

Name:

Date:

Eugenics

Instructions: Read the article and define the terms in bold using context clues or a dictionary. Then complete the Main Idea and Details graphic organizer.

Eugenics is the selection of desired **heritable** characteristics in order to improve future generations, typically in reference to humans. The term *eugenics* was coined in 1883 by British explorer and natural scientist Francis Galton, who, influenced by his cousin Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection, advocated a system that would allow "the more **suitable** races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing speedily over the less suitable." Social Darwinism, the popular theory in the late 19th century that life for humans in society was ruled by "survival of the fittest," helped advance eugenics into serious scientific study in the early 1900s. By World War I many scientific authorities and political leaders supported eugenics. However, it ultimately failed as a science in the 1930s and 1940s, when the assumptions of eugenicists became heavily criticized, and the Nazis used eugenics to support the extermination of entire races.

Term	Definition
heritable	
suitable	

History

The advance of eugenics in the late 19th century was concurrent with an increasing appreciation of Darwin's account for change or evolution within society—what contemporaries referred to as social Darwinism. Darwin had concluded his explanations of evolution by arguing that the greatest step humans could make in their own history would occur when they realized that they were not completely guided by instinct. Rather, humans, through selective reproduction, had the ability to control their own future evolution.

A language related to reproduction and eugenics developed. It led to terms such as *positive eugenics*, defined as promoting the expansion of "good **stock**," and *negative eugenics*, defined as prohibiting marriage and breeding between "**defective** stock." For eugenicists, nature was far more contributory than nurture in shaping humanity.

Term	Definition
stock	
defective	

During the early 1900s eugenics became a serious scientific study pursued by both biologists and social scientists. They sought to determine the extent to which human characteristics of social importance were inherited. Among their greatest concerns were the predictability of intelligence and certain **deviant** behaviors. Eugenics, however, was not confined to scientific laboratories and academic institutions. It began to **pervade** cultural thought around the globe, including the Scandinavian countries, most other European countries, North America, Latin America, Japan, China, and Russia.

Term	Definition
deviant	
pervade	

In the United States, the eugenics movement began during the Progressive Era and remained active through 1940. It gained considerable support from leading scientific authorities, such as zoologist Charles B. Davenport, plant geneticist Edward M. East, and geneticist and Nobel Prize laureate Hermann J. Muller. U.S. political leaders in favor of eugenics included President Theodore Roosevelt, Secretary of State Elihu Root, and Associate Justice of the Supreme Court John Marshall Harlan.

Eugenics Organizations and Legislation

In 1910, the Carnegie Institution opened the Eugenics Record Office (ERO) at Cold Spring Harbor, Long Island, New York. Davenport and Harry H. Laughlin, a professor from Missouri, were in charge of ERO efforts and activities. The ERO was organized around a series of missions. These missions included the following objectives:

- Serving as the national repository and clearinghouse for eugenics information
- Compiling an index of traits in American families
- Training fieldworkers to gather data throughout the United States
- Supporting investigations into the inheritance patterns of particular human traits and diseases
- Advising on the eugenic fitness of proposed marriages
- Communicating all eugenic findings through a series of publications

Prior to the founding of the ERO, eugenics work in the United States was overseen by many committees and organizations, including the American Eugenics Society.

Following World War I, the United States gained status as a world power. A fear began to rise that if the healthy stock of the American people became diluted with socially undesirable traits, the country's political and economic strength would begin to crumble. The maintenance of world peace by fostering democracy, capitalism, and, at times, eugenics-based schemes was central to the activities of "the Internationalists." They were a group of prominent American leaders in business, education, publishing, and government. One core member of this group, New York lawyer Madison Grant, aroused considerable pro-eugenic interest through his best-selling book *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916).

Beginning in 1920, a series of congressional hearings was held to identify problems that immigrants were causing the United States. As the country's "eugenics expert," Harry H. Laughlin provided **tabulations** showing that certain immigrants, particularly those from Italy, Greece, and Eastern Europe, were significantly overrepresented in American prisons and institutions for the "**feebleminded**."

Term	Definition
tabulations	
feebleminded	

Further data were **construed** to suggest that these groups were contributing too many genetically and socially **inferior** people. Laughlin's classification of these individuals included the feebleminded, the insane, the criminalistic, the epileptic, the inebriate, the diseased—including those with tuberculosis, leprosy, and syphilis—the blind, the deaf, the deformed, the dependent, chronic recipients of charity, paupers, and "ne'er-do-wells."

Term	Definition
construed	
inferior	

In 1923 Laughlin was sent by the U.S. secretary of labor as an immigration agent to Europe to investigate the chief emigrant-exporting nations. Laughlin sought to determine if a plan could be made whereby every prospective immigrant would be interviewed before embarking to the United States. He provided testimony before Congress that ultimately led to the passing of the Immigration Act of 1924, which severely restricted the annual immigration of individuals from countries previously claimed to have contributed excessively to the dilution of American "good stock."



Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.LC-USZ62-111372

President Calvin Coolidge signed the Immigration Act of 1924 which limited or banned immigration of people from certain parts of the world.

Immigration control was but one method to control eugenically the reproductive stock of a country. Laughlin appeared at the center of other U.S. efforts to provide eugenicists greater reproductive control over the nation. He approached state legislators with a model law to control the reproduction of institutionalized populations. By 1920, two years before the publication of Laughlin's influential *Eugenical Sterilization in the United States* (1922), 3,200 individuals across the country were reported to have been **involuntarily** sterilized. That number tripled by 1929, and by 1938 more than 30,000 people were claimed to have met this fate. More than half of the states adopted Laughlin's law, with California, Virginia, and Michigan leading the sterilization campaign.

Term	Definition
sterilization	
involuntarily	

Laughlin's efforts secured strong judicial support in 1927. In the precedent-setting case of *Buck v. Bell*, Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., upheld the Virginia statute and claimed, "It is better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or to let them starve for their **imbecility**, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind."

Term	Definition
imbecility	

Popular Support for Eugenics

During the 1930s eugenics gained considerable popular support across the United States. Hygiene courses in public schools and eugenics courses in colleges spread eugenic-minded values to many. A eugenics exhibit titled "Pedigree-Study in Man" was featured at the Chicago World's Fair in 1933–34. Consistent with the fair's "Century of Progress" theme, stations were organized around efforts to show how favorable traits in the human population could best be perpetuated.

By studying the passage of ancestral traits, fairgoers were urged to adopt the progressive view that responsible individuals should pursue marriage with eugenics principles in mind. Booths were set up at county and state fairs promoting "fitter families" contests, and medals were awarded to eugenically sound families. Drawing again upon long-standing eugenic practices in agriculture, popular eugenic advertisements claimed it was about time that humans received the same attention in the breeding of better babies that had been given to livestock and crops for centuries.

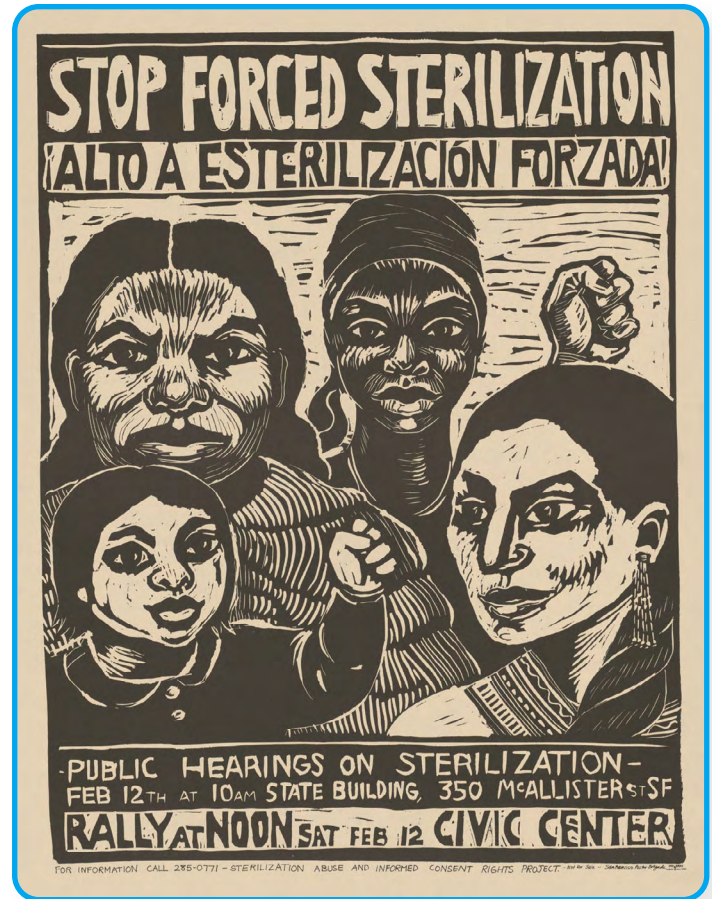
Anti-Eugenics Sentiment

Anti-eugenics sentiment began to appear after 1910 and intensified during the 1930s. Most commonly it was based on religious grounds. For example, the Catholic Church condemned reproductive sterilization in 1930, though it did not specifically prohibit positive eugenic attempts to amplify the inheritance of beneficial traits. Many Protestant writings sought to reconcile age-old Christian warnings

about the heritable sins of the father to pro-eugenic ideals. Indeed, most of the religion-based popular writings of the period supported positive means of improving the physical and moral makeup of humanity.

In the early 1930s, Nazi Germany adopted American measures to identify and selectively reduce the presence of those deemed to be “socially inferior” through involuntary sterilization. When Germany extended its practices far beyond sterilization in efforts to eliminate the Jewish and other non-Aryan populations, the United States became increasingly concerned over its own support of eugenics. Many scientists, physicians, and political leaders began to denounce the work of the ERO publicly. After considerable reflection, the Carnegie Institution formally closed the ERO at the end of 1939.

During the aftermath of World War II, eugenics became **stigmatized** such that many individuals who had once hailed it as a science now spoke negatively of it as a failed **pseudoscience**. Eugenics was dropped from organization and publication names. In 1972 the American Eugenics Society adopted the less-offensive name Society for the Study of Social Biology. Its publication, once popularly known as the *Eugenics Quarterly*, had already been renamed *Social Biology* in 1969.



A 1970s San Francisco protest poster condemned California’s forced sterilization program that affected women of color. It ended in 1979 after about 20,000 forced sterilizations. Hispanics were disproportionately affected. Hispanic women were 59% more likely than non-Hispanic women to be sterilized against their will.

Term	Definition
stigmatized	
pseudoscience	

U.S. Senate hearings in 1973, chaired by Senator Ted Kennedy, revealed that thousands of U.S. citizens had been sterilized under federally supported programs. The U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare proposed guidelines encouraging each state to repeal their respective sterilization laws.

Name:

Date:

Main Idea and Details

Detail 1

Detail 2

Main Idea

Detail 3

Detail 4

Detail 5