939), pp.32-35.

<sup>40</sup> John Steinbeck. The Grapes of Wrath (1939). (New York: Viking Press,

Amid this atmosphere of squalor, poverty and prejudice, those committed to state correctional and mental health facilities, or who ran afoul of local officials were rapidly dispatched to their state of origin. Persons could be legally deported from California even if they had maintained a permanent residence in the state for five years, which allowed the Deportation Agency to remove 813 persons in the 1930-1932 biennial period alone.<sup>41</sup> Poverty and desperation, thus, became justification for the forced removal of several thousand non-Californian Americans throughout the 1930's.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, by 1940 local officials looking for permission to deport had a battery of legal statutes and government institutions to draw upon and utilize, such as the "anti-Okie law" (Number 2615 of the Welfare and Institutions Code), the Mann Act of 1910 (which prohibited the interstate traffic in women for immoral purposes), and the deportation agency.<sup>43</sup> It was reported that during the winter of 1931-32, Governor Roskie of California, feeling the necessity to do something regarding the mass of migrants into California, began a program of state sponsored labour camps for the

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1963), p.163.

<sup>41</sup> "Table No.2: Time in California of Deportees During the Biennium," Sixth Biennial Report of the State Department of Institutions, p.10.

<sup>42</sup> For the cumulative total of deportations to other American states during the 1930's, see, "Table No.4: Showing Deportations from September 1915, to June 30, 1940," Tenth Biennial Report of the State Department of Institutions of the State of California, Two Years Ending June 30, 1940. (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1940), p.9.

<sup>43</sup> For an account of the "anti-Okie" law see: Roske, p.504. The operation of the Mann Act (1910), 1936-1938 was documented in "Traffic in Women and Children," League of Nations Advisory Committee on Social Questions: Summary of Annual Reports for 1936/37, Prepared by the Secretariat. (Geneva: C 70. M.26. IV, January 21, 1938), p.23.

"tramps from the east."<sup>44</sup> Soon thirty such camps were in operation, with the local police empowered to apprehend vagrant men and deliver them to appropriate camps. "I was picked up by the police in Groveland, [California] and asked if I wanted to go to a camp," recounted 56 year old labourer Frank Inglis in 1932. "At the camp we found that we was getting hardly enough to eat and our bunks were lousy."<sup>45</sup> By the summer of 1932 the camps were exposed as "forced labor camps," which "could not be whitewashed, and [they] were subsequently abandoned."<sup>46</sup> In the later 1930's transient labour camps were established under the auspices of the New Deal, but there was consistently more demand for such facilities than space and funding.

While the Deportation Agency was coercive and disruptive to the lives of numerous people, it could not reach those persons within the native-born community who were deemed defective. Mental health professionals desperately sought measures which would eliminate, or at least control the reproduction of California's native-born "unfit." Segregation in state hospitals had been the accepted tactic for removing the so-called unfit from sight in the Nineteenth Century, but by the early Twentieth Century institutional populations had swollen to the point of near bursting. Medical superintendents quested for measures which could reduce asylum populations, while limiting the expansion of the state's native-born "unfit." Although they did not invent sterilization, several California medical superintendents seized upon the procedure as a solution to the perceived menace posed by the state's feeble-minded. Sterilization at

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<sup>44</sup> Fred Gendral. "The Homeless Go to Camp," Current History. (Volume XLII, Number 5, August 1935), p.489.

<sup>45</sup> Frank Inglis. As quoted in: *Ibid*.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*.

once ended possibilities of "like breeding like", and allowed for the parole of those sterilized back into the community, thereby lessening the pressure on state institutions. To several California superintendents, sterilization appeared the perfect, perhaps the only solution to the problem posed by the growing numbers of mentally ill persons in the state.

In the United States sterilization had been sporadically used as a punitive addition to the sentences of sexually deviant criminals, but its first usage as a eugenic prevention occurred in the Pennsylvania Training School for Feeble-minded Children between 1889 and 1892.<sup>47</sup> However, the numbers sterilized in Pennsylvania were strictly limited by the absence of legal sanction for such operations. In an attempt to legalize the use of sterilization in asylum treatment regimens, several nationally prominent eugenicists, most prominently Isaac Newton Kerlin and Martin Barr, guided Pennsylvania legislators in the drafting of America's first strictly eugenic sterilization law.<sup>48</sup> Pennsylvania's 1905, "Act to Prevent Idiocy" was passed by both houses in the state, only to be vetoed by Governor Samuel Pennypacker. In his veto message, Governor Pennypacker stated that "to permit such an operation would be to inflict cruelty on a helpless class in the community which the state has undertaken to protect."<sup>49</sup> Governor Pennypacker's message of compassion apparently went unheeded outside Pennsylvania, however, as Indiana passed the first successful legislation in 1907, and by 1921 there were fifteen states with operating sterilization

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<sup>47</sup> Julius Paul. "State Eugenic Sterilization History: A Brief Overview," Eugenic Sterilization, ed. Jonas Robitscher. (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1973), pp.28-29.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Governor Samuel Pennypacker quoted in: Ibid, p.30.



laws, including California.<sup>50</sup>

Actually, the number of states passing involuntary sterilization statutes is misleading, as only a few states followed through with a policy of committed enforcement. Indeed, of the fifteen states that passed eugenic sterilization statutes after 1907, five were unable to defend their legislation as constitutional.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, by 1921 "eugenical sterilization laws [had] been vetoed by the governors of Pennsylvania, Oregon, Vermont, Nebraska and Idaho," although Oregon and Nebraska subsequently passed revised statutes.<sup>52</sup> Viewing this limited application of sterilization throughout the United states, Harry Laughlin was driven to implore "that in order to affect the future population favorably, by improving its hereditary endowments to a considerable degree, the number of eugenical sterilizations must be numbered by thousands instead of by tens."<sup>53</sup> The first and only state willing to accept Laughlin's quest to eliminate bad heredity through mass sterilization was California. By 1921, for example, California had performed 2,558 operations, or almost 83 percent of the national total of

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<sup>50</sup> Harry Laughlin. "The Present Status of Eugenic Sterilization in the United States," Eugenics in Race and State: Scientific Papers of the Second International Congress of Eugenics, Held at the American Museum of Natural History, September 22-28, 1921 (Vol.Two), eds. Charles Davenport et al. (Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins Company, 1923), p.287.

<sup>51</sup> States with sterilization statutes, 1921: California, Connecticut, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Washington and Wisconsin. The laws were declared unconstitutional in Indiana, Michigan, Nevada, New Jersey and New York. It should be noted, however, that "more than 500 such operations" were performed in Indiana before the practice was ruled unconstitutional. Source: Ibid, p.287.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p.290.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p.287.

3,233. To put this in perspective, one might note that Nebraska and Oregon ranked second and third in the nation, having performed 155 and 127 operations respectively.<sup>54</sup>

The sterilization program whose results were to dwarf those of all other American states combined began with the passage of legislation legalizing the procedure in California prisons, state hospitals and homes for the feeble-minded in 1909.<sup>55</sup> The Journals of the California State Legislature do not maintain a record of debate, but it seems certain that in passing this law legislators were motivated by some combination of factors, including hereditarian arguments for eugenic population control and the desire to lessen a burden on the public treasury. The economy of sterilization was predicated upon the release of those inmates receiving the operation, thereby decreasing the numbers confined in the state hospitals. Sterilization eliminated the ability of the disabled to procreate, and ended their threat to the integrity of the gene-pool. Ultimately, argued Medical Superintendent F.O. Butler of the Sonoma Home, sterilization and release "relieve[d] the state and counties of the expense for their support as well as making [the disabled] happy in the thought of being self-supporting."<sup>56</sup> These sentiments were echoed by Samuel Holmes in 1926. Holmes

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p.290.

<sup>55</sup> "An act to permit asexualization of inmates of the state hospitals and the California Home for the Care and Training of Feeble-Minded Children, and of convicts in the state prisons," Statutes of California: Thirty-Eighth Session. (Sacramento: April 26, 1909), pp.1093-1094.

<sup>56</sup> F.O. Butler. "Surgical Work and Research," Twelfth Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy for the Two Years Ending June 30, 1920. (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1920), p.59.

explained that while "eugenicists may differ as to whether defectives should be segregated or sterilized,... they are in substantial agreement that the procreation of these social burdens should somehow be checked."<sup>57</sup>

Parole or release based on having received an involuntary sterilization was not, however, entrenched in the 1909 legislation. Indeed, the 1909 law was crudely crafted, leaving key provisions ill-defined and ambiguous. It did little, except legalize the procedure and empower officials within the state's prisons and mental hospitals to enforce their interpretation of the statute. The text provided that "whenever in the opinion of the medical superintendent of any state hospital,... [sterilization] would be beneficial and conducive to the benefit of the physical, mental or moral condition of any inmate,... they may perform the same."<sup>58</sup> Provision was made to "call in the general superintendent of state hospitals and the secretary of the state board of health" for consultation in the decision to sterilize, but otherwise the text provided no provision for parole or safeguard against abuse.<sup>59</sup> Nor did this legislation differentiate between eugenic sterilization to remove bad heredity, and the punitive sterilization of sexually depraved criminals.

In 1912 the Fortieth Session of the California legislature began the process of defining the powers within the sterilization statute. A significant revision in the legislation of 1912 was the creation of a legal mechanism for the sterilization of

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<sup>57</sup> Samuel Holmes. "Eugenics Vital to the Human Race," Current History. (Volume 25, Number 2, November 1926), p.350.

<sup>58</sup> "An act to permit asexualization (1909)," pp.1093-1094.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p.1094.

disabled minors, providing that the medical superintendent had received "written request of the parent or guardian of any such idiot or fool."<sup>60</sup> Yet, while they differentiated between eugenic and punitive sterilization, these revisions did not address the question of legalized parole from the state hospitals.<sup>61</sup> Although sterilized patients were often discharged as "cured" or "improved", it was only in 1917 that legal provision was made to facilitate the parole of the disabled from state institutions. The text was carefully worded to ensure the eugenic, not the punitive, interpretation prevailed, and featured strongly hereditarian language. These revisions did not, however, place any checks, such as periodic independent audits of each institution, on the ability of the superintendent to sterilize. Until the Second World War the mental health community, through the various boards and commissions composed of its members, was essentially self-policing.

By focusing on the eugenic rather than the punitive rationale for sterilization, California legislators had guaranteed the law constitutional, although they could not have realized that at the time. In California sterilization was not envisioned as a punishment for the sexually intransigent, but an eugenic vaccination against hereditary disease. Ultimately, the United States Supreme Court accepted this interpretation of the

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<sup>60</sup> "An act to provide for the asexualization of inmates of the state hospitals for the insane, the Sonoma State Home, of convicts of the state prisons, and of idiots, repealing an act entitled 'An act to permit asexualization of inmates of the state hospitals and the California Home for the Care and Training of Feeble-Minded Children, and of convicts in the state prisons,' Statutes of California: Fortieth Session. (Sacramento: August 10, 1913), p.776.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p.776.

usage of sterilization, and upheld purely eugenic sterilization as constitutional in 1927. In the written opinion of Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. it was "better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or to let them starve for their imbecility, society [could] prevent those who [were] manifestly unfit from continuing their kind."<sup>62</sup> In sanctioning this position, all but dissenting Justice Pierce Butler agreed that "the principle that sustains compulsory vaccination [was] broad enough to cover cutting the Fallopian tubes."<sup>63</sup> When Time magazine reported the Buck versus Bell decision on May 16, 1927, California had already sterilized 4,500 persons, while the rest of the country had performed 1,842 operations.<sup>64</sup> When Justice Holmes and the Court declared that "three generations of imbeciles are enough"<sup>65</sup> and upheld sterilization, they vindicated California's eugenic sterilization program and legitimized the crusade against bad heredity.

While the 1912 revisions ultimately secured California's sterilization program as constitutional, revisions enacted in 1917 were also of key importance to the development and untrammelled operation of the state's sterilization regime. Merely based on a superintendent's professional opinion that a person had a "mental disease which may have been inherited," inmates of the state hospitals and the Sonoma State Home were thereafter eligible for sterilization.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, medical superintendents

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<sup>62</sup> "Buck Versus Bell Superintendent," United States Reports 274. (United States Supreme Court, 1927), p.207.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> "The Judiciary: Sterilization," Time. (May 16, 1927), 10.

<sup>65</sup> "Buck Versus Bell," p.207.

<sup>66</sup> "An act to amend section one of an act entitled 'An act to provide for the

received protection from civil and criminal prosecution, which only reinforced aggressive positions regarding the use of sterilization.<sup>67</sup> Hence, by 1917, eugenic sterilization had been entrenched in such a fashion that the ability to sterilize was concentrated almost solely in the hands of each institutions' medical superintendent.

While California was undeniably the state which most broadly utilized eugenic sterilization, this should not be taken to mean that all of the state's medical superintendents were zealous hereditarians. Opinions on eugenics varied between superintendents, as they did among academic scientists. These differences of opinion were clearly illustrated by the vast differences in the sterilization totals from the respective institutions. Between 1909 and 1929, California superintendents sanctioned the sterilization of 6,298 persons, or 66 percent of the national total of 9,522.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, and more striking still, between 1909 and 1928 fully 49 percent of the sterilizations performed in the United States were done in just three California institutions: the Stockton and Patton State Hospitals, and the Sonoma State Home for Feeble-Minded Children.<sup>69</sup> Weilding their broad discretionary authority as a weapon

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asexualization of inmates of the state hospitals for the insane, the Sonoma State Home, of convicts of the state prisons, and of idiots, repealing an act entitled 'An act to permit asexualization of inmates of the state hospitals and the California Home for the Care and Training of Feeble-Minded Children, and of convicts in the state prisons,' Statutes of California: Forty-Second Session. (Sacramento: July 27, 1917), p.571 .

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> "Appendix Two: Periodic Cumulative Grand Totals of Persons Sterilized Under State Laws According to the Categories Covered by the Laws, and by Sex, Gathered From Various Sources," Eugenic Sterilization, p.123.

<sup>69</sup> Sterilizations, 1909-1928: Patton State Hospital - 1,732 persons; Stockton State

in their personal wars on bad heredity, several California superintendents undertook ambitious programs.

One would be remiss, however, in attributing the outburst of sterilization solely to hereditarian ideology. A good example of an alternative motivation for sterilization was the Stockton State Hospital, which under the direction of medical supervisor Fred Clark, vigorously operated an asexualization program from 1909 into the 1930's.<sup>70</sup> Reporting that his institution had performed the relatively modest total of 237 operations over the biennial period 1910-1912, Clark suggested that sterilization was "a very important feature of the work connected with the insane, not alone to posterity, but also to the patients themselves."<sup>71</sup> The use of sterilization as a cure for psychoses and the desire to parole those sterilized animated Clark's reports throughout his tenure. "In my opinion," wrote Clark in 1912, "every patient, man or woman, under fifty years of age who is committed to an insane hospital, if there is a prospect of recovery, discharge or parole, should be sterilized."<sup>72</sup> In 1924 Clark proclaimed that his sterilization therapy was so successful that he had "a number of men at the hospital ask [him] to sterilize them after they had seen the beneficial effects of the operation on

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Hospital - 1,486 persons; Sonoma State Home - 1,424; Napa State Hospital - 565 persons; Norwalk State Hospital - 536 persons; Mendocino State Hospital - 172 persons; Agnews State Hospital - 159 persons. Source: Fourth Biennial Report of the Department of Institutions, p.112.

<sup>70</sup> "Stockton State Hospital," Seventh Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy for the Two Years Ending June 30, 1908. (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1908), p.46.

<sup>71</sup> Ninth Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy, p.49.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

other patients."<sup>73</sup>

While eugenicists and like-minded superintendents typically focused on the long-term success possible through the elimination of future progeny by sterilization, Clark suggested that sterilization also served as a cure in the short-term. The merging of the long range goal of eliminating bad heredity and the short-term aim to provide relief for the conditions of insanity was often visible in Clark's reports to the Commission in Lunacy. "To my mind," wrote Clark in 1914, "California -- through the enactment of [the sterilization] law, and seeing that its provisions are carried out -- is leading the world in providing that the patients committed to her various state institutions are receiving the benefits of sterilization -- not alone for its curative effects -- but to prevent the filling of her institutions in the future, from the offspring of the insane who recover or partially recover and are permitted to again go out into the world and reproduce their like."<sup>74</sup>

Clark's optimism regarding sterilization as a curative treatment for insanity was not, however, shared by most of his colleagues within the hereditarian camp. The prime movers among California's hereditarian community, general superintendent F.W. Hatch and medical superintendent F.O. Butler of the Sonoma State Home, were focused on their task of removing bad heredity and had little time to explore

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<sup>73</sup> "Report of the Medical Superintendent -- Stockton State Hospital," Second Biennial Report of the Department of Institutions for the State of California, for the Years 1922 - 1924. (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1924), p.103.

<sup>74</sup> Tenth Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy for the State of California, for the Years 1916 - 1918. (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1919), p.53.



sterilization as a cure for mental illness. Butler found the therapeutic results of sterilization ambiguous in his first exploration, and thereafter stopped speculating publicly about such possibilities.<sup>75</sup> Hatch was more blunt in his assessment. Feeble-mindedness, he argued was so deeply ingrained in the persons afflicted by it that "a cure cannot be expected."<sup>76</sup> Hatch continued that "mental defectiveness [was] not a disease that [could] be medically treated."<sup>77</sup> As it was understood by Hatch and Butler, mental deficiency was the product of some hereditary defect, which had arrested mental development, and as such was not something concrete which could be surgically removed from the body. These superintendents argued that it could however be surgically removed from the body-politic. Hatch qualified his position though, stating "there [could] be no really substantial social progress until the people of the land [had] become educated up to the point of looking on the procreation on the part of the insane and feeble-minded with the same horror that they now look upon, with far less scientific reason, incest -- the mating of parent and child, or brother and sister."<sup>78</sup>

With the potential for a cure so apparently unreasonable, Butler, Hatch and superintendent John Reilly of the Patton State Hospital all turned towards policies of sterilization and release, which lowered their costs and attacked future generations of

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<sup>75</sup> Eighth Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy, p.21.

<sup>76</sup> Twelfth Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy, p.8.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Sixth Biennial Report of the State Board of Charities and Corrections, p.62.

bad heredity. In this regard, Hatch often referred to asexualization as "the good work of sterilization."<sup>79</sup> Hatch felt justified calling it good work "because the records show that a large number have either been discharged or allowed to go home on leave of absence after sterilization."<sup>80</sup> Concurrent with Hatch extolling the virtues of the state's "good work," F.O. Butler was also pointing out the benefits of sterilization to the state. Under Butler's tutelage it was Sonoma's policy that all "defectives who are capable of propagating" were "first be asexualized before leaving the institution."<sup>81</sup> Moreover, Butler proudly pointed to the fact that Sonoma received " a great many each year just for sterilization alone."<sup>82</sup> Thereafter such persons were returned "to their respective communities without training, some being discharged, others remaining on parole."<sup>83</sup> Under such a program the state bore little expense beyond the medical procedure itself, while Butler was able to sterilize 1 in every 7.5 inmates committed to the institution.<sup>84</sup>

Although F.W. Hatch's report to the State Board of Charities and Corrections in 1918 lauded him as one who "thoroughly appreciate[d] the necessity of sterilizing a

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<sup>79</sup> F.W. Hatch. "Report of the Consulting Psychiatrist," First Biennial Report of the State Department of Institutions, p.33.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> F.O. Butler. "Report of the Medical Superintendent of the Sonoma State Home," Ibid, p.80.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> For the Biennial period 1920-1922 Sonoma had a peak patient population of 1,808, and during the same period 241 sterilizations were performed. Ibid, p.81.

considerable proportion of the inmates of that institution,"<sup>85</sup> Butler still sought to expand the range and scope of his asexualization agenda. By 1926 Sonoma's population had swelled to 2,561, despite Butler's sterilization and release initiative.<sup>86</sup> In an attempt to assess and sterilize those deemed feeble-minded without admitting them into the hospital population, Butler began, in 1924, a sterilization outreach program operated by two eugenic field workers equipped with batteries of intelligence tests. When these field workers discovered "a defective mother with many offspring, the majority of whom are defective, one way or another, it [was Sonoma's] policy to try to get her to an institution for the operation in order that she may return and care for the children and not propagate more of her kind."<sup>87</sup>

Addressing the National Conference of Juvenile Agencies in Jackson, Mississippi during November of 1925, Butler called the California sterilization law "one of the best things that [had] been done to prevent the unfit from reproducing their kind and adding to the state's burden," and argued that "sterilization of both sexes should be the common practice, not only in every state in the Union, but the entire universe."<sup>88</sup> Moreover, he explained, the authority of the eugenic field workers needed expansion to locate more potential subjects for sterilization. "It is only to be regretted," concluded

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<sup>85</sup> "Care of the Insane," Sixth Biennial Report of the State Board of Charities and Corrections, p.63.

<sup>86</sup> F.O. Butler. "Sterilization Procedure and its Success in California Institutions," Third Annual Report of the California Department of Institutions, p.93.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, pp.96-97.

Butler, "that we cannot reach out further -- ie. Sterilize those defectives who do not come into state institutions, it being estimated that there are perhaps 16,000 defectives in California alone who are being cared for outside state institutions."<sup>89</sup> To justify this call for an eugenic inquisition upon the disabled, Butler argued that the genetic soul of California was in jeopardy due to the presence of bad heredity, which tainted and degraded the good. "The very life of our nation is its manhood and womanhood," implored Butler in his closing remarks, "and something must be done that we may beget none but sound offspring, and thus have a nation physically and mentally strong."<sup>90</sup>

Despite Butler's call for a crusade against bad heredity, however, several superintendents chose a much more limited application of sterilization. The Mendocino state hospital, which only performed 172 operations between 1909 and 1928, reported that its "sterilization program had been very conservative in the proper selection of cases...[although they] had been very careful to overlook no case in which the operation was plainly indicated."<sup>91</sup> In contrast to this careful evaluation, Fred Clark declared that Stockton had continued the "work of sterilizing all patients under 45 or 50 years of age committed to the hospital," performing 1,486 operations during the same period.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, p.97.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Fifth Biennial Report of the Department of Institutions for the State of California, for the Years 1928 - 1930. (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1931), p.44.

<sup>83</sup> Tenth Biennial Report of the State Commission in Lunacy for the State of

Hatch had also criticized the operation of Mendocino's sterilization program in his 1918 submission to the State Board of Charities and Corrections. In the style of Dugdale and Goddard, Hatch recounted how one feeble-minded mother, who was repeatedly released without sterilization, gave birth to eleven mentally deficient children in the years after her initial admission to Mendocino.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, he pointed out that Mendocino medical superintendent Dr. Robert Richards had released 745 inmates between 1911 and 1918, but only performed 34 operations since 1909.<sup>94</sup> "Agnews [State Hospital] also has a very poor record," Grumbled Hatch.<sup>95</sup> Agnews State Hospital had a population of some 1,600 inmates in 1918, "yet, from the foundation of the institution up to that time, only 47 operations for sterilization had been performed."<sup>96</sup>

Butler, Clark, Hatch and Reilly continued sterilizing throughout the 1930's, and into the 1940's. The criticisms of eugenics mounted, and the scientific community shrank back from human genetics in favour of more lucrative fields of study in university agriculture departments,<sup>97</sup> but California continued to sterilize. During the

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California, for the Years 1916 - 1918. (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1919), p.53.

<sup>93</sup> Sixth Biennial Report of the State Board of Charities and Corrections, p.62.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, p.63

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Cravens, p.175.

hereditarian ascendance of the early Twentieth Century, from roughly 1890 (although sterilization was not implemented until 1909) to 1925, California sterilized 4,636 persons.<sup>98</sup> In the similar sixteen year period 1926 to 1941, California sterilized 9,932, despite the shift in the academic model to more broadly accommodate environmental considerations and the mounting criticism of eugenics.<sup>99</sup> Scientists abandoned eugenics, social scientists attacked it as biologically determinist pseudo-science, and journalists described it as intrusive upon the basic civil and human rights of the disabled. Increasingly, the leaders of the national eugenics movement were cast as misguided zealots and Nazi sympathizers. J.B. Eggen, a practicing psychologist claimed in 1926 that the eugenics had shown all that "interference with the reproductive powers of the race is a serious thing -- not to be entrusted to superficial and fanatical reformers."<sup>100</sup> Moreover, scolded the poison pen of H.L. Mencken, "the sharecropper, though he may appear to the scientist to be hardly human, is yet as much under the protection of the Bill of Rights as the president of Harvard," and as such "may not be gelded unless his continuance at stud is plainly and undoubtably [sic] dangerous to society."<sup>101</sup> In America's universities and to most of the general public, Harry Laughlin appeared the perfect fascist in 1934 by pronouncing, in reference to

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<sup>98</sup> "Appendix Two," Eugenic Sterilization, p.123.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> J.B. Eggen. "Eugenic Teaching Imperils Civilization," Current History. (Volume 24, Number 5, August 1926), p.885.

<sup>101</sup> H.L. Mencken. "Utopia by Sterilization," American Mercury Magazine. (Volume 41, August 1937), p.406.

sterilization, that "the Germans are beating us at our own game."<sup>102</sup>

Despite its growing association with the excesses of fascist Germany, and the pointed accusation that eugenics was little more than unsubstantiated pseudo-science, in California its doctrines persisted. Through the 1930's and 1940's several of the state's superintendents continued to sterilize, while the locus for eugenic research and information dissemination became the Human Betterment Foundation based in Pasadena. Not until after the Second World War were California's eugenic programs and propaganda services (operated through the Human Betterment Foundation) seriously curtailed.

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<sup>102</sup> Harry Laughlin. As quoted in Kevles, p.116.

### Conclusion:

"The Man who Never Changes his Opinions, is like Standing Water; and Breeds  
Reptiles of the Mind." - William Blake.

California has held a prominent place in the American eugenic vanguard from the early Twentieth Century until the present day. From David Starr Jordan in the early Twentieth Century to Dr. Daniel Koshland, Jr. in the 1990's<sup>103</sup>, numerous prominent and influential Californians had accepted, implemented and broadcast hereditarian initiatives and ideas. Various state medical superintendents, eugenicists attached to the Human Betterment Foundation in Pasadena, and private individuals influenced by hereditarian dogma carried out eugenic programs, such as the deportation and sterilization of those deemed "unfit," transmitted eugenic ideology, and taught eugenics in prominent state universities. The hereditarian population control arguments of the early Twentieth Century were given a full test in California, in order that scientists and mental health officials might gauge the potential impact of eugenic intervention into the state's gene-pool. The experiment ran from 1909 through 1946, and was only stopped when it had become clear that it could not fulfill the lofty expectations of its' inventors.

Despite sharp criticism, some from within the hereditarian community itself,

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<sup>103</sup> Dr. Daniel Koshland, Jr. currently teaches biology at the University of California at Berkeley and edits the journal Science, widely accepted as "the most influential peer reviewed journal in the U.S."(p.123). In a recent editorial, Koshland "contended that genetic research may help eliminate society's most intractable problems, including drug abuse, homelessness and, yes, violent crime"(p.123). Indeed, Koshland is currently America's most prominent and vocal advocate of the "new eugenics". For an outline of the re-emergence of eugenic thought in the U.S., see: John Horgan. "Trends in Behavioural Genetics: Eugenics Revisited," Scientific American. (Volume 268, Number 6, June 1993), pp.122-131.



eugenic thought and action continued in California until the conclusion of the Second World War. Although criticism mounted through the 1930's, it was not until 1946 that California's sterilization totals drop off significantly. By 1946 the list of reasons to discontinue mass sterilization was sufficiently long to cause most superintendents to end such practices. Sterilization and parole had proven unworkable, with most of those sterilized remaining in institutions despite the operation. The inability to parole such inmates lost eugenicists much of their credibility among administrators, and prompted considerations of more radical surgical interventions and drug therapies. As well as new surgical interventions, many superintendents began in the late 1920's to call for the establishment of out-patient clinics for the mentally ill as alternatives to institutionalization. As psychosurgery, new drug therapies and outpatient clinics were implemented to stem growing asylum populations, sterilization waned in its usage, remaining isolated largely in those few institutions which had traditionally favoured its usage. Moreover, university biology and genetics departments grew increasingly disenchanted with the topics dominating human genetics. Plant and animal genetics were perceived to have greater utility, and were therefore funded much more handsomely than was human genetics. As well, the manipulating of plant and animal species in the interest of creating pedigree stock was substantially less morally and ethically charged than limiting or encouraging the reproduction of human beings.

By the mid-1930's the efficacy of involuntary sterilization had come into serious question, even among some committed hereditarians. While in 1936 J.H. Landman accepted the argument that "the various socially inadequate classes... present[ed] the

greatest weight of scientific evidence for inheritability," he failed to see any tangible reduction of these groups through the sterilization regimes then-operating.<sup>104</sup> Indeed, Landman found it most incongruous that "about twice as many operations were performed on the mentally diseased as on the feeble-minded," despite the conclusion of most mental health professionals and eugenicists that feeble-mindedness was "more conclusively hereditary than mental disease."<sup>105</sup> In Landman's assessment this was precisely where sterilization failed; it was focused too heavily upon the insane, who were in no way assisted or "cured" by the operation and had to remain institutionalized. Moreover, he argued that a concentration on the so-called "higher-grade defectives" was necessary if more paroles were to be granted. Pointing out that fully 67 per cent of California men and 79 per cent of California women were sterilized and never released, Landman branded the California sterilization program a failure.<sup>106</sup> Moreover, Landman pointed with distress to the reports of psychologists proclaiming that most successful parole subjects succeeded outside the institution "due to the training in behaviour and in a trade that he or she received in the institution rather than because of the surgery."<sup>107</sup> Hence if sterilization was not a key factor in the successful parole of those inmates allowed to leave, and was not fulfilling its great promise to lower institutional costs, the value in its continuation was dubious.

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<sup>104</sup> J.H. Landman. "Sterilization: A Pointedly Frank Discussion of a Grave Social Problem," Current History. (Volume XLIX, Number 5, August 1936), p.94.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, p.93.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

While the shift in the academic paradigm, the smart criticisms of journalists like H.L. Mencken, or the scorn and revulsion of social scientists like J.B. Eggen may have driven the American eugenics movement from national prominence, it was undoubtedly more damaging to hereditarianism that it lost many of its allies on university campuses and was wracked with in-fighting among its professional ranks. Ironically, a discipline dedicated to culling the "unfit" was marginalized because it was perceived as an inferior alternative for university genetic researchers. By 1934, Samuel Holmes was among the last university science professors teaching eugenics, which greatly limited the exposure of young genetic researchers to eugenic ideas.<sup>108</sup> In the 1937 edition of the Elements of Modern Biology, Professor Charles Plunkett of New York University declared that although "subnormal mental conditions, such as some forms of insanity, feeble-mindedness, etc., often showed a marked tendency to 'run in the family,'" it had to be kept in mind that the "knowledge of human inheritance [was]... still very meager in detail - to say nothing of the difficulty of deciding what qualities are desirable to 'breed for' in man."<sup>109</sup> Indeed, science texts in general tended to distance themselves from eugenics during the 1930's.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> See Cravens, pp.175-177.

<sup>109</sup> Charles Robert Plunkett. Elements of Modern Biology (4th Edition). (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1937), p.423.

<sup>110</sup> For example, see: John Ritchie. Biology and Human Affairs. (New York: World Book Company, 1938). Biology and Human Affairs was a standard freshman text used in several American universities during the late 1930's and early 1940's. Within its 818 pages it contained only five pages on heredity as it related to eugenics. Moreover, the point of eugenics, culling the weak and encouraging the strong, was illustrated not through human examples (such as sterilization) but with an analogy from the plant kingdom. "If you plant a row of radishes," wrote Ritchie. "Some will grow quickly and make good roots. Some will be feeble and

Fred Clark had hoped hospital tours would perpetuate the eugenicists' kind, but he and his fellow hereditarians were cut off from potential new researchers by their refusal to adjust to the shift in the accepted explanations for differing abilities and intelligence. As universities chose to maintain the more lucrative and acceptable branches of the life sciences, such as plant genetics, biology and zoology, eugenics was consciously excluded. Thus the ability of eugenics to reproduce itself as a legitimate avenue of study was greatly circumscribed. The rejection of academic eugenics did little to impede the generation already operating sterilization programs, but it rendered eugenic asexualization moribund once those superintendents retired or were relieved of their duties. Butler, for example was still publishing articles advocating sterilization at the conclusion of the Second World War, while the world looked on aghast at the horrors of eugenics run amok in the ruins of Nazi Germany.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, Butler did not retire from service until 1963, and the only mention of his exit was a single column in the San Francisco Chronicle entitled, "Sonoma County bids Goodbye to Good Doctor Butler".<sup>112</sup> With Butler's retirement, Sonoma largely

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tardy in growth and may never make radishes fit for the table. If you should pull out the good ones to give the poor weak ones room and then should save the seed for the next crop from the weak ones, that would not be eugenics"(p.599). As well, Plunkett argued in 1937 that human heredity was too complex for quick solutions, but that "the laws of heredity... have already proved of enormous practical value in the improvement of domestic plants and animals by selective breeding" (p.423).

<sup>111</sup> F.O. Butler. "A Quarter Century's Experience in the Sterilization of Defectives in California," American Journal of Mental Deficiency. (Volume XLIX, April 1945), pp.508-513.

<sup>112</sup> "Sonoma County Bids Goodbye to Good Doctor Butler," San Francisco Chronicle. (August 7, 1963), p.14.

ceased sterilizing the disabled, as had the rest of California's institutions.<sup>113</sup>

As the 1930's opened, California medical superintendents were increasingly suggesting that the best way to reduce institutional costs was to not commit people unless absolutely necessary. Dr. Romney Ritchie, medical superintendent of the Mendocino State Hospital, suggested that "the prolonged duration of most mental disorders makes it of great economical importance that the commitment be avoided if possible and that the period of treatment in the hospital be reduced to the minimum."<sup>114</sup> While reporting that Mendocino performed only 62 sterilizations (out of a patient population of 1,296 over the biennial period 1928-30), Dr. Ritchey advocated an expanded program of outpatient facilities. Reduced pressure on the state's institutions was to be "accomplished to a large extent by the establishment of outpatient clinics in all the larger centres of population and by the employment of specially trained psychiatric social workers to follow the paroled patients into the homes to assist them in making the necessary adjustments in their environment which will enable them to remain socially harmless and as near self-sustaining as possible."<sup>115</sup> As well as Mendocino, Napa State Hospital also accepted the efficacy of outpatient clinics and reducing the general number of committals. The Napa Hospital Social Service Department was responsible for establishing "out patient clinics...

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<sup>113</sup> "Appendix Two," Eugenic Sterilization, p.123.

<sup>114</sup> "Report of the Mendocino State Hospital," Fifth Biennial Report of the State Department of Institutions (1930), p.43.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

throughout the rural communities," and establishing a program of home investigations to reduce the numbers treated within the institution.<sup>116</sup>

Although outpatient treatment, the decline in academic eugenics, and the inability to parole so many of those sterilized all contributed to the demise of California's eugenic programs, the 20,108 involuntary sterilizations<sup>117</sup> performed between 1909 and 1964 stand as a testament to the unspeakable horrors historically visited upon the insane and mentally disabled in mental health facilities across the United States and around the world. Sterilization, electroshock therapy, insulin shock, high dosages of dangerous drugs, mechanical restraints, lobotomy and other forms of psychosurgery, and a variety of other such "treatments" were tried and tested on the bodies and minds of the insane and disabled. As the mental hospital increasingly became the domain of medical and scientific experimenters in the early Twentieth Century, the varieties of experimental surgeries expanded manifold. "Gynecologists have busied themselves perfecting a technique of sterilizing women which would be less painful and serious," wrote Dr. J.S. Landman in 1936. "Dr. R.L. Dickinson has tried coagulating the ends of the oviducts with an electric current," but this was difficult due to the "fact that the surgeon is obliged to manipulate very much in the dark."<sup>118</sup> Doctors, psychologists and surgeons continued to recommend and perform experiments "in the dark" for

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<sup>116</sup> "Report of the Napa State Hospital," Ibid, p.49. As well, for a complete assessment of the emergence of the residential out-patient clinic as the primary alternative to prolonged institutionalization in California, see: Fox. "From 'Railroading' to 'Therapy': The Growth of Medical Control over commitment in California," So Far Disordered in Mind, pp.37-74.

<sup>117</sup> "Appendix Two," Eugenic Sterilization, p.123.

<sup>118</sup> Landman, p.92.

much of the Twentieth Century. The positivist spirit of these experimenters was captured most clearly by Dr. George Pratt of the Yale University Medical School. Pratt wrote in 1935 that

modern psychiatry has new techniques like the insulin shock and metrazol shock treatments, which are applied in cases of dementia praecox or schizophrenia and depressive forms of insanity. Similarly, electric shock to the brain has been tried. One of the latest techniques is the removal of the frontal lobe of the brain for depressive forms of insanity. All of these methods are still highly experimental and should only be used by experts working in institutions.<sup>119</sup>

California's sterilization law was never repealed, and, although it has fallen into almost complete disuse, remains on the state statute books.<sup>120</sup> Despite the assertion of the importance of maintaining bodily integrity to maintain human dignity, sterilization for eugenic reasons received overt legal sanction as late as 1966.<sup>121</sup> After 1966, the law was not tested in the courts, as it had largely fallen into disuse. The punitive use of sterilization, as part of the sentence in sex crimes was overturned in the California Court of Appeal in 1936. In the *People versus Blankenship* (1936), the court ruled that the addition of vasectomy as a condition for parole in the case of rape constituted a punitive addition to the sentence, and was therefore unconstitutional.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Pratt, p.847.

<sup>120</sup> "Welfare and Institutions Code: Statute 6624," Statutes of the State of California. (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1970), p.7254.

<sup>121</sup> California's involuntary sterilization statute was upheld last by the Supreme Court in the 1966 *Schmerber versus the State of California* decision. In this decision the Court decreed that while the maintenance of bodily integrity was a just and noble goal, the safeguarding of society as a whole, as per the *Buck versus Bell* decision, was the paramount concern. "Schmerber versus the State of California," United States Reports 757. (United States Supreme Court, 1966), pp.382-386.

<sup>122</sup> "People versus Blankenship," Decisions of the California Court of Appeal,

In the Eighteenth Century and earlier the disabled were ignored, shunned, or locked away because they had no utility to their society or their keepers. Following the brief interlude of moral treatment in the Nineteenth Century, the disabled began to assume utility in the minds of asylum superintendents. As the mental health profession evolved into an experimental science in the early Twentieth Century, hospital inmates became invaluable subjects in the research work of their captors. Yet this utility was fleeting, and not without substantial cost. The mutilation of the disabled through lobotomy, electroshock and sterilization was the stuff of training films and professional reports through much of the Twentieth Century, but only in recent years has the extent of such atrocities been revealed. By the 1960's surgical interventions were greatly reduced in mental health facilities, as increasingly aware family members, advocates for the rights of the disabled, and a new generation of mental health professionals, such as Erving Goffman and Thomas Szasz, pressed for greater protection for those who could not protect themselves. Denied the ability to experiment freely upon the disabled, superintendents grudgingly yielded to the overall process of deinstitutionalization and slipped quietly into retirement. For all its good intentions, however, deinstitutionalization has begun a new chapter of neglect and despair for many of America's homeless mentally ill.

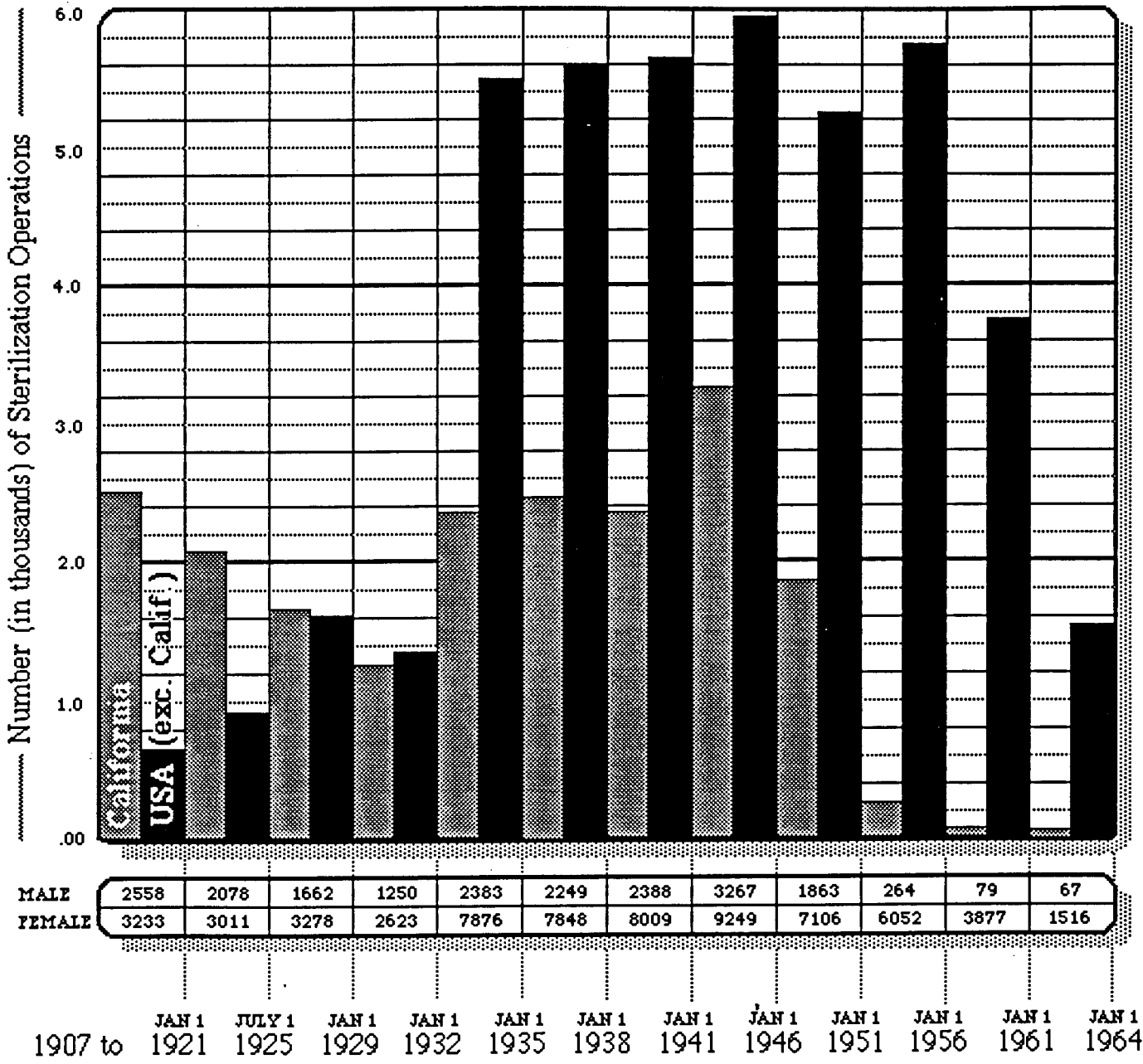
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Number 16. (California Court of Appeal, 1936), pp.pp.349-356.



Table No. 1

Comparison of Total California Operations to USA (exc. Calif.)



Source: "Appendix Two: Periodic Cumulative Grand Totals of Persons Sterilized Under State Laws According to the Categories Covered by the Law, and by Sex, Gathered From Various Sources," Eugenic Sterilization, ed. Jonas Robitscher. Springfield, Ill.: Chales C. Thomas, 1973, p.123.

**Chart Number Two:**

**Poor and Working Class Commitments\*, 1900-1920.**

<u>Biennial Period:</u>	<u>Total Commitments:</u>	<u>Poor and Working Class Commitments:</u>	<u>" " as % of Total Commitments:</u>
1900 - 1902:	2,490	1,664	67
1902 - 1904:	-	Statistics Unavailable.	-
1904 - 1906:	2,940	1,999	68
1906 - 1908:	3,033	2,048	68
1908 - 1910:	3,552	2,375	67
1910 - 1912:	4,588	3,035	66
1912 - 1914:	6,068	3,803	63
1914 - 1916:	6,935	4,144	60
1916 - 1918:	6,949	3,826	55
1918 - 1920:	6,749	4,771	71

\* - The State Commission grouped vocations into the following groups: Professional, Commercial, Agricultural and Pastoral, Mechanics at Outdoor Vocations, Mechanics, Etc. at Sedentary Vocations, Exposed Vocations, Domestic Service, Educational and Higher Domestic, Laborers, Gamblers / Paupers / Tramps, and No Occupation. For the purposes of this table only those classified as belonging to the Exposed Vocations, Domestic Service, Higher Domestic Service and Laborers were considered "working class". While only Gamblers / Paupers / Tramps and No Occupation were considered poor. This is a deliberately conservative interpretation of the vocational classifications, which further illustrates the preponderance of commitments from these social groups.

Sources: Biennial Reports of the State Commission in Lunacy, 1900 - 1920  
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"An act to provide for the asexualization of inmates of state hospitals for the insane, the Sonoma State Home, of convicts in the state prisons, and of idiots, and repealing an act entitled "An act to permit asexualization of inmates of the state hospitals and the California Home for the Care and Training of Feeble-Minded Children, and of convicts in the state prisons, approved April 26, 1909," The Statutes of California and Amendments to the Codes Passed at the Extra Session of the Fortieth Legislature. Sacramento: 1913, pp.775-776.

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