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Author Bios

Alex Berryhill graduated from UC Berkeley with highest honors May 2015, receiving a B.A. in Political Economy with a concentration in Latin American development and a minor in public policy. Her interest in indigenous rights, democratization, and autonomous governance was sparked after spending the Spring 2014 semester in Nicaragua with the School for International Training (SIT). During that semester, she conducted an independent research project on youth participation in regional and community development on the Caribbean Coast. As part of the International and Area Studies (IAS) honors thesis program, she returned January 2015 to Nicaragua to conduct research for this paper. Alex is grateful for the support of her two supervisors on the paper, Alan Karras and Jamie O'Connell. At the IAS graduation, this research paper was recognized as the best honors thesis in the department for the 2014-2015 school year.

Naamleela Free Jones received her B.A. in Religious Studies with a focus in mysticism and esotericism, graduating in Spring 2015, Phi Beta Kappa, with highest honors and an award of distinction in her department. Returning to Berkeley as an adult student, Naamleela spent her early life growing up in the Fiji Islands. She is an enthusiast of folklore, comparative mythology, and esotericism in popular culture, and is particularly interested in the study of religion that takes into account heterodox and esoteric voices within the plurality of religious dialogue. Naamleela is also an accomplished pianist and composer, and has performed throughout North America, Europe, and the Pacific.

Natalie Oveyssi graduated with highest distinction from UC Berkeley in Spring 2015 with a bachelor's degree in Sociology. Her honors thesis, "Dangerous Love: 'Positive' Eugenics, Mass Media, and the Scientific Woman, 1900-1945," was awarded highest departmental honors. She is currently a Staff Associate with the Center for Genetics and Society, where she continues to write about early twentieth-century eugenics. She plans to attend law school to study bioethics and biotechnology law.

Nicole Owens graduated from UC Berkeley in the spring of 2015. While at Berkeley, Nicole played varsity softball and fell in love with neuroscience. She currently resides in Santa Cruz, CA, where she is finishing her remaining pre-medicine prerequisites before applying to medical school to pursue neurology. She enjoys working as a Court Appointed Special Advocate for foster youth, conducting biomedical research at the UC Santa Cruz Chemical Screening Center and assisting a speech pathologist at Cabrillo College's Stroke and Disability Center. Nicole would like to thank her family and friends for helping her maintain her own sanity during her undergrad at UC Berkeley and for proofreading endless drafts of this thesis.

Jorge Toledo: I graduated UC-Berkeley in May 2015 with a double major in Legal Studies (Honors) and Political Economy. I currently work at Simmons and Ungar LLP, a corporate immigration law firm in San Francisco specializing in business non-immigrant and immigrant visa petitions. This

entry to the Berkeley Undergraduate Journal was originally submitted as my Honors Thesis to the Legal Studies Department. It was written under the supervision, assistance, and guidance of Professor Steven Solomon (University of California, Berkeley School of Law), Michael Musheno (previous Director of Legal Studies Department) and Andrew Brighten (Jurisprudence and Social Policy Ph.D. Candidate, UC-Berkeley School of Law). I would like to thank those mentioned above in addition to my extremely supportive and loving family that have made everything in my life possible: Jorge A., Lisa, and Dodita.

Michael Tom is a 3rd year undergraduate Economics major at UC Berkeley and intends to graduate in the Spring of 2016.

DANGEROUS LOVE

“Positive” Eugenics, Mass Media, and the Scientific Woman, 1900–1945

By **Natalie Parisa Oveyssi**

In the early twentieth century, the concept of eugenics swept through the American scientific community and lay public. Concerned with the production of “better babies” through “better breeding,” eugenics found a place among other Progressive Era social movements, such as public health and home economics, that thought to use science to improve social conditions. Eugenists promoted both “negative” eugenics—the use of coercion, isolation, and sterilization to prevent childbearing among those deemed genetically inferior—and “positive” eugenics—the encouragement of increased or improved voluntary childbearing among those of “superior stock.” My research will identify why positive eugenics became so popular among middle-class white women in the United States. By examining newspaper and magazine articles dating from 1900–1945, I argue that many middle-class white women supported positive eugenics because 1) it assured women that they could experience more independence, happier marriages, healthier children, and superior parenthood; and 2) it formed areas in which women could exercise authority and build interpersonal relationships with other women. While scholars have portrayed eugenics as simply a tactic to coerce and subjugate women’s sexuality and fertility, I instead contend that some middle-class white women supported eugenics because of its promises for self-empowerment.

I. Prologue

In New York City on a summer day in 1913, Lady Frances Tennessee Claflin Cook and a small but lively group of women were celebrating the promises of the new millennium. To the three confused male reporters covering the women’s meeting—was the millennium not 87 years away?—the ladies quickly explained that they were hailing the progress of the eugenics campaign

in which their small but dedicated group was playing an active part. Miss Alice Ives, the newly-elected chairman of the committee, urged the ladies present to honor Mrs. John Jay Hammond as a eugenic pioneer. “You should say the *pioneers*,” corrected Lady Cook, in a barbed reminder of the credit owed to her as a longtime eugenics activist. Halfway through Miss Ives’s speech about a purity campaign “ending all of the world’s evils, including war,” Lady Cook, nearly seventy years old and not loath to dismiss proprieties, interrupted her once more to ask for details. Respectfully, Miss Ives outlined a plan to promote eugenics in schools, churches, and settlement houses in order to “teach the young people the right way to live.” Though the women present supported a common cause, the meeting was not without conflict. The imperious Lady Cook claimed that all women hoped to marry eventually, to which the unmarried—and at this point rather put-upon—Miss Ives took objection. Lady Cook merely replied, with a pointed look, “A woman of 35 is not considered an old maid now as in days gone by,” leaving Miss Ives without retort.

In their excitement to plan their eugenics crusade, the ladies forgot that the date was July 4, Independence Day.¹

II. Introduction

According to physician Havelock Ellis, “English-speaking” scholars in the latter half of the nineteenth century believed that the “Anglo-Saxon” race would develop so quickly in population and wealth that the “whole of the earth [would be] their heritage, and that the other peoples of the world would sooner or later be hopelessly submerged.”² Yet the United States in the early twentieth century was rapidly changing in ways that challenged this expectation of white Western hegemony. Immigration and industrialization contested existing race, gender, and class hierarchies.³ The falling “Anglo-Saxon” birth rate further rattled the white middle and upper classes who feared that people they perceived as inferior would grow to outnumber them.⁴ Advancing genetic knowledge, prevailing prejudices, and Progressive Era reform movements intertwined to boost the popularity of an emerging science known as eugenics, the improvement of human heredity through selective breeding.^{5,6}

Eugenic advocates, called “eugenicists,” proposed that the United States could enhance its diminished prospects by preventing the reproduction of people with “bad” genetic heritage—mainly people of color, immigrants, and the poor—and encouraging the reproduction of people with “good” genetic heritage—primarily the white, native-born, and relatively prosperous.⁷ For the first four decades of the 1900s, eugenics attracted support from diverse members of American society and captured the attention of a fascinated public, until the atrocities of Germany’s eugenics

1 “Lady Cook Declares She Wants to Cheer.” *New York Times*, (Jul. 5, 1913).

2 Ellis, Havelock. “Eugenics and St. Valentine.” *The Living Age*, (Jul. 14, 1906).

3 Kline, Wendy. *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 2.

4 Paul, Diane B., *Controlling Human Heredity* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1995), 122.

5 Haller, Mark H., *Eugenics: Hereditarian Attitudes in American Thought* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1963), 3.

6 Paul, *Controlling Human Heredity*, 77.

7 Haller, *Eugenics*, 77.

program during World War II threw classical eugenics out of favor.⁸

It is important to delve further into the two branches of eugenics and what they entailed in practice. When Francis Galton first presented his concept of eugenics in 1883, he outlined two avenues for the production of fitter people for a better nation: “negative” eugenics and “positive” eugenics. Negative eugenics would prevent those deemed genetically inferior from having children, while positive eugenics would encourage childbearing among those of “superior stock.”⁹ Using the legitimizing force of science to add authority to their ideas, American proponents of positive eugenics in the early twentieth century argued that the future of the nation depended on raising reproduction rates among genetically fit white men and women of means.¹⁰ Eugenists targeted much of this discourse towards white middle-class women, placing on their shoulders blame for a potential “race suicide,” as well as a civic responsibility to protect the interests of the nation by having more, and better, children.¹¹ Eugenists believed that while negative eugenics could be accomplished through coercion and force, as in the case of mass sterilization campaigns,¹² accomplishing positive eugenics would require public cooperation.¹³

While there has been much research into negative eugenics, there has been comparatively little examination of positive eugenics. However, eugenics was very much a two-pronged movement, and many eugenists of the time stressed that positive eugenics was an equally vital component for reaching the eugenic goal.¹⁴ The lack of scholarly attention to positive eugenics is thus an unfortunate oversight. Furthermore, in spite of the understanding that middle-class white women were central to eugenists’ efforts, and indeed were so frequently eugenists themselves,¹⁵ the literature has failed to adequately address these women’s motivations for supporting eugenics, particularly the positive branch.

Hence, my research seeks to illuminate why the positive eugenics movement became so popular with white middle-class women. Through the examination of over a thousand newspaper and magazine articles dating from the early twentieth century, I contend that many middle-class white women came to support positive eugenics because of 1) its promises for the direct improvement of women’s lives through greater independence, happier marriages, healthier children, and enriched parenthood; and 2) its creation of spaces of authority and camaraderie for these women. In contrast to accepted scholarly interpretations that eugenics was *solely* a method to sexually coerce and repress women, or to enable more privileged women to sexually coerce and repress those less privileged, I provide the alternative interpretation that some middle-class white women found in positive eugenics a means for self-empowerment.

III. Literature Review

An exploration of the popularity of the positive eugenics movement among middle-class white women involves many facets that deserve scholarly foundation. First among them is a deeper examination of the social conditions that prompted support for eugenics as a whole. During the

8 Ibid., 180.

9 Ibid., 3, 77.

10 Paul, *Controlling Human Heredity*, 5.

11 Kline, *Building a Better Race*, 8, 11.

12 Haller, *Eugenics*, 4.

13 Ibid., 81.

14 Ibid., 18, 81.

15 Kline, *Building a Better Race*, 30.

early twentieth century, the United States underwent dramatic industrialization, immigration, and urbanization that resulted in massive social, political, and economic change. Overcrowding in cities exacerbated practical problems like sanitation and public health and made social “evils” like alcoholism and urban poverty more apparent to the middle class.¹⁶ A sense of displacement and unease due to the breakdown of established social norms as a result of social change, a phenomenon social theorist Emile Durkheim terms *anomie*,¹⁷ caused existing racism, sexism, nativism, and classism to intensify.¹⁸ Additionally, the Progressive Era, delineated as the period between 1890 and 1920, witnessed a number of social movements intending to apply recent science to improve society.¹⁹ The potential to eliminate broad social problems through concrete action was deeply attractive to middle-class reformers, particularly those who had observed some success from the promotion of sanitation and public health measures.²⁰ Together with advancements in scientific and statistical techniques, a resurgence in acceptance of evolutionary theory, a more selective construction of normality, and the ubiquity of reform efforts in the Progressive Era, these conditions set the stage for Galton’s formerly esoteric theory of eugenics to explode in popularity with the public.²¹

Scholars have characterized eugenics as a progressive movement that attracted political conservatives and progressives alike.²² Social reformers warned that unless society took action through eugenic policies and promotion, the hereditarily “unfit” would overtake the “fit” in numbers. The United States would subsequently fall prey to mass degeneracy, leading to a “race suicide.”²³ Most of the leaders and most vocal supporters of the eugenics movement originated from the middle to upper-middle classes, which were gaining in numbers as well as wealth due to the rising industrial and professional economy. The middle classes attributed their relatively high social position to their own intelligence, abilities, and hard work rather than to the inherited wealth and social rank of the upper class. Yet, they were insecure in and possessive of their social rank. They believed that those who were unable to climb the social ladder as they had done were unfit, while those who were able to excel had proven themselves deserving.²⁴ The field of eugenics became a modern, scientific way to identify inferior and superior people, certainly with strong conformity to the middle class’s preconceived attitudes.²⁵

Furthermore, in light of extensive social changes, Victorian mores regarding sexuality, femininity, and purity began to shift, producing a “new morality” that “celebrated an equality of desire between the sexes.”²⁶ Some social observers feared that the “new morality” would lead to the corruption of women and the decline of the American family. As Kline states, eugenics “linked anxieties about race and gender in the language of Progressivism,”²⁷ whose key terms

16 Allen, Garland E. “Is a New Eugenics Afoot?” *Science* 294, no. 5540 (Oct. 5, 2001): 61.

17 Elwell, Frank. “Emile Durkheim on Anomie.” Rogers State University, accessed April 5, 2015, <http://www.faculty.rsu.edu/users/f/felwell/www/Theorists/Essays/Durkheim1.htm>.

18 Rothschild, Joan. *The Dream of the Perfect Child*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 35.

19 Allen, “Is a New Eugenics Afoot?,” 61.

20 Burke, Chloe S. and Christopher J. Castaneda, “The Public and Private History of Eugenics: An Introduction.” *The Public Historian*, 29, no. 3 (Summer 2007): 6.

21 Rembis, Michael A. *Defining Deviance: Sex, Science, and Delinquent Girls, 1890–1960*. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 8–10.

22 Freeden, Michael. “Eugenics and Progressive Thought: A Study in Ideological Affinity.” *The Historical Journal* 22, no. 3 (Sep. 1979): 645.

23 Kline, *Building a Better Race*, 2.

24 Rothschild, *Dream of the Perfect Child*, 42.

25 *Ibid.*, 51.

26 Kline, *Building a Better Race*, 1.

27 *Ibid.*, 29.

were “science” and “reform.” As a science, the social ontology of eugenics appeared objective and empirical, rather than as a “moral rationale for regulating sexual behavior.”²⁸ Furthermore, it offered easy solutions to its identified problems, namely the segregation and sterilization of unfit, lower-class men and particularly women to curtail their perceived sexual deviancy.²⁹

Many scholars have explored how support for negative eugenics culminated in restrictive immigration legislation like the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, which placed immigration quotas on Southern and Eastern Europeans out of the belief that lower quality “stock” originated from these regions.³⁰ Other scholars have focused attention on eugenic sterilization laws, which sanctioned the forcible sterilization of 60,000 inmates of asylums, prisons, and in-patient treatment centers whom experts believed to possess defective “racial stock.”³¹ It is worth noting that “race” in this context does not refer to the racial categories we understand today, but to the “human race” or even the “American race.” Race, while absolutely central to the ideology of negative eugenics, had little direct consideration in positive eugenics and in middle-class women’s reform activities. Positive eugenics was largely a conversation between white middle-class individuals about their own reproductive practices, with little attention toward people of color or of the working class. As Rothschild states, race and ethnicity played little role in the eugenic reform efforts because “only certain Caucasian stocks were deemed fit among either sex,” so other “stocks” were typically ignored.³² In other words, since white eugenicists already considered other racial “stocks” to be inferior as a rule, they directed their attention towards those who resembled themselves, and thus whose “quality” could not be so easily ascertained. Most individuals who faced sterilization were poor, nominally white, and first-generation in the United States, with women sterilized about one-and-a-half times more commonly than men.³³ It was not until the 1950s that black Americans faced disproportionate sterilization rates in some states.³⁴ Therefore, race remained, to use Rembis’s word, “marginal” at least in the eugenic reform efforts of positive eugenicists in the early twentieth century.³⁵

Thus, the literature has offered ample consideration to the social conditions that promoted eugenics and to the support for and political manifestation of negative eugenics. However, there are two components of my question on which there is a dearth of literature: the support for positive eugenics and the role of white middle-class women. Interestingly, many scholars have acknowledged the one-sidedness of eugenic scholarship,³⁶ but few have broadly addressed the other dimensions they are certain exist. As Dikötter states, most scholars have chosen to focus on “the most extreme expressions of race improvement” in Northern and Western Europe and the United States, while “ignor[ing] the multifarious dimensions and extraordinary appeal of eugenics to individuals of very different social backgrounds, political convictions, and national affiliations.”³⁷ Burke and Castaneda state that for many eugenicists, “it was as essential to encourage the reproduction of those possessing desirable hereditary traits (positive eugenics) as it was to

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid., 20.

30 Paul, *Controlling Human Heredity*, 97–98.

31 Allen, “Is a New Eugenics Afoot?,” 61.

32 Rothschild, *Dream of the Perfect Child*, 43.

33 Ibid., 46.

34 Ibid., 48.

35 Rembis, *Defining Deviance*, 4.

36 Dikötter, Frank. “Race Culture: Recent Perspectives on the History of Eugenics.” *The American Historical Review* 103, no. 2 (Apr. 1998): 467.

37 Ibid.

deter the breeding of those who did not.”³⁸ Yet despite the clear recognition of the need for diversified examination of the eugenics movement, scholars—Dikötter and Burke and Castaneda included—proceed to ignore some of the very “multifarious dimensions” of which they speak. This silence includes the dimensions of positive eugenics and the role of middle-class women.

Kline’s *Building a Better Race* provides perhaps the most thorough consideration of positive eugenics. In contrast to the construction of lower-class women as sexually promiscuous and morally depraved in negative eugenics, positive eugenics constructed the middle-class woman as the “mother of tomorrow” whose natural task was to propagate the race and ensure its moral and domestic well-being.³⁹ Women who failed to marry or have children, especially as the cost of an occupation outside the home, were roundly condemned and blamed for an impending “race suicide.”⁴⁰ Eugenists stressed the idea that marriage and motherhood were a woman’s ultimate calling and would bring women the fullest happiness.⁴¹ The ideology of positive eugenics conveniently emerged at a time when increasing opportunities for women were beginning to threaten “white middle-class male authority,” and offered a solution that would reestablish the status quo.⁴² Kline states that beginning in the 1930s, eugenists turned their attention to positive eugenics and began mass campaigns to encourage men and women to select eugenically fit marriage partners and campaigns to advocate for marriage counseling to establish a happy and harmonious home.⁴³ Eugenists stressed “reproductive morality,” the idea that a couple should consider their children’s impact on the race before having them.⁴⁴ After eugenic ideology declined following World War II, the positive eugenics movement gradually evolved into the pronatalism of the 1950s.⁴⁵ Yet, I find Kline’s assessment of positive eugenics to be incomplete. While Kline certainly recounts some of the features of positive eugenics, she does not explain why middle-class women would be drawn to such an ideology that, at its core, limited their potentialities to that of wives and mothers and condemned their foray into public life, especially at a time of growing educational and economic opportunities for women. I also vehemently challenge her assertion that positive eugenics did not emerge until the 1930s, as I will more fully detail in my paper.

Moreover, the roles and motivations of women in eugenics as a whole have not received sufficient consideration. Existing literature on eugenics has portrayed women as either victims or victimizers. According to the literature, via negative eugenics, eugenists tried to control the sexuality and procreation of lower-class women through sterilization and segregation, thus victimizing them. Through positive eugenics, eugenists attempted to coerce women to marry, reproduce, and behave in accepted ways or risk being deemed selfish traitors to the race, also rendering women victims. In addition, as victimizers, middle-class women were directly involved in the subjugation of poor women through their work as physicians, psychologists, social scientists, administrators, eugenic fieldworkers, social workers, and judges who supported eugenic policies and ideas. Most of those who directly examined supposedly “feeble-minded” women in asylums and hospitals were other women.⁴⁶ These female experts treated and diagnosed these women as

38 Burke and Castaneda, “Public and Private History of Eugenics,” 7.

39 Kline, *Building a Better Race*, 8.

40 Ibid., 11.

41 Ibid., 127.

42 Ibid., 11, 19.

43 Ibid., 124.

44 Ibid., 126.

45 Ibid., 125.

46 Rembis, *Defining Deviance*, 4.

defective and supported segregation and sterilization procedures.⁴⁷ Furthermore, women who did not work directly in these capacities but learned about eugenics in universities or through the media also became among the most prominent and instrumental actors in eugenic policymaking and advocacy through women's clubs and organizations.⁴⁸

However, if indeed, as Kline argues, “the message [of eugenics] was so compelling that even women reformers, themselves blamed for part of the ‘race-suicide’ problem . . . participated in the eugenic debate” and “supported the idea that fertility should be controlled,”⁴⁹ why exactly did they do so? And why, especially, did they support positive eugenics so strongly, even though positive eugenics sought to constrain their own marital and childbearing decisions and practices? Existing literature does not adequately address these questions. Furthermore, a construction of women as either eugenic victims or victimizers is overly simplistic, ignores women's agency, and fails to speak to their motives in supporting the eugenics movement. Therefore, my research seeks to examine the appeal positive eugenics may have held for middle-class white women in order to understand why it became so accepted among this group.

IV. Methodology

The newspapers are inextricably mixed up with all the human emotions, they are in contact with every home, every sanctuary, every religion—the daily mirror of humanity with all its strife, its longing, its heartaches, its little triumphs. Whether it is a society tea or a funeral, the birth of a king or the death of a felon, a fairy pageant or the social evil, the submarining of a great ocean liner or the victorious winner of a yacht race, a monster labor strike, jitney busses, billboards, new fashions, June brides, or the blue sky law, soul kisses, typhus germs, or a society scandal—the newspaper is the great vehicle of expression, understanding, information, sympathy.

—Alma Whitaker, *Los Angeles Times*, 1917⁵⁰

In the early twentieth century, the newspaper was a powerful cultural force that possessed tremendous authority for readers.⁵¹ In major cities like New York, hundreds of thousands of newspapers were printed and distributed to an eager public.⁵² As society began to change dramatically during this time, people began to rely on newspapers more than ever not only to distribute the news but also to shape their sense of identity in their emerging world.⁵³ V. S. Yarros wrote in the *American Journal of Sociology* in 1899, “The power of the press has never been so great, so decisive, so irresistible as it is now.”⁵⁴ Yarros in particular expressed concern about

47 Ibid., 3.

48 Ibid., 5.

49 Kline, *Building a Better Race*, 30.

50 Whitaker, Alma. “Our Profession.” *Los Angeles Times*, (Jun. 07, 1917).

51 Douglas, George H. *The Golden Age of the Newspaper* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), ix.

52 Ibid., xi.

53 Ibid., x.

54 Yarros, V. S. “The Press and Public Opinion.” *American Journal of Sociology* 5, no. 3 (Nov. 1899): 372.

the rise of yellow journalism,⁵⁵ an emerging provocative, sensationalistic style of reporting that often covered scandalous topics and played with the truth.⁵⁶ Robert E. Park, writing in 1923, described the newspaper as “no longer an organ of propaganda and opinion, but a form of popular literature.”⁵⁷ Park claimed that with a new focus on yellow journalism intending to entertain, titillate, and shock, women became more avid readers of newspapers.⁵⁸

Writing much more recently, Dustin Harp suggests that Park’s interpretation may possess some truth. To increase newspaper readership, and therefore sales and profits, some newspapers introduced women’s pages beginning in the 1890s.⁵⁹ Advertisers also hoped to target women, whom they saw as ideal consumers and whom they believed to be in charge of family purchases.⁶⁰ Magazines and newspapers in the early twentieth century began to reflect both the old Victorian ideals as well as the changing norms for women. Within these pages, women might have been presented in “traditional roles” or in “progressive and alternative ways.”⁶¹ Harp writes that magazines attempted to “define standards of behavior for women of the time, instructing them on their role in society, and more accurately, in the home as appropriate women, wives, and mothers.”⁶² Yet, drawing from this focus on women and children, some stories covered social issues relating to poor living conditions, family health, and children’s education.⁶³ In this manner, articles diverged from advice on cooking, cleaning, and keeping house, and drew women’s minds to issues considered of particular concern to women. Not only were women consumers of news, but they were also producers of it. New women’s pages in newspapers required the work of women journalists, who helped draw female readers further into print media and into issues of progressive reform and social justice.⁶⁴

With greater readership for newspapers and magazines, early reformers turned to the press to convince the public to abandon their prior understandings of the world and adopt new understandings. Public health reformers, for example, urged one another to adopt the techniques of “advertising men” to “sell” their cause to an unknowledgeable public, the way consumer goods might be sold.⁶⁵ Das argues that social movements have the power to effect social change, but only after proponents articulate to the public why such a change should occur. Mass media aids social movements because it acts as an instrument of “suggestibility,” presenting attractive answers to problems.⁶⁶ People become “vulnerable to new patterns of socialization and behavior” when the old social and political patterns are worn away.⁶⁷ Mass media is able to carry a single message to many people at once and alter belief systems and behavior, which makes it invaluable to social

55 Ibid., 374.

56 Campbell, W. Joseph. *Yellow Journalism: Puncturing the Myths, Defining the Legacies*. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), 7.

57 Park, Robert E. “The Natural History of the Newspaper.” *American Journal of Sociology* 29, no. 3 (Nov. 1923): 278.

58 Ibid., 288.

59 Harp, Dustin. *Desperately Seeking Women Readers: U.S. Newspapers and the Construction of a Female Readership*. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), 19.

60 Ibid., 19, 21.

61 Ibid., 106.

62 Ibid., 21–22.

63 Ibid., 22.

64 Ibid., 23.

65 Kirschner, Don S. “Publicity Properly Applied’: The Selling of Expertise in America 1900–1929.” *American Studies* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1978): 73.

66 Das, Mitra. “Social Movements, Social Change, and Mass Communications.” *International Review of Modern Sociology* 11, no. 1/2 (1981): 131.

67 Ibid., 132.

movements.⁶⁸

In light of the tremendous power and wide middle-class readership of newspapers and magazines in the early twentieth century, it becomes worthwhile to study mass media sources to determine why so many middle-class white women subscribed to the idea of positive eugenics. Additionally, I have found no other work on eugenics that has surveyed mass media to any considerable extent. I used ProQuest's general database to examine articles dating from 1900 to 1950 published in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *San Francisco Chronicle*. I selected these newspapers both for methodological and practical reasons. Firstly, because these newspapers were based in major metropolitan areas, they would have possessed substantial readerships. Secondly, the archives of these newspapers were the most complete that were readily available to me. I acknowledge the limitation that my sample of newspapers does not represent a diverse geographic swath of the United States. However, through temporary access to the archives of the *Boston Daily Globe*, *Hartford Courant*, *Baltimore Sun*, *Kentucky Courier Journal*, *Detroit Free Press*, *Atlanta Constitution*, *Cincinnati Enquirer*, *Indianapolis Star*, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, *Nashville Tennessean*, *Austin Statesman*, and *Arizona Republican*, I was able to cross-check my findings from the five newspapers in my sample. I found the content to be highly compatible across newspapers, and I am satisfied that my sample is representative of major newspapers across the country. I also examined articles from nearly thirty American magazines contained in ProQuest's database that were intended for general readers, including *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, *North American Review*, *Forum*, *Current Opinion*, and *Vogue*. A search for the terms "eugenic," "eugenics," and "eugenicist" presented me with approximately 11,600 newspaper and magazine articles. Through reading headlines and skimming contents, I further narrowed my sample to about 1,200 articles, which I employed in my research.

V. Eugenic Women

They are not so fooled as were some of their grandmothers by talk of sacred womanhood which was simply a flowery cloak for a double standard of morals. But neither are they fooled, upon hearing some young apostle of sex freedom dismiss an erstwhile flame with the words, "Oh, yeah, Lucy's a good kid but she has her ragged edges," into thinking Lucy is getting a much better deal than her grandmother.

—*La Mar Warrick*, *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, 1930⁶⁹

Conditions for women were quickly changing in the early twentieth century. By 1900, 20 percent of women over the age of ten worked outside the home in occupations newly available to them.⁷⁰ Before this time, most employment open to women was in domestic service and was typically undertaken by Asian, Hispanic, black, and immigrant white women. With increasing

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁶⁹ Warrick, La Mar. "Farewell to Sophistication." *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, (Oct. 01, 1930).

⁷⁰ Schneider, Dorothy and Carl J. Schneider. *American Women in the Progressive Era, 1900–1920*. (New York: Facts on File, 1993), 5.

industrialization, working-class women began to work in factories, while white middle-class women entered previously male-only white-collar occupations, like stenography, accounting, clerking, and retail sales.⁷¹ Women could be found in 295 of the 303 occupational categories on the U.S. Census by the year 1900.⁷² As more employment opportunities became available to women, more women moved to the cities, leaving behind the narrow support systems of home. Women witnessed the broadening of their social worlds, and increasingly frequented movie theaters and dance halls and shopped in department stores.⁷³ In addition, industrialization changed housework for women by establishing the mass production of many foods and clothing, leaving middle-class women more time for leisure and socializing.⁷⁴ Even so, few married women worked formally because of the lack of child care options and the prevailing social view that women should devote themselves to the household and care of their families.⁷⁵ Even though more occupational opportunities opened for women, hierarchical advancements in these occupations were rare.⁷⁶ Women made strides in educational attainment as well. By 1900, women made up 36 percent of the undergraduate and 13 percent of the graduate students in American universities.⁷⁷ Enrollment only continued to rise as the twentieth century progressed, as the 85,000 female enrollees in universities in 1900 exploded to 283,000 in 1920.⁷⁸

Amid increasing educational and economic opportunities for women, the late nineteenth century saw the birth of the middle-class archetype of the “New Woman.” In the Victorian Era, women were held to the standard of the “cult of true womanhood,” characterized by the four tenets of “piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness.”⁷⁹ However, the New Woman of the Progressive Era became educated in university, played sports clad in bloomers, spent time with men unchaperoned, shared her informed opinions on politics, and asserted her right to exist independently from a man. Compared to her Victorian mother or grandmother, the New Woman was more knowledgeable about sex and willing to discuss it frankly.⁸⁰ The New Woman presented a stark contrast to the domestic, morally pure, and physically weak “True Woman” of the Victorian Era. Yet, it was important that the New Woman still held matrimony and motherhood as her highest ideals, though she hoped for a marriage predicated more on affection and mutual respect.⁸¹ The New Woman, with her “gestures, energy, and activism,” found representation in popular novels and films of the era, encouraging middle-class women to emulate her.⁸²

A. *The Modern Woman and Eugenics*

71 Bose, Christine E. *Women in 1900: Gateway to the Political Economy of the 20th Century*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 55.

72 Lagemann, Ellen Condliffe. *A Generation of Women: Education in the Lives of Progressive Reformers*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 3.

73 Schneider and Schneider, *American Women in the Progressive Era*, 5.

74 Ibid.

75 Bose, *Women in 1900*, 56.

76 Schneider and Schneider, *American Women in the Progressive Era*, 15.

77 Muncy, Robyn. *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890–1935*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 4.

78 Schneider and Schneider, *American Women in the Progressive Era*, 52.

79 Dicker, Rory. *A History of U.S. Feminisms*. (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2008), 21.

80 Schneider and Schneider, *American Women in the Progressive Era*, 142, 144.

81 Ibid., 16–17.

82 Scharf, Lois and Joan M. Jensen. *Decades of Discontent: The Women's Movement, 1920–1940*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), 113–114.

She is practically the theme of almost all your writers, the model for your artists—particularly your illustrators—the spirit of your dances. Where else are there so many women’s colleges, young women’s clubs? Here she has led her sex into the realm of business, and even there has been a conqueror. For her are brought to these shores the riches of many lands, and upon her young shoulders rests the burden of the suffrage gain. She is our coming office holder. And, above all, the Girl of To-day is the mother of to-morrow.

—Miss Olga Nethersole, *New York Times*, 1913⁸³

Social commentators of the day heralded, or warned, the arrival of the “modern woman.” According to these observers, the modern woman of the twentieth century was young, well-educated, independent, and passionate. Though sometimes frivolous and self-centered, the modern woman possessed strong progressive political views, particularly regarding marital and sexual matters.⁸⁴ Unlike the naïve women of the past, cynical modern women did “not think marriages are made in heaven,” scorned “a legal system which will not permit divorce by mutual consent,” and abhorred “a social system which withholds birth control knowledge from the group having most economic need of it.”⁸⁵ Female writer La Mar Warrick claimed of modern women, “There is little that they don’t know about trial marriage,⁸⁶ eugenics, birth control, and the mechanization of emotions.”⁸⁷ Most importantly, unlike their forebears, modern women held few qualms about openly discussing these views, including on eugenics.⁸⁸ Dr. Evangeline Young, a prominent proponent of the eugenics movement, asserted that young people had embraced eugenics far more quickly and forcefully than older generations, even stating that young couples enter her medical practice to inquire if they are eugenically fit to marry.⁸⁹ The “modern woman” became an ideal for young middle-class women, who increasingly saw such women portrayed on stage, screen, and print. Eugenists successfully connected support for eugenics with modernity and independence, especially among women.

The holdover Victorian ideal of women as modest, delicate, and pure was more and more challenged by women who had entered male professions and spheres, such as *Los Angeles Times* reporter and columnist Alma Whitaker. Criticizing those who lamented the loss of “modesty” in favor of “modernity” in young women, Whitaker wrote that the modesty that men believed was so essential for femininity was based on the “shame and humility” of women. This modesty would encourage women to fear men’s sexuality, to cower from the world, to conceal their intelligence, and “above all” to view their bodies as “indecent.” This modesty “would see evil in the study of eugenics, no matter how important that branch of science may presently prove to the world” because such prurient subjects are only acceptable for men’s ears. A woman who had achieved modernity and independence would not shun knowledge of eugenics but embrace it. Wrote Whitaker:

83 “Wonders at Ability of ‘Girl of To-day.’” *New York Times*, (Oct. 27, 1913).

84 “Proof Is Found Woman’s Brain Equals Man’s.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (Sep. 29, 1927).

85 Warrick, La Mar. “Farewell to Sophistication.” *Harper’s Monthly Magazine*, (Oct. 01, 1930).

86 “Trial marriage” refers to cohabitation prior to marriage to determine whether a couple is a good match.

87 Warrick, La Mar. “Farewell to Sophistication.” *Harper’s Monthly Magazine*, (Oct. 01, 1930).

88 “How to Choose Mate: Eugenic Rules Should Be Kept in Mind to Wed Wisely.” *Washington Post*, (Feb. 21, 1915).

89 Ibid.

No, dear lords of creation, much as we yearn to please you, I think I am glad we are less modest, less ashamed, less suspicious. It is better that we should be able to discuss serious questions with you without a modest (and rather vulgar) blush. It is well that we can look you straight in the face and meet you on an intellectual level. . . . It is best that we should cull such wisdom as we can from eugenics, that we should learn to know you and ourselves, our possible heights, our possible depths. Best for us and best for you!⁹⁰

As Whitaker illustrates, modern women saw in eugenics a way to learn more about themselves, to broaden their worlds, and to explore their potentialities.

This association between modernity and eugenics is epitomized in eugenicists' arguments about women's romantic choices. Eugenicists were aware that as social conditions for women were changing, so were social relations between men and women. Included in these changes were women's ability to select romantic partners from among a greater number of men and with different and perhaps stricter standards. For example, one article argued that the invention and popularity of the car was enabling women to both work in the city and travel between "four and five counties" to "take her choice" from among the "eligible boys."⁹¹ Florence Kiper wrote that as society progresses, "woman will be freer to choose her mate as a personality, not as a dispenser of goods, financial or otherwise."⁹² Women's romantic and marital freedoms were manifested in the very idea of positive eugenics, and indeed, were a requirement for its success. If women were no longer obligated to select spouses based on wealth, social status, or simple physical proximity, they could now choose partners according to whatever criteria mattered to them, including compatibility and love. If positive eugenics hoped to succeed in its aims, it was imperative that women possess the ability to select husbands based on eugenic criteria. Thus, positive eugenics *sanctioned* the idea of women's marital choice, and was thus modern in its outlook on marriage. For women who embraced the "New Woman" title, eugenics, with its progressive views on marriage and association with advanced scientific thought, would have been an attractive ideology. These women might therefore have been considered "new, *scientific* women."

B. *Profiles of Eugenic Women*

She fryeth doughnuts with one hand and marcelleth her hair with the other. She runneth her own motor car with her right hand while she letteth her Beloved hold her left hand. She knitteth helmets or rolleth bandages with her fingers while she talketh politics or eugenics with her lips and flirteth with her eyes. And when her day's labors are finished . . . who is THIS that queeneth it over the ballroom and coquetteth in the conservatory? Even the 'Perfect Lady' of Nineteen-nineteen.

—Helen Rowland, *Washington Post*, 1919⁹³

Newspapers and magazines frequently printed complimentary profiles of young, middle-class

90 Whitaker, Alma. "A Question of Modesty." *Los Angeles Times*, (Aug. 18, 1913).

91 "Automobile Marriages." *Los Angeles Times*, (Oct. 01, 1923).

92 Kiper, Florence. "The New Motherhood." *Forum*, (Aug. 1914).

93 Rowland, Helen. "Sayings of Mrs. Solomon." *Washington Post*, (Feb. 04, 1919).

“New Women” who espoused eugenic ideology. In 1916, the *Washington Post* published a profile of Violette Wilson, the daughter of the mayor of Berkeley, California. Wilson had attended the University of California, but had dropped out at the age of nineteen because she had felt that the university was stifling her creative energies and individuality. The “pretty” Miss Wilson was an athlete who had played as the only woman on her high school’s football team and who had hiked 300 miles in the Sierra Nevada wearing men’s clothes. She enjoyed reading books by authors like prominent feminist and eugenicist Ellen Key. Wilson praised the virtues of freedom, self-expression, and emotional display, and championed modern views on matrimony, such as that spouses should divorce if they no longer love each other. Even more stunningly, she dismissed the majority of men as wanting nothing more than toys for wives, whom they can put away whenever they tire of them. Still worse, these plaything wives, Wilson said, “know nothing about eugenics.”⁹⁴ As a modern, independent, and intelligent young woman knowledgeable about eugenics, Wilson exemplified the archetype of the eugenic woman.

Yet another profile of a eugenic woman boasted the headline “Perfect Woman Gives Views on Eugenics.” Miss Susan Myrick, a physical education schoolteacher described as “the perfect woman” who “sleeps outside the year around” and “climbs trees for exercise,” was the first person to add her name to a eugenic health registry in her hometown of Battle Creek, Michigan. The article relayed Myrick’s beliefs in the efficacy of eugenics, the requirement of health certificates to obtain marriage licenses, and the need for eugenic considerations in matters of love, and even included a text box with Myrick’s eugenic words of wisdom.⁹⁵

Other articles profiled women working in occupations involving eugenics. One article covered Miss Blanche Bass, a graduate of the St. Louis School for Social Economy, who “ha[d] given up her place in the younger social set” to serve as the superintendent of a eugenics school for girls.⁹⁶ Another such eugenic woman was Barbara Budd, a sociology major at George Washington University, who planned to create a news and feature service on eugenics. The reporter, Emma Perley Lincoln, described Budd as “the epitome of the serious-minded young woman of 1935” who will “upset the graybeards who wag their heads over the sad state of the younger generation.” In addition to her scientific and eugenic interests, Lincoln reported that Budd was an entrepreneur who had run previous “independent business ventures” in order to pay her way through college.⁹⁷

The profiles were approving of their subjects. Wilson’s profile, for example, described her as possessing “a certain touch of a woman twice her years.”⁹⁸ The women were portrayed as forward-thinking trailblazers, whom female readers could follow or risk being left in the dust of antiquity. Female readers would have noticed that the newspapers recorded these women’s thoughts for mass distribution to an interested public. For young women trying to establish a space for themselves in their changing societies, these eugenic women would have been powerful role models of modern womanhood. Most influentially, these eugenic women were intellectually and behaviorally independent and even rebellious. Wilson demonstrated independence in leaving

94 “Quit When Love Dies, Says Girl: Scores the ‘Toy’ Wives of Today; Wearies of Convention’s Masks.” *Washington Post*, (Apr. 02, 1916).

95 “End the Wild Oats Days of Men’: Perfect Woman Gives Views on Eugenics; Would Have Human Thoroughbreds.” *Washington Post*, (Jan. 28, 1917).

96 “Quits Society for Eugenics: Young St. Louis Woman in Charge of New School in Louisiana.” *New York Times*, (Aug. 29, 1913).

97 Lincoln, Emma Perley. “Eugenics News and Feature Service Is Planned by Student at G.W.U.” *Washington Post*, (Jun. 20, 1935).

98 “Quit When Love Dies, Says Girl: Scores the ‘Toy’ Wives of Today; Wearies of Convention’s Masks.” *Washington Post*, (Apr. 02, 1916).

university because it limited her individuality. Myrick behaved independently in adding her name first to the eugenic registry and working outside the home as a physical education teacher. Bass abandoned her comfortable social setting to work in a profession in a leadership position. Budd planned to create an independent news service to promote ideas that would “upset the graybeards.” As the articles conveyed, their subjects epitomized the “New Woman” of the early twentieth century, all the more so because they supported eugenics.

VI. Eugenics and Marriage

Eugenics is making headway everywhere. It is even penetrating into the exclusive circles of the old aristocracy of Philadelphia. A Philadelphia girl of the highest aristocracy actually got engaged last month to a young bank clerk. A Philadelphia club man said to her reproachfully at a tea: “Is it possible that you, of a family eminent for seven generations, can stoop to marry an unknown upstart?” The young girl, a student of eugenics, answered coldly, “Well, I prefer to marry a man without a name rather than a name without a man.”

—Harold Bolce, “the proud father of Eugenia, the eugenics baby,” San Francisco Chronicle, 1915⁹⁹

Middle-class women in the early twentieth century were deeply cognizant of the importance of a good marriage for their happiness. A married woman was expected to submit to her husband’s demands within the home and in the marital bed and accept any punishments he might choose to dispense.¹⁰⁰ After marrying and especially after having children, few middle-class women worked outside the home, rendering them financially dependent on their husbands.¹⁰¹ Divorces were legally difficult to obtain and were highly stigmatized regardless.¹⁰² If a woman successfully obtained a divorce, the court would usually award the former husband custody of the children.¹⁰³ Though exact statistics are unavailable, sexually transmitted diseases were epidemic, and husbands and doctors often conspired to prevent wives from discovering that their spouses or even they were infected.¹⁰⁴ Consequently, many women feared choosing the “wrong” man to marry because of the strong chance they would not be able to extricate themselves from a toxic marriage. Women found support for their fears in print media. Wrote British writer Francis Gribble, if men and women are not careful about whom they marry, they will become “disillusioned” in their married life, which will lead to “bickerings,” “estrangement,” “intense dislike,” and perhaps even “postnuptial alarms and excursions.”¹⁰⁵ Recognizing the stark realities and limited options for women who married unkind, unhealthy, or poverty-stricken men, middle-class white women found in eugenics a seemingly scientific way to highlight the problems associated with adverse marriages, to identify an explicit *cause* for such marriages, and to promote marriages to physically

99 “The Eugenist.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Jan. 10, 1915).

100 Dicker, *History of U.S. Feminisms*, 22.

101 Schneider and Schneider, *American Women in the Progressive Era*, 145.

102 *Ibid.*, 146.

103 Dicker, *History of U.S. Feminisms*, 22.

104 Schneider and Schneider, *American Women in the Progressive Era*, 143.

105 Gribble, Francis. “Right Age to Marry; Not Young.” *Los Angeles Times*, (Jul. 02, 1922).

and intellectually fit partners, in hopes of inspiring greater lifelong happiness.

Beauty columnist Lillian Russell identified that the idea of eugenic marriages held greater legitimacy for women than men precisely because women disproportionately bore the difficulties of bad marriages. She wrote, “Men, unless their minds are of a scientific bent, are much given to pooh-poohing the subject of proper mating. Women, I believe, think to look deeper into the theme, for upon the wives and mothers falls the chief burden of any evil that results.” Accordingly, she said, every young woman who intends to marry should study eugenics.¹⁰⁶ As a 1909 *Current Literature* article proclaimed, “Marriage is, essentially, a science.”¹⁰⁷ Indeed, many eugenists portrayed marriage exactly as a science, the “facts” of which women could learn and put into practice through their personal marital decisions.

A. *Avoiding the Wrong Men*

Susie (aged six)—And when we grow up we’ll be married, won’t we, Tommy?

Tommy (sadly)—No, Susie, I can’t marry into your family. Your papa has weak eyes and your auntie has spasms.

—Washington Post, 1913¹⁰⁸

Eugenists warned readers of the dangers of marrying the “wrong” kind of man. Concerns about insidious physical degeneracy were not only relegated to the realm of negative eugenics, but were prominent in positive eugenics as well. Middle-class women feared, and male and female eugenists promoted the notion, that any man could have hereditary defects that were invisible to the untrained eye. Marriage to such men would have disastrous consequences for women, but through careful training in eugenics, women could avoid these men and ensure happier lives for themselves.

Despite scholars’ agreement that the percentage of Americans who qualified as defective was low relative to the general population, eugenists warned that the threat of the degenerate was undeniable.¹⁰⁹ Nearly all undesirable characteristics, including alcoholism and feeble-mindedness, had hereditary roots, should one trace the afflicted person’s lineage far enough. Also, as Dr. Woods Hutchinson, Clinical Professor of Medicine at New York Polyclinic, cautioned at a session of the American Public Health Association, degenerates were not relegated solely to “the communities of chicken thieves [and] feudists who fight and inbreed among themselves and live like animals.” Defective people also existed “on the roof of society, among the idle and mentally weak.”¹¹⁰ Hidden defectives could be lurking anywhere, including in the upper social echelons, and women must be vigilant to protect themselves.

106 Russell, Lillian. “Lillian Russell’s Beauty Secrets: Insanity—Mental and Moral.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (Jan. 16, 1914).

107 “Marriage As the Youngest of the Sciences.” *Current Literature*, (May 1909).

108 “Eugenics.” *Washington Post*, (Nov. 30, 1913).

109 “Would Check Birth of All Defectives.” *New York Times*, (Sep. 21, 1912).

110 *Ibid.*

Female eugenisists tried to impress upon other women the importance of considering eugenics when selecting marriage partners. In *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, Nanna E. Frank pointed out that women attempt to learn more about a suitor's moral and financial qualifications before marriage, but rarely inquire into a suitor's "physical qualifications."¹¹¹ Many medical professionals, including female doctors like Evangeline W. Young, warned readers that no one who has the "taint" of feeble-mindedness or insanity in his or her family should marry.¹¹² Other eugenisists cautioned that some people were born without consciences, "color blind to right and wrong," and hence likely to be dangerous to women.¹¹³ Dr. Anna Blount was one of the most vocal and most cited supporters of the application of eugenic principles to spousal selection. Blount wrote that cruelty is a hereditary characteristic that causes men to desert their wives. A cruel man, she warned, would leave his wife destitute and would only return to impregnate her again, creating not only another mouth for its mother to feed but yet another dysgenic blight on society, much like its father.¹¹⁴

In another article, Blount warned that alcoholic men were "deteriorating . . . mentally, morally, and physically" and were therefore unsuitable for marriage.¹¹⁵ In agreement, Dr. Norman Barnesby counseled women to avoid marrying alcoholic partners, as "drinkers" may be "classed as belonging to inferior types, either through heredity or environment." Barnesby continued:

A young girl is therefore taking a long and dangerous chance when she marries a habitual drinker. . . . Nearly every girl who falls in love with a "drinker" tries to make an exception in her own case, and has confidence in her ability to reform the man she admires for his other qualities. Some millions of women, altogether, have married with this idea, looking forward confidently to the future; but a baby could count the number who have not paid the penalty that they invited—a wrecked life and a dreary home.¹¹⁶

With statements like these, eugenisists warned women that despite their hopes that the men they marry will abandon their damaging habits, inborn qualities cannot be stamped out.

According to Blount, naturally inferior men are also more likely to be sexually promiscuous, leading them to contract venereal diseases that they are then likely to spread to their unsuspecting wives. Even "modern novelists," Blount wrote, cannot convey the misery of "the blooming bride transformed in a few short months to the querulous invalid, or returning from the surgical operation at the hospital with the best of life and hope gone." Venereal infections are so destructive to women that even smallpox appears "innocent and kindly" in comparison.¹¹⁷ Even diseases not transmitted sexually were cause for concern. Dr. G. de Forrest Martin shared a story of a tubercular man who subsequently passed on the disease to his new wife, who had since entered "the last stages of consumption." Additionally, the couple had produced "four sickly, emaciated children, all having respiratory weakness, diseased throats, and not one-half a chance

111 Frank, Nanna E. "An Old Science Under a New Name." *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, (Aug. 1913).

112 "Would You Wed? Then Do, or Don't, Advises a Boston Woman Physician, but Be Sure [to] Keep These 'Ifs' in Mind." *Washington Post*, (Feb. 14, 1915).

113 Darrah, David. "Find Marriage for Love Best Race Builder." *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (Dec. 31, 1937).

114 Blount, Anna. "Effect of Divorce on the Next Generation." *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Jan. 28, 1917).

115 Ibid.

116 Barnesby, Norma. "Eugenics and the Child." *Forum*, (Mar. 1913).

117 Blount, Anna. "What Marriage Health Test Bill Means If It Becomes Law." *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Mar. 18, 1917).

of living to maturity.”¹¹⁸

Some eugenists, like Professor Dean Inge of the Eugenics Education Society, claimed that knowledge of eugenics would help women avoid poor marriage choices by enabling them to find in prospective spouses “hidden signs of degeneracy, which are obvious to the scientific eye.” Without eugenic knowledge, women might find themselves drawn simply to a man’s “fine and strong physique,” despite lack of adequate information about his health.¹¹⁹ Miss Virginia Hinkins, who taught eugenics as secretary of the YWCA at Indiana University, advised young women “when ‘they looked into his eyes,’ to examine for signs of trachoma, rather than for yearning, burning, soulful fires, which rage in the erotic litany of love.” She continued, “His heart, to beat true, must pump seventy-two to the minute, and his sighs should rest under suspicion as indicating a liverish and morbid disposition.”¹²⁰ Thus, eugenics offered not merely an abstract way to prevent poor marriages, but actual methods for women to identify physically and mentally healthy men to marry. However, if women made a mistake, then physicians’ certificates could at least provide an additional checkpoint for physically healthy spouses.

B. *Health Certificates for Marriage*

Justice Jewett—Have each of you obtained the assurance of a physician that you are fitted for the higher calling of parenthood?

Both—We have.

*—From the wedding vows of Delia Dana and Robert Hutchinson, Chicago Daily Tribune, 1913*¹²¹

Eugenists advocated state and federal laws requiring men, and sometimes women, who wanted to receive marriage licenses to first obtain a health certificate signed by a physician indicating they were fit to wed. Eugenists hoped that certificates would provide information on an individual’s health, intelligence, and moral character.¹²² Where and when such laws were absent, eugenists also encouraged men and women to voluntarily seek certificates from their partners before consenting to wed. For middle-class white women, certificates from potential husbands provided assurance that a man was physically and mentally healthy and would thus serve as a good husband, father, and financial provider. In a letter to the editor, reader Helen M. Bent wrote in favor of a health certificate law using eugenic rhetoric about mothers. She argued, “The wife should be protected from infection with the diseases of vice in the living of her life as the mother of the race.”¹²³ Dr. G. de Forrest Martin, who shared the anecdote about the tubercular couple,

118 “Argue for Eugenics: Homeopaths Tell of Marriage Results That Might Have Been Better.” *New York Times*, (May 31, 1912).

119 “Science in Marriage: Knowledge of Eugenics Would Prevent Unwise Unions.” *Washington Post*, (Mar. 20, 1910).

120 “‘Science First’ in This Wooing.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (Oct. 25, 1915).

121 “Eugenic Wedding for Bridal Pair.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (Jun. 27, 1913).

122 “The Future of Love-Making in the Light of Science.” *Current Literature*, (Jul. 1906).

123 Bent, Helen M. “Bills Affecting Women: One Limits Dower Rights, the Other Concerns Eugenics.” *New York*

supported mandatory health certificates to obtain marriage licenses in order to avoid similar occurrences in the future.¹²⁴

The necessity of health certificates before marriage became a popular idea with widespread support. Even some Protestant clergymen began to refuse to conduct wedding ceremonies without prospective spouses first presenting certificates.¹²⁵ Several women's organizations adopted the cause of health certificates, and their efforts were in some part successful. For example, in June of 1913, Commissioner Cuno H. Rudolph of Washington, D.C., began work to propose a Congressional bill to require all men intending to marry to present a health certificate before the issuance of a license. He was in part inspired by a eugenics lecture given at the home of prominent eugenicist Mrs. John Hays Hammond just two days earlier. Another source of inspiration was his experience serving as foreman of a grand jury for a case in which an eighteen-year-old woman became blind after contracting a sexually transmitted disease from her husband. Rudolph and his supporters suggested that even local bills would further the eugenic cause because women could compel their prospective husbands to marry in locales covered by the law. If the men tried to evade marrying in these locales, it would raise their brides' suspicions.¹²⁶ Thus, eugenists proposed health certificates, in addition to eugenic training, as a way for women to protect themselves from dysgenic men. Eugenic knowledge and measures appeared to enable more intelligent and scientific methods of selecting marriage partners.

C. *Eugenics, Love, and Romance*

It is the man whose mind a woman can delight in, whose companionship she can play in, and whose soul she fervently prays for, that she finally acknowledges as the one she is willing to father her children; and the marriages in which love has reached such manifestations, the audience were told, are those that make ideal happiness in the present and for an ideal race in the future. Thus was proven the statement that love and eugenics are not only perfectly compatible, but are the same.

—San Francisco Chronicle, 1911¹²⁷

Supporters of eugenics stressed that eugenics would not eliminate love and romance in marriage, but would enable a more informed and intelligent type of love. Dr. Elizabeth Hamilton-Muncie asserted that eugenists wanted love to remain essential for marriage but also desired that couples love “with their eyes open and brains active.”¹²⁸ To build on feelings of love, eugenics would

Times, (Feb. 03, 1913).

124 “Argue for Eugenics: Homeopaths Tell of Marriage Results That Might Have Been Better.” *New York Times*, (May 31, 1912).

125 “Pastors Adopt Eugenics: Won't Perform Marriages for the Physically Unfit.” *New York Times*, (May 26, 1913).

126 “New Marriage Law: Rudolph Drafting Bill to Require Medical Certificate.” *Washington Post*, (Jun. 04, 1913).

127 “Doings of the Women's Clubs: Ellen Key's 'Love and Marriage' Freely Discussed.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Dec. 19, 1911).

128 “Won't Banish Cupid: Dr. Elizabeth Muncie Defends the Purpose of Eugenics.” *Washington Post*, (Jul. 07, 1914).

help women use “self control and common sense” to choose spouses. Many eugenists believed that eugenics would even enhance love. Said Hamilton-Muncie, “Far from banishing love, eugenics imbues it with an unselfishness, a readiness for self-sacrifice that it might not otherwise possess.”¹²⁹ Therefore, spouses who select each other with eugenic principles in mind might find themselves better prepared to love and sacrifice for one another.

Some eugenists even argued that love was not only compatible with eugenics in marriage, but could serve as a precursor to or stimulator of eugenic marriages. Homer Folks, secretary of the State Charities Aid Association in New York, expressed the view that marriage for love bolsters eugenics because it is “better for a pretty girl to marry a brave, handsome youth for love—true love—than it is for her to marry an elderly millionaire for his money.” In other terms, marriage for love between two young and healthy people rather than for money with an unhealthy or elderly person would help promote the eugenic cause. Marriage between young and healthy people who love each other, Folks said, is “nature’s law of eugenics.”¹³⁰ Havelock Ellis echoed this statement, writing that money, social position, and simple convenience hinder love. Unions between “wholesome wooers” are not only more likely to benefit the race, but are also apt to lead to happiness for the married couple. Instead of destroying love, eugenics would “enlarge the boundaries of love” and allow an “altering of ideals” in the selection of marriage partners.¹³¹ As the twentieth century ushered in new social norms for women and more progressive views on marriage, eugenics endorsed marriages based on love and compatibility. Therefore, as one supporter of eugenics phrased it, eugenic marriages embodied “the height of romance and science,”¹³² brought together to create stronger love and happier marriages.

D. *Eugenic Weddings*

Justice Jewett—Robert and Delia, do you intend to help and to consider each other and so to live that each, through the other’s affections and comradeship, may lead a fuller and more useful life? And do you intend to bring up any children which you may have to the best of your ability and for the good of mankind?

Both—We do.

—From the wedding vows of Delia Dana and Robert Hutchinson, Chicago Daily Tribune, 1913¹³³

Alongside such proscriptions of dysgenic marriages and prescriptions for eugenic ones, newspapers often covered “eugenic” weddings. These weddings usually occurred between socially prominent men and women with faultless pedigrees and impressive educations. The brides and grooms were quick to proclaim their marriages perfectly eugenic and to give their ringing endorsement to the

129 Ibid.

130 Darrah, David. “Find Marriage for Love Best Race Builder.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (Dec. 31, 1937).

131 Ellis, Havelock. “Why First Love Is Always Wrong.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (Nov. 24, 1912).

132 “Perfect Babies to Mate for Good of the Race.” *Los Angeles Times*, (Mar. 13, 1915).

133 “Eugenic Wedding for Bridal Pair.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (Jun. 27, 1913).

eugenic creed, both in word and deed. For example, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported on the San Jose wedding of Miss Elizabeth Goodrich—whose ancestry, the article claimed, could be traced to Noah Webster, compiler of the popular English dictionary—and Dr. James L. Whitney. In addition to standard details about the bride’s family, the groom’s profession, and the couple’s honeymoon destination, the article provided the subtle eugenic note that the pair had “confided to relatives . . . that they had exchanged health certificates prior to the ceremony.”¹³⁴ Considerably less subtly, during the aforementioned Miss Virginia Hinkins’s wedding, Hinkins instructed the minister “to announce to the large bridal gathering in the Hyde Park Presbyterian Church that both contracting parties had presented certificates of perfect health signed by reputable physicians.” Speaking about her husband, Hinkins explained that she had wished to marry a man “who was alive all over and sound.” She continued, “It is ridiculous to say love must be cold blooded in this method of selecting mates. I call it a normal desire to know the standing of a life partner, the only human insurance we can get for permanent love and happy married life.”¹³⁵

Additional articles profiled engaged eugenic couples using quite flattering terms. The *Los Angeles Times* published two articles covering the engagement and wedding plans of Leo B. de Lano and Betty Wehrle, both “ardent believers in the theory of eugenic marriages.” The earlier article gave de Lano the rather dashing description of “athlete, aquatic hero, temperance advocate, hat salesman, U.S.C. graduate, adventurer and extremist,” while branding Wehrle “a modern Aphrodite” and “about as pretty a girl as ever posed for an artist.” The later article included the bride and groom’s height and weight and described the couple as “perfect blondes.”¹³⁶ Wehrle, a modern young woman, had resolved that she would marry a man who was not only handsome but met eugenic standards.¹³⁷ De Lano stated that both Wehrle and he have a “fair share” of “mental, moral and physical strength,” as required for a “perfectly happy married life.”¹³⁸

Perhaps the most famous and most reported eugenic wedding—covered in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *San Francisco Chronicle*—featured Delia F. Dana, a granddaughter of poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Robert P. Hutchinson. The articles offered detailed descriptions of Dana and Hutchinson’s family histories and educational backgrounds, and more understatedly hinted at their families’ considerable wealth. In an interview before the wedding ceremony, Dana said, “Marriage is a calling that should be studied as one would any profession. . . . I have made a close study of eugenics, and am of the opinion that I am fitted for the marriage state with all its duties.”¹³⁹ During the wedding itself, the justice of the peace read a statement the bride and groom had prepared that included fitness for parenthood and health certificates as portions of the vows.¹⁴⁰

Many of these eugenic weddings occurred between clearly well-educated couples from wealthy society families. The profiles covered details about the weddings’ enviable locations, beautiful floral arrangements, and general grandeur. The articles’ flattery of the couples, as well as their impressive pedigrees and accomplishments, would likely encourage readers to follow their example. In addition, these articles promoted not only the idea that love and eugenics could coexist, but also that marrying with eugenic ideals in mind could initiate greater love.

134 “Eugenic Pair Wed Under Tree.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, (May 15, 1914).

135 “‘Science First’ in This Wooing.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (Oct. 25, 1915).

136 “Eugenic Wedding to Begin the New Year.” *Los Angeles Times*, (Jan. 01, 1914).

137 “Real Eugenic Marriage.” *Los Angeles Times*, (Dec. 31, 1913).

138 “Eugenic Wedding to Begin the New Year.” *Los Angeles Times*, (Jan. 01, 1914).

139 “Exponent of Trial Marriage Is a Bride.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Jun. 27, 1913).

140 “Eugenic Wedding for Bridal Pair.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (Jun. 27, 1913).

VII. Eugenics, Children, and Parenthood

Those children will have the best chance in life, the richest endowment whose parents come from families that are at least sound, physically and mentally, who love and desire their children, and who, in harmony of life, in the vigor of manhood and womanhood, living simple, wholesome, and beautiful lives, with much of the out-of-doors, prepare for their coming and guard with loving care the developing life. These are the true mothers and fathers, worthy of honor. These are the well-born children. This is eugenics.

—Mary L. Read, *New York Times*, 1912¹⁴¹

Disease was a constant fear in the early twentieth century, as tuberculosis, smallpox, influenza, typhoid fever, dysentery, and others killed hundreds of thousands of people.¹⁴² In 1918, the average life expectancy was just 53 years for men and 54 for women. Nationally, one in five children died before the age of five; in some cities, the number rose to one in three before the age of one.¹⁴³ Uncontaminated milk was not widely available, and mothers struggled to protect their children from childhood diseases like rickets and milk sickness.¹⁴⁴ With venereal diseases rampant, many women gave birth to infected children. Authorities estimated that syphilis alone caused the deaths of 73,000 babies in 1916.¹⁴⁵ Doctors in general could provide little assistance during the first few decades of the 1900s. About 90% had not attended college or had attended poor medical schools, and many doctors did not practice proper aseptic technique, further spreading infections.¹⁴⁶ At a time when mothers desperately struggled to make sense of the high infant mortality rate and sought ways to reduce it, eugenics emerged as just such a palliative.

A. Healthier Children

A well born baby! What mother does not wish for it!

—Emile Berliner, *Washington Post*, 1926¹⁴⁷

The problem of infant mortality so troubled the nation in the early twentieth century that four of the five newspapers in my sample covered the November 1913 meeting of the recently-formed American Association for the Study and Prevention of Infant Mortality, which included a eugenics section.¹⁴⁸ Speaking at the meeting, Mrs. John Hays Hammond, the wife of a millionaire mining titan,¹⁴⁹ alleged that a “majority of babies [who] die [do so] from causes traceable to conditions

141 Read, Mary. “What Is the Real Meaning and the Use of Eugenics?” *New York Times*, (Nov. 03, 1912).

142 Schneider and Schneider, *American Women in the Progressive Era*, 7.

143 United States Department of Health and Human Services, “The Great Pandemic: The United States in 1918–1919,” accessed April 20, 2015, http://www.flu.gov/pandemic/history/1918/life_in_1918/index.html.

144 Schneider and Schneider, *American Women in the Progressive Era*, 8.

145 *Ibid.*, 143.

146 *Ibid.*, 9.

147 Berliner, Emile. “The Education of Mothers.” *Washington Post*, (Jan. 31, 1926).

148 “Study Ills of Babies: Association to Prevent Infant Mortality Meets Here Next.” *Washington Post*, (Jul. 06, 1913).

149 Yale University Library, “Guide to the John Hays Hammond, Sr. Papers: Overview,” accessed April 5, 2015, <http://drs.library.yale.edu/HLTransformer/HLTransServlet?stylename=yul.ead2002.xhtml.xsl&pid=mssa:ms.0259&clear->

prior to their birth,” poor heredity chief among these. If more couples married eugenically, she asserted, fewer infants would die. Hammond said quite vividly:

More than one-half the processions of white coffins . . . are assured before the birth, or at the birth of their little occupants. So appalling are these figures that I believe it behooves every mother to inquire, “Why did my baby die?” and every girl to ask, “Why cannot all women have rosy, plump, dimpled, healthy babies?” The answer will be found in the science of eugenics and more efficiently trained obstetricians.¹⁵⁰

To support her assertion, Hammond maintained that eugenics could “within a generation” achieve “the reduction of three-fourths of all disease, the elimination of one-half of the mortality of the children, and the practical elimination of degeneracy and useless waste of infant life.”¹⁵¹ The article, and likely Hammond herself, did not explain how she arrived at these statistical conclusions, nor how she defined the successful implementation of eugenics. However, as a well-respected society woman, Hammond’s social position would certainly lend authority to her views. Hammond was just one of the many eugenicists who stressed the scientific validity of the field, often by citing supposedly accurate statistics. Dr. Norman Barnesby asserted that knowledge of heredity was so advanced that “it is possible to predict almost exactly the kind of children that will be born to parents whose heredity and mental habits are known” as a matter of “definite scientific knowledge.”¹⁵² Authoritative, expert guarantees of the legitimacy of eugenics, and seemingly valid evidence in its favor, would have been persuasive to a lay public. Eugenics could provide exactly the scientific solution to infant mortality for which mothers had hoped.

While eugenicists often acknowledged the importance of environment for a child’s well-being, many believed that a child’s mental, moral, and physical health were largely determined before its birth. As one eugenicist phrased it, “Gardeners know the importance of good soil, but no amount of cultivation will turn a thistle into an orchid. The same rules apply to human beings.”¹⁵³ Hammond proposed that eugenics in practice could raise a baby’s “biological capital,” giving it the resources to avoid or fight ill health.¹⁵⁴ A eugenically well-born child, eugenicists emphasized, is capable of handling the most perilous environmental aspects of modern life, including overcrowding and infectious disease.

Yet in order to produce these well-born children, women once again had to be careful to marry morally, mentally, and physically healthy men. Advice columnist Mary Haworth typified this sentiment of women’s duty to find eugenic fathers for their children, writing that it was among a mother’s most important responsibilities to “giv[e] her children a congenital endowment of splendid physical and moral health.”¹⁵⁵ Eugenicists warned that criminal tendencies, susceptibility to disease, and even intelligence were hereditary,¹⁵⁶ making marriage to eugenic men all the more imperative. Florence Kiper wrote in *Forum* that the science of eugenics had revealed the

stylesheet-cache=yes.

150 “Eugenics Remedy for Race Suicide.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (Nov. 16, 1913).

151 “Eugenics Not a Destroyer of Romance.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Nov. 16, 1913); “Eugenics Remedy for Race Suicide.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (Nov. 16, 1913).

152 Barnesby, Norma. “Eugenics and the Child.” *Forum*, (Mar. 1913).

153 Darrah, David. “Find Marriage for Love Best Race Builder.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (Dec. 31, 1937).

154 “Eugenics Not a Destroyer of Romance.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Nov. 16, 1913).

155 Haworth, Mary. “This Business of Living: Mother Worried Over Daughter’s Engagement.” *Washington Post*, (Aug. 06, 1935).

156 Darrah, David. “Find Marriage for Love Best Race Builder.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (Dec. 31, 1937).

hereditary requirements of fatherhood. Because women are more concerned with children's well-being than are men, it is their onus to select the best men to father their children.¹⁵⁷ Eugenists encouraged women to choose spouses largely according to their worth as fathers, even suggesting that officiators should ask brides during the marriage ceremony, "Do you choose this man to be the father of your children?" rather than "Will you love, honor, and obey?"¹⁵⁸

Among eugenists' concerns was parental drug use, which they warned could have both prenatally and genetically deleterious effects on children. Dr. C. W. Saleeby attributed to Francis Galton an anecdote that a woman "had five sickly children, dying in infancy" when married to her alcoholic first husband, but in a second marriage to a sober man "bore normal and vigorous children." Saleeby claimed to have himself seen a man who had fathered two healthy children while sober, but had "engendered two idiots" after becoming addicted to cocaine.¹⁵⁹ Thus, appropriate spousal selection could make all the difference for children's survival and health. Dr. Anna Blount warned that alcohol is a "germinal and fetal poison," and its excessive use in mothers or fathers in their lifetimes will cause epilepsy, feeble-mindedness, poor health, and early death in their children. Blount asserted that the children of an alcoholic father would probably inherit his addictions and deficiencies, with little of the positive qualities he possessed before he began abusing alcohol.¹⁶⁰ Other vices in the parents could also negatively affect children. Blount wrote about "social diseases" or "red light diseases," euphemistic terms for sexually transmitted diseases. Blount recognized that women had been shielded from knowledge of social diseases to their detriment. She cautioned that these social diseases killed thousands of people each year and sometimes caused birth defects such as blindness in newborn babies.¹⁶¹

In sum, eugenics gave mothers a scientific explanation for the death of so many of their babies and hope that they and other mothers could be saved from experiencing this tragedy and agony ever again. Eugenists implored women to place their faith in science rather than religion to prevent infant mortality. As Emile Berliner, inventor of the gramophone, wrote in an article, "When a minister stands at the coffin of a child or young person and devoutly pronounces the well-intended consolation: 'The Lord gave and the Lord has taken. Blessed be the name of the Lord'—he expresses in nine cases out of ten an unintentional, pious bit of blasphemy."¹⁶² In other words, children's deaths are not God's will but avoidable human error. Berliner argued that we cannot merely rely on "superstition and guesses" to explain infant mortality. Eugenics provides a scientific rather than a spiritual reason, along with a scientific *solution* in proper eugenic living. "Twenty-five years ago every mother trembled for her baby," wrote Berliner, but eugenics now promises mothers they can have healthier children and less heartbreak.¹⁶³ If eugenics were put into practice, readers would see "such a diminution of human misery, such an augmentation of human ability and happiness, as no previous half century has ever known."¹⁶⁴ What desperate mother could resist such a claim?

B. *Baby Contests*

157 Kiper, Florence. "The New Motherhood." *Forum*, (Aug. 1914).

158 "Urges Eugenic Wedding Ritual." *Washington Post*, (Mar. 10, 1916).

159 Austrian, Delia. "Women and Children First." *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (Jun. 09, 1912).

160 Blount, Anna. "Effect of Divorce on the Next Generation." *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Jan. 28, 1917).

161 Blount, Anna. "What Marriage Health Test Bill Means If It Becomes Law." *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Mar. 18, 1917).

162 Berliner, Emile. "The Education of Mothers." *Washington Post*, (Jan. 31, 1926).

163 *Ibid.*

164 Read, Mary. "What Is the Real Meaning and the Use of Eugenics?" *New York Times*, (Nov. 03, 1912).

The old method of having the Mayor of the town, or most popular bachelor (who expects to be a candidate for office) saunter into the baby show, shake hands with the beaming mothers, chuck the round and be-ribboned babies under the chin, and select the one with the bluest eyes and goldenest curls and deepest dimples (and most relatives of voting age) to wear the blue ribbon or carry away the silver, doesn't go any more—not at the purely scientific baby shows that are now the vogue. The passion for improving the race and the interest in eugenics have changed that.

—Helen Dare, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1913¹⁶⁵

While baby shows had existed before eugenics became popular, “Better Baby” contests that judged babies and awarded prizes based on babies’ apparent eugenic health, physical fitness, mental vigor, and pleasing disposition became a popular pastime and a fixture of agricultural fairs and association gatherings, even those with no clear connection to eugenics. For example, at their second annual beach picnic, the Southern California Retail Grocers’ Association held a baby contest and awarded a prize to the grocer with the largest family (Christian Krier, forty years old, who had eight children).¹⁶⁶ Mrs. Mary Terrill Watts, co-founder of the Better Baby contests and president of the American Baby Health Contest Association, explained that she was motivated to establish the contests after witnessing the livestock and produce displayed at fairs improve with each passing year, while the human stock saw no such improvement.¹⁶⁷ One 1913 *Los Angeles Times* article asserted that Better Baby contests with as many as 200 contestants had sprouted up in such states as New York, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Michigan, Iowa, Kentucky, Texas, and Oregon.¹⁶⁸ The contests grew so popular that the Eugenic Congress’s baby contest in Los Angeles was filmed for showing at the Mozart Theater and in other cities.¹⁶⁹

Contest organizers claimed to judge infants according to carefully determined scientific criteria for perfection. Unlike earlier, non-eugenic baby contests which rated babies for beauty and charm, Watts was concerned with indicators of “a sound little body and the promise of a vigorous mind.”¹⁷⁰ Watts told the *Los Angeles Times* that Dr. Margaret V. Clark had created a scientific system of measurement for accurately judging children’s health and development, adapted from the scorecard used to judge livestock. Other Better Baby contests used different testing systems than Dr. Clark’s, like the scientific-sounding Kuhlman-Binet-Simon Test for mental and physical development.¹⁷¹ As columnist Helen Dare wrote in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, babies in Better Baby contests are judged according to “height, weight, shape of head, shape of ears, shape of forehead, width between the eyes, strength of chin, presence or absence of adenoids, condition of tonsils, general intelligence, quality of skin, quality of muscle, quality of bone, strength of spine,

165 Dare, Helen. “Mere Beauty No Longer Counts in a Baby Show Prize Winner.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Apr. 17, 1913).

166 “Grocers Sport at Ocean Park.” *Los Angeles Times*, (Aug. 06, 1915).

167 “Judge Babies by Foot Rule: Mother of All Infant Shows Here to Show ‘Em.” *Los Angeles Times*, (May 01, 1913).

168 Ibid.

169 “Eugenic Babies in the Movies.” *Los Angeles Times*, (Mar. 10, 1915).

170 “Judge Babies by Foot Rule: Mother of All Infant Shows Here to Show ‘Em.” *Los Angeles Times*, (May 01, 1913).

171 “Better Babies at Pasadena: Infants of All Ages to Enter Congress of Kiddies.” *Los Angeles Times*, (Oct. 09, 1915).

[and] ability to walk or creep.”¹⁷²

Demonstrating awareness of the conforming influence of the Better Baby contests, the organizers hoped that the scientific determinations on their children’s scorecards would inspire “intelligent, conscientious, loving mothers” to “bring their babies up to the standard as nearly as they can.”¹⁷³ Contest organizers intended for mothers who did not win or who had not entered their children to look to the examples of the winners and to consider such scientific criteria in rearing their children. In addition, because the contests were based on science (or so they said), mothers could rest assured that the contests’ standards and judgments were sound. Mary Watts asserted that the contests “present scientific thought to the people in a concrete, popular form that is acceptable to all.”¹⁷⁴ This supposedly scientific system of judging babies made parents believe that indicators in childhood that were easy to measure and perhaps possible to improve could foretell their children’s lifelong health and happiness.

Newspaper articles on contest winners further underscored this idea. A representative article covered ten-month-old Russell Delmot Nelson, who was awarded a score of 99.5 out of 100 in Washington, D.C.’s first Better Babies contest. Baby Russell “arrived in the world with the first requisite of a eugenic baby—a heritage of healthy flesh, tissue, nerves, and blood.” In addition to his fine heredity, Russell had a mother and father “who realized the necessity of scrupulous care in everything that affected his growth and development.” As the article recounted, Russell was breast-fed, drank pure water, was bathed in water at body temperature, and slept in a well-ventilated room.¹⁷⁵ Cases like these convinced mothers that a prescription existed for having a healthy baby: good heredity and careful parental attention. The ideas that eugenic mating would produce better marriages and that the results of the Better Baby contests were unquestionably scientific were so cemented in parents’ minds that two mothers of Better Baby contest winners made a pact to encourage their children to marry each other when they come of age. Said the mother of the baby girl, “If it is the high and noble work of the parent to take the tiny hand of the child and lead him along the best paths toward achievement and happiness, why should we not take an interest in the most important step of all.”¹⁷⁶ If babies said to have been born eugenically could win healthy baby contests, then it must mean that eugenics is the key to healthy children. With scientific Better Baby contests declaring winners between ages six months and three years “practically perfect in physique and mentality,”¹⁷⁷ here was the evidence that perfect babies could indeed be made, if the parents were conscientious, knowledgeable, and fortunate enough.

C. *Eugenic Legacy of Mothers*

In this day and age, when eugenics is so generally studied, it is strange that no more attention should have been directed to the stage. For it is certain that there is no more fruitful study in heredity than that which is here revealed. . . . Probably the best known of the American players, who are just as popular with the present generation as their forebears were in the early part of the last century, are the Drews and the Barrymores.

172 Dare, Helen. “Mere Beauty No Longer Counts in a Baby Show Prize Winner.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Apr. 17, 1913).

173 Ibid.

174 Watts, Mary. “Fitter Families for Future Firesides.” *Billboard*, (Dec. 15, 1923).

175 “Prize Infant Eugenic: Generations of Health Helped Nelson Baby Win.” *Washington Post*, (Nov. 30, 1913).

176 “Perfect Babies to Mate for Good of the Race.” *Los Angeles Times*, (Mar. 13, 1915).

177 “Perfect Babies Awarded Prizes.” *Los Angeles Times*, (Jan. 13, 1914).

—San Francisco Chronicle, 1913¹⁷⁸

Supporters of eugenics enticed women with portraits of “eugenic mothers” who by virtue of their careful, eugenic childbearing had become the progenitors of a line of distinguished and accomplished men and (occasionally) women. Some of their claims stretched far back in history. In an article loftily titled “Family Rules World,” Dr. David Starr Jordan of Stanford University posited that at least half of all Americans with English forebears were descended from a single twelfth-century woman, Isabel de Vermandois. Jordan claimed that the descendants of this “superwoman” number among the “fittest’ of the English-speaking race,” and include such American industrial barons and heroes of the middle class as John D. Rockefeller and J. Pierpont Morgan. Jordan declared that almost anyone descended from “Mother Isabella” is eugenically healthy and “stand[s] a more than usual chance to inherit the earth.”¹⁷⁹ According to Dr. Charles Davenport, the founder of the Eugenics Record Office, another such eugenic mother was Elizabeth Tuttle of England. In contrast to “Mother Isabella,” of whom little was said beyond her apparent eugenic dynamism, Davenport stated that Tuttle possessed “great beauty, commanding appearance, strong will, extreme intellectual vigor, [and] mental grasp akin to rapacity.” Her positive traits had recurred in her many esteemed descendants, among whom were Jonathan Edwards, Ulysses S. Grant, Grover Cleveland, and “the novelist” Winston Churchill.^{180, 181}

Other eugenic mothers were much more contemporary. In a letter to the editor, reader “A Mother of Ten” related that her husband was one of eleven children born to a strong lineage. Almost all of the members of the family, the reader said, possessed good character, had achieved success, and headed illustrious families of their own. The reader wrote, “Could the mother of this notable company look into the face of any child there and say she grudged the care, the toil, the actual suffering and sacrifice that gave them life and brought them forward to superb manhood and womanhood? Nay, verily! I am the mother of ten children myself, and I should be proud to specify the success of risks taken.”¹⁸² In other words, “A Mother of Ten” argued that a woman’s difficult work as a mother was a worthy price for the chance to create a eugenic legacy.

Newspapers sometimes identified eugenic mothers by following up on couples who had married eugenically. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* printed a short article about the progress of Mr. and Mrs. Albertus Bode, credited as the first eugenic couple.¹⁸³ The article stated that their marriage “ha[d] proven its worth with its progeny,” a boy and girl of excellent health. Accompanying the article was a photograph of a proud, serene-looking Mrs. Bode and her two children.¹⁸⁴ A *Los Angeles Times* follow-up with the Bells, the first Californian couple to obtain health certificates before marriage, credited the couple jointly as saying, “Ever since our marriage we have kept right on with our good health program. Look at our daughter Helen here. She’s 13 years of age

178 “How Heredity Makes Stage Stars.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Feb. 23, 1913).

179 “Family Rules World: Half of English-Americans Descendants of Superman.” *Washington Post*, (Dec. 31, 1912).

180 “Why Scientists Are Eager to Breed a Eugenic Baby.” *Washington Post*, (Nov. 09, 1913).

181 Davenport articulated this theory in an article published in 1913, when Winston Churchill was best known as a novelist. Churchill would not become the prime minister of the United Kingdom until 1940.

182 “The Value of Good Stock.” *The Independent . . . Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts*, (Apr. 13, 1905).

183 It is worth noting that the five newspapers in my sample gave the “first eugenic couple” label to many different couples, including within the same newspaper in different issues. I surmise that stories about the first, rather than any, eugenic couple would have been most intriguing to readers—and would thus have sold more newspapers.

184 “Eugenics Baby Makes Good.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (Dec. 24, 1922).

and has never been tardy or absent at school. . . . We never have had a family physician.”¹⁸⁵ This claim to have never had a family physician is especially significant, as it hints that, despite the high infant mortality rate, the Bells’ children never grew so ill that the family experienced enough fear to consult a doctor. Moreover, in a society that limited opportunities for women and reinforced women’s purpose as wives and mothers, women may have perceived leaving a eugenic legacy as a means to have a lasting contribution to society long after their deaths.

D. *Financial Assistance for Eugenic Parents*

It is ghastly in a country like this, where we have sufficient human and natural resources to give everyone work and a comfortable living, to realize that a large number of our girls and boys cannot marry because they can’t afford to. . . . College graduates no longer find it easy to get jobs equal to their abilities and training. Young architects, engineers, and teachers must, in many instances, be content with running elevators, counter-jumping, or soda-jerking.

—Dr. Henry Pratt Fairchild, professor of sociology at New York University, Harper’s Monthly Magazine, 1937¹⁸⁶

According to a 1934 *New York Times* article, Professor William McDougall first proposed family allowances for eugenic purposes in 1906. The article hailed the rising popularity of the idea both abroad and in the United States ever since that year. Certainly, many eugenists argued that the government should provide assistance to eugenic couples so they could afford to have children. Mrs. Shepard Krech, president of the Maternity Center Association, complained that many couples delayed childbearing for five years or more after marriage because they worried they did not have the financial means to support children.¹⁸⁷ Frederick Osborn of the American Eugenics Society argued that state aid would encourage young couples to have more children.¹⁸⁸ In a letter to the editor, reader Eleanor E. Wolf echoed this idea, saying that cautious young couples had to choose between three options: “(1) to postpone having children until late youth; (2) to limit the number rigidly; [or] (3) to descend to the pauper class and accept charity.”¹⁸⁹ Providing government aid to these couples would ensure they could have many eugenic children and have them early, without losing their standard of living.

Eugenists proposed different techniques for providing financial assistance to eugenic couples. One suggestion was to raise taxes on the childless to provide subsidies to parents or potential parents. Some said that it was not necessary for couples to even have had children before qualifying for state aid. Dr. Clarence G. Campbell, president of the Eugenics Research Association, proposed that the government give tax breaks to couples who may be well-suited for parenthood and raise taxes for those who would “make no contribution to racial reproduction and replacement.” Campbell argued that high-quality children are a public good that will

185 “Eugenists Are Congratulated: Health Marriage Bill Celebrated.” *Los Angeles Times*, (May 20, 1929).

186 Parkhurst, Genevieve. “Shall Marriage Be Subsidized?” *Harper’s Monthly Magazine*, (Jun. 01, 1937).

187 “Eugenists Favor Subsidy on Births.” *New York Times*, (May 06, 1938).

188 “Rearing of Children Held Society’s Duty.” *New York Times*, (Dec. 01, 1938).

189 Wolf, Eleanor E. “Expensive Babies.” *New York Times*, (Aug. 30, 1932).

have a “hundredfold return” on the “social body.” Thus, it is worth it for the public to invest money toward the production of such children. Campbell suggested using the periodical *Who’s Who*, a yearly guide to the most prominent men and women of society, as a starting point for identifying desirable couples to endow.¹⁹⁰ However, other eugenisists indicated that couples need not be wealthy and eminent in order to qualify. For example, William Durant proposed that parents in the middle class should have their income tax exemption doubled for each dependent child.¹⁹¹ Even further, Margaret Sanger, the famous birth control advocate, hoped the creation of a “marriage fellowship fund” would increase childbearing among poor couples who possessed “good family and education” but could not afford to marry.¹⁹² Providing family allowances, some eugenists stated, served as “a more direct, rapid and sure method of numerically improving the higher grades of a population” than sterilization of the feeble-minded.¹⁹³

Eugenists, too, turned the issue of state aid toward mothers. An article entitled “Pensions for Mothers of the Race” used eugenic rhetoric about the “mother of tomorrow” to advocate for pensions for women. The article stated that future society will consist of men and women carefully and scientifically reared by their mothers, who have begun to learn about eugenics. The unknown author of the article proposed that the state award each needy woman a pension after the birth of her first child and extending until her child’s third year. This measure is “in no sense a charity,” the author emphasized, but what mothers of the race are owed.¹⁹⁴

Yet others proposed that family aid should come not from the state but from employers. The aforementioned 1934 *New York Times* article claimed that research from respected professors in England, the United States, and Germany showed that “inadequate salaries” is the primary reason for low fertility in the professional class.¹⁹⁵ Dr. Samuel J. Holmes, zoology professor at the University of California, suggested that employers should increase their employees’ annual incomes at the birth of each of their children.¹⁹⁶ Dr. Paul Popenoe proposed that men’s wages mandatorily increase by twenty percent upon marriage and by fifteen percent for each dependent child they have. Popenoe stated that paying unmarried and married men the same wage was “economically unfair, socially unjust and eugenically unsound.”¹⁹⁷ Middle-class women may have supported Popenoe’s assessment. Though certainly at a financial advantage compared to the working class, members of the middle class still likely would have supported policies that would provide them with more money to care for their households, with the justification of eugenic benefit.

VIII. Women’s Importance, Professionalization, and Authority

A group of attendants at the American Home Economics Association Conference motored here from New York today to inspect the Summer Institute of Eugenics at Vassar College. They were greeted by Miss Ruth Wheeler, director of the institute, and conducted on a tour

190 “Urges Endowment to Improve Race.” *New York Times*, (Jun. 02, 1929).

191 “Eugenists Stress Home Life Factor.” *New York Times*, (May 08, 1936).

192 “Mrs. Sanger Gets Town Hall Award.” *New York Times*, (Nov. 11, 1936).

193 “Eugenics and Salaries.” *New York Times*, (Jan. 21, 1934).

194 “Pensions for Mothers of the Race.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (Jul. 09, 1911).

195 “Eugenics and Salaries.” *New York Times*, (Jan. 21, 1934).

196 “Family Bonus Scheme Urged.” *Los Angeles Times*, (Feb. 26, 1934).

197 “Economist Urges Higher Pay for Married Men.” *Washington Post*, (Apr. 02, 1937).

of the Eugenics Building and the Nursery School. The institute opened Wednesday, and mothers and their children participate in the course of lectures and training.

—New York Times, 1934¹⁹⁸

The Progressive Era witnessed the arrival of “scientific utopianism,” or the belief that the intelligent application of science could solve social problems.¹⁹⁹ Like most progressives of the era, middle-class women came to revere occupational specialization and scientific training.²⁰⁰ Their belief in the problem-solving power of science was reinforced in the universities, where women’s professors encouraged them to put their educations and training into practice through professional work.²⁰¹ In increasing numbers, women entered paid employment in occupations like nursing that they had previously performed on a voluntary, unpaid basis. Professional women lent scientific expertise to their work and raised their occupations’ standards and prestige.²⁰² Women also professionalized in fields including medicine, law, science, social science, journalism, and education, challenging Victorian notions that women were too fragile to work and should be shielded from any emotional or intellectual excitement.²⁰³ Still, professional women frequently encountered discrimination and found their career advancement constrained. Some managed to circumvent the glass ceiling by carving out professional niches for themselves in subfields more socially accepting of women, such as pediatrics in medicine, or by forming their own professional areas.²⁰⁴

One professional area that women created for themselves was home economics, which applied the principles of science to improve homemaking. Home economics intended to make household and family care work more intellectually challenging and modern for women. With scientific training and the production of female experts, home economists also hoped that homemaking, and by extension motherhood, would gain a new social status and reputation as a worthwhile intellectual goal for women.²⁰⁵ Furthermore, women worked to turn home economic sub-fields, such as nutrition and child development, into recognized academic subjects.²⁰⁶ Women found it easier to enter and create professions concerning women and children, which were socially acknowledged as women’s jurisdiction. Such professions helped “reconcile professional ideals with values from female culture,” granting women in those fields legitimacy and authority.²⁰⁷ Thus, professional women were able to use to their advantage a culture that required and rewarded technical knowledge for occupations. Yet, even as women increasingly ventured into public life, the cult of domesticity that labeled women’s highest vocation as wife and mother remained a powerful force. Women were encouraged to see their work as mothers

198 “Eugenics Institute Inspected.” *New York Times*, (Jul. 02, 1934).

199 Grant, Julia. “Modernizing Mothers: Home Economics and the Parent Education Movement, 1920–1945,” in *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History of a Profession*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 65.

200 Schneider and Schneider, *American Women in the Progressive Era*, 13.

201 *Ibid.*, 53.

202 *Ibid.* 54.

203 *Ibid.*, 77.

204 *Ibid.*, 77, 79.

205 Grant, “Modernizing Mothers,” 56.

206 Elias, Megan J. *Stir It Up: Home Economics in American Culture*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 9.

207 Muncy, Robyn. *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform: 1890–1935*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), xiv.

as deeply vital for the well-being of the nation.²⁰⁸ Indeed, eugenists used these principles to emphasize that the very future of the nation depended upon women.

A. *Women's Importance for Eugenics*

The best example of how children are protected was shown when the steamer Carpathia steamed into New York a few weeks ago, bringing with it 800 women and children. . . . Men of wealth and culture, men of science and eminence considered their lives as nothing when compared with the lives of the youngsters playing with teddy bears and dolls. They gave their lives ungrudgingly and chivalrously so that women and children might be saved. And it was not sentimental chivalry either that prompted this act, for each man knew that by surrendering his place to a woman he was doomed. But each of the Titanic victims felt that this should be, that women and children must be saved even at the peril of their lives.

—*Delia Austrian, Chicago Daily Tribune, 1912*²⁰⁹

Eugenists were convinced that the success of positive eugenics rested upon women. As those primarily responsible for the care of children, women would assure the future of the nation through their actions as mothers. Said Mary L. Read, director of the New York School of Mothercraft, “It is not what the sociologists urge nor the scientists reveal nor the physicians preach about eugenics that can realize the being-wellborn of one single child”; only a mother can do that.²¹⁰ Read’s words were echoed by Miss Mary Anderson, director of the Women’s Bureau of the Department of Labor, who said that “women have especial significance in society because they are directly responsible for the life of the home.” The nation would prosper only to the extent that the happiness, health, and security of the home were maintained.²¹¹ As such, people identified women as authorities within the domestic sphere and viewed women’s work in motherhood as profoundly important because it ensured the continued welfare of the entire nation.

A 1917 *Los Angeles Times* article about the release of an educational film on childbirth displays the authority of women in issues pertaining to motherhood. While the theater originally reserved the film for women only, it decided to allow its female audience to vote on whether to allow men into the theater. Upon an affirmative vote, men were permitted to watch the film, but only in the balcony and gallery seats, while the entire lower floor remained reserved for women.²¹² Similarly, a lecture by Edith Lees Ellis—wife of Havelock Ellis—entitled “Sex and Eugenics” was also initially reserved for women until the female audience voted to allow the men waiting outside to enter the auditorium. Before an eager audience of 1,200 women and 300 men, Ellis discussed her views on the “sacred secrets of her sex,” and encouraged women to be more open to sex and men to be more humane towards women.²¹³ Ellis’s lecture demonstrates that a wide and mixed early twentieth-century audience wished to hear a woman’s perspective on these

208 Elias, *Stir It Up*, 4.

209 Austrian, Delia. “Women and Children First.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (Jun. 09, 1912).

210 Read, Mary. “Romantic Love in Girls Should Be Fostered in Doll Days, Says Expert.” *New York Times*, (Oct. 03, 1915).

211 “Says Race Suffers by Trial Marriages.” *New York Times*, (Jan. 05, 1928).

212 “A Eugenic Picture.” *Los Angeles Times*, (Nov. 11, 1917).

213 “300 Brave Men Hear Mrs. Ellis.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (Feb. 05, 1915).

issues and accepted Ellis's authority to discuss these matters.

Eugenists understood that the broad support of women would invaluablely benefit their cause precisely because of women's accepted authority over the family and home. Demonstrating this, Dr. Paul Popenoe gave a presentation on California's eugenic efforts to the Southern California chapter of the Business and Professional Women's Club. After praising California's sterilization program, Popenoe implored the women "to throw their complete forces behind the movement to inaugurate the sterilization practice in county hospitals throughout the state."²¹⁴ Many women certainly assumed the mantle, including eugenics sections in their club and organization meetings, particularly those relating to women's and children's welfare.²¹⁵

Supporters of eugenics argued that its primary purpose was to protect women and children, leading writer Delia Austrian to compare eugenics with the recent *Titanic* disaster. "The noble cry on a sinking ship is 'women and children first,'" wrote Austrian in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*. "The sooner we recognize that women and children need to be protected, the sooner we can prevent society from its downfall." Eugenics in particular was the application of science to promote this protection. As Austrian wrote, "Science, with her strong, glaring searchlight, has at last focused her interest on womankind."²¹⁶ Dr. C. W. Saleeby similarly stated that through eugenics, the laws of life have given us a natural, biological way to benefit humankind. However, "we must help nature by helping the mother and child" through the teaching and promotion of eugenics. Said Saleeby, "Every human being that exists or ever has existed is a product of mother love or foster mother love." Therefore women should be protected so they can continue to nurture children.²¹⁷ Thus, eugenists afforded women tremendous importance in society. As the bearers, caregivers, and teachers of children, women had a fundamental function in determining the future direction of the race. Society had long relegated women to secondary status and denied them a public role. But now, science and scientists had at last directed the public's attention to the welfare of women and children; why should women not embrace it?

B. Professionalization of Motherhood

To the woman who desires motherhood as a vocation . . . a most fascinating occupation is ready. She has the whole world from which to choose for her material. Biology, hygiene, gynecology, for the coming life, and in the care of the growing child psychology, the many pedagogical methods, the study of the peculiar problems of adolescence—astronomy, poetry, civics, ethics, comparative religions—indeed, at no point can she touch the multiform world with understanding and enthusiasm without adding to her equipment of motherhood. A great mother would be a personality more vivid and more sane than any that our civilization of specialized vocations could furnish.

-Florence Kiper, *Forum*, 1914²¹⁸

214 "Business Women Hear Address on Eugenics." *Los Angeles Times*, (Jun. 12, 1932).

215 "Work to Save Babies: Delegates Will Meet Here for Child Welfare." *Washington Post*, (Apr. 06, 1914).

216 Austrian, Delia. "Women and Children First." *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (Jun. 09, 1912).

217 Ibid.

218 Kiper, Florence. "The New Motherhood." *Forum*, (Aug. 1914).

Just as the Progressive Era begat the prevailing belief that the application of science could solve myriad social problems, it also produced the idea that most occupations require scientific training.²¹⁹ Inspired by the eugenics movement that held that mothers were responsible for the preservation of the race, people grew concerned that young middle-class women who attended university were not learning how to become good mothers. Through the ideas of scientific training for occupations and the patriotic responsibilities of motherhood, many people started to believe that competent motherhood required a certain set of skills that were not innate to women but could be learned. In recognition of motherhood as a skill, several schools of “mothercraft” emerged purporting to give women the talents and knowledge necessary to become expert mothers.

The first, largest, and most famous of these schools was the New York School of Mothercraft, founded by Mary L. Read. The school offered courses in subjects including psychology, sociology, biology, ethics, eugenics, children’s physical care, dietetics, cooking, laundry, sewing, accounts, management, marketing, home care of the sick, children’s education, children’s stories and games, and nature study.²²⁰ Read stated that in past decades, women spent more time in the home and learned more household skills than women today, but today’s women have the benefit of advanced scientific knowledge that can assist in raising healthy and happy children.²²¹ Thus, today’s mothers had a duty to take advantage of scientific advancements and adopt the skills needed to nurture their children.

Not only was motherhood recognized as a learnable skill, but commentators of the day agreed that women held authority over motherhood and its instruction. Professor Charles Zueblin advocated that women lead the science and instruction of mothercraft, and in fact, lamented that men had played a significant role in its teaching thus far.²²² Indeed, almost all who administrated or taught at the schools of mothercraft were women. Read even planned to form the National Association for Mothercraft Education with women in its executive positions.²²³ In formal recognition of the mothercraft skill, graduates of the New York School of Mothercraft received a “Bachelor of Mothercraft” degree. The school became so well-regarded that some called for the development of a “school of fathercraft” and for mothercraft schools to be established in every major city of the United States.²²⁴ Some even suggested that women should have the option to take a sequence of mothercraft courses in standard universities, and then receive a “Q.M.” (“Qualified Mother”) degree in addition to their undergraduate degree.²²⁵

Officials at the School of Mothercraft impressed upon the public that mothercraft was a science and should be studied as such in order to produce the best possible citizens of the future. The professionalization of motherhood embodied a combination of eugenics and its emerging companionate field of eugenics, the scientific improvement of individuals’ living conditions and environment.²²⁶ At the National Conference on Race Betterment in 1914, Mrs. Melvin Dewey—wife of the eponymous inventor of the Dewey Decimal Classification system²²⁷—said that while

219 Schneider and Schneider, *American Women in the Progressive Era*, 13.

220 Marshall, Edward. “This School Teaches Women How to Be Good Mothers.” *New York Times*, (Jun. 09, 1912).

221 Ibid.

222 “Educators Praise School for Mothers.” *New York Times*, (Mar. 14, 1915).

223 Ibid.

224 Ibid.

225 Dare, Helen. “Planning Another University Degree for the Girl Student.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Mar. 18, 1913).

226 Elias, *Stir It Up*, 11.

227 University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, “Biography of Melville Dewey,” accessed April 5, 2015, <http://www.library.illinois.edu/circ/tutorial/biography.html>.

eugenics may ensure a nation of healthy stock, euthenics is needed to ensure the stock lives appropriately and does not deteriorate once more.²²⁸

This concern with euthenics extended to the traditional universities. Women's college Vassar's first summer course, offered in 1926, covered euthenics for women, defined as "the things that go into living as a wife, a mother, a home-maker, a member of society."²²⁹ To keep up with a society that is rapidly changing due to industrialization, a *New York Times* article explained, "women must be trained for their careers in home-making just as men have been trained to apply science to the building of skyscrapers, to control of disease, to the disposal of sewage, to all things where science and efficiency have taken the place of lack of training and muddling through." A woman must be trained to apply science to motherhood—her profession—in the same way a man is trained to use science in his profession.²³⁰ Thus, science could be said to have lent its prestige to motherhood. As a scientific field, mothercraft made motherhood appear worthy of study by learned persons and involved specialization that only women could attain. Furthermore, this science was among the most important of all because it concerned the very heredity, environment, and future of humankind. Through the understanding that competent motherhood was a learned skill, not an intrinsic attribute for women, good mothers could receive recognition for their expertise.

C. Professionalization in Other Areas

Dr. Mjoen, chairman of the consultive eugenics commission of Norway, hopes for much from the entrance of women into public affairs provided she can be properly educated and trained, and provided she will specialize in racial and social hygiene. This is a field in which the male members of society have shown their utter incapacity as statesmen, politicians, legislators, and administrators.

—Dr. W. A. Evans, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1930²³¹

In addition to the professionalization of motherhood, eugenics contributed to the creation of other occupations in which women could professionalize and specialize. These occupations included eugenic lecturers and teachers, field workers, laboratory assistants, social workers, scientists, and doctors. Women like Dr. Lillian C. Irwin and Dr. Anna Blount gave lectures at association meetings and universities and published writings on eugenics.²³² Some female doctors like Dr. Evangeline Young made eugenic marriage consulting an aspect of their medical practices.²³³ A woman calling herself "A Recent Vassar Graduate" wrote that two of her former classmates now worked in the eugenics field, one as a researcher for a eugenics record office and the other as a eugenics field worker for a girl's school.²³⁴ Women also headed research of their own, like Dr.

228 "A Better Race in the Making." *Los Angeles Times*, (Jan. 11, 1914).

229 Feld, Rose C. "Vassar Girls to Study Home-Making As Career." *New York Times*, (May 23, 1926).

230 Ibid.

231 Evans, W. A. "How to Keep Well: Mentality of Women." *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (Oct. 23, 1930).

232 "Teach Eugenics, Plea of Doctor." *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Jun. 04, 1915).

233 "How to Choose Mate: Eugenic Rules Should Be Kept in Mind to Wed Wisely." *Washington Post*, (Feb. 21, 1915).

234 A Recent Vassar Graduate. "After Vassar, What?: The Record of a College Class." *Outlook*, (Jun. 30, 1915).

Maude Slye of the University of Chicago, who found based on her research with mice that cancer could be eliminated from the human population within two generations if all marriages were eugenic.²³⁵

In fact, there was a middle-class demand for such female eugenic specialists, particularly in medicine. Mrs. John Francis Yawger—impressively president of the New York City Colony of the National Society of New England Women, of the New York Medical College and Hospital for Women, *and* of the National Association of the School of Mothercraft—proposed that children should undergo medical inspection in schools to identify potential health problems. However, she strongly recommended that women physicians perform these examinations, at least for the girls, instead of “young men just out of the medical schools.”²³⁶ Similarly, in 1912, Dr. Sarah J. McNutt highlighted how women doctors had become more highly regarded than they were only a few years ago, particularly in treating “nervous ailments” and performing “maternity work.”²³⁷ Thus, women, aided by eugenics, were able to carve out professional niches for themselves in obstetrics, pediatrics, and psychiatry.

Nowhere is this specialization of women more clear than in two national meetings of infant welfare associations. Women headed several committees at the 1914 meeting of the American Association for the Study and Prevention of Infant Mortality, including Dr. Lillian Welsh for the committee on programs, Dr. Helen C. Putnam for continuation schools of home-making, Dr. Mary Sherwood for obstetrics, Miss Harriet L. Leete for nursing and social work, and Miss Julia C. Lathrop for vital and social statistics.²³⁸ The third International Congress on the Welfare of the Child hosted speeches from several women’s and children’s organizations, including the National Kindergarten Association, the National Civic Federation, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, and the Daughters of the American Revolution. Women speakers were slated to give lectures and moderate discussions on topics including “Physicians’ Work in Prevention of Infant Mortality,” “The Press and Baby Saving,” and “Twentieth Century Motherhood.” Stunningly, the association had invited women delegates from other countries, including Bulgaria, Japan, and China. Altogether, the *Washington Post* article mentioned the names of nineteen women speakers, delegates, researchers, and attendees—and only one man.²³⁹ Therefore, women’s presence in these areas was both legitimated and common. At a time when many professions and specialties were barred to women, these areas gained recognition as women’s domain.

IX. Women’s Organizations, Clubs, and Activism

*The women’s clubs are a far greater power in the United States than men’s clubs are. . . .
Women’s clubs are mostly planned for work, not play. They are admirable institutions . . .
. . . You men have nothing like them.*

235 “Eugenics Held Bane of Cancer.” *Los Angeles Times*, (Dec. 02, 1926).

236 “Gods and Goddesses in Jersey If Her Eugenic Plan Succeeds.” *Washington Post*, (Dec. 19, 1915).

237 Marshall, Edward. “Man Largely to Blame for Woman’s Shortcomings.” *New York Times*, (May 05, 1912).

238 “Study Ills of Babies: Association to Prevent Infant Mortality Meets Here Next.” *Washington Post*, (Jul. 06, 1913).

239 “Work to Save Babies: Delegates Will Meet Here for Child Welfare.” *Washington Post*, (Apr. 06, 1914).

—*Dr. Sarah J. McNutt, New York Times, 1912*²⁴⁰

After graduating from university, many middle-class women felt their educations and talents were not being fully utilized. Demands for proper female passivity and modesty often conflicted with the requirements of professions like medicine and law, and even women who did not work outside the home chafed under the enforced domesticity.²⁴¹ Women's clubs and organizations emerged both to fulfill women's desire to interact with other middle-class women and to enable women to use their knowledge and skills to improve society.²⁴² They allowed women to escape submissiveness in the home and direct their own labor without the domination of men.²⁴³ As the accepted preservers of morality and protectors of the family, women had public authority in social reform work.²⁴⁴ The "bond of motherhood" was an influential tool to organize women in support of causes, especially those relating to the welfare of women and children.²⁴⁵ Women's organizations became very powerful and well-organized interest groups. Indeed, the Progressive Era saw the emergence of a "feminine dominion" in reform work.²⁴⁶

Over time, women joined sexual reform campaigns to promote sex education, abolish prostitution, protect women from infection with venereal disease, raise the age of consent for sexual activity, and uphold the right of married women to refuse sex.²⁴⁷ With such campaigns, women frankly discussed sexual matters in ways their mothers and grandmothers would not have dreamed. While often out of touch with the experiences of poor and working-class women,²⁴⁸ these middle-class campaigners changed the terms with which society spoke about sex and marriage and exposed to public scrutiny what had previously been perceived as private domestic matters.

A. *Eugenics As a Social Activity*

Just before tea, one sits dreamily in a twilight room, half listening to the music that flutters in from somewhere, and discoursing inanities. . . . But suddenly a maid appears, wearing a frilled apron and bearing tea-things. Then occurs a metamorphosis. Abruptly one sits up with new interest in life; everyone sits up with new interest in life. The inanities die away. The hostess recalls that her guests take it with lemon and no sugar, and with sugar and no lemon. A girl on the left helps herself to a little, nut-jeweled cake and, looking one straight in the eye, asks for a candid opinion on eugenics.

—*Louis Baurly, Vogue, 1913*²⁴⁹

240 Marshall, Edward. "Man Largely to Blame for Woman's Shortcomings." *New York Times*, (May 05, 1912).

241 Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion*, xiii.

242 *Ibid.*, 5.

243 *Ibid.*, 4.

244 Schneider and Schneider, *American Women in the Progressive Era*, 14.

245 Scharf and Jensen, *Decades of Discontent*, 202.

246 Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion*, xii.

247 Schneider and Schneider, *American Women in the Progressive Era*, 137, 139.

248 *Ibid.*, 140.

249 Baurly, Louis. "Features: The Tea-Table Forum." *Vogue*, (Nov. 15, 1913).

Performing reform work became a fad during the Progressive period. As “Mme. Z,” who wrote a column entitled “Washington Society” for the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, noted in 1914, “Charity? Everybody’s doing it—everybody, that is, who is anybody at all in Washington.” Mme. Z stated that many of what were once the hallmarks of high society—such as the ability to dance, play card games, and dress in fashion—were no longer required for membership. Now, women were required to “talk alleys, slums, settlement work, welfare, and uplift, with a bit of eugenics thrown in maybe for light conversation.”²⁵⁰ In order to participate in middle- and upper-class social networks, women had to have knowledge of the progressive welfare work of which eugenics was a part. It was even more impressive in these social circles if a woman had firsthand experience with reform work. Rather than passing its time “in pursuit of pleasure,” Mme. Z wrote, society women now spend it “in pursuit of the poor.”²⁵¹

Adopting this notion of reform work as a social activity, at women’s club meetings, eugenics often became the subject of what the *San Francisco Chronicle* rather condescendingly called “teacup discussion.”²⁵² Eugenics was well-represented in the popular trend of “parlor science,” a combination of education and entertainment that typically took place in the home. Women’s clubs often met in members’ homes and invited professors, researchers, and doctors to give lectures on popular topics, including eugenics. For example, one article reported that Dr. Sarah McNutt had lectured on eugenics at her sister Dr. Julia McNutt’s home during the regular meeting of the Society of New England Women, and some of the presidents of Albany’s women’s organizations had attended.²⁵³ The distinguished guest list demonstrates that many of these meetings were exclusive affairs; it would have been a social boon to be invited. Another newspaper article conveyed that Mrs. J. Ogden Armour hosted a group of friends each Thursday to listen to a lecture by a “person of prominence.” On that particular Thursday, Edith Lees Ellis gave a lecture on eugenics, followed by a discussion over lunch with the dozen women who had attended.²⁵⁴

Larger and less exclusive women’s organizations also included eugenics among their activities. The Chicago Women’s Aid organization would meet every Tuesday for events including “papers on civics, eugenics, art, opera, etc.”²⁵⁵ The conference of the California Federation of Women’s Clubs included sections for lectures and discussion on music, California history and landmarks, international relations, and maternity and eugenics.²⁵⁶ Thus, eugenics was incorporated into many women’s clubs as a source of education and amusement.

B. *Eugenics and Activism*

In describing the results of genealogical studies made recently by Maj. Charles B. Davenport, Prof. Glaser says that they indicate very clearly that efficiency in fighting is far

250 Mme Z. “Washington Society.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (Mar. 22, 1914).

251 Ibid.

252 “Doings of the Women’s Clubs: Club Women Discuss Right to Influence Pre-Natal Conditions.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Jun. 03, 1912).

253 “Eugenics a Cure for Nation’s Ills.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, (May 31, 1913).

254 “Society and Entertainment: Mrs. Havelock Ellis Guest of Mrs. Armour.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (Feb. 12, 1915).

255 “Interesting Work Is Done by Chicago Woman’s Aid.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (Feb. 23, 1913).

256 “Schedule of Club Topics Is Given Out: Music, Philanthropy and Public Health to Be Studied at Conference.” *Los Angeles Times*, (Jan. 17, 1926).

more likely to be passed along the maternal than the paternal line of the family.

—San Francisco Chronicle, 1919²⁵⁷

As women's clubs and organizations learned and discussed more about eugenics, women were inspired to act to support eugenic aims. Reader Helen M. Bent wrote a letter to the editor in favor of a eugenic bill that would have required parties planning to marry to provide a health certificate indicating that they were free of sexually transmitted diseases. She argued that the bill was supported by a host of organizations, including "the State Federation of Women's Clubs, the New York State Assembly of Mothers, . . . the New York City Federation of Women's Clubs, the West End Women's Republican Club, [and] the Women's Democratic Club."²⁵⁸ Other women called for the founding of organizations devoted exclusively to eugenics. In a letter to the editor, "Mrs. E.S.D." suggested that women join together to form an organization called the National Sex Solidarity Union to encourage people to consider eugenics in their sexual relations. "Why should not women band themselves together in a great crusade to bring light on the question of sex to every living soul as they have banded themselves to bring light on the temperance, suffrage, and many other questions?" she asked.²⁵⁹ At the eugenics section of the annual meeting of the American Association for the Study and Prevention of Infant Mortality, Mrs. John Hays Hammond also called for the creation of a "national society for the promotion of practical eugenics," separate from the efforts of the association.²⁶⁰

Women's clubs already possessed a strong reputation for advancing public health and sanitation efforts during the Progressive Era. Their reputation was such that in 1913, the surgeon general of the United States, Rupert Blue, extolled their efforts to promote sanitary conditions and even communicated directly with women's organizations to perform public health work. He commended the organizations' resourcefulness, knowledge, dedication, and hard work. Said Blue, "Woman as guardian of the home (the environment in which we spend, or should spend, the bulk of our time) can exert a mighty influence in the control of those factors which make for health."²⁶¹

Thus in keeping with their efforts to promote health, women's clubs and organizations turned to the promising science of eugenics, especially the positive branch. At the National Council of the General Federation of Women's Clubs in 1915, speakers included well-known eugenicists David Starr Jordan and Governor of Washington Ernest Lister. At the meeting, Dr. Lillian C. Irwin also presented a paper entitled "Eugenic Marriages." In her talk, she said that legislation to prevent the unfit from reproducing is "helpful . . . but it comes under the head of negative eugenics." Even more benefits could be achieved through positive eugenics by teaching young people the right type to marry.²⁶² Three years later, the General Federation of Women's Clubs passed a resolution recommending that men and women hoping to marry first undergo physical and mental examinations.²⁶³

257 "How Science Proves That the Female of the Species Is More Deadly Than the Male." *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Jun. 08, 1919).

258 Bent, Helen M. "Bills Affecting Women: One Limits Dower Rights, the Other Concerns Eugenics." *New York Times*, (Feb. 03, 1913).

259 Mrs. E.S.D. "Letter 3 -- No Title." *McClure's Magazine*, (Jan. 1918).

260 "Favor National Society to Promote Eugenics." *Los Angeles Times*, (Nov. 16, 1913).

261 "Women's Work for Public Health." *New York Times*, (May 04, 1913).

262 "Teach Eugenics, Plea of Doctor." *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Jun. 04, 1915).

263 "Favors Eugenic Marriages." *Washington Post*, (May 08, 1918).

As another example, the Chicago Political Equality League, a women's political club with 1,700 members, formed a eugenics committee. Seven of the eight members of the eugenics committee were women, including its chairman. Chairman Mrs. Alfred Jannotta chose for inclusion on the committee individuals with expertise in biology, sociology, law, and motherhood, demonstrating the accepted authority of mothers in eugenic matters. The explicit purpose of the eugenics committee was to influence legislation. In particular, the committee's aims were to promote the establishment of a lecture bureau for eugenics, encourage every women's club in Chicago to include lectures on eugenics in their activities, plan a public forum on eugenics, and support legislation requiring health certificates before marriage.²⁶⁴ Even when they lacked the right to vote in many states and federally, women still advocated politically. In December 1914, a group of Illinois clubwomen held a "legislature" in which they passed six measures that they then intended to present to the actual state legislature for consideration. The women approved a eugenics law requiring health certificates before marriage, with punishments for violators. They also approved laws that financially support abandoned wives and children, financially support illegitimate children, abolish houses of prostitution, abolish fines against prostitutes, and provide for state care for the feeble-minded. The women had sufficient political power that the lieutenant governor promised that the bills would be presented to the state legislature at its next session.²⁶⁵

Beyond political efforts, the women's organizations hoped to inform members of the public about eugenics in order to influence their behavior, particularly in matters concerning children's health. For example, in honor of Nation-Wide Baby Week in 1916, women's clubs in Los Angeles organized a week of activities surrounding infant welfare, with the slogan "Save the Babies! Save the Nation!" During the week, there were conferences and exhibits organized around the question, "What can we do to better the condition of the baby?" In addition to the women's clubs, which hosted the events and determined the program, the events had the support of Los Angeles's mayor, board of supervisors, city council, board of health, board of education, public library, and others.²⁶⁶

In addition to inserting eugenics into their existing clubs, women also founded and participated in organizations exclusively devoted to eugenics. The *Washington Post* reported in 1913 that several society women were arranging to form the National Society for the Promotion of Practical Eugenics. Mrs. John Hays Hammond held a planning session at her home attended by such notable women as Mrs. Woodrow Wilson (wife of the president), Mrs. William Jennings Bryan (wife of the secretary of state), Mrs. Leonard Wood (wife of the army chief of staff), and Mrs. Charles Hughes (wife of a U.S. Supreme Court justice). The women expected that Mrs. Wilson would become an honorary officer of the organization.²⁶⁷ Women also became active and important in eugenics organizations initially founded by men. For example, the 1907 meeting of the California State Eugenics Association incorporated several women speakers, including Mrs. Ida Miller who opened the meeting by explaining the work, goals, and future plans of the organization.²⁶⁸ Thus, women used eugenics to form interpersonal relationships with other women and sometimes men, and to exercise their political might in ways they believed would benefit themselves, their families, and society as a whole.

264 Walters, Marion. "Mrs. Treadwell Recognized As Skillful Leader of the Political Equality League." *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (Nov. 23, 1913).

265 "'Legislature' of Women Demands Eugenic Law." *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (Dec. 11, 1914).

266 "City and Nation Unite for the Baby's Sake." *Los Angeles Times*, (Mar. 05, 1916).

267 "New Marriage Law: Rudolph Drafting Bill to Require Medical Certificate." *Washington Post*, (Jun. 04, 1913).

268 "Eugenics Association Has Interesting Meeting." *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Jan. 07, 1907).

X. Positive Eugenics, Feminism, and Challenging Power Structures

[Women] are trying to find themselves, and, in doing this, what wonder that some of their actions are such as to make copies for the yellow journals?

—Dr. Dudley A. Sargent, *New York Times*, 1913²⁶⁹

Positive eugenics as a means of improving women's lives must be understood as a socially rebellious idea. Though we can recognize that positive eugenics reified the necessity of matrimony and maternity, it was radical in addressing middle-class women's difficulties and dissatisfaction in marriage, motherhood, and society as a whole. It was even more extraordinary in its supposition that women could and should take control in sexual matters. As much as marriage and motherhood remained socially vital for middle-class womanhood, positive eugenics gave women the tools to wrest power over the direction of their marital and reproductive behavior. Even if women could not operate the brakes, they could manage the steering wheel. This control allowed middle-class white women to challenge existing power structures and imagine different formations of power in society, as women's responsibility for the well-being of the nation gave them a potent sense of authority. Though women still remained vanguards of sexual morality and keepers of the home, the focus on women's power and agency within their limited spheres aligned with the goals of first-wave feminism.

First-wave feminism emerged as a revolt against the restraints of the cult of true womanhood. During the Victorian Era, people believed that excessive intellectual activity in women would deplete their reproductive organs of the strength needed for them to function, and too much physical activity would deform the organs entirely.²⁷⁰ A woman would be socially ostracized if she challenged men's authority, sought a role in the public realm, or behaved in a sexually "impure" manner.²⁷¹ Married women had few legal rights under the principle of coverture, in which their civil identities were subsumed with their husbands'. They could not own property, enter into contracts, or take control over their own wages.²⁷² Integral to first-wave feminism was a fight to increase women's civil rights, most prominently the right of suffrage.²⁷³ An associated cause was women's sexual and reproductive rights. In the nineteenth century, married women were expected to sexually submit to their husbands, and because birth control was not widely available, most married women would give birth to many children, for an average of seven children per woman in 1800.²⁷⁴ First-wave feminists argued that women had the right to refuse their husbands for sex. With the early twentieth century birth control movement, some women extended the right to refuse sex to the right to control one's fertility through contraception.²⁷⁵ Positive eugenics, while reinforcing the idea that women should marry and have children, also entailed women making careful marital and reproductive decisions for themselves to better their own lives and the lives of their children. In this regard, we should afford positive eugenics a place

269 "Exercise Cure for Feminine Unrest, Says Dr. Sargent." *New York Times*, (May 18, 1913).

270 Dicker, *History of U.S. Feminisms*, 21.

271 *Ibid.*, 22.

272 *Ibid.*

273 *Ibid.*, 44.

274 *Ibid.*, 22.

275 *Ibid.*, 52.

among the feminist sexual reform movements of the early 1900s.

While still limited in their opportunities, having responsibility over the nation's moral and physical welfare through their personal decisions gave many middle-class women a sense of empowerment. Through acknowledged importance as wives, mothers, and household managers, women gained a measure of respect they had not felt before. Positive eugenics gave women a mechanism with which to tackle issues of sexual freedom, domestic violence, power disparities in marriage, and access to information about sexual and reproductive health. When eugenicist Dr. Anna Blount protested the "humiliation [she had] seen women suffer as a price of board and clothes and a roof for their babies,"²⁷⁶ she reflected the very real grievance of the marital power inequalities and limited options for women of her time. Furthermore, in speaking about these issues publicly, with assistance from the popular press, middle-class women quite shockingly broke with the tradition that such matters were private. Hence, I contend that middle-class white women adopted positive eugenics in the era of first-wave feminism because it gave them the most radical tools possible in their milieu to control and improve their lives.

Those skeptical of the argument that positive eugenics was at least in part a feminist enterprise might expect that non-feminist men would almost universally support positive eugenics as a strategy to encourage women to remain restricted in the domestic sphere. However, female supporters of positive eugenics were certainly not without their male detractors. Quite revealingly, several male commentators disparaged women for supporting and campaigning for positive eugenics precisely because of its feminist undertones. A *New York Times* article asserted that women who shun typical submissive and dependent roles in marriage and motherhood by vocally supporting feminist and sexual causes, including eugenics, can be classified as belonging to a "third sex" that is neither male nor "normally" female.²⁷⁷ More clearly stated, feminist and eugenicist women were labeled abnormal, unfeminine, and even "un-womanly" for their reformist beliefs. A *Milwaukee Free Press* editorial, summarized in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, ridiculed club women who sought sexual reforms like eugenics and advised them to "stop talking sexual problems and go home and have more babies themselves." The editorial claimed that women were less interested in their cause than they were in "spectacular hustling," thus depicting women's excursion into the political realm as a social crime. "Is there no limit to the mischief which idle women, inspired and abetted by masculine cranks, can work to modern society?" the editorial asked.²⁷⁸

Some tried to turn eugenic arguments back on the women who supported feminism and eugenics, saying that eugenics would lead to the end of women who are not "normal, monogamous, [and] motherly . . . for the very simple reason that she will refuse to propagate herself."²⁷⁹ This was again a subtle jab at supposedly "unfeminine" women who declined the socially accepted roles of marriage and motherhood. Within a single article, popular journalist H. L. Mencken acknowledged that "life bears upon women more harshly than it bears upon men," but also chastised the "pornographic viragoes" who worked for sexual reforms.²⁸⁰ Mencken thus reflected the cult of true womanhood idea that women should uncomplainingly sacrifice and bear difficulties but not actually act to improve their situations.²⁸¹ Women were aiming to disrupt the status quo for sexual relations, and men who felt their power threatened responded in the best

276 Blount, Anna. "Effect of Divorce on the Next Generation." *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Jan. 28, 1917).

277 Gregg, W. W. "The Third Sex." *New York Times*, (Sep. 15, 1918).

278 "Editor Frowns on Club Women." *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (Jan. 03, 1917).

279 "Flirtation Doomed by Nature to Become a Lost Art." *Washington Post*, (Mar. 21, 1915).

280 Mencken, H. L. "Women as Politicians." *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (Apr. 25, 1926).

281 Schneider and Schneider, *American Women in the Progressive Era*, 16.

manner they knew: to question these women's gender identities and demand they behave in a more "feminine" fashion by quieting down and sequestering themselves in the home. It is important to understand that for these male critics, support for positive eugenics was "unfeminine" precisely because it challenged—even in its still limited way—the unequivocal capitulation of women in marriage and childbearing. Eugenics emphasized women's personal choices and enabled a female criticism of men that would not have been socially acceptable without its veneer of science. These male critics therefore reveal the extent to which new conceptions of women's sexuality and role within the family, of which eugenics was a part, were exceptional in challenging rather than merely reinforcing men and women's accepted social positions.

Newspapers and magazines charted and encouraged white middle-class women's support for positive eugenics. They gave women an avenue in which to discuss their sexual, marital, familial, and social roles; to air the troubles they encountered in their lives; to reach an understanding that they were not alone in their feelings and experiences; and to share solutions to their problems. As a salacious, scientific, and controversial topic, eugenics sold newspapers—and so generated more content. In witnessing traditionally male-dominated media suddenly devote its news space to the issues concerning women and to recording women's voices, men like the critics above quite abruptly glimpsed, in a very tangible form, the social and political changes that were to come.

XI. Conclusion

When studying the American eugenics movement and witnessing the ultimate harm it wrought to thousands of the most vulnerable people in society through incarceration and sterilization practices, it might be tempting to label all supporters of eugenics as deliberately evil and simply end the exploration there. But in making such a characterization, we disregard the motivations, reasoning, hopes, and fears of the individuals who supported this ideology. Moreover, we fail to truly understand both eugenics as a social movement and the people who supported it. For this reason, when examining historical events and actors, it is important to use an approach scholars call *historical empathy*. Historical empathy asks us to consider the experiences of individuals in the past and the broader contexts that may have contributed to their decisions. It requires us to recognize our own biases and acknowledge our own positionality as present actors looking back at the past.²⁸² Exercising historical empathy does not mean that we cannot be critical of historical events, beliefs, or actors. Very few critics today could examine classical eugenics and argue that it was, at its core, a beneficial or positive ideology. Yet, using historical empathy represents an effort to try to understand what life was like for people in a time and place different from our own. I have held this approach in mind as I have worked to uncover why positive eugenics achieved popular support from white middle-class women.

My research has revealed that positive eugenics became popular with middle-class white women even as the movement sought to monitor and direct their reproductive and marital behavior. It attracted support for many reasons, including its association with and promise for greater modernity and independence for women. Eugenists promised women that following its tenets in marital decisions would provide better spouses and happier lives. At a time of significant infant mortality, eugenics gave women hope that they could act to ensure the survival, health, and well-being of their babies. Eugenics afforded women a national importance that society

282 Yilmaz, Kaya. "Historical Empathy and Its Implications for Classroom Practices in Schools." *The History Teacher* 40, no. 3 (May 2007): 331.

had heretofore denied them. It granted authority and prestige to women in the domain of motherhood and paths for occupational legitimacy and professionalization. Many women's clubs and organizations centered their activities around eugenics, exposing their members to eugenic doctrine. Eugenics became a centerpiece for social activity and political activism for middle-class women who wanted to form relationships and exercise their talents outside of the home.

Through these avenues, eugenics became a method for women to gain maximum control over their limited domains of motherhood, family, and the home. While women were unable to break beyond their imposed social, political, and economic limitations, they could at least turn to eugenics to achieve the most power in their restricted spheres. In this way, we should reconceptualize positive eugenics to reflect not only its use in constraining women, but also its role as a strategy white middle-class women actively employed to empower themselves.

XII. Afterword

“Ah! Little did I think,” [Christopher Columbus] mused, “when I leaned over the side on that fatal day and, gathering up a bunch of seaweed, knew that we were approaching land, that I should be the cause of Henry Ford, Hearst, the Colonel, Kansas whiskers, Kentucky whiskey, professional humorists, eugenics, Broadway plays, Billy Sunday, Life’s Short Story Contest, Congress, child labor, adulterated best sellers and the kangaroo flop. It’s pretty bad, isn’t it?”

—Life, 1916²⁸³

283 “Interviews with Dead Celebrities.” *Life*, (Jan. 06, 1916).

XIII. Illustrations



FIGURE 1: "UNTITLED CARTOON." LIFE, (MAY 15, 1913).

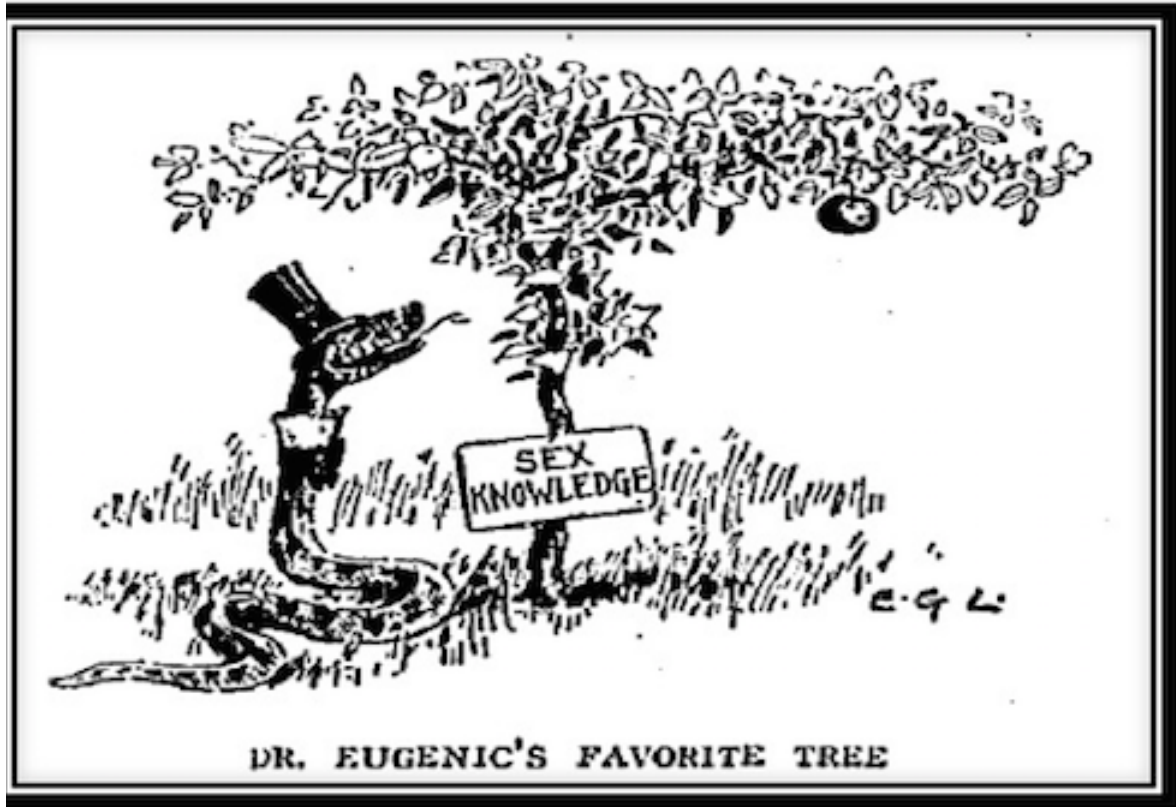


FIGURE 2: E. G. L. "DR. EUGENIC'S FAVORITE TREE." LIFE, (MAR. 05, 1914).

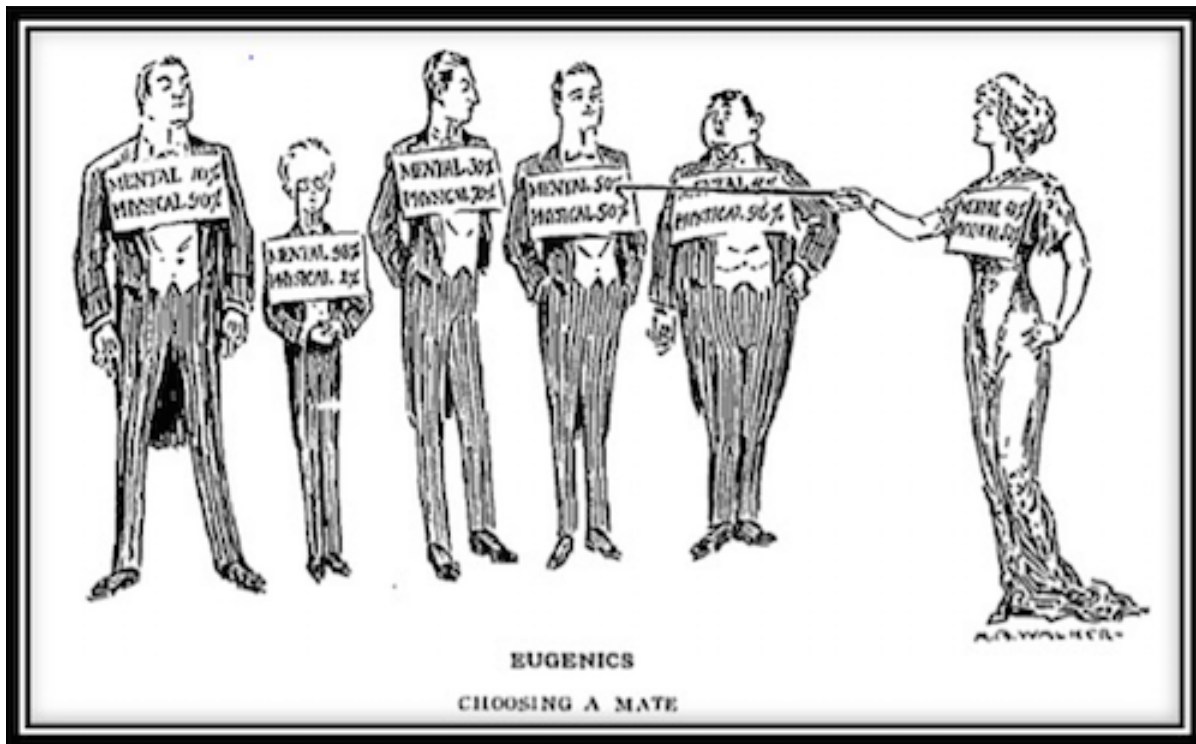


FIGURE 3: WALKER, A. B. "EUGENICS: CHOOSING A MATE." LIFE, (MAY 29, 1913).



Figure 4: Walker, A. B. "Eugenics." *Life*, (Jan. 21, 1915).

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