

A LEGACY OF EUGENICS

Eugenics is commonly defined as the, “The study of hereditary improvement of the human race by controlled selective breeding.” This scientific-sounding definition might seem benign, but eugenic theory has been the foundation for incalculable human suffering. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) has a portion of its website dedicated to those who were abused and/or killed as a direct result of Nazi eugenics. It opens this way:

On July 14, 1933, the Nazi government instituted the “Law for the Prevention of Progeny with Hereditary Diseases.” This law, one of the first steps taken by the Nazis toward their goal of creating an Aryan “master race,” called for the sterilization of all persons who suffered from diseases considered hereditary, such as mental illness, learning disabilities, physical deformity, epilepsy, blindness, deafness, and severe alcoholism. With the law’s passage the Third Reich also stepped up its propaganda against the disabled, regularly labeling them “life unworthy of life” or “useless eaters” and highlighting their burden upon society.

In another portion of the USHMM website we read that the “strategies (to eliminate ‘unfit’ Germans) began with forced sterilization and escalated toward mass murder. The most extreme measure, the Euthanasia Program, was in itself a rehearsal for Nazi Germany’s broader genocidal policies. It is estimated that 275,000 adults and children were murdered because of their disabilities.”

The man most responsible for generating the practical framework that became the Nazi’s compulsory sterilization policy was Harry Laughlin, an American. Laughlin “received an honorary degree from the Nazi-controlled University of Heidelberg” as “a pioneer in the science of race cleansing,” and was devoted in the U.S. to “[developing] a ‘white’s only’ legal definition of ‘the American Race’”. He was cited in 1926 during a congressional immigration hearing as saying, “in regard to all forms of social inadequacy, the foreign born and their children, who make up about 34 percent of our population, are even inferior to our own native Negro population not long ago released from slavery.”¹ Twelve years earlier Laughlin wrote candidly of eugenics in “Calculations on the Working out of a Proposed Program of Sterilization”.

To purify the breeding stock of the race at all costs is the slogan of eugenics. The compulsory sterilization of certain degenerates is therefore designed as a eugenical agency complementary to the segregation of the socially unfit classes and to the control of the immigration of those who carry defective germ plasm.

At first only the very lowest would be selected for sterilization. . . . As time passes, and the science of eugenics becomes more exact, and a corps of experts, competent to judge hereditary qualities, are developed, and public opinion rallies to the support of the measures, a large percentage could, with equal safety, be cut off each year.²

Today the eugenic policies of Harry Laughlin and his cohorts are universally scorned. The Eugenics Archive tells us that “the vast majority of eugenics work has been completely discredited” for being mere “political and social [prejudice], rather than scientific [fact].” Nevertheless, despite massive public condemnation of this fraudulent “science”, one of the chief organizations to emerge from the American eugenics movement continues to thrive today. It is an organization that began its existence by sharing

a combined office with the American Eugenics Society. It is an organization that published prolifically in support of eugenics and proudly displayed on its masthead the slogan, "Fewer But Fitter Children". It is an organization that shared 11 board members in common with the American Eugenics Society (AES) and placed six AES council members on its Citizen's Advisory Committee, including the afore-mentioned Harry Laughlin. What is the name of the organization? Back then it was called the American Birth Control League. Today it is called Planned Parenthood.

Planned Parenthood's founder, Margaret Sanger, was an outspoken eugenicist, as was nearly everyone else in association with her Birth Control League. One member of their Clinical Research Bureau, Dr. Hannah Stone, wrote that:

The eugenicist, again, comes to birth control with a racial viewpoint. He sees in it an important aid towards controlling and improving the type and quality of the human stock... It is [on] this biological basis that I believe the birth control clinics of the future will be organized. In connection with the birth control center there will also be a eugenic department... In such a center the racial aspect of reproduction could be stressed.³

Of course, race wasn't their only concern. Their 1943 statement of goals included, a desire to "foster selective pregnancy" so as to "offer the eugenically unsound means to avoid bringing offspring into the world who would become social liabilities."⁴ Nine years earlier, they had suggested mandating government-issued "birth permits" before anyone was given "permission" to reproduce. When Margaret Sanger's long directorship of Planned Parenthood came to an end, she was succeeded by one Dr. Alan Guttmacher, a former vice-president of the American Eugenics Society.

Today, Planned Parenthood is the largest abortion provider in the nation. They drive the industry, and the eugenic principles of their infancy show themselves in two significant ways. The first deals with race and the second with disability. Abortion destroys minority children at a rate that far exceeds that of white children. Margaret Sanger confided in a 1939 letter to her friend Charles Gamble that, "We do not want the word to go out that we want to exterminate the Negro population, and the minister is the man who can straighten that idea out if it ever occurs to any of their more rebellious members." Planned Parenthood continues to foster support from the African-American community in public while they turn around and abort their children in private. They honor Dr. Martin Luther King with one hand (Dr. King received Planned Parenthood's "Margaret Sanger Award" in 1966), and kill his people with the other. Their "service" to the black community is not a kind one.

Planned Parenthood's record concerning disability is no better. The widespread use of amniocentesis, beginning in the 1960's, has been fatal to countless "birth-defective" children. In 1977 Planned Parenthood hailed genetic testing as a way to effectively control fetal abnormality. They suggested putting, "primary emphasis upon pregnancy testing and preventive services, prenatal diagnosis of fetal defects, [and] genetic counseling."⁵ Planned Parenthood's means for preventing birth-defects, of course, is to kill birth-defective children before they can be born. This is not medicine, this is eugenics. In 1991, a New York Times article reported of a severely disabled woman who quit her employment with Planned Parenthood because of their attitudes about disability. "There was a strong eugenics mentality that exhibited disdain, discomfort, and ignorance toward disabled babies."⁶ What is the average disabled person to think when Planned Parenthood suggests euthanizing unborn babies who "might" have the same condition that they themselves are living with? Might it be a little troubling for children living with a disability outside the womb to hear Planned Parenthood argue that children with disabilities inside the womb are better off dead?

The United Cerebral Palsy organization tells us on their website that they are working towards “effecting public policy that will enhance the ability of people with disabilities to live lives without limits in the communities, neighborhoods, schools and jobs of their choice”. They say this of genetic testing. “Genetic testing is clearly harmful if the information is used to deny jobs or insurance, or if it leads to other forms of discrimination.” Would killing unborn children for being genetically “unfit” fall under the category of “other forms of discrimination”? When genetic testing is used to identify and eliminate babies with disabilities, it is nothing more than the practical continuation of the eugenic principle that drove Planned Parenthood’s founders. Only now it’s worse. Where they use to be content with birth control and sterilization, abortion is now their mechanism of choice. Planned Parenthood can claim whatever they want, but the results speak for themselves. Afterall, you can know a tree by its fruit.

1. Guy Irving Burch, notes about U.S. House of Representatives Immigration Hearing, 68th Congress, *Birth Control Review* (November 1926): 345

2. Harry Laughlin (superintendent, Eugenics Record Office, Cold Springs Harbor, Long Island, New York), “Calculations on the Working out of a Proposed Program of Sterilization”, in *Proceedings of the First National Conference on Race Betterment*, January 8-12, 1914, Battle Creek, Michigan, published by the Race Betterment Foundation, ed. Emily F. Robbins, no copyright, excerpts, 478-94.

3. Hannah Stone, M.D., “The Birth Control Clinic”, May, 1929, *Eugenics*, vol. 2, no. 5 (May 1929): 11.

4. “A Statement of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, Inc., for 1943”, 9-10, SSCSC.

5. PPFA, “Planned Births, the Future of the Family and the Quality of American Life: Towards a Comprehensive National Policy and Program”, June 1977, 3.

6. “Abortion Issue Divides Advocates for Disabled”, *The New York Times*, National, July 4, 1991, A 11.