

“Eugenically Yours”: A History of the American Eugenics Society

By

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Abstract

In 1926, the American Eugenics Society (AES) was founded in New Haven, Connecticut just two blocks from Yale University, the home institution of the AES’ first president, Economics Professor Irving Fisher. The term eugenics refers to the science of better breeding that could improve the human race by eliminating “undesirable” traits from the gene pool. Inherently, the work of eugenicists was enabled by pre-existing hierarchies based on race, class, gender, ability, and citizenship status and the simultaneous social construction of new categories of desirability and defectiveness. The American Eugenics Society emerged from the 1921 Second International Congress of Eugenics after leading eugenicists felt there was a lack of eugenic organization, advocacy, and education in the United States. From its founding, the AES has sought to conduct research, educate the public, and advocate for conservative eugenic legislation on immigration and sterilization. The goal of this article is to underscore the central role played by Yale University, an institution that propelled the American eugenics movement to the forefront of research and legislation. By exploring the archives of crucial AES members, this work uncovers the not-so-hidden history of Yale’s centrality to the movement. The activism and advocacy of the New Haven-based and Yale professor-led American Eugenics Society reflect the creative ways that university professors and powerful institutions were able to leverage their credibility to mobilize a popular movement for eugenic research, education, and legislation.

Keywords: Eugenics, Yale University, Social Movement, American Eugenics Society

Introduction

In 2014, activists and organizers in New Haven began to unearth and call out the buried history of eugenics at the highest levels of government in the state of Connecticut. In the 1930s, Governor Wilbur Cross commissioned a statewide survey to determine the number of “defectives” and decide how to decrease the economic and social burden of such “socially inadequate” people (Boyle 2015). Despite his participation in the eugenics movement in New Haven, throughout the city one can find a high school, highway, and awards given in Cross’s name (Bass 2014). As a graduate from the College and later as a professor, Cross had deep ties to Yale University. However, he was not the sole Yale-affiliated eugenicist.

During the eugenics movement, Yale University was home to some of the world’s most prominent eugenicists, including Irving Fisher and Ellsworth Huntington, two Yale professors who would go on to serve as Presidents of the American Eugenics Society (Osborn 1974). This story of reckoning with the legacies of the eugenics movement is not unique. Rather, this is emblematic of the ways that eugenic principles pervaded academic, government, medical, and social spaces during the 20th century. By relying on the prestige of a powerful institution like Yale, the American Eugenics Society created a national movement for the violent oppression and segregation of entire classes of marginalized and ostracized people. The activism and advocacy of the New Haven-based American Eugenics Society reflects the creative ways that university professors and elite

institutions were able to leverage their credibility to mobilize a movement for eugenic research, education, and legislation.

Origins of the Term *Eugenics*

The term eugenics was first coined in 1883 by Francis Galton, an English statistician and scientist. Galton derived the term from the Greek word *eugenes*, meaning “in good stock, hereditarily endowed with noble qualities” and thought eugenics could serve as “a brief word to express the science of improving stock” (Galton 1883:24-25). In his seminal work, Galton sought to establish a credible, reasoned, and scientific argument for eugenics. His goal was to study the variability across classes, families, and races to show the “practicability of supplanting inefficient human stock by better strains” (Galton 1883:1). The ultimate eugenic goal, Galton believed, was to “further the ends of evolution more rapidly and with less distress than if events were left to their own course” (Galton 1883:2). Early eugenicists utilized emerging knowledge about Mendelian genetics, claiming that by preventing “defective” people from breeding, they could reduce and eventually eliminate these deleterious traits that pose moral, economic, and social burdens on humanity (Paul & Spencer 1995). Advocates were largely successful in making eugenics widely taught and accepted in science and in bolstering the case for forced sterilizations, segregation, selective breeding, and restricted immigration (Farber 2008).

Inherently, Galton’s definition of eugenics delineated certain traits as more valuable, while pointing to others that posed a threat to the future of humanity. He believed that “criminal classes” and others deemed “the saddest disfigurements of modern civilization” ought to be eliminated from society (Galton 1883:3,15). The work of eugenicists was enabled by pre-existing hierarchies on the basis of race, class, gender, ability, and citizenship status as they simultaneously produced new social categories on the basis of desirability and defectiveness. By asserting a belief in innate biological difference, eugenicists instilled a sense of fear over “race suicide” if these “less civilized” groups continued to reproduce at rates higher than people seen as “desirable.” (Kline 2005:15). In doing this, the science of heritability was weaponized as a source of validity, objectivity, credibility, and power for the eugenics movement (Bashford and Levine 2010:5). By encouraging wealthy, white, Anglo-American people to reproduce, eugenicists invented “positive eugenics” in hopes of improving the gene pool (Huntington 1935:35). Simultaneously,

they constructed “negative eugenics” to prevent those deemed unworthy -- people of color, poor people, people with disabilities, people with mental illness, people who have committed crimes -- from reproducing at all (Kline 2005:13). Importantly, no genetic basis could be demonstrated for crime, intelligence, poverty, musical talent, or other traits seen as valuable or deleterious to a capitalist society. Yet, many eugenicists, as scientists and scholars, brought legitimacy to their unproven claims by asserting the validity and scientific soundness of their work

The eugenics movement spread to an international stage by the early 20th century. By 1912, the First International Congress of Eugenics was held in London to discuss the aims of eugenics and bring the field to the forefront of various disciplines. Consultative Committees from the United States, Belgium, France, Germany, and Italy allowed elite members, mainly doctors, researchers, and professors, to aid in the planning of the Congress. The American Consultative Committee consisted of professors at universities like Harvard, University of Chicago, and Johns Hopkins. Importantly, the secretary and treasurer of the Committee was Dr. Charles B. Davenport, who served as the founder of the Eugenics Record Office in Cold Spring, New York, and would later be a founding member of the American Eugenics Society (*Problems in Eugenics* 1912: xii). The more than 100 delegates in attendance listened to speakers who discussed topics ranging from biology, sociology, practical eugenics, education, and medicine. One delegate represented the State of Connecticut, Ernest W. Brown, a mathematics professor at Yale (*Problems in Eugenics* 1912: xv-xvii). These delegates and speakers at the First Congress highlight the central role of institutions, especially elite universities, in shaping and executing eugenics in the United States.

The Beginnings of an Organized American Eugenics Movement

In 1921, the Second International Congress of Eugenics began a conversation around the lack of a formidable, unified American eugenics movement. Yale economics professor Irving Fisher noted the importance of creating some kind of “continuous popular eugenic education program” in the United States (*American Eugenics Society* 1927:2). To form the foundation for a national eugenic society, the Eugenics Committee of the United States of America was formed. In 1922, the Committee began to organize its membership under the

new name of the Eugenics Society of the United States of America. On January 30, 1926, the organization incorporated as the American Eugenics Society, an official, tax-exempt organization headquartered on 185 Church Street in New Haven, Connecticut, until moving to New York City in 1936 (*Report of Activities of the American Eugenics Society*, published in 1937). New Haven was a prime location for these New England eugenicists: centrally located between major universities, near to the Eugenics Record Office in Cold Spring Harbor, and in the backyard of Yale University, the home university to many of the Society’s founders.

The Society’s original Board of Directors consisted of eight members: Dr. Harry H. Laughlin, Prof. Henry Fairchild Osborne, Prof. Henry E. Crampton, Prof. Irving Fisher, Mr. Madison Grant, Prof. Henry P. Fairchild, Dr. Charles B. Davenport, and Dr. C.C. Little (*American Eugenics Society* 1927:8). These founding members -- with affiliations at Yale University, New York University, and other elite institutions -- helped to craft the goals of the Society, which they described as promoting “the study and discovery of sound eugenic principles of all matters in any way related thereto and to make practical application of such principles to the improvement of the human race” (*American Eugenics Society* 1927:8; Huntington 1935: i). In the founding constitution, the members outlined their goals of promoting eugenic research, eugenic education, conservative eugenic legislation, and eugenic administration. They proposed fifteen standing committees focused on research, education, publications, and advocacy around birth regulation, immigration, and crime prevention. Several committees also sought to collaborate with powerful figures such as physicians and clergymen whom they identified as critical allies in disseminating and practicing eugenic ideals (*American Eugenics Society* 1927:8). They stated that the goal of these committees was to increase the longevity of the organization, as a contrast to the “short campaigns like many political or social movements.” Instead, their aspiration was for the eugenics movement to be “handed on from age to age,” which they likened to the “founding and development of Christianity” (*American Eugenics Society* 1927:7).

Under the Society’s first president, Irving Fisher, the AES gained a critical foundation for its success. Fisher, an active member of the international eugenics movement and a professor of Political Economy at Yale University, believed that eugenics functioned as a simple “application of modern science to improve the human race” (Fisher 1913:2). He wrote in 1913 that the eugenics movement was “sweeping over the world with

wonderful rapidity and taking hold of the emotions of mankind in a way that no other movement has ever done or has deserved to do” (Fisher 1913:1). He envisioned the AES as having a crucial role in strengthening that movement. As the Society’s first President, he created the foundations for an organized national movement with the “utmost care” to ensure that it would be “strong and enduring” (Fisher 1926:3). To do this, he established what he deemed to be the most important groundwork for any movement: prestige, programming, personnel, and adequate financial support. In its first few months, his main priorities were to establish a network of 100 scientific experts to build their Advisory Council. This Council served two main purposes: to guide the direction of the movement through their research, and to provide credibility to the cause using their names, degrees, and institutional affiliations. In terms of personnel, the New Haven Office employed four people as secretaries and recordkeepers, but their main workforce was composed of volunteers and committee members (Fisher 1926:4). In 1925, the organization had enlisted 125 committee members. Their goal with an ambitious membership was to “harness up every eugenic influence available in this wide country” (Fisher 1926:4-5).

From 1934 to 1938, Ellsworth Huntington, a professor of Social Sciences and Geography at Yale University, served as the American Eugenics Society’s President (Osborn 1974). His vision for the organization was to bring eugenics to a new level of mainstream popularity through widespread educational campaigns. In 1937, he hosted a conference on the role of eugenics in education (*Preliminary Suggestions for Topics of Discussion at the Conference on Eugenics and Education* 1937). He invited university professors, superintendents and principals of schools, and others engaged in education to answer critical questions including where eugenics should be taught and whether the emphasis of eugenical education should be placed on the social aspects of eugenics or the biological ones (*List of Invitations to the Eugenics and Education Conference* 1937; *Preliminary Suggestions for Topics of Discussion at the Conference on Eugenics and Education* 1937). He hoped that through these efforts he could appeal to college students, who had been known to the Society as being “very cold and even very critical” of eugenics (Wiggam 1935). To better understand students’ attitudes towards eugenics, he crafted a six-question survey that he sent to university newspapers across the country. The survey asked students to share how many siblings they have, their preferred age at marriage, their desired number of children, if they believed in sterilization of “hereditary

defectives,” and if they considered eugenics when choosing a partner (Huntington 1935a). In his letters to university newspapers, he would try to appeal to the younger generation by stating that the differential birth rates would be one of the most challenging aspects of their future (Huntington 1935b).

The *Yale Daily News* refused to publish the survey, stating that it would be a “distinct mistake.” The editor believed that the information obtained from the survey would *not* be “valuable” and that the questions would not be answered “seriously” (Bingham 1935). Huntington aspired for university students to buy into the eugenics movement and wanted to make it accessible to them. To do so, Huntington (1935c) wrote a book entitled *Tomorrow’s Children: The Goal of Eugenics*. There, he outlined the principles underlying eugenics through a question-and-answer format to make the subject more approachable by breaking down its logic, scientific background, and real-world applications. In publishing this book, he, along with the rest of the Directors of the American Eugenics Society, sought to highlight a “new approach to eugenics” with its emphasis on social sciences and economics rather than a strictly biological approach that more “orthodox eugenicists” preferred (Notestein 1935; Wiggam 1935.)

Beyond the leadership of the Society, the organization’s committees drove their goals of research, education, education, and administration. Since many of its members were professors, researchers, and physicians, the Society was able to emphasize the importance of eugenics research. They sought to determine the “modes in which physical, mental, and temperamental traits are inherited” (*American Eugenics Society* 1927:2). This research was often led by those directly involved in the Society. For example, the Society’s President, Ellsworth Huntington, studied five family names of Puritan origin, including his own, to provide evidence for his claim that people of Puritan descent were more fit, adequate members of society (*Eugenics in a Planned Society* 1934:3). He found that these five family names were more likely to be authors, lawyers, scientists, physicians, and claimed that this “excellence” could be traced to natural selection. He hypothesized that because men outnumbered women in the Puritan colonies, women could choose a mate more carefully and therefore they selected for more desirable traits in men (*Eugenics in a Planned Society* 1934:4). He presented these findings in a talk at the 1934 Annual Meeting and Dinner of the American Eugenics Society in New York. At this same event, he was elected President of the Society.

Eugenics Education

The AES’s goal of education took two main approaches: formal education and popular education. The Society sought to popularize eugenics at every academic level from the university to the elementary school. They strived for every university to offer a course on eugenics and to integrate the subject across disciplines like sociology, biology, zoology, and ethics. They wanted every student at every age to be fluent in the language of eugenics, and for eugenic principles to be “as familiar as the multiplication table” (*American Eugenics Society* 1927:4). To do this, they circulated hundreds of copies of eugenics literature to universities across the country (*Letters Received from January 1, 1933, to April 1, 1933*).

Outside of academic institutions, the Society sought to mobilize other organizations to rapidly spread the movement to every community possible. The Society recognized that not every person would be interested in becoming a member of their organization; nonetheless, they aspired for every person to at least be familiar with and in support of the general purpose of using biological means to solve social problems. The Society relied on public visibility and awareness raising for the eugenic cause. They imagined the press, military, churches, and libraries as arms of the movement to appeal to different populations. They even co-hosted events with organizations like the Y. M. C. A in New Haven to encourage people to learn about eugenics and act together (*April Calendar, Women Voters Bulletin* 1931). They wanted eugenics to be featured everywhere-- from art galleries to Sunday newspapers, and they hoped that these partnerships could be a vehicle for mass mobilization (*American Eugenics Society* 1927:4). To promote their vision, their Committee on Popular Education compiled a series of programs that organizations could request for free to aid in teaching about eugenics (“*Suggested Programs for Clubs and Other Organized Groups Interested in the Betterment of the Human Race*” 1926).

The Society creatively introduced eugenic ideals into leisurely activities to attract more families to the cause. For example, the Society helped to organize “Fitter Family” contests at state fairs across the country (*American Eugenics Society* 1927:11). At these contests, families and individuals were judged to determine which were most “fit” by eugenic standards. Participants’ personal information was recorded including medical records, occupation, educational level, marital status, religion, and political affiliation. They then took an IQ test as

a measure of their intelligence and finally underwent physical examinations and disease testing. Then, each individual would receive a score and a family level score. Those who scored highly would receive a medal that read “Yea, I have a goodly heritage” (Boudreau 2005). Not only did these contests bring more visibility to the eugenics movement, but they also allowed for the collection of data and photographs on families’ traits that could be compiled for research use. However, not all people were able or encouraged to participate in these competitions. The desirable competitors were largely white, non-immigrant, married, educated, wealthy families to promote the image of the ideal, desirable traits for positive eugenics.

The church provided another venue for generating public eugenic knowledge. The Committee for Cooperation with Clergymen organized national sermon competitions. The first contest in 1926 received 60 sermon submissions, each judged by three Society members for its scientific, literary, and “convincing” quality (*American Eugenics Society* 1927:11; *Conditions of the Awards for the Best Sermons on Eugenics* 1926). Each of these sermons given in churches across the country highlighted the central role of eugenics and heredity as a means of bettering the future of humanity (Bozeman 2004). The American Eugenics Society strategically relied on the collaboration and support of institutions like state fairs and churches to give themselves a larger platform and audience to popularize eugenics.

The Society engaged and educated its membership through continuous mailings, publications, and conferences. It sent letters to excite, unify, and organize their membership. In these letters, it might publicize events like their annual meeting or inform its members of an exclusive discount for a newly published book on eugenics (Whitney 1927). It sought to create a sense of collectivity and develop personal relationships that would sustain their organization. Often, the society would launch campaigns where each member would nominate friends, neighbors, and colleagues to join the AES. Once nominated, one would receive a card inviting them to join and instructing them how to pay dues (*Membership Dues and Invitation to New Members* n.d.). As the AES’ Executive Secretary, Leon F. Whitney, later a professor at the Yale School of Medicine, played a crucial role in growing the society’s membership. In his letters, he would state his sincerest trust in the members and ask for their input on important matters with the hope that they would take a vested interest in eugenics. In one of his letters, Whitney signed off with the phrase

“Eugenically yours” (Whitney 1928). Here, the term “eugenic” is made interchangeable with well wishes and kindness, intentionally obscuring the violence perpetuated by the movement and instead replacing it with seemingly altruistic compassion for the members of the AES who believe in a “common good.”

Major Campaigns: Restrictive Immigration and Eugenic Sterilization

The American Eugenics Society mobilized its members to advocate for conservative eugenic legislation. The Committee on Selective Immigration released several Immigration Programs. The goal of these reports was to determine the “most practicable means by which immigration may be made to maintain the essential racial character of the American people and to advance their inborn hereditary capacities” (*Fourth Report of the Committee on Selective Immigration* 1928:2). In Society’s eyes, immigration was a threat to the sanctity of the human race. To prevent immigration from tarnishing the gene pool, the Society recommended three main eugenic measures: national origins quotas, deportation, and overseas examinations of immigrants prior to their departure (*Fourth Report of the Committee on Selective Immigration* 1928:1). These practices are deeply entrenched in the white supremacist project of constructing race and otherness, arguing that “without a certain degree of basic racial homogeneity no nation or civilization reaches a very great height” (*Fourth Report of the Committee on Selective Immigration* 1928:6). In the Committee’s report, they go as far as to state that the “need for labor,” whether that be enslaved Africans, or “low-grade Mexicans” does not compare to the need to preserve the “white race” (*Fourth Report of the Committee on Selective Immigration* 1928:9). They advocated for tightened restrictions on immigration eligibility by only allowing those who could “become an asset to American citizenry” (*Fourth Report of the Committee on Selective Immigration* 1928:16). The Society sent its members repeated letters with the rationale for why they should oppose increased immigration to the United States and a step-by-step guide for how they could make their voices heard in Congress on behalf of the Society (Whitney 1930a). They encouraged their membership to sign and send a copy of the Society’s program on immigration to President Hoover and/or their representatives in Congress to ensure that any immigration reforms that took place were in accordance with eugenic principles (Whitney 1930b).

Eugenic Sterilizations

In the case of sterilization, the Society believed that “those who are evidently inferior biologically” would be least likely to use birth control and, thus, sterilization was required to prevent those deemed to be inadequate from “transmitting serious defects to their children.” They viewed this as a “strictly protective” measure, rather than a punitive one (Huntington 1935:51). They promoted both voluntary and involuntary sterilizations so long as they were eugenic in character, meaning that they prevented the inheritance of “defective” traits (*Practical Eugenics* 1938). Harry H. Laughlin, one of the Society’s founding members, advocated firmly for the expansion of sterilization laws across the country.

Prior to the AES’ existence, Laughlin (1922:446) outlined a “model eugenical sterilization law” that detailed the selection, regulation, and sterilization of “socially inadequate” people. He described the successes, failures, and legal challenges that state sterilization laws faced up until that point, in hopes of drafting an airtight law that would “prevent certain degenerate human stock from reproducing its kind” (Laughlin 1922:446). In 1926, the Society published and promoted the model law, encouraging states to adopt or enforce the template Laughlin drafted (Laughlin 1926). Through their legislative advocacy, the Society successfully pushed for eugenic sterilization laws that would result in the forced sterilization of 60,000 people marginalized by the state in the U.S. (Ladd-Taylor 2017:1).

The AES and its associated members also sought to expand eugenic measures in Connecticut. In 1935, a state-wide survey was commissioned by the Governor of Connecticut, Wilbur L. Cross, to investigate the “prevention, treatment and care of mental disease and defects, and allied problems.” Led by former American Eugenics Society President Harry H. Laughlin, the survey sought to catalog every “human inadequate” and create a case for their sterilization to reduce the economic burden that they posed for the state (Laughlin 1938:8). Prior to becoming the society’s President, he advocated for the necessity of eugenical sterilization in the United States. By preventing “degenerate” people from reproducing, Laughlin believed that man could “direct” evolution (Laughlin 1926:1). In the 1938 survey, he defines the “socially inadequate classes” as people who could be classified as feeble-minded, insane, criminalistic, epileptic, inebriate, diseased, blind, deaf, deformed, or dependent in any way (including orphans and people experiencing homelessness). In contrast, he defines the “socially adequate” as those who are lawful,

productive, well-educated, and wealthy. He found that roughly 3% of the state’s population, which equaled between 50,000-60,000 at the time, could be classified as inadequate (Laughlin 1938:16).

Laughlin was most alarmed by the fact that the state’s expenditures were increasing tremendously for “inadequate” classes of people. From the years 1935-1936, he found a 663% increase in these expenditures (Laughlin 1938:39). Using these data, Laughlin advocated for a more effective administration of eugenic sterilizations by bringing this action under the purview of the Department of Welfare. Here, he argued, the state could “comb the whole population of the state for hereditary degenerates” to ensure that the “most degenerative and defective human family stocks” can be rid from the gene pool (Laughlin 1926:2; Laughlin 1938:51).

Essentially, Laughlin drafted a plan for a massive ethnic cleansing project in Connecticut, the first of its kind in the United States. In his plan, he determined that roughly 10 percent of the entire state’s population could be selected for sterilization, deportation, or segregation due to their inadequacy. However, the plan was *not* implemented, in part because Governor Cross lost re-election in 1938. The state of Connecticut attempted to hide the proposed plan, and did so rather successfully, as there are very few copies of Laughlin’s report existent today (Black 2012).

The Roles Played by Women in the Eugenics Movement

Women played important, behind-the-scenes, less visible roles than their male counterparts in the eugenics movement. While men comprised the majority of the Society’s members, women often held positions as assistants or secretaries, playing an important role in keeping the Society running. In the New Haven office, the Society employed Lillian Armstrong as a Corresponding Secretary and several stenographers who reminded members about their dues, sent letters and publications, and other tasks that aided the Society’s growth (Fisher 1926:4).

As members, most of the work that the Society permitted women to do was related to education. In 1926, Margaret Andrus served as the Executive Secretary of the Committee on Formal Education which promoted school and college courses on eugenics. Mary T. Watts, the founder of the “Better Babies” movement, led the Society’s work on the “Fitter Family Contests” which she organized across the country as the chairwoman of

the Committee on Popular Education (Fisher 1926:5). She held the first Fitter Family Contest in 1921 at the Kansas Free Fair and would go on to supervise over 20 such fairs from 1924 to 1926 (Fisher 1926:6). Through these contests, the AES successfully brought people into the movement and enabled them to collect family histories for the Eugenics Record Office (Fisher 1926:6).

Outside of the AES, women played a major role within the Eugenics Record Office (ERO) where they conducted research as eugenic field workers. At the time, eugenic field work was one of the only opportunities for women to participate in scientific research positions and they dominated the field with 85% of all ERO-trained field workers being women (Bix 1997:634). Hospitals, asylums, and other institutions interested in contributing to eugenic research contracted these women to create pedigrees and determine the number of “defectives” that they housed (Bix 1997:629). Often, they would go directly to the homes of their subjects to observe them in their “natural environment” and collected data on their behavior and heredity to produce “pedigrees.” (Bix 1997:632). This research would be used to create a sense of legitimacy and objectivity for the eugenics movement, as the ERO positioned itself as an unbiased scientific institution (Bix 1997:627). In these roles, women were positioned as the mothers of the movement and contributed “emotional” work that produced eugenic knowledge.

The Demise of the American Eugenics Society

These successes of the American Eugenics Society were ultimately limited by four main factors: funding, member engagement, internal tensions, and public disinterest in eugenics. First, the Society struggled to collect sufficient membership fees to sustain its work. Even with a growing number of members (up to 415 by August of 1937), membership payments were often delinquent, and it greatly cost the Society to continue sending reminders to every member who had not yet paid their dues (*Report of Activities of the American Eugenics Society Presented at the Twelfth Annual Meeting of the Society* 1937). Additionally, when they moved their New Haven Office to New York, they incurred some additional moving expenses. It presented logistical difficulties and increased travel expenses, as many of its most prominent members were still associated with Yale University (*Financial Statement from July 4, 1936, to August 21, 1936*). This lack of funding (and organizational skills) became apparent when the Society was informed in 1938 that it

failed to pay \$1,000 to the winners of a Sermon Contest that occurred in 1930 (MacArthur 1938). Additionally, there were internal tensions between members of the Board of Directors. One tension arose between President Ellsworth Huntington and his Executive Secretary, George R. Andrews, that resulted in Andrews being terminated by a vote of the Board (*Minutes from the Board of Directors Meeting of the American Eugenics Society* May 28, 1936).

Huntington wrote in a statement that Andrews was “lacking” necessary experience to fulfill the role and that “well-informed people raised their eyebrows and wondered why the Eugenics Society had an executive secretary with so little scientific knowledge” (Huntington 1936a). This reveals the Society’s value of optics and the desire to be perceived as undeniable experts. However, Andrews subsequently submitted a letter of resignation, stating that he was stepping down due to a “fundamental difference of opinion” (*Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors of the American Eugenics Society* October 1936). These examples indicate the presence of both internal tensions regarding the movement’s future, and concern for the Society’s perception.

Beyond these internal disputes within the organization, eugenics became increasingly unpopular in the wake of World War II with the stark connection between eugenics in the United States and Nazism in Germany. While serving as President of the Society, Ellsworth Huntington stated that Germany was “doing some good work for eugenics even though she is also making, as I see it, a very grave mistake in her attitude toward the Jews and toward race in general” (Huntington 1936b). However, during the same year, the American Eugenics Society considered renaming itself and all the name suggestions replaced the word eugenics with phrases like “human betterment” or “tomorrow’s children” to usher in a changing image of eugenics (*Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors of the American Eugenics Society* June 1936). After several decades, the Society began the process of rebranding. It changed the name of its publication from *Eugenics Quarterly* to *Social Biology* in 1968 and fully changed the name of the organization from the American Eugenics Society to Society for the Study of Social Biology in 1973 (Messall 2004). However, the eugenics movement lived on well beyond the war, with Society-sponsored marriage restrictions, and immigration and sterilization legislation remaining on the books until the 1960s and 70s. Even today, some sentiments around advancements in genetics and genetic modifications mirror the language of biological solutions to social

issues that were similarly used to promote eugenics (Lombardo 2018). Lastly, these eugenic sentiments live on in the conservative policies that disproportionately and systematically harm marginalized communities, in turn perpetuating similar effects as negative and positive eugenics of the 20th century.

CONCLUSIONS

The American Eugenics Society successfully advocated for the eugenics movement, positioning their work as a solution to the issue of race suicide. The Society was able to make broad appeals that could garner the support of reformists, college students, professors, conservative legislators, and the public alike. Through its engagement with its membership, collaboration with other organization, and reliance on credibility, the American Eugenics Society could build a sustainable, successful movement. Eugenics was *not* a pseudoscience, as it commanded the attention and respect of highly respected individuals and institutions alike with the leadership of the Society. In uncovering these histories and the involvement of prominent academics, we can better hold institutions like Yale accountable for its role in leading the eugenics movement.

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