A HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN EUGENICS SOCIETY, 1921-1940

BY

BARRY ALAN MEHLER

B.A., Yeshiva University, 1970
M.A., City College of New York, 1973

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History in the Graduate College of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1988

Urbana, Illinois

Copyright 1988 by Barry Allan Mehler
ABSTRACT

A History of the American Eugenics Society, 1921-1940

Barry Alan Mehler, Ph.D.
Department of History
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1988
Richard Burkhardt, Jr. Advisor

A history of the American Eugenics Society from its origins as the Eugenics Committee of the United States of America to World War II, this monograph represents the first in-depth study of an American eugenic institution. It is critical of the widely held thesis that American eugenics underwent a major transformation between 1915 and 1930. The author disputes the claim that a "new" eugenics emerged after 1930. The AES is viewed in the context of the international eugenics movement. The notion that Anglo-American eugenics developed independently of other European eugenics movements is disputed, and specific examples of foreign influence on American eugenics are documented. The dissertation includes a detailed prosopographical analysis of the 153 members of the Society's board of directors and advisory council between 1923 and 1935 as well as a 135 page appendix containing the biographies of 170 leading members of the Society between 1921 and 1940. There is a detailed comparison of American and Nazi sterilization programs demonstrating the ideological unity of the two programs in the prewar years. There is an examination of AES efforts to restrict immigration between 1921 and 1940. The author shows that a vigorous campaign to restrict immigration of
non-whites, Mexicans, and others was pursued between 1925 and 1940. This campaign paralleled the earlier campaign against Eastern and Southern Europeans. The study concludes with a detailed analysis of the theory and policy of the Society between 1938 and 1940.
In the memory of my mother

ESTHER MEHLER

1914-1987
Acknowledgments

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of numerous colleagues, friends, and institutions. I am especially indebted to Professor Garland E. Allen of Washington University who first suggested this study in 1976. Between 1976 and 1980, I worked with Professor Allen as his Research Associate. Our work was sponsored by National Science Foundation Grant # SOC 75-21902. His generosity, good humor, integrity, and intellectual clarity are much appreciated. During this period I also met Allen Chase, whose encouragement was unflagging and invaluable.

A grant from the Rockefeller Archive Center in the Summer of 1977 allowed me to travel to Tarrytown, New York to examine the papers of the Population Council of America and the Bureau of Social Hygiene. These papers have been extremely important in forming my perspective on the eugenics movement of the thirties and forties. This material will play an increasingly important role in my work as I begin the exploration of the period 1940 to 1960.

In 1981, Jerry Hirsch invited me to join the Institutional Racism Program at the University of Illinois. As a Trainee in the Institutional Racism Program, I received four years of fellowship support from the National Institute of Mental Health [NIMH grant MH 15173-05]. Dr. Hirsch also
brought me into his behavior genetics laboratory, insisting that a historian of eugenics not only understand the fundamentals of genetics, but have actual laboratory experience in behavior genetic analysis.

Professor Hirsch has been a constant source of materials and information and has given freely of his personal time to discuss the issues of this dissertation and the broader issues of ethics in science. I was also privileged to work with Professor Hirsch's graduate students: Mark Vargo, Mark Halliday, Stephen Zawistowski, and Jeff Ricker. I am particularly indebted to Jeff Ricker, who read many of my manuscripts over the years of our association.

My advisor, Richard W. Burkhardt Jr., was a source of constant good humored support and encouragement. He read through draft after draft of this dissertation and helped to hone the work into its final form. Through the entire process Professor Burkhardt kept me on track. He is, more than any other person, to be thanked for the completion of this manuscript.

Orville Vernon Burton has been my mentor in the area of American social history, historical methodology, and computer analysis. There are very few historians who can match his extraordinary skills in demographic and quantitative analysis. Professor Burton's support has been invaluable.
All the members of my committee, Professors Burkhardt, Burton, Hirsch, and Melhado proved to be extremely supportive of my efforts. Professor Melhado was especially helpful in reorganizing several chapters.

I also wish to acknowledge the help and support of Frederic C. Jaher. Throughout my graduate work, he has been a friend and mentor. In this context, I also wish to mention James Anderson, Professor of History of American Education, in the Educational Policy Studies Program and co-director of the Program for Training in the Study of Institutional Racism.

In the final stages of preparing the manuscript for deposit, Kelly Mickey, owner of the YMCA Used Book Store, read the manuscript and offered very helpful suggestions. Kenneth Wodke, Professor of Psychology, at the University of Wisconsin also read the entire manuscript and offered many helpful suggestions.

The history department at the University of Illinois has been a congenial place to work. I received constant support from the department in the form of steady employment as a graduate assistant from 1982 to the present. I was also awarded the departments Babcock Fellowship in 1986 which gave me a year of uninterrupted time to write the first draft of this manuscript. I would especially like to thank Sandy Colclasure, the departments Administrative
Secretary, for her assistance in winding my way through the University bureaucracy

Everyone who has gone through this process, knows how difficult dissertation writing can be on a spouse. My wife, Jennifer, endured it all with great resilience. Her love and support were the foundation upon which this work was completed. Finally, my son Isaac, helped me put the whole project into perspective when he pointed out that the dissertation was not nearly so important as a Care Bear movie.
Contents

One: Introduction............................................. 1
Two: The Origins of the American Eugenics Society..... 34
Three: The American Eugenics Society, 1926-1940....... 81
Four: The American Eugenics Society: a Prosopography.. 129
Five: The American Eugenics Society and Immigration Restriction, 1921-1939.............................................. 180
Six: A Comparison of American and Nazi Sterilization.. 223
Seven: The Eugenic Hypothesis, 1938-1940............... 269
Eight: Conclusion.............................................. 296
Appendix: AES Advisory Council and Board, 1923-1940.. 306
Bibliography.................................................. 450
Vita .............................................................. 477