Chapter Three
The American Eugenics Society, 1926-1940

The American Eugenics Society was officially incorporated in January 1926. The first meeting of the incorporators was held at the home of Madison Grant in New York City on January 30th. The incorporators were Harry Laughlin, H.F. Osborn, Henry Crampton, Irving Fisher, Madison Grant, Henry P. Fairchild, C.B. Davenport, C.C. Little, and Harry Olson. Fisher was elected the Society's first President, Davenport was elected Vice-President, and Henry P. Fairchild was elected Secretary-Treasurer. Leon Whitney was officially appointed Field Secretary with an annual salary of three thousand dollars.

Immediately following the first meeting of the new American Eugenics Society the group held the last meeting of the Eugenics Committee of the United States of America. Irving Fisher moved that the new American Eugenics Society take over the functions of the Committee and that the funds of the Committee be transferred to the new Society. The motion carried and the Eugenics Committee dissolved itself.

The new Society was off to a good start. There were 928 charter members in 45 states, the District of Columbia, Canada, Cuba, England, Germany, Hawaii, Italy, the Philippine Islands, Puerto Rico, and Switzerland. New York

1 Minutes, 1/30/26.
supplied the largest contingent with over two hundred members including over a hundred active and sustaining members. There were eighty-eight members in Massachusetts, seventy-one members in California, sixty-six in Illinois, and fifty-nine in Pennsylvania. Most other states had between one and ten members.

The office staff of the society consisted of eight full-time paid staff workers including Leon Whitney, Field Secretary; Lillian Armstrong, Corresponding Secretary; Margaret Andrus, Executive Secretary of the Committee on Formal Education; Vassa Fedoroff, General Secretary; and two stenographers. Miss Anna Wallace was in charge of the New York Office, located at 370 Seventh Ave and finally, Miss Martha Feser was Secretary of the Committee on Crime Prevention and Legislation in Chicago. Besides these eight full time staff people Mrs. Mary T. Watts served as a full time volunteer Chairman of the Committee on Popular Education. Her efforts were primarily devoted to organizing Fitter Family Contests at State Fairs.

The budget for 1925 was $17,000. The Society actually had more money than it could use. The largest portion of the budget came from wealthy financiers. George Eastman contributed ten thousand dollars in 1925 and repeated that donation in 1926. John D. Rockefeller Jr. contributed five

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2 Active members donated at least ten dollars, sustaining members donated at least one hundred dollars. Professional membership cost two dollars per year.
thousand dollars in 1925 and again in 1926. The Society received $2,530.05 from "Active Members." Professional membership brought in $720.20. There were also a number of one-thousand-dollar donations over the years. By 1927 the expenditures of the Society had grown to forty-one thousand dollars, representing growth of over 240 per cent in two years!

These were years of tremendous energy and activity on a host of different fronts both nationally and internationally. The Committees of the Society produced a flood of pamphlets and reports. They set up exhibits at county fairs, municipal buildings, schools, and libraries. They surveyed college campuses for courses in genetics and eugenics and encouraged eugenic course work. They ran sermon contests, organized lectures, participated in local and national legislative initiatives. They set up state committees in most states and helped launch a number of national and international organizations in the field of population control. They sent representatives to national

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4 Minutes, 1/3/27. The total budget was $41,275.
and international conferences, worked with the League of Nations and the International Federation of Eugenics Organizations, and made a serious effort at networking the numerous organizations with eugenic interests.

The first annual meeting of the American Eugenics Society took place in June 1926, in joint session with the fourteenth annual meeting of the Eugenics Research Association. The meetings were held at the Eugenics Record Office in Cold Spring Harbor, New York. Arthur Estabrook, President of the ERA, delivered the opening address, "Blood Seeks Environment." After the address Charles W. Burr introduced Irving Fisher who gave the Report of the President on the status of the AES.

Fisher began with a brief review of the history of the Eugenics Committee from 1921 to 30 January 1926, when the AES was officially incorporated. He explained that the Committee laid the foundations of the Society with "the utmost care in the hope that the structure to be gradually erected on these foundations would be strong and enduring." The cornerstones of this foundation were "prestige," a "suitable program," suitable personnel, and an adequate financial base.\(^5\)

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\(^5\) "Report of the President," *Eugenical News* 11 #3 p. 3.
"With surprisingly few exceptions," Fisher explained with regard to the selection of the advisory council, "we secured the acceptance of all those who were deemed of especial importance in lending the movement the prestige of their names and in making available the counsel needed from time to time. We have the assurance of one of the best eugenic authorities and observers in the world that in no other country does the eugenics movement command such complete support from geneticists and other technical authorities. This advisory council has been consulted as to each important step taken, and has shown interest in our program...".6

The entire program of the Society, he continued, was hammered out slowly in stages and at each stage, it was submitted to the entire advisory council for comment and then presented at the annual meetings for discussion. The first outline of the program was adopted in February 1923.7

"As will be seen by anyone reading this program, it was developed not to cover a few years merely but rather the whole future, so far as we can now see it. While we do not anticipate that this program will remain in its present form without change, it is serving to set the grooves along which our movement is to proceed as far as we now know."8

There were fourteen active committees. One hundred-twenty-five members of the Society belonged to one or more of these committees. The Committee on Selective Immigration and the Committee on Popular Education created the most

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6 Ibid.

7 Minutes, 2/24/23.

public interest and generated the largest number of newspaper and magazine articles.⁹

"We are naturally most pleased," Fisher told the membership, "when we realize the important part our Committee on Selective Immigration played in the passage of the recent Immigration Act by Congress." He expressed the hope that the law would have a far reaching effect "upon the future character of America." He also read a letter from Albert Johnson, Chairman of the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization and the chief architect of the legislation which bore his name -- the Johnson Immigration Restriction Act. Johnson personally thanked the Eugenics Society, noting that the work of the Committee was "of the greatest value to the House Committee" in preparation of the law.¹⁰

Newspapers and magazines were also interested in the Fitter Families Contests which generated valuable propaganda. Fisher pointed out that the publicity from the contests were equal to many thousands of dollars. Mrs. Watts, the originator of the "Better Babies Contest," joined with Florence Sherborn to convince the managers of the Kansas State Free Fair to hold the first Fitter Family Contest in 1921. There were three contests in 1924 and seven in 1925. By 1926 the Society was supervising fifteen

⁹ Ibid. p. 5.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 6.
or more contests per year and many more were held under local supervision. In 1927, the Society purchased a Ford truck, an exhibition tent and other materials for its permanent traveling fair exhibit.\textsuperscript{11} "Eugenics Exhibits" were held in connection with the contests and thousands of fair-goers were exposed to such exhibits.\textsuperscript{12}

The Society prepared special traveling exhibits which were set up at expositions, fairs, and museums across the country. One of the Society's traveling exhibits, entitled "Some People are Born to Be a Burden on the Rest," consisted of a series of flashing lights mounted on a large display board. One light flashed every 15 seconds and a sign under it declared: "every 15 seconds $100 of your money goes for the care of a person with bad heredity...." A second light flashed every 48 seconds, indicating the birth of another "defective." "Every 50 seconds," the viewer was informed by another light, "a person is committed to jail." To make the point explicit the display commented, "Very few normal people ever go to jail." The slowest light of all flashed every seven and half minutes, indicating the birth of a "high grade person."\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Eugenical News} 12 #10 (October 1927) p. 138.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid. p. 5.

\textsuperscript{13} AES photo collection. See also, Mehler and Allen, "Sources in the Study of Eugenics #1," \textit{Mendel Newsletter}, (June 1977) p. 10. I have been unable to discover the source for these calculations, nor have I found any definition of "high grade person." I do not think the reference is simply to IQ. These contests judged
The Committee on Cooperation with Clergymen consisted of thirty-five members representing almost all denominations of Protestant Christianity, Catholics, and Jews. Among the membership were some of America's most prominent clergymen, including Harry Emerson Fosdick, Henry Huntington, Bishop John M. Moore, and Francis J. McConnell, as well as rabbis Louis L. Mann and Daniel De Sola Pool.14

To take one of these men as an example, Rabbi Louis L. Mann graduated Johns Hopkins University (B.A. 1908), University of Cincinnati (M.A. 1912), Hebrew Union College (BHL, 1912, rabbi, 1914) and finally, Ph.D. (psychology) from Yale in 1920. He stepped into the most prestigious pulpits in the country including the Sinai Congregation in Chicago. He lectured on ethics at Yale between 1920 and 1923. He became Vice Chancellor of the Jewish Chautauqua Society and a member of the Board of Governors of the Hebrew Union College. He also served as national director of the B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundation. He was a member of the executive board of the of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. He is one of the few rabbis honored with a biography in the National Cyclopedia of American Biography.

When Louis Mann became the rabbi of Chicago Sinai Congregation in 1923 "he was only 33 years old; but he quickly established himself as a new voice in Chicago," wrote Richard Hertz in a speech before the Central Conference of American Rabbis. "Throngs followed his messages Sunday after Sunday. He made a great pulpit even greater. He brought new life to the relevancy of the pulpit..." See Central Conference of American Rabbis: Seventy-Seventh Annual Convention, June 21, 1966. Toronto, Canada, Volume LXXVI, edited by Sidney L. Regner.

The biographies of the others are equally illustrious. These were all nationally prominent ministers.
The committee organized the best eugenic sermon contest, which offered prizes of five, three, and one hundred dollars for the best sermon on eugenics. The contest brought inquiries from every state of the union and was mentioned in almost all the religious press. An estimated 300 sermons were inspired by the committee and over seventy of them were submitted for judging. The Society was thus able to send eugenics literature to clergymen across the country.

The sermons emphasized that we are at the dawning of a new day "when man may understand and control the stream of his creative power." Ministers told their parishioners that "worthy citizens do not spring from the loins of the unfit any more than silk-purses are made from sow's ears." Rabbi Harry H. Mayer told his Kansas City Temple Sisterhood: "May we do nothing to permit our blood to be adulterated by infusion of blood of inferior grade." Ministers told their congregations that eugenics was a religious obligation; that if future generations were born diseased, defective, and feebleminded it would weigh as a sin against them. Thus

15 There is no article or monograph on the religious component to the eugenics movement. Why the biologist and psychologist get all the attention is an enigma to me. The clergymen should be studied just as carefully. The mistake that seems to be made most often is to consider the "eugenics" movement as more inspired by genetics than other social ideas. There was an important theological component to eugenics. The leading eugenicists did not wish to replace Judaism or Christianity with eugenics; they wanted to infuse eugenics into religion.
ministers helped carry the message of eugenics as a moral imperative. Galton himself hoped that eugenics could be established as a "civic religion," and the American Eugenics Society was probably the most active eugenics organization promoting this view. One of the largest committees of the Society was the Committee on Cooperation with Clergy and the Society regularly published a "catechism."16

Ministers were called upon to translate eugenic theory into eugenic theology. While they supported immigration restriction, they called for wiser regulation of the "immigration from Heaven"17 and demanded segregation and sterilization as moral imperatives. It was their job to deliver homilies on eugenics. Eugenics, they argued, would not only lead to sounder bodies but to sounder, purer souls. Sin, disease, alcoholism, and sexual degeneracy were all linked to degenerate and weak bodies.

Until the impurities of dross and alloy are purified out of our silver it cannot be taken in the hands of the craftsman for whom the refining was done. God the refiner we know: do we yet dream of the skill or the beauty of God the Craftsman with His once purified silver?18

16 F. Olin Stockwell, Methodist Episcopal Church, Lamont, OK. Third Prize Sermon for 1926. AES Papers. See also, Kevles, In the Name of Eugenics (New York 1985) p. 61.

17 This phrase is taken from Reverend Osgood's sermon and refers to birth regulation. Just as eugenics sought to regulate the immigration from abroad, it also had to regulate the "immigration from heaven" i.e. births.

18 Phillip E. Osgood, St. Marks Church, Minneapolis. First Prize winner, 1926. AES Papers.
The Committee on History and Survey of the Eugenics Movement chaired by Samuel J. Holmes produced a number of extensive bibliographies of eugenics which were widely distributed by the Society. There were also committees on organization, finance, an editorial committee, a committee on biologic genealogy, and a committee on cooperation with social workers. All in all, the AES in 1926 was embarked upon a grand attempt to organize eugenic activity throughout the country and interlock American eugenic efforts with the international eugenics movement. Within a year the AES had set up twenty-nine state committees and was actively seeking to set up committees in most other states.19

The Society also began working on a "Eugenics Catechism" which was presented to all members of the advisory council for comment. The council and committee members were quite active in the Society. Even a subject as mundane as the Society's Constitution generated 40 replies from the council members. The "Eugenics Catechism," first published in 1926 as a ten page pamphlet, went through numerous changes until it was finally published by Ellsworth Huntington as a one hundred thirty-five page book entitled Tomorrow's Children.20 By that time it represented nearly a decade of debate within the advisory council.

19 See "Membership lists and State Committees". The first 26 state committees were set up by June 1927. Minutes, 6/25/27.

Committees continued to proliferate in the years between 1926 and 1930. A committee on publications was established. The Committee on Crime Prevention and Legislation was divided into two committees. Harry Olson took the chair of the Committee on Crime prevention which operated out of Chicago and began a large project to compile statistics on the national origins of criminals. Roswell Johnson took the Chair of the Committee on Legislation which drafted model laws regarding marriage regulation, sterilization, segregation, and other issues. These two committees kept a close watch on state legislatures and were prepared to act both through their state committees and directly to promote laws that would have a eugenic effect.

At the November 1927 meeting of the Board, Madison Grant complained that the "important question of mixed marriages" had not been properly dealt with by the Committee on Legislation. He noted that "colored people have an elaborate program to defend mixed marriages" and the Committee needed to respond in some way. This was not the first time he had raised the issue of miscegenation. It was his feeling that the Society ought to work more vigorously for antimiscegenation legislation and its position should be more explicitly stated. As with other delicate matters it was decided to circulate the proposal among the Board.

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21 Minutes, January 1927.
22 Minutes, 11/29/27.
Although the society did oppose miscegenation, Madison Grant was never satisfied with the vigor of the Society's position.23

While the Committee on Legislation needed prodding regarding the issue of race-mixture, the Committee on Research headed by Charles Davenport certainly did not. In the 1926 pamphlet, "Research Problems in Eugenics," the committee stated that race mixture was a topic which required "immediate investigation." Not only was it imperative to understand the consequences of the mixture of whites with Negroes and Asiatics, but it was also necessary to understand the consequences of the mixture of northwest Europeans with Jews and Italians.24 Davenport had already stated his belief that the Jews had a propensity for "crimes against chastity,"25 particularly with regard to prostitution. They also showed an intense individualism and were concerned with financial gain at any cost. On the whole, their character was the opposite of northern Europeans in these regards.26 Madison Grant expressed the

23 Minutes, 11/29/27.

24 The mixture of Jews with Negroes and Asians with Italians was of less interest. The obvious focus was on the impact of racial mixture on the "white race".

25 Davenport used the phrase "crimes against chastity" with specific reference to Jews in Heredity in Relation to Eugenics (New York 1911) p. 216. He used the phrase to connote Jewish participation in the white slave trade as well as a general vulgarity.

26 Research Problems in Eugenics: Being a report of the Committee on Research, 26 March 1926, AES Papers;
fears of many in the Society that the "peculiar mentality" of the Polish Jews were "being engrafted upon the stock of the nation." 27

Unfortunately, the committee report stated, "the whole work stands still for lack of research and invention in the field of measurement of temperamental and social traits." What was desperately necessary, the Committee believed, were instruments to measure the propensity to crimes against chastity and similar behavioral traits. This problem was never solved, but it is worth noting that no one on the Committee, which included Harrison Hunt, C.R. Stockard, F.A. Woods, and Sewall Wright seemed to think the task impossible. 28

Despite these problems the AES supported anti-miscegenation bills in Virginia, Washington, D.C., Michigan, and Texas. Madison Grant was particularly concerned with the situation in Virginia, where "many mulattoes are claiming to be Indian." Although the Indian was not a "serious sociological problem" since one could assume they would "gradually disappear," the Negro posed a serious threat. Negroes formed about nine percent of the American population and included a considerable number of mulattoes.

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28 Research Problems in Eugenics: Being a report of the Committee on Research, 26 March 1926. AES Papers.
who were passing as white. "We have gone a long way... towards absorbing negro germ-plasm," Edward M. East said, and "we can find no probability that the negro will contribute hereditary factors of value to the white race..."29

In addition to anti-miscegenation legislation, the AES resolved to support legislation requiring applicants for marriage certificates to state in writing that "neither of the contracting parties [had] a father, mother, sister brother, or cousin who was born blind."30 If this could not be done a bond of $1000 would be required to ensure that the children resulting from such a marriage would not become public charges. The AES later extended this marriage law to include other defects.

In 1929, the Society enlisted the aid of Professor Albert C. Jacobs of Columbia University’s School of Law to draft a model eugenic marriage law. Under Jacob’s model bill a person would be refused a marriage license, unless

29 Minutes, 10/31/25; Edward M. East, Heredity and Human Affairs (New York 1927) pp. 188/9. Bently Glass notes that East was "perhaps the most outstanding of the Harvard professors at the Bussey Institute." Furthermore, according to Glass, geneticists considered East among the worlds leading authorities on the consequences of inbreeding and outbreeding. Thus his statements on the subject of race crossing were highly influential. See Bently 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) p.132.

30 Minutes of the Joint Session of the AES and the ERA, 6/2/28. See "Dr. Howe’s Resolution."
bond were posted, if any close family member suffered from "hereditary" blindness, deafness, epilepsy, feeblemindedness, or insanity. The Committee on Legislation also drafted legislative programs which called for "authorization of approved physicians to sterilize insane, feebleminded, epileptic, and genetically blind or deaf individuals." The committee furthermore called for the legalization of prescription sale of contraceptives, the restriction of immigration to "those who are superior to the median American in intelligence tests" and changes in sentencing and parole laws to take into account the "possible social and hereditary menace" of the individual.31

The Society had come to accept and vigorously promote birth control and population control, so much so, in fact, that in 1929 the AES board discussed merging the Birth Control Review and the Eugenics magazine.32 In 1931, Henry P. Fairchild, then president of the Population Association of America, proposed that the AES, the Birth Control League, and the Population Association merge into one organization. Neither proposal was accepted, but they did garner serious support and continued to be discussed through the mid-thirties.33

31 "State Legislative Programs," typescript, no date, see Minutes, 1929.
32 Minutes, 2/14/29.
Another indication of change within the Society in these years was the election of Henry P. Fairchild, an eminent sociologist, as president of the AES in June 1929. This was an indication of the increasing status of sociology within the eugenics society. Fairchild was one of the original incorporators of the Society and clearly part of the inner core of the Society's leadership. A strong advocate of the sociological view of eugenics, he came to be a key critic of the genetic determinism of Davenport.

Fairchild served as president of the AES from June 1929 to June 1930. While his perspective on the importance of genetics to the eugenics program differed from previous presidents of the Society, his view of the goals and methods of eugenics was substantially the same as his predecessors'. He was particularly active in the anti-immigration movement, but his opposition to immigration was primarily from a sociological perspective. He emphasized that eugenics was composed of two main fields: genetics, the science of heredity and sociology, the science of society.34

Fairchild, for example, rejected the notion that Southern and Eastern Europeans were inherently inferior to Northern Europeans. Instead, he argued that small numbers of immigrants could be acculturated without any great harm.

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34 Henry P. Fairchild, Greek Immigration to the United States (New Haven 1911); Immigration: A World Movement and its American Significance (New York 1913), and The Melting Pot Mistake (Boston 1926).
The problem of immigration was that races and ethnic groups were specialized to different environments and the mixing of nationalities from diverse environments resulted in a cultural mongrelization. The attempt to mix nationalities of different religion, language, and culture destroys culture. The destruction of culture and disorientation of society in turn leads to dysgenic trends in births.35

In an address before the Galton Society in January 1930, Fairchild rejected the notion that the new immigrants were genetically inferior to the old. "The real harm in immigration," he told the fellows of the Galton Society, was "the introduction of large numbers of people whose community standards are different from our own." As a result the "social unity of the country is inevitably broken down." Sidestepping entirely the question of heredity, Fairchild based his opposition to immigration wholly on sociological factors. Immigrants were still seen as a threat to the germ plasm of the nation, but the threat was less direct. The breakdown of American culture was inimical to eugenic development. A sound and stable culture was essential for sound and stable families.36

35 H.P. Fairchild, The Melting Pot Mistake (Boston 1926) quoted from a review in Eugenical News 11 #7 (July 1926) p. 95.

36 Frederick Osborn, a leading advocate of the sociological view in the mid-thirties, believed that the opponents of the sociological view "forgot, perhaps, that Galton once defined eugenics as the 'study of factors under social control.'" see F. Osborn, "A History of the American Eugenics Society," Social Biology 21 #2 (1974) p. 119.
After Fairchild's talk, Davenport, who presided at the meeting, thanked him for presenting "a new aspect of a vital and much argued subject" and opened the meeting for discussion. E.G. Conklin immediately disputed Fairchild's claim, maintaining that "there are races that are not by inheritance capable of being socially-minded." Davenport agreed, stating that although there is "no inheritance of crime" there was inheritance of traits such as altruism. Davenport put forward the hypothesis that "there is a difference in mean incidence of crime in racial stocks due to a difference in incidence of a strong altruism in the people to be governed by it." In this context, Francis Kinnicutt, commenting on the Leopold-Loeb case in which two Jewish boys from wealthy homes had committed a murder as "an experiment" to see if they could get away with it, said he believed this was a clear indication of "a racial difference in ethics." \(^{37}\)

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37 *Eugenical News* 15 #1 (January 1930) p. 9. Kinnicutt was saying, in effect, that Jews have a racial difference in ethics which allows them to see murder as a "legitimate experiment." No one at the meeting took this as in any way an antisemitic statement. Fairchild answered Kinnicutt by telling a story of a young Albanian in Paris who committed a murder in accord with the Albanian code of honor. The point of the story was that here was another case of murder committed in accord with a different moral code based on a cultural difference. The exchange was published in the *Eugenical News*. Throughout the thirties one finds racist remarks apparently passing without notice. It is clear that at the time racial bias was so prevalent it went unnoticed. In a single issue of the *Eugenical News* in the 1930s you can find the most liberal advocates of eugenics side by side with praise for Hitler and the Nazis. See, for example, volume 21 #4 (July/August 1936) pp. 65-73. The first article is by C.M. Goethe praising Hitler and the second article is
Fairchild maintained throughout that he found no convincing statistical evidence to show that the new immigrants engaged in substantially more crime than the old. The second generation, on the other hand, "shows a striking and opposite result." This claim supported his contention that it was the dilution of culture, not genes that caused crime. If crime were a racial trait, Fairchild claimed, "there would no variation; consequently it is an environmental character." 38 Eugenics, Fairchild argued, was not concerned solely with genes. It was also concerned with bringing out the best in a population and this could not be accomplished in mixed populations. Nationalities were best off remaining homogeneous.

While the majority of those at the meeting disagreed with Fairchild, it is clear that the debate over the sociological perspective was taking place in these years within the eugenic society and was accepted as a legitimate perspective. It is also clear that the debate was not over changing policies towards immigrants or blacks. Fairchild's election as president of the AES in 1929 may indicate a growing acceptance of the "sociological" perspective, but it did not indicate a change in policy.

Frederick Osborn explaining the "new" or "reform" eugenics. This is not to say that Osborn and Goethe held similar views. It is to say that both views were considered legitimate and despite differences in orientation they agreed in principle on goals. For a report by the Eugenical News on the Leopold-Loeb case see Eugenical News #10 (October 1924) p. 87.

38 Eugenical News 15 #1 (January 1930) p. 6.
In an article entitled, "The Science of Larithmics," published in the Eugenical News in March 1931, Fairchild argued that eugenics and "larithmics", a term he coined to mean the branch of population theory dealing with questions of quantity, should both be considered subdivisions of population theory. Thus, population problems would be divided into two classes, quantity and quality. Later that year he helped found the Population Association of America "to organize, promote, and support research with respect to problems connected with human population in both its quantitative and qualitative aspects." The officers of the new organization included Frederick Osborn, C.C. Little, Raymond Pearl, and Ellsworth Huntington.

In 1931, leadership of the Society was handed over to H.F. Perkins, professor of Zoology at the University of Vermont. Perkins' presidency marked another kind of change in the Society. While he had been a member of the advisory council since the organization of the Eugenics Committee, he clearly had less stature than former presidents. According to Frederick Osborn, Perkins, "had a more limited acquaintance with influential people than his predecessors." His elevation to a leadership position

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39 Eugenical News 16 #3 (March 1931) pp. 31-33.
40 Eugenical News 16 #6 (June 1931) p. 84.
appears to be related to his relationship with the Rockefeller Foundation and his orientation to eugenics.

The Rockefeller interests in these years included several foundations and important institutions. There was the Rockefeller Foundation, the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Fund, and the Bureau of Social Hygiene - to name just a few of those most directly interested in eugenics. No clear policy united these different institutions. Thus, eugenics projects such as the Institute of Criminology and W. Carr-Saunders' eugenics survey were financed by the foundations at the very same time that criticism of eugenics was emerging within parts of the Rockefeller camp.

By the mid-twenties a new direction was emerging within the Rockefeller foundations which was to influence the AES in the early thirties. The tendency was to move away from projects that aimed at the "root cause" of social problems and to support projects that focused on rationalizing the institutions of social control. For example, the Bureau of Social Hygiene began its work in 1914 by investigating the biological "root causes" of crime with an eye towards eliminating crime via sterilization and segregation of criminals.42 This approach was abandoned by the mid-

twenties when funding turned to ballistics and finger print identification studies as well as studies of European Police systems. Thus, there was a tendency to reject the notion that eugenics could solve problems such as crime, pauperism, and feeblemindedness. This did not mean that eugenics was not useful in social policy formation particularly in the area of population management.

The Rockefeller Foundations continued to fund eugenic projects but the new projects tended to emphasize migration patterns, resource potentials, differential fertility, and human migration patterns as well as sophisticated attitudinal studies regarding family planning and birth control. These studies were obviously much more useful for planning ongoing projects including planning for regional development. Thus, the new eugenics studies funded by the Rockefeller foundations were much broader in scope and aimed not so much at improving the germ plasm but at industrial needs and resource potentials. This broader scope did not preclude concerns over the quality of the germ plasm, but encompassed them. 43

and Social Science: The Rockefeller Foundation and Economists, 1913-1929," unpublished paper, no date.

It was not only the Rockefeller Foundations which were moving away from straight eugenic projects. In 1922, the Scripps Foundation for Research in Population Problems was established under the direction of Warren S. Thompson and P.K. Whelpton. Frederick Osborn and Warren Thompson worked closely together on population issues and Thompson joined the newly constituted AES Board in 1935. These men represented a new breed of demographers who were applying advanced statistical methods to population problems. The Milbank Memorial Fund was sponsoring work in the area of differential fertility, contraception, and census analysis, the emphasis being on factors which made for change in population trends. The Milbank granted $250,000 to Princeton University to establish the Office of Population Research. The Rockefeller Foundation began funding the National Research Council’s Committee for Research in Problems of Sex in 1931. The Committee’s focus was on fertility control. In 1931, the Carnegie Corporation of New York approved grants to the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population Policy (IUSSPP) and the Population Association of America. In 1932, the Macy Foundation began a series of grants to Dr. Gregory Pincus for his work on ovulation which eventually led to the development of the birth control pill. Collectively these grants broke new ground in population and fertility studies. They were used to train demographers to develop new statistical techniques for population trend analysis, and
perhaps most importantly, to develop methods for fertility control such as the birth control pill and IUD. Thus, between 1930 and 1935 foundation funding was turning away from the older eugenics organizations, but not away from eugenics.

In 1926, H.F. Perkins began a Eugenics Survey of Vermont sponsored by the Vermont branch of the American Eugenics Society and the University of Vermont. The study was a modest affair styled after an earlier study conducted by the AES in Shutesbury, Massachusetts. The idea was to determine whether the deterioration of small New England towns in the late 19th century could be traced to deterioration in the genetic stock of the area. It was believed that this could be done by collecting family histories. If it could be shown that the best stock migrated out of the area leaving the worst behind, this would be an indication that deterioration in genetic stock was a cause of social decay. If this were true, it would bode ill for the future of the country since those who

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migrated to the cities from the rural areas had fewer children than those who remained behind.  

The results of the first year’s investigation were cause for concern. A pedigree study of sixty-two selected families revealed 4,624 paupers, 380 feebleminded, 119 with prison records, 73 illegitimate children, 202 sex offenders, and 45 with serious physical defects. Perkins concluded:

...the characteristics which are pronounced in past generations are still plain to be seen in the living members of a family. This is true whether the family has moved from the original section of the state in which we found the records of the earlier members or whether, as has been the case in a few instances, they are still living in the ancestral home. The effect of heredity contrasted with that of environment seems to be very strongly emphasized as a result of our study. Without making too positive an assertion, I think we can safely say that in the sixty-two families that we have studied at any rate, 'blood has told,' and there is every reason to believe that it will keep right on 'telling' in future generations."

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46 "Lessons from a Eugenical Survey of Vermont," Eugenical News 12 #3 (March 1927) p. 29. See also, "The findings of the Eugenics Survey of Vermont," Eugenical News 12 #8 (August 1927) pp. 106-08. The emphasis is in the original.
As to the means the state should take to prevent the reproduction of defectives and other social inadequates, increased institutional aid, special classes, and psychiatric clinics were recommended. Nevertheless, Perkins maintained, "there is no possible chance during the next decade of increasing the facilities enough to segregate anywhere near all the feebleminded.... It then raises the question whether, after exhausting the above mentioned means for eugenical control, eugenical sterilization would not prove the most effective preventive." Perkins stated his belief that "the time is ripe for the introduction of a bill permitting eugenical sterilization in Vermont."\textsuperscript{47}

In 1927, the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Fund took an interest in the Vermont project and donated $87,000 to do a thorough study. The Rockefeller input changed the complexion of the study. Eugenics became a minor part of a large scale study of human migration patterns, resource potentials, land utilization, conservation problems, and a whole series of attitudinal studies. The project no longer sought the simple "cause" of the deterioration of the area. The focus of interest was now trend analysis and resource utilization. The eugenics factor was not lost sight of, but it was relegated to a less prominent position. The project brought Perkins a good bit of recognition within the

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
eugenics movement because of the huge sum appropriated for what was ostensibly a eugenics study.\textsuperscript{48}

Dissension had been mounting in the AES in the late twenties. Leon Whitney, Executive Secretary of the organization, wrote in a confidential letter to Paul Popenoe, Executive-Secretary of the Southern California branch of the AES, that "it was a great shame that Dr. Davenport... was able to block the desires of almost all other members of the Society that the Eugenics Research Association and the American Eugenics Society [should combine]... to my way of thinking [they] should be one organization. It was also a pity that he was able to block the discontinuance of the \textit{Eugenical News}. Laughlin does most of the work on it and Laughlin was for giving it up... and so was practically every other person, but they had to toady to Davenport since he wanted to run it so much... it is nothing but a financial drain... Now we have the new improved 'Eugenics'... and the old \textit{Eugenical News} continues just the same. It is simply a waste of good effort."

Whitney went on to say that there were also too many organizations, too much overlapping effort and energy. The eugenics movement, he believed, needed to be streamlined and it was Davenport who stood in the way.\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{48} See folder marked, "Eugenics Survey of Vermont" (1927) in the LSRMF Papers, Tarrytown, N.Y.

\textsuperscript{49} Minutes, 2/21/29.
Later that year an old bone of contention reared up again within the organization -- the question of the place of sociology within the eugenics movement. Fairchild, Perkins, and others felt "that the time has come when the American Eugenics Society should emphasize the sociological aspect of the subject." It was argued that a eugenics program should include more than sterilization and educational programs. Davenport believed that social welfare constituted a burden "that is crushing our civilization." As far as he was concerned sound heredity would find a way to show itself.\textsuperscript{50} As noted in our examination of the Society's goals and committees, Davenport's narrow view of eugenics was never shared by the majority of the leadership. Nevertheless, he wielded a disproportionate amount of power with the Society because of his position as Director of the Carnegie Institution's Department of Genetics. That is why he became the center of criticism from the "sociological" camp.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{50} Minutes, 11/16/29. Davenport to Osborn 12/23/32, Osborn Papers. See also, Davenport to Osborn, 9/11/35 Davenport Papers. Davenport wrote: "The black buzzard of despair still seems to hang over me... Socio'logy' is in the saddle, and I fear [it will] ... bring down the race nearly to extinction; but I suspect that the species will be able to rise again from the remnants."

\textsuperscript{51} The "sociological" camp included all those who felt that society ought to tax its citizens for such social welfare projects as prenatal care, public health care, etc. Davenport opposed social welfare on principle. He believed all social welfare programs were dysgenic. In this opinion he was a clear minority in the Society.
At the same time that dissension within the organization was growing, the Depression was having its effect. Money was drying up. Salaries and expenses could not be met and the Society was moving rapidly into the red. In 1931, Whitney tended his resignation but was persuaded to stay on a while longer. Both Fairchild and Perkins were turned down for grants by the Milbank and Carnegie Institutions.\(^{52}\) By the end of 1931 the Society was nearly seven thousand dollars in debt. At that point Whitney insisted his resignation be accepted.\(^{53}\) Whitney's resignation was the last of a number of resignations which included C.G. Campbell (who resigned only months after being elected to the presidency), Dr. H.H. Laughlin, Charles Davenport, Madison Grant, Harry Olson, Mrs. Lucien Howe and H.J. Banker.\(^{54}\) By 1933 the 1260 members had shrunk to four or five hundred.\(^{55}\) Membership continued to decline until the end of 1935 and then began to rise again between 1936 and 1939.

It was at this point that Frederick Osborn emerged as the new leader of the Eugenics movement. Kenneth Ludmerer described Osborn's entrance into the eugenics movement as

\(^{52}\) Minutes, 11/11/31.

\(^{53}\) Minutes, 6/4/32.

\(^{54}\) Minutes, 10/3/31; 10/13/31/ 3/6/32/ 4/15/32 and 8/22/32.

"sudden and unexpected." In fact, Osborn's father, William Church Osborn, was a Patron member of the American Eugenics Society. Frederick's grandfather, Cleveland Dodge, helped finance the Second International Congress of Eugenics in 1921; and his uncle, Henry Fairfield Osborn, a founder of the American Eugenics Society and member of the advisory council from 1923 to 1935, was curator of the American Museum of Natural History where Frederick Osborn studied eugenics from 1928 to 1930. Allan Chase comes closer to the truth in describing the American Eugenics Society as "an Osborn fiefdom."57

Frederick Osborn is without doubt the most important figure in American eugenics in the post-World War II period. He was at the heart of the struggles which went on within the movement in the thirties. From 1930 to his retirement in 1972, he was a leading figure in the American Eugenics Society.58 An examination of his views will help clarify

57 For background on Frederick Osborn see, Who's Who in America, volume 40 (1962-3); National Encyclopedia of American Biography Supplement I (1960); Who Was Who in America volume 8; Current Biography (1941), pp. 640-41; There is also a memorial volume in Social Biology 29 #1-2. The quote from Chase is from personal correspondence, 21 January 1979, see also Chase, Legacy of Malthus, p. 326.
58 Carl Bajema described Osborn to me at the 1987 History of Science Society Meeting as "a man who could make things happen."
the ideological orientation of American eugenics in the thirties.

Frederick Henry Osborn was born in New York on 21 March 1889 to William Church and Alice Dodge Osborn. William Church Osborn was a lawyer and President of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The Osborns were Hudson River Squires whose family of bankers, lawyers, and financial magnates had lived on the Hudson for over a hundred years. Frederick was the grand-nephew of J. Pierpont Morgan and had been raised in an environment in which the business approach to problems was hammered into him from an early age.59 As a boy he recalled discussing problems of heredity with his uncle Henry Fairfield Osborn.60

Osborn graduated from Princeton in 1910 and began a career in the family businesses as treasurer and Vice-President of the Detroit, Toledo, and Ironton Railroad. After World War I, he sold the railroad to Henry Ford and in 1921 went into banking as a partner in G.M.P. Murphy Company, a New York banking house. He also served in

59 I am indebted to Allan Chase for this observation (personal correspondence with the author, 1/21/79). Chase went on to comment, "Osborn set out to turn a failing venture -- the American eugenics movement -- into a successful operation. This he did by making cosmetic changes ... and by spreading money around liberally to younger scholars of promise."

various executive capacities on the boards of at least a dozen major corporations.

In 1928, at the age of forty, he retired to spend the rest of his life in philanthropic and scientific endeavors. Between 1928 and 1930, his uncle Henry Fairfield Osborn arranged for him to have an office in the American Museum of Natural History, where he studied eugenics. As early as 1929 he emerged as an important figure in the movement, becoming one of the original incorporators of the Eugenics Research Association.61 He joined the AES in 1930 and by 1931 was put in charge of the important Nominating Committee which chose new members for the Board of Directors and the advisory council.62 He also became a regular at the meetings of the Galton Society.63

Osborn's earliest expression of what has been called "the new eugenics" appears in an important policy address at the Eighteenth Annual Meeting of the Eugenics Research Association in May 1930 in which he argued for a change of priorities within the eugenics movement. While noting that the "larger progress of eugenics" depended on advances in

61 *Eugenical News* 14 #2 (February 1929) p. 25. The ERA had been established in 1913 but was not incorporated until 1929.

62 Minutes, 6/6/31.

63 See the *Eugenical News* for 1928-1935. He first attends the 72nd meeting in January 1929 as a guest of the Society. By June 1930 he was a member of the Galton. See *Eugenical News* 15 #6 (June 1930) p. 79.
genetics, he went on to stress the effects of the social environment on evolution.64

Osborn believed that the factors relating to the effect of the social environment on human evolution were "lagging behind to an extent which seriously endangers the advance of practical Eugenics." Osborn went on to say that the current trends in human evolution were still not well understood. "Until some clearer knowledge is obtained... the efforts of practical eugenics ... [will be] much handicapped."65

Osborn believed that the eugenics movement would "ultimately stand or fall" on the validity of practical eugenic proposals. In this regard, he vigorously defended the "important studies" of Harry Laughlin, E.S. Gosney, and Paul Popenoe which advocated a vigorous role for widespread eugenic sterilization. He concluded:

The most effective studies of this sort ever done were the studies and papers of Dr. Laughlin reporting on the effect of immigration into the United States which so greatly influenced Congress in the passage of the acts restricting immigration.66

While Ludmerer claims that Osborn used his influence to replace "men like Grant and Laughlin" with "individuals of


65 Ibid. p. 114.

66 Ibid. 115.
more balanced views, the fact is that there was a good deal of mutual admiration between Harry Laughlin and Frederick Osborn. Osborn and Laughlin worked closely together in the thirties running the Eugenics Research Association and publishing the *Eugenical News*. In praising a manuscript, "Social Eugenics," which Osborn had prepared for the Eugenics Research Association, Laughlin commented that "the science of eugenics is greatly indebted to you" for this "fine piece of work." Laughlin was particularly impressed with Osborn's work on differential fecundity. "When all is said and done," he wrote to Osborn in 1932, what really counts is the differential birth-rate "between fine stocks and races on the one hand and incompetent and degenerate races and stocks on the other."

That Osborn admired Laughlin is clear from their correspondence throughout the thirties. They worked closely together on a number of projects and Osborn praised Laughlin's work both publicly and privately. How much Osborn actually thought of Laughlin is partially revealed in a letter to Laughlin written in 1937. Osborn and Laughlin were involved in helping to set up the Pioneer Fund, a

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68 Osborn was the Treasurer and Laughlin was the Secretary of Eugenics Research Association. There is a good deal of correspondence between them in both the Laughlin and Osborn Papers.

69 Laughlin to Osborn, 11/17/32; Osborn to Laughlin 1/4/33. Laughlin Papers, Kirksville, MO.
Eugenics Foundation established in 1937 with funds from Wycliffe Draper, a New England textile manufacturer. One of the first projects of the Fund was to give cash grants to junior flying officers of superior quality "whose income limits the number of children" they can afford. Laughlin was so excited about the project he was thinking of running it himself.

Osborn wrote to Laughlin that "I think it would be a great mistake in generalship for you to try it. ... It would be like a general, responsible for the strategy of the army, wanting himself to drive one of the tanks in the attack."

You and I are exactly in the position of the general. We have long experience and contacts with people who are supplying the sinews of war. We know the strategy required. And it is our job to find the men specially trained to carry out that strategy....


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It is the same thing in many of the activities of the Record Office in which I am so much interested. If we can get you the backing so that you can have a real staff to direct, you can win some real battles. ...\footnote{Osborn to Laughlin, written from Heathcote Farm, Princeton, no date approximately May 1937 (Osborn was attending his son's graduation from Princeton). Harry Laughlin Papers, Kirksville, Missouri.}

Osborn was a member of the Board of Directors of the Carnegie Institution of New York and the Milbank Memorial Fund, and had numerous connections with executives of major east coast foundations. In May 1933, he wrote a revealing "Memorandum on the Eugenics Situation in the United States" for "the Rockefeller interests." In that memorandum he noted that the "rediscovery of Mendel... and the marvelous development of a science of genetics in the succeeding years distracted attention from the social and psychological studies necessary for a broad base in eugenics."\footnote{Frederick Osborn, "Memorandum on the Eugenics Situation in the United States," 24 May 1933, AES Papers, p. 1}

Particularly in this country under the leadership of Davenport at Cold Spring Harbor, the relationship between genetics and eugenics was over-stressed, and studies in the mechanism of human heredity were carried forward too rapidly and published as evidence in the cause of eugenics without sufficient experimental support, in regard to their application to man, so that eugenics came into disrepute with such sound men as T. H. Morgan of California, and Jennings of Johns-Hopkins.

Osborn believed that eugenics propaganda was being disseminated that was not in line with the knowledge base of eugenics. "Excellent and carefully considered proposals..."
were outlined" by the AES advisory council but were not carried out. By 1930 the American Eugenics Society had a large budget without corresponding sources of income and a large number of proposals that lacked adequate scientific basis.

Osborn specifically criticized Davenport for hampering Laughlin and concluded that eugenics in America was "at a low ebb" and "lacked a sense of direction." He also believed that "some of the personalities in the older societies are far less in touch with the movement in eugenical research and the new needs." He was specifically referring to the new work being done in sociology, psychology, and demography. Osborn concluded that the Eugenics Research Association and the American Eugenics Society needed new leadership, and he urged the Rockefeller Foundations to hold off funding eugenics projects until a clearer direction emerged.73

Osborn had praise for three men: Henry Perkins, Harry Laughlin, and Henry Pratt Fairchild. Perkins was praised for bringing conservative leadership to the AES. Laughlin was described as "a thoroughly competent man of real ability" and Fairchild as a "moderate" who "works well with others of more technical experience."74

73 It is not clear that this memorandum was ever sent or to whom it might have been intended.

74 Davenport, on the other hand did not think highly of Fairchild and opposed his nomination to the nominating
By 1935 Osborn and his allies were able to take over the Society. Osborn brought Frank Notestein, from the Milbank Memorial Fund, and Warren S. Thompson, president of the Scripps Foundation, into the AES. He personally supervised the revision of the constitution and by-laws of the Society, doing away with its advisory council and revamping its organizational structure. By 1936, Ellsworth Huntington could report that membership was climbing and the financial situation was considerably improved.\(^75\)

In 1940, Osborn published Preface to Eugenics, a college text book, which summed up the ideological changes which have come to be referred to as the "new" eugenics. The essential goal of eugenics remained the same: to control human reproduction to "cast out the worst" and "to continue the normal or superior."\(^76\) Thus, the basic program of positive and negative eugenics remained intact.

Psychologists and sociologists were, according to Osborn, "in substantial agreement that differences in environment alone are not sufficient to account for the variations in level of intelligence shown by the deviates at the upper and

\(^75\) Minutes, 6/7/36.

\(^76\) Frederick Osborn, Preface to Eugenics (New York 1940) p. ix.
lower extremes." While environment might affect the outcome basically, "individuals who are bright progress rapidly through the schools" and "included most of those who enter the professions and assume responsible executive positions in business and public affairs." Condensing eugenic wisdom into a nutshell, Osborn wrote, "The whole range of general intelligence, including feeblemindedness, average intelligence, and genius is due to beggarly, average, and rich assortments of many gene alternatives."

There has been a general confusion regarding the relationship of the "new" eugenics to sterilization. While it is true that the ideal as stated by Osborn in 1940 was that every adult should be free to choose the size of family they wanted, this did not apply to the those who were clearly hereditary defectives. In other words, the "new" eugenics did not redefine the Society's policy on sterilization. "Geneticists," according to Osborn, were in general agreement that "the inadequacy of a number of genes contributes to feeblemindedness, and that the inheritance is recessive in at least some clinical types." The

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77 Ibid. p. 14. Compare this to Laughlin's statement made in 1932 on page 116 that what really counts is the birth differential between "fine stocks and races" and "degenerate races and stocks." The difference is that Osborn does not use terms such as "stocks" and "races" with regard to human populations.

78 Ibid. p. 10.

79 Ibid. p. 17.

80 Ibid. p. 18.
feebleminded constitute the greatest social and eugenical problem group. "They usually arise in families whose adjustment to society is unsatisfactory, occur often several to a family, and recur in the same family lines." 81

Osborn explained that the absolute prevention of births among all definitely feebleminded persons would result in a reduction of between one-tenth and one-third per generation. Even at the lower figure this would be an "enormous" savings in money and social injury. The feebleminded, morons, idiots, and imbeciles 82 "swell the ranks of unskilled labor, and in times of stress are a direct burden on society." 83 Osborn quoted one government estimate that claimed there were 1.5 million feebleminded people in the U.S. 84 Of course, the number of carriers of the recessive genes for feeblemindedness was much greater than the number of actual cases "so that a great number of feeble-minded persons are born of parents of 'borderline' or dull-normal capacity." 85

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81 Ibid. p. 15.

82 A moron is a high grade idiot; an idiot is a high grade imbecile.

83 Ibid. p. 17.


85 Ibid. p. 18.
It should be possible quite rapidly to educate the public to accept the principle that feeble-minded persons not be permitted to have children, for, quite apart from the hereditary consequences, it is a tragic injustice to children to be reared by feeble-minded parents. ... Sterilization on leaving institutional care, or the absolute prevention of marriage, would be a substantial forward step.\textsuperscript{86}

There remained the "graver problem" of the idiots and morons for whom there was no easy solution. "We may hope that sometime in the future science may find some way to diagnose carriers of hereditary defect of this sort." Until that time "the only acceptable course" is to discourage "persons of obviously low grade mentality, likely in any event to give their children a poor bringing-up," from having large families. Every effort had to be made to encourage them in the use of contraceptives. The "complete solution to the problem of the feeble-minded was far in the future." But "we can hardly be forgiven if... we fail to reduce this sad burden of our own and future generations."\textsuperscript{87}

Another large category of mental defectives that Osborn believed needed to be sterilized were those with hereditary mental disorders such as those suffering from schizophrenia and manic depressive psychosis. As with the feeble-minded "great results can be achieved" even "with the rudimentary and acceptable methods which have been described above, it should be possible to reduce the number of... schizophrenics

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid. p. 19.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
and manic-depressives" by 150,000 per generation for several
generations to come.88

In 1935, Osborn had estimated between 700,000 and two
million people were definitely "carriers of serious
hereditary defect" and another two or three million were
"probable" carriers of serious hereditary defect. At this
extreme "we must work towards a complete elimination of
births." While every effort to prevent these people from
breeding ought to be made, this would not solve the eugenics
problem. Eugenics would only be effective if it could reach
the other 95 percent of the population with positive eugenic
measures. "It is unlikely that a direct measure of genetic
quality will ever be available for the majority of our
people." Yet, it is the "differential birth rate among this
95 per cent which will ultimately make or mar our
civilization."89

Since there was no scientific measure of genetic
quality for the large majority of the population who fell
between the extremes of feeblemindedness and genius "we must
fall back on the measure of some outward characteristic or
group of characteristics, hoping that on average they will
be indicative of genetic qualities as well." Osborn

88 Ibid. p. 36.
89 Frederick Osborn, "The Basis of Eugenic Selection,"
suggested some evaluation of the quality of the home and the I.Q.90

From about 1934 on Osborn began to argue that we "have no real evidence concerning differences in central tendency or in general distribution curves for hereditary mental capacities between whites and Negroes."91 In a major policy speech in 1937, Osborn said that eugenicists had been too "dogmatic" about the categories of defectives particularly with regard to race and class. It "would be unwise for eugenists to impute superiorities or inferiorities of a biological nature to social classes, to regional groups, or to races as a whole."

Scientists in recent years have made pretty careful studies of this question of superiority and inferiority. They are not at all sure that any races or social classes in this country are above or below others in biological capacity for developing socially valuable qualities. But they are sure that even if there are differences between the average biological qualities for developing socially valuable qualities they are small compared to the much greater differences existing between individuals. Eugenics should therefore operate on the basis of individual selection. ... Fortunately, the selection desirable from the point of view of heredity appears to coincide with the selection desirable from the environmental point of view.92

90 Ibid.


Osborn's views on this matter became official Society policy in 1939 with the publication of the editorial "The American Concept of Eugenics." The editorial began with the admonition that it is "clearly the responsibility of physicians and public health officials to discourage childbearing among hereditary defectives."

But the gradual diminution of defective genes will not greatly improve the average person's capacity for developing intelligence and socially valuable traits of personality.... Differences in these genetic factors were once attributed to various occupational, regional, or racial groups. Now we know that there is hardly any scientific evidence of innate differences in large groups.... It seems therefore clear that the eugenic program must be directed to influencing births among individuals, rather than among groups or classes, with particular emphasis on increasing births among parents whose socially valuable qualities rise above their neighbors', in whatever environment they may be found.93

While the new focus of eugenic selection was squarely on the individual and no racial or social group per se had a monopoly on genetic qualities of value, this did not mean that the differential fertility increase of Indians and Mexicans could be looked upon with favor. According to Osborn Negroes constituted 19.3% of the population in 1790, 14.1% in 1860 and 9.7% in 1940. This was a trend which presented no problems from Osborn's perspective. On the other hand Indians and Mexicans were reproducing at a rate sufficient to double their numbers each generation. "The

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Indian no longer needs protection against extinction. The present problem of the Indian is that such a rapidly expanding group cannot much longer continue to grow in the limited space allotted to it."

There were 332,000 Indians in the United States in 1930, and something over 1,400,000 Mexicans. In sixty years if their present rates of reproduction continue, their combined numbers would about equal that of the American Negro. Thus a new racial problem threatens to grow to dangerous proportions before the public becomes aware of it.

These problems are not eugenic, so far as we know at present, but they are a matter of grave social concern, since racial problems are accentuated by any tendency of minority groups to increase at the expense of the majority. An acceptable eugenic program would be of a sort which would tend to equalize any disproportion between the natural increase of whites, blacks, Indians, and Mexicans.94

The ideological characteristics of the new eugenics have not been fully appreciated. There was a recognition that genetics alone could not justify or guide a eugenic program. To some extent the changes in the society involved a changing of the guard, particularly, in regard to Charles Davenport. But Harry Laughlin and Henry P. Fairchild, men usually associated with the "old" eugenics were clearly

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94 Osborn, Preface to Eugenics (New York 1940) p. 118-19. There was no plea to increase the falling Negro population. Osborn's estimates are not far off the mark. The 1980 census indicates that 11.2 percent of the population are Afro-American. Native Americans (including Eskimos and Aleutians) compose 6 percent of the population. Hispanics are 6.4 percent of the population. Thus, the Native American and Hispanic population actually compose a larger portion of the population than Afro-Americans. See The New York Times summary of the 1980 census, 6 September 1981, p. E5.
leaders of the so-called "new eugenics." Furthermore, the new approach was clearly rooted in traditional eugenic ideology. The leaders of the 1930s sought to incorporate sociological, psychological, and particularly demographic studies into the eugenics program, and there was a new emphasis on positive eugenics. But the goals of the Society in relation to negative eugenics remained unchanged.

Thus, the new eugenics of the 1930s differs significantly from the portrait of the new eugenics sketched by Mark Haller, Kenneth Ludmerer, and Daniel Kevles. I believe these historians were misled by Frederick Osborn, and more subtly by an unconscious Whiggism that views the development of genetics as progress and assumes that the racism of the early eugenics movement was an aberration.

It is clearly not the case that Osborn came into the eugenics movement "suddenly and unexpectedly," drove out the racists, and reorganized American eugenics. His goals for eugenics between 1937 and 1940 differed very little from those of Harry Laughlin in 1920. In fact, throughout the 1930s, Osborn worked closely with Harry Laughlin. These two men shared a vision of eugenics which was rooted in the 1920s. The changes that occurred in American eugenics between 1920 and 1940 were moderate changes, mostly accommodations to new knowledge, technology, and social conditions.
Osborn was acutely sensitive to the failure of pre-war eugenics. He lived through the frustrations and failures of the 1930s and later the devastating revelations of the post-war period. It was his sensitivity to the vulnerability of eugenics, especially after the Holocaust, that led him to rewrite the history of pre-war eugenics.