Part I: Historiography

This is the first monographic study of an American eugenic institution. It is unique in several respects. First, this is an in-depth look at eugenics between the years 1921 and 1940, a period during which eugenics in America underwent considerable growth and change. I offer here a new interpretation of that change which challenges the consensus in the literature to date. Second, this study examines American eugenics in the context of the international eugenics movement. I show, for the first time, how American eugenics was influenced by eugenics in France, Norway, and Sweden. I also take a close look at the relationship between American and Nazi eugenics during the thirties. Third, this dissertation contains the first prosopographical study of American eugenic leaders. This is the first systematic analysis of the leadership of American eugenics. All previous studies of eugenics in America deal with the leadership in a haphazard fashion, which has clouded our understanding of the influence of eugenics on American culture.

The historical interest and importance of the eugenics movement is less well appreciated than it should be. The
Eugenics movement had a significant impact on American society. Eugenics was an integral part of the Progressive movement, and the study of eugenics is inseparable from the study of genetics, public health, criminal justice, and the welfare state in general. Furthermore, it has had a lasting and profound impact on American social attitudes and legislation.

The eugenics movement played an important role in the passage of the 1924 immigration restriction act which established the "national origins" principle in U.S. immigration policy. This principle was not abandoned until 1965 with the passage of the Celler Act. Thus from 1924 to 1965 American immigration policy was self-consciously based on ethnicity and national origins. The policy was disastrous from the very beginning, pitting ethnic Americans against one another and causing serious foreign relations problems.¹

Eugenicists also had a significant impact on the American judicial system. They helped convince legislators that crime was the product of bad heredity. This undermined a fundamental principle of American jurisprudence - the idea that everyone should be equal under the law. As Charles Davenport protested, "nothing could be more stupid, cruel, and unjust. The nature of the person should be given no less consideration in determining treatment than the nature

¹ Peter Wang, Legislating Normalcy: The Immigration Act of 1924 (Saratoga 1975).
of the deed done. 2 The view that sentencing should be regulated by the nature of the criminal rather than the nature of the crime led to the widespread acceptance of the indeterminate sentence. 3

The eugenicists in America were also successful in carrying the cause of eugenic sterilization to the Supreme Court and successfully defending the Constitutionality of eugenic sterilization. In 1927, Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, declared that "three generations of imbeciles are enough." It was Holmes opinion that sterilization of biological degenerates was in the best interest of the patient and society. 4 The eugenics movement made deep inroads in educating Americans to accept sterilization as a solution to social problems.

Less clearly understood has been the impact of the eugenics movement on social welfare legislation and the administration of such programs established during the New Deal. From 1937 to 1939 the American Eugenics Society either organized or participated in some twenty-two conferences on such diverse subjects as housing, recreation, recreation,  


4 Oliver Wendell Holmes, Buck v. Bell, Supreme Court Reporter 47 (St. Paul 1928) pp. 584-585.
health care, education, medicine, and other public welfare projects.

For example, in 1938 eugenic leaders called a conference on eugenics in relation to housing shortly after the passage of the Wagner-Steagall Act which set aside federal funds for the construction of public housing.\(^5\) It is clear that eugenic leaders believed public housing projects could contribute to the dysgenic trend in births which they believed was prevalent in the United States at the time. During the debate in Congress Senator Byrd and other opponents of the bill attached an amendment which was derisively referred to as the "race suicide amendment" since it limited the size of public housing units to an average of four rooms per unit. It was hoped that this limitation would prevent the Federal Government from subsidizing large families among the dysgenic elements.\(^6\)

It is clear that the leaders of the eugenics movement were able to convey their perspective to legislators and administrators of federal projects. It is still not clear

\(^5\) Passed in Congress 3 February 1938. The conference was held 1 April 1938.

\(^6\) See the debate on this point during the Conference on The Eugenic Aspect of Housing of the American Eugenics Society at the Town Hall Club in New York City, Friday 1 April 1938. AES Papers. Specific reference to the "race suicide amendment" can be found in the presentation by Edith Elmer Wood, "The Scope and Methods of Modern Housing," p. 4. See also, the remarks by Warren Thompson, "Housing and Population." I comment further on this in the conclusion to this dissertation.
to what extent eugenics leaders were able to influence either the legislation or the administration of public welfare projects passed during the New Deal. But there is certainly enough evidence now available to warrant a close examination of this issue. Allan Chase has presented clear evidence that eugenic concerns influenced the operation of federally funded family planning programs in the early seventies. As Judge Gerhard Gesell noted in Waters v. Walker, "there is uncontroverted evidence in the record" that "poor people have been improperly coerced into accepting a sterilization operation" under federally subsidized programs. Judge Gesell went on to observe, "the dividing line between family planning and eugenics is murky."

Despite the profound impact that eugenics has had on American society, important aspects of its history remain to be explored. In the past decade, several scholars have taken up the subject. Yet, no American history text deals with eugenics in anything more than a cursory fashion. I have surveyed general undergraduate history texts, texts that focus on the twentieth century, and many general monographs specifically dealing with the Progressive era. These texts, as well as monographs on the history of medicine, psychology, social hygiene, and other areas

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generally ignore eugenics. That a movement as broadly based and widely influential should have been largely disregarded by historians for so long is certainly worth some thought.

With regard to textbooks the reason may be that textbooks sometimes lag a generation or more behind the leading edge of scholarship, it may take time before discussion of eugenics works its way into general college textbooks. It is certainly to be hoped that the present interest in eugenics will attract the interest of textbook writers.

With regard to the monographic literature the answer is less clear. For the period from 1940 to 1970 there is very little work treating eugenics as an important and serious topic. Certainly, the leaders of the eugenics movement in the United States did not seek attention in this period. The post-war eugenic leadership felt that "the time was not right for aggressive eugenic propaganda or any aggressive campaign for increased membership." Instead, the period called for "thinking out the problems of eugenics with the help of a well-informed audience."9


Researchers interested in the Holocaust ignored eugenics because there were more pressing historical issues that needed clarification. Holocaust research focused on the extermination process itself and on the magnitude and complexity of the death camp system. More recently, Holocaust historians have taken a serious interest in the role of academic disciplines in the Holocaust. They have also turned their attention to the euthanasia program and eugenics movement as aspects of the Holocaust.¹⁰

Historians of science did not turn their attention to eugenics until after the publication of Kenneth Ludmerer's history of American eugenics in 1972. Since the history of genetics was still in its infancy in the early seventies, it is not difficult to understand why eugenics was ignored. It is more difficult to understand why social historians have not paid more attention to eugenics.

Recently, however, there has been a virtual explosion of interest in eugenics in the United States and Europe. Researchers have taken up the subject in virtually every country in which eugenics has had an impact. Sessions on eugenics are regularly scheduled at the meetings of scholarly societies throughout the world. The history of

¹⁰ For an example of the earlier literature see Raul Hilberg, The Destruction of European Jewry (Chicago 1967). For an example of the more recent literature focusing on euthanasia and eugenics see Robert Jay Lifton, The Nazi Doctor: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide (New York 1986).
eugenics in Germany which was until very recently poorly understood is now being carefully studied.\(^\text{11}\)

The question arises: why has eugenics, so neglected for all these years, suddenly become such a popular topic? Obviously, advances in genetics, birth control, genetic screening, amniocentesis, sperm and egg banks, and the highly publicized legal cases involving these issues have spurred our interest in the history of eugenics. At the same time historians of science have become increasingly interested in the social context of science. Genetics in general became a topic of interest in this context since it was so clearly sensitive to the political and social environment. Eugenics has served as an important case study of the interaction of a science with society.

The shock and opprobrium which accompanied the revelations of the Holocaust have subsided which has resulted in a resurgence of support for eugenics among respected academics. Thus, eugenics has re-emerged as a legitimate topic for consideration and debate. Articles published in Intelligence by Daniel R. Vining and more

recently by Marian Van Court and Frank Bean claim to show that there is a dysgenic trend with regard to intelligence in American birth differentials. This has led one highly regarded psychologist to remark that this dysgenic trend "cannot be tolerated for long by a democracy." He asks:

Have we adopted social policies that encourage reproduction among those least able to provide for the intellectual development of their children? Obtaining an answer to this question should have the highest priority.

Thus, eugenics is becoming a more respectable subject in academic circles. We should not be surprised at this trend or underestimate its potential for growth in the years ahead. The chapters that follow show that American eugenics grew out of an international movement of great strength. The leaders of eugenics in America were generally leaders in various fields of endeavor, especially academia, social work, public health, philanthropy, business, and politics. The movement has exhibited extraordinary resiliency. If the

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12 Daniel R. Vining, "On the Possibility of the Reemergence of a Dysgenic Trend with Respect to Intelligence in American Fertility Differentials," Intelligence 6 (1982) pp. 241-264; Marian Van Court and Frank D. Bean, "Intelligence and Fertility in the United States: 1912-1982," Intelligence 9 (1985) pp. 23-32. Van Court and Bean were both at the University of Texas at Austin, Vining was at the Population Studies Center at the University of Pennsylvania.

13 Lloyd Humphreys, "Intelligence and Public Policy," paper presented at the symposium on "Intelligence, Measurement, Theory and Public Policy," held at the University of Illinois, 30 April - 2 May 1985. The conference was held in professor Humphreys' honor and his was the final presentation. The conference papers are scheduled to be published by the University of Illinois Press.
history of the movement is any guide we can expect the resurgence of eugenics advocacy to spread as the social and political environment becomes more hospitable.

Definition and Historiography

Eugenics was defined in the late 19th century as the movement to improve the inborn qualities of the human species both physically and mentally by manipulating the mechanisms of social control in such a way as to encourage the breeding of genetically superior individuals and discourage the breeding of genetically inferior individuals. More recently, eugenics has been defined as a social movement encompassing "all efforts whose goal is the modification of natural selection (the guiding force of evolution) to bring about change in a particular direction within human populations or the human species as a whole." The movement is now just over one hundred years old.

During the course of its evolution it has been redefined


15 Carl J. Bajema (Ed.), Eugenics Then and Now (Stroudsburg 1976) p.2. Bajema goes on to define the purpose of eugenics as a science and as a social movement. As a science, the purpose of eugenics is to ascertain the direction of genetic change in a population. As a social movement, the purpose of eugenics is to modify in a eugenic direction the way in which natural selection is operating (p. 3).

16 Eugenic organizations in the United States today include the International Association for the Advancement of Ethnology and Eugenics in New York and the Mankind Quarterly, an international quarterly specializing in
numerous times by its advocates. Generally, there has been agreement that there are two main directions of eugenic policy. Efforts to raise the general level of genetic fitness of the human species fall within the category of "positive eugenics." Efforts to eliminate specific negative aspects of human character and physique fall within the category of "negative eugenics."

Eugenics advocates have variously stressed the positive or negative side of eugenics, depending upon the context of the eugenics movement of the moment. Thus, Francis Galton, in the last quarter of the 19th century stressed positive eugenics. In the first quarter of the 20th century, Charles Davenport, Galton's American disciple, emphasized negative eugenics. For a decade after the Holocaust, eugenics advocates, in the face of world-wide opprobrium, avoided mention of negative eugenics programs. More subtle changes in focus, not only with regard to positive and negative eugenics but more broadly with regard to the scope of eugenics have occurred over the century of the movement's history. Furthermore, in any period of the movement's history, the various promoters of eugenics have held a range of views regarding the aims and methods of the movement, so

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17 During this period eugenics was also narrowly defined as medical genetics and genetic counselling.
that a "center of gravity" for the movement is not always easy to identify.

Mark Haller published in 1963 the first monograph on the history of the eugenics movement in America. He divided the history of eugenics into three stages: from about 1870 to 1905, during the first period, eugenic ideas flourished among the directors of institutions for the insane, feebleminded, paupers, and criminals. In this initial period eugenics advocates were essentially part of the liberal movement in America. During the second phase, between 1905 and about 1930, the eugenics movement reached its height of influence, when, according to Haller, a conservative bias and a racist tone marked its polemics. The period after 1930 was marked by rapid decline in the movement. According to Haller, advances in genetics, anthropology, psychology, and psychiatry undermined the scientific foundation of the movement. "At the same time, Hitler in Germany demonstrated the uses that might be made of some of the eugenics doctrines." These developments stripped eugenics of its scientific trappings and exposed it as a movement motivated by nativism and based on a reactionary social philosophy. Nevertheless, the movement did not die out. Over the next three decades, according to Haller, a group of "thoughtful students of human heredity"
gradually worked out a "cautious, sober, and scientific eugenics." 18

In 1972 Kenneth Ludmerer published the second major monograph on American eugenics. He accepted the division of eugenics outlined by Haller and began his study with the period 1905 to 1930. For Ludmerer, too, eugenics was both a science as well as a "sanctuary for bigots and racists." 19 Ludmerer claimed that eugenicists' "misuse" of the science of genetics "became so blatant" in the period 1920 to 1930 that "many prominent geneticists" felt obliged to denounce the movement publicly. Furthermore, the misuse of genetics by leading eugenicists inhibited research in the area of human genetics. As eugenics fell into disrepute, so too did the field of human genetics. 20

Ludmerer believed that it was important to determine whether particular individuals were "racists". It was therefore essential to define "scientific racism." A "scientific racist," according to Ludmerer, was a person who believed scientific evidence supported the myth of "Aryan" or "Nordic" superiority. The scientific racist was blinded by a strong emotional stake in the outcome of studies of

20 Ibid. p.3.
Ludmerer concluded that many of the early eugenicists were racists, but he pointed out that they lived in a period when determinist hereditarian interpretations of human nature were ubiquitous. He concluded that they should not be judged by today's standards.

Ludmerer's definition of scientific racism was abitrarily narrow. Scientific racism can be more broadly defined as the belief that the human species can be divided into superior and inferior genetic groups and that these groups can be satisfactorily identified so that social policies can be advanced to encourage the breeding of the superior groups and discourage the breeding of the inferior groups.

The question of whether the early eugenicists were racist and how to judge them was pursued by Carl J. Bajema in Eugenics: Then and Now (1976). Bajema denied that eugenics included racist policies such as those of the Nazis. The attribution of racism to eugenics was the result of "confusion" which "still exists" over the precise meaning of eugenics. Citing Francis Galton, Bajema stated that any eugenic policy had to fulfill two criteria. It had to be humane and lead to the genetic improvement of the human species. By this standard, Bajema concluded, the Nazi sterilization and breeding programs were not eugenic since

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21 Ibid. p. 5.
they were not humane and did not, in fact, do anything to improve human genetic development.\textsuperscript{22}

By Bajema's criteria there was no eugenics movement at all before 1935 since all eugenics prior to that date— including Galton's eugenics—failed Galton's criteria. Certainly, the American movement to sterilize degenerates and inhibit the flow of European immigrants does not meet Bajema's interpretation of Galton. Furthermore, Bajema's reading of Galton is difficult to accept. Galton very clearly believed that non-white races were inferior to the white race and that the goal of eugenics was to give the "more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing speedily over the less suitable than they otherwise would have had." Galton went on to claim that there existed a "sentiment, for the most part quite unreasonable, against the gradual extinction of an inferior race." Galton also stated the belief that the Jews were "specialized for a parasitical existence." Thus, whether Galton should be excused from those implicated in the Nazi atrocities seems at least worth considering.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{22} Carl Jay Bajema, (ed.) \textit{Eugenics Then and Now} (Stroudsburg 1976) pp. 5-6.

While a general belief in inferior and superior genetic strains was an essential ingredient in the early eugenics movement, there was a clear difference between those who accepted theories of Aryan superiority and those who did not. Sheila Faith Weiss, in an article on German eugenics, identifies "nonracist eugenicists within the German movement." She notes, however, that "it goes without saying that all eugenicists, insofar as they accepted the racial and cultural superiority of Caucasians as a matter of course, were 'racist' by today's standards." Barbara Ross, editor of the Journal of the History of Behavioral Sciences agrees with Weiss. She claims it is historically incorrect to use "today's enlightened view" to label an earlier generation of eugenic leaders racists.

The opposite view is taken by historian Gisela Bock, who believes that eugenics was an "essential core of National Socialist racism." She also contends that


25 Barbara Ross, "Scholars, Status, and Social Context," *Contemporary Psychology* 30 (1985) p. 857. See the response, "Eugenics has a long racist history," by Jerry Hirsch and Barry Mehler in volume 31 #8 (August 1986) p. 633. Neither should we judge those who burned the witches at Salem by "today's enlightened view," but it is appropriate to apply feminist theory and analysis to the history. The question is not how to judge the eugenicists, but how shall we understand them? As we look back on the eugenics of the thirties we can hardly fail to notice the racism inherent in their ideology. Our task is to understand the dynamics of this racism and its consequences, not to excuse it with platitudes about the ubiquity of "hereditarian notions."
"eugenics was a form of racism." This, in fact, is one of the main themes in her book, Zwangssterilisation im Nationalsozialismus: Studien zur Rassenpolitik und Frauenpolitik (1986), and she explores this theme both historically and theoretically. Bock contends that the very theory of inferiority is essentially a form of scientific racism. In this regard British, Scandinavian, American, and English eugenicists were essentially the same. Conditions in the Nazi state simply allowed the Nazis to "do a better job" than their American and European counterparts.26

In 1985 Daniel Kevles published In the Name of Eugenics. Kevles' book is a comparative study of British and American eugenics from Francis Galton to the present. Kevles does not believe that Anglo-American eugenics was much influenced by the European eugenics movement. While he acknowledges there was some interaction, he claims there are no real signs of any European eugenics movement influencing Anglo-American eugenics. He also supports Ludmerer's claim that the success of American eugenics in the field of

legislation and its subsequent opprobrium inhibited the
development of human genetics in America.\textsuperscript{27}

The present study touches on many of these issues. This study focuses on the historical development of eugenics in the United States between 1921 and 1940. It examines the collective views of the leadership of the AES and compares these views with those of European eugenicists. It examines the question of interaction between American and European eugenicists and explores the issue of scientific racism and the interrelations of American and Nazi eugenics.

Particularly for the years between 1920 and 1940, historians have placed too much emphasis on change in the eugenics movement and not enough on continuity. There are many reasons for this historical orientation. From the mid-thirties to the early forties the American eugenicists themselves continuously wrote and spoke of a new American eugenics. Bitter conflicts emerged particularly between Charles Davenport, the acknowledged leader of American eugenics, and some other eugenic leaders. Ultimately, Davenport retired from leadership of the movement in the mid-thirties.

Furthermore, the eugenics movement peaked in the period from 1915 to 1930. This was a period of extraordinary activity and growth. With the onset of the depression and

\textsuperscript{27} Daniel Kevles, \textit{In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity} (New York 1985).
troubles in Europe, attention naturally turned away from eugenics. The period between 1930 and 1940 was one of struggle for the eugenics movement. During this period many eugenic institutions declined in membership or disappeared completely. Writers on the history of eugenics in this period have tended to attribute this decline to internal factors. The old eugenics was dying because it was out of touch with changing social conditions. Some older eugenicists were dying and retiring, but they were being replaced by younger recruits in a natural process of change and development. Nevertheless, the turnover in leadership, at least for the period 1930 to 1940, was not dramatic.

Historians have also generally approached the history of eugenics from a Whiggish perspective which sees science moving away from prejudice and naiveté. The history of eugenics has generally been portrayed as moving from a period of great ignorance about human genetics to a period of enlightenment regarding the complexity of human genetics, particularly with regard to intelligence and character traits. There also developed in the thirties a greater

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29 There are numerous examples of this trend. It is most apparent in Kenneth Ludmerer’s Genetics and American Society (Baltimore 1972) and Bentley Glass, "Geneticists Embattled: Their Stand Against Rampant Eugenics and Racism in America During the 1920s and 1930s," Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society 130 #1 (1986) pp. 130-154. See also "Eugenics: Must It be a
self-consciousness regarding the prejudices of the earlier period. According to most accounts, American eugenics by 1930 had abandoned much of its early ideology.30

Influenced by this Whiggish orientation, many commentators appear to believe that eugenics is fundamentally a legitimate endeavor, and to express the view that the movement as a whole ought not to be condemned because of the excesses of some of its early advocates. These commentators have taken pains to distinguish the honest scientists and the legitimate concerns of eugenics from the extremists and their unacceptable ideas. The desire to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate eugenics has led to a focus on old and new eugenics.31

Dirty Word?" by James F. Crow in Contemporary Psychology, 33 #1 (1988) pp. 10-12. Crow criticizes Kevels, Haller, and Ludmerer for emphasizing the negative side of eugenics. He writes that "we should not lose sight of its (eugenics) more lofty aims." Quoting Curt Stern, he writes that eugenics has a "sound core." Crow is professor emeritus in the Genetics Department at the University of Wisconsin and a member of the National Academy of Sciences.

This is not to deny that significant advances in genetics occurred during this period. I believe these advances had less effect on the social and political goals of the movement than has been generally portrayed by historians.

Haller, for example, writes, "Eugenists grasped an important fact that a person's heredity is a major factor in his success and development. . . . Unfortunately, the early eugenists oversimplified the problems of human genetics . . . and the excesses of the early movement brought eugenics into disrepute. . . . Today. . . a cautious, sober, and scientific eugenics is once more struggling for attention." Haller, Eugenics: Hereditarian Attitudes in American Thought (New Jersey 1963) p. 3-6.
The eugenics movement did undergo changes in the 1930s. The eugenics movement was developed in American society along with other social movements. Eugenic leaders defined eugenics in relation to birth control, population control, the public health movement, as well as emerging academic disciplines such as demography, medical genetics, social biology, and social psychology. Eugenic leaders interacted with social reformers of all stripes and worked very hard to define a place for eugenics within their various areas.

This study stresses the fundamental continuity and coherence in the history of eugenics as a corrective to an oversimplified division of the movement into "old" and "new". This is not to deny historical development. Significant evolution did take place in the American eugenics movement, but that evolution was not from a "bad" eugenics to a "good" eugenics nor was the eugenics of the 1930s a repudiation of the older eugenics. The evolution was continuous and while one old timer such as Davenport might lose favor, others such as Harry Laughlin and Henry P. Fairchild remained leaders throughout the thirties. Still others, such as Paul Popenoe remained in leadership positions well into the post-war period. Thus, in some

32 In my own work I have used the term "new eugenics" to refer to the resurgence of eugenics advocacy in the past three decades, i.e. since 1960. Even in this case my work has stressed the historical consistency of the movement. See, Mehler, "The New Eugenics: Academic Racism in America Today," Science for the People 15 #3 (May/June 1983) pp. 18-23.
important respects the outline of the history of American eugenics has yet to be clarified.

Part II: The Organization of the Dissertation.

Chapter Two of this dissertation begins with the organization of the American Eugenics Society as an ad interim committee of the Second International Congress of Eugenics held in New York in 1921. The committee's original purpose was to help organize central eugenic organizations among the member nations of the International Congress.

The first half of Chapter Two is devoted to the Second International Congress of Eugenics. The international aspect of eugenics has generally been overlooked in studies of American eugenics. If eugenics had been confined to England and the United States it would hardly have been able to generate the enthusiasm it did. We have yet to show clearly the ways in which eugenic ideas travelled from one country to another. We need to know more about the development of national eugenic movements. Eugenics was an international movement and we know very little of the international dimensions of the movement.

Virtually all writers to date have rejected the notion that the Anglo-American eugenics movement was influenced by other national eugenic movements. I present two carefully documented cases in which AES policy clearly derived from Norway and Sweden. Much more work needs to be done to
clarify the origins of particular eugenic ideas and trace their movement from one country to another.

The fact that eugenics was an international movement by 1921 was clearly a source of great pride among the leadership. It helped to confirm their belief that eugenics was destined to spread throughout the world and rival Christianity as a secular religion. There was a lively exchange of ideas at the international gatherings as well as a constant exchange of news. Leaders from various countries traveled internationally to survey the progress being made in different parts of the world.

American eugenics cannot be fully understood in isolation. The American Eugenics Society was created by a motion from the Norwegian Eugenics Commission and was strongly influenced by its leader Jon Alfred Mjoen. In later years what became known as the "eugenic hypothesis" which was the core of the so-called "new" or "reform" eugenics was developed by Frederick Osborn from ideas derived from Swedish eugenics programs.\[33\]

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The second half of Chapter Two focuses on the Eugenics Committee (later to become the AES) and its relationship to other eugenic organizations both in the U.S. and abroad. Eugenics was well organized in the United States by 1921. The Eugenics Record Office (ERO), established in 1910, was the largest and best funded of the American eugenic organizations. It functioned as a training and research center as well as a clearing house for information which was published in the Eugenical News. In 1906 John Harvey Kellogg established the Race Betterment Foundation which ran conferences on eugenics and acted as Michigan's largest eugenics organization. The Eugenics Research Association (ERA), founded in 1913, was established to promote the exchange of information among eugenic researchers and field workers. It was meant to be a professional organization of scientific workers in the field of eugenics. The Galton Society was established by Madison Grant, Charles Davenport, and Henry Fairfield Osborn in 1918 ostensibly to be an anthropological society to counter the influence of Franz Boas. It actually became an elite fellowship society whose members were carefully chosen from among the inner core of the East Coast eugenic establishment. There were numerous other smaller eugenics organizations throughout the United States. Thus, the establishment of the committee was actually the culmination of numerous organizing efforts on behalf of eugenics.

referred to the Swiss program as the source of his belief in the validity of the "eugenic hypothesis"
From the start the committee acted as a central eugenic agency to coordinate activity in the United States. The idea of the committee was to work in close association with all related organizations including related professional and scientific associations. The committee leaders believed eugenics encompassed virtually all societal concerns including religious orientation, political philosophy, administration of justice, health care and insurance, education, foreign policy, immigration, labor, and scientific endeavors directly related to eugenics. The committee endeavored, through the selection of the advisory council, to secure a broad representative sample of leaders in all these areas.

The committee worked most closely with the Eugenics Record Office, Eugenics Research Association, and the Galton Society. These three organizations, closely tied to the American Museum of Natural History in New York, shared interlocking boards, the publication the *Eugenical News*, and regular meetings. Thus, coordination among these organizations was extremely close. Slightly more peripheral, but still closely affiliated, were such organizations as the American Genetics Association, the Life Extension Institute, and the Race Betterment Foundation.

From the beginning the committee was well connected to national and international scientific and professional organizations, government agencies, foundations, and
educational institutions. While the AES was not actually incorporated until January 1926, the goals and orientation of the society were all established during the committee years.

Quite clearly these goals represented a sweeping vision for the complete transformation of American society along eugenic lines. These goals were carried forward from the Second International Congress and closely resemble in spirit and form the policies articulated at the Congress meetings. Eugenics was seen as a new religion or secular ethic which, it was hoped, would pervade all aspects of American society. Teachers, clergymen, politicians, lawyers, and scientists would all pursue their endeavors with the goal of promoting a "eugenic society."

Chapter Three carries this story forward from the incorporation of the AES in January 1926 through 1940. The focus in this chapter remains the organizational structure and general ideological development of the society. It details the phenomenal growth of the society and examines the range of activities of the numerous committees established during this period. The society was sponsoring sermon contests and exhibits at state fairs, publishing eugenic pamphlets, and lobbying for eugenic legislation.

Chapter Three also discusses ideological changes which were occurring within the society. This section focuses on three men, Henry P. Fairchild (1880-1956), Henry F. Perkins
(1877-??), and Frederick Osborn (1889-1981),\textsuperscript{34} all of whom played important roles in the development of the society. Fairchild was elected president of the society in 1929.\textsuperscript{35} Perkins was elected president to serve from 1931 to 1934. While Frederick Osborn was not elected president of the society until 1946, he rose to a leadership position in the society between 1934 and 1940. This section looks closely at changes in theory and policy during the period between 1926 and 1940 and concludes that, while changes in theory did take place, policy remained remarkably consistent.

Most historians who have written about Frederick Osborn have accepted the notion that he paved the way for the transformation of American eugenics into "social biology." Osborn has been depicted in the literature as the man who came into the eugenics movement in the early thirties and slowly retired the extremists from the American Eugenics Society and articulated a "new eugenic" ideology.\textsuperscript{36} I have given extensive space to examining this claim and Osborn's views both in the early thirties and later, when they developed into his "eugenic hypothesis," discussed in Chapter Seven.

\textsuperscript{34} Ellsworth Huntington was also a key figure in these years and his contribution is discussed in Chapter Six.

\textsuperscript{35} Fairchild served as president from 1929 to 1930.

\textsuperscript{36} Most fully developed in his 1940 monograph, Preface to Eugenics (New York 1940).
The fourth chapter of the dissertation is unique in eugenics literature. Virtually all studies of American eugenics discuss the same group of perhaps two dozen eugenic leaders. One typically finds chapters or large sections on Francis Galton, Karl Pearson, Charles Davenport, Henry Fairfield Osborn, and Harry Laughlin. A coterie of other names generally appears but one finds throughout the literature virtually the same individuals being discussed. For example, in all of the literature one does not find a single reference to August Vollmer, the criminologist who introduced IQ testing for recruitment of police. Vollmer was an active member of the Eugenics Society and helped organize police departments the world over. His contribution to eugenics has gone completely unrecognized.

In their critiques of Kevles in *Isis*, Robert Olby and Richard Lewontin called for us to go beyond the "handful" of individual biographies "to search for common features predisposing individuals to eugenic commitments." Chapter Four is still just a beginning, but I am convinced that nothing less than a full scale database of the several hundred leading eugenic activists in the the United States will convey the true dimensions of the eugenics movement. To date, far too much attention has been paid to the biologist and far too little to the clergymen, sociologists, and lay persons.

Standard biographies made little mention of individuals' activities within the eugenics movement. Quite
often even extended monographs and articles which should have touched on the eugenics aspects of a person's career made no mention of those aspects or consciously minimized them. For example, in an article on the noted anthropologist Clark Wissler, in which Ruth and Stanley Freed specifically seek an explanation of the "strained relations" between Wissler and Franz Boas, the authors completely ignore Wissler's advocacy of eugenics.  

Similarly, William Provine minimizes the role of Sewall Wright in the American Eugenics Society by claiming that Wright was a member in name only and profoundly disagreed with the conclusions of the society leadership. No doubt Sewall Wright was less active in the society than many others but he allowed his name to be used for over a decade in publication after publication.

Bentley Glass, in a recent article, "Geneticists Embattled," comments on the "sorry history" of eugenics and the curious interest historians of genetics have shown in the "peripheral development of eugenic policies and programs during the first four decades" of the century. His article makes it appear that the tendency has been to over-emphasize

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37 George Stocking's biography of Wissler likewise minimizes the place of eugenics ideology in Wissler's career. See Dictionary of American Biography pp. 906-909.

the enthusiasm geneticists showed for eugenics. Glass believes there were many reasons why geneticists didn't speak out against eugenics but that generally they disapproved of the movement. However, this study shows that the number of biologists and geneticists who belonged to the advisory council increased from 1923 to 1935.\(^{39}\)

In no area has the tendency to minimize the role of eugenics been more pronounced than in the history of psychology. The standard histories of psychology such as E.G. Boring's *A History of Experimental Psychology* and Robert Thomson's *The Pelican History of Psychology* have little to say about the race theories and eugenics advocacy of the leading psychologists. Most recently Mark Snyderman and Richard Herrnstein have gone the farthest toward blatant apologetics. Fortunately, the well-balanced work of Franz Samelson stands as a counter to this tendency.\(^{40}\)

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39 Bentley Glass, "Geneticists Embattled: Their Stand Against Rampant Eugenics and Racism in America During the 1920s and 1930s," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 130 #1 (1986) pp. 130-154. We still need to understand in greater detail why some biologists and geneticists supported eugenics while others opposed it. Obviously, there were competent professionals on both sides of the issue.

If my analysis of the society’s leadership shows anything clearly, it is that the leadership was a social and political elite. To my knowledge there were no workers’ organizations advocating eugenics, and poor people in general are not to be found in the membership of the eugenics societies. Many of the elite of the American Eugenics Society came from old American stock. Some were socialist while others were conservatives. The eugenics movement was not monolithic. It was held together by a fear of degeneracy and a dream of a better world. All eugenicists considered themselves "progressive" in the sense that eugenics was a great social-scientific movement to improve the human species.

Clearly, the eugenics movement contained many individuals who did not share common political, social, religious, or scientific orientations. A common belief in eugenics was able to bring anti-Semites together with learned rabbis; socialists, communists, and liberals together with reactionaries and fascists. Regardless of the political philosophy of the exponents, however, eugenics was always the tool of an elite.

Chapter Five examines the issue of immigration restriction. There is an abundance of literature on this issue, but virtually all examinations of eugenics in relation to American immigration policy focus on the Immigration Act of 1924. I have closely examined the role
of the AES in the passage of the 1924 law, but I have also carried forward the study to examine the position of the society between 1924 and 1939.

The passage of the Johnson Immigration Restriction Act in 1924 was a great victory for the society, one which was not to be repeated in the ensuing years. Nevertheless, the society continued to campaign vigorously for the extension of immigration restriction to the Americas. The society was particularly interested in restricting the immigration of Mexicans, Latins, and blacks across the U.S.'s southern borders. The campaign against Mexican immigration parallels in every way the campaign against eastern and southern Europeans.

Chapter Six on sterilization shows that the American eugenics society saw the dysgenic elements of our population as less than full human beings. They were seen as a disease to be eliminated from society. The American programs espoused by Frederick Osborn and other "new eugenicists" differed very little from earlier eugenics programs. The social and political milieu changed drastically as the Nazis began their rise to power but, Osborn and the other leaders of the AES praised the Nazi programs throughout the thirties. The combination of Nazi fascism and eugenics was particularly deadly. The situation in America was clearly not as bad as Nazi Germany, but this should not obscure the
fact that there was a good deal of ideological affinity between the two movements.

Chapter Seven examines the final pre-war years of the society, looking closely at the development of the "eugenic hypothesis" and summing up the theme of the study: while changes were occurring within American eugenics between 1920 and 1940, much of the older ideology survived these transitional years. What emerged between 1938 and 1940 was a more sophisticated version of the earlier ideology with most of the essentials intact. The society was still focusing on the need for the creation of a eugenic society; warning of the dangers of the dysgenic trend in births; and calling for sterilization, immigration restriction, and social controls over the feebleminded.

This dissertation stresses the continuity of eugenics over time and the international scope of the movement. Changes did occur in America eugenics in the thirties. There were national and even regional differences in eugenics. We have yet to explore the differences between the eugenics movement in the Northern industrial centers as opposed to the movement in the South and West. But, much work has already been done on the differences between eugenics in the various countries of Europe. Nevertheless, there was a core of values which held the eugenics movement together both geographically and temporally. The elements of that continuity has thus far been overlooked.