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## Eugenic Ideology and Historical Osmosis

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Much is missing. We are directed towards the substance of our understandings by our collective and individual experience, while our awareness of the influence of history, ideology, and the experience of subjugated groups slips away. What is missing must be examined for, as Madeline Grumet (1988) observed,

If the world we give our children is different from the one we envisioned for them, then we need to discover the moments when we, weary, distracted, and conflicted, gave in, let the curtain fall back across the window, and settled for a little less light (p. xv).

Throughout the twentieth century, the ability of the purveyors of official culture (Bodnar 1992) to divert attention from meaningful correctives across a broad spectrum of social policy at the same time as they fortified the ideological, economic and political context in which inequity thrives, has been underestimated. And so we find ourselves, over half a century after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, in a state of what Kozol (2005) has called apartheid schooling. Eugenic ideology<sup>i</sup>, but a blip on a much longer continuum of cultural and intellectual history, permeates what has variously been described as *historical consciousness*, *collective memory*, and *remembrance*, such that we would be presumptive to assume we are immune<sup>ii</sup>. Ideological contexts are egregiously absent from the text of our national dialogue, and we are well advised to examine their content as well as the external and internal mechanisms by which they are transmitted through time. Tapping in to such an understanding, it is my hope, will allow us to counter insidiousness with transformative potential.

If effective analysis of “the nightmare that is the present” (Pinar 2004) requires that we fully incorporate both historical rootedness and our own culpability, then so too must effective resistance. After all, the concerted governmental and societal effort to wipe out entire ethnicities, and to direct the lives of poor, non-Aryan, and the otherwise disenfranchised in the name of eugenics was pursued not by societally marginal hate groups, but by progressives: the nations most respected universities, esteemed scientists and professors, government agencies and officials, wealthy philanthropists and industrialists, and untold numbers of working people from teachers to social workers. Operating within a power differential defined by class, race, gender, and a narrowly defined conception of ‘normality,’ “eugenics was a fundamental aspect of some of the most important cultural and social movements of the twentieth century, intimately linked to ideologies of “race,” nations, and sex, inextricably meshed with population control, social hygiene, state hospitals, and the welfare state” (Dikotter 1998 p. 467) and, I would add, education.

The work of examining the influence of history is not merely a linear exercise, nor is it external. History seen through curriculum theory is multifaceted and requires that we engage in personal as well as political, economic, sociologic, and philosophical analyses. Grumet describes curriculum theory as the study of what goes on in schools through the interpretive disciplines and calls upon Sartre’s notion of *negation* “the creative refusal of human consciousness that says ‘not this, but that’” (xii). Negation, Grumet argues, allows our glimpse of the future to be imbued with more light, windows to be unfettered. We are too quick, all of us, to shift our gaze, to focus on the window itself rather than the possibility it provides, and to nudge negation towards prescription.

This paper seeks to supplant our tendency to limit the process of negation through an exploration of what is missing from our knowledge of the past and exploring the ways in which an insidious racialized scientism known as eugenics provided the foundation for a system of education that has served to fortify inequity ever since.

I am concerned here not only with navigating the historical terrain that has been so sorely neglected in our national dialogue, but also with understanding the underlying assumptions, motivations, and beliefs that led to the movement and continue to shape thinking in the present. Using archival data, along with the writings of a number of eugenic popularizers and educators, I explore how the eugenics movement shifted their focus from racial cleansing to a vision of social control and ultimately to a system of education ‘in service to eugenics.’ Racial and class stratification are implicated in the limitations of political democracy and definitions of success wholly reliant on capitalistic verve. Eugenics and education are inextricably linked, creating an ideological legacy that has morphed and dodged its way into the present on a number of fronts and is embedded in each of us, dictating where we cast our gaze and the foci of our analyses.

Even within the field of curriculum studies, the historical panorama is incomplete with historical accounts of the era focused on social efficiency instead. Throughout, I will argue that we (referring here not only to educators and curriculum theorists but to generations of schoolchildren who have been misled) have been severely constrained by what can only be described as an outstandingly conspicuous vacuum in the historical record where eugenics and the enveloping influence of eugenic ideology is concerned. This absence from the discourse comes from the tautological blindness that is self reflection for the vast majority of us. Thus, we continue to tinker with the same pile of

blocks, unaware, and slightly comfortable that way, of all the other blocks that surround us. We must ask why, given the far reaching, liberatory gaze of reconceptualist and post-reconceptualist curricular work, schools remain as entrenched as ever. Curriculum studies has its historical roots deeply and directly implanted in the soil of eugenic ideology and might be considered to have been developed as the basis for policy directly in service of eugenic principals. The boundary between past and present, interior and exterior, work and life is illusory – to gaze intently at it is difficult, but not impossible.

### **The Elusive Curriculum: Eugenics Past**

Eugenics has always been an extremely nimble ideology. It cannot be isolated from the movements it bolstered and was conscripted by: nationalism, “reform-oriented” liberalism, out-and-out homophobia, white supremacy, misogyny, and racism. Its longevity relies on these confederacies for the simple reason that even as one falls into relative disrepute, others remain intact (Ordovery 2003 p. xxvii).

Human beings, hundreds of thousands of them, were victims of the eugenics movement in the United States, either through forcible sterilization, anti-miscegenation laws, immigration restriction, or the sorting, testing, and tracking policies implemented in schools across the country during the early decades of the twentieth century and since. The programs and policies of the eugenics movement, rooted as they were in streams of intellectual history long preceding the twentieth century, were evident across the globe and were ultimately responsible for the Holocaust and other genocidal events. In America, victims fell into roughly three areas: poor, non-Aryan, and socially deviant. Those targeted by eugenicists included both urban and rural residents who were often deemed mentally ‘unfit’ and labeled with the dubious term ‘feeble-minded’. They ranged from unwed mothers and young boys who masturbated, to anyone whose poverty, isolation, language, or habits rendered them unacceptable by ‘polite’ society.

When the American Eugenics Society charged their Committee on Formal Education with the task of advancing eugenic teaching in the schools in 1921 (Paul, 1998), their task was aided considerably by the positivistic substrate created by French thinker Auguste Comte half a century earlier. Comte, to whom is credited both positivism and the field of sociology, introduced the idea that societies evolve through three phases – the theological, the metaphysical (wherein human rights supersede human authority) and the scientific, or positive, which, according to Comte, allowed solutions to human problems to be enforced not by the *will of god* or the moral call of *human rights* but human agency and authority instead. Since, as Comte wrote, “the science of society...supplies the only logical scientific link by which all our varied observations of phenomena can be brought into one consistent whole” (1907 p. 2), subsequent arguments about social phenomena adhered to a form that de-legitimized observations and perspectives occurring outside the scientific establishment. Positivism thus understood allows us to see that privileged voice and the ensuing era of boundaried, class, gender and race-based inquiry provided a perfect confluence for the introduction of eugenic ideology within an otherwise progressive period. We have seen this particular convergence since; the superimposition of new ideas on older, collectively rooted understandings comprise the Ruby Payne phenomenon (see Gorski 2005), the recycling of myths around gender and intellectual proclivity (or specificity), and in the resurgence of explicit race based explanations of ability embodied in Herrnstein and Murray’s 1994 publication of *The Bell Curve* and the endless Jensonian debacle carried on now by a new generation of educational psychologists promoting racialized scientism.

Comte wanted to address the "great crisis of modern history" and envisioned that a "new moral power will arise spontaneously throughout the West, which, as its influence increases, will lay down a definite basis for the reorganization of society" (1907 p. 1). Comte's positivist philosophy also considered hopeless the task of "reconstructing political institutions without the previous remodeling of opinion and life" and the "synthesis of all human conceptions [to be] the most urgent of our social wants" (p.1). How perfect a context, then, for the likes of two Englishmen, cousin of Charles Darwin and coiner of the term *eugenics* Francis Galton (1822-1911) and eminent statistician Karl Pearson (1857-1936) who together eased the transition from social Darwinism to eugenics through the provision of language and scientific validity for the hierarchical and racial assumptions that had long been an active strand of intellectual history (Chesterson 1922/2000; Blacker 1952; Kevles 1985; Hasian 1996; Numbers 1999).

Francis Galton (1822-1911), an explorer and anthropologist who traveled for decades among 'primitive cultures' and wrote about them for the educated public at home (as did many men of privilege at the time), believed that family preeminence in certain fields was hereditary, a theory no doubt modeled on the success of both sides of his family. Galton's grandfather Erasmus Darwin, physician, natural philosopher, poet, and inventor was a venerated inquirer as was his cousin Charles Darwin while Galton's father was descended from a long line of wealthy bankers and gunsmiths and was the youngest of seven children (Blacker 1952). Galton's (1889) *Natural Inheritance* so influenced Karl Pearson that it changed the course of his career. "It was Galton," Pearson (1914) wrote, "who first freed me from the prejudice that sound mathematics could only be applied to natural phenomena under the category of causation. Here for the first time was

a possibility - I will not say a certainty - of reaching knowledge as valid as physical knowledge was thought to be, in the field of living forms and above all in the field of human conduct" (p. xvii).

Pearson went on to write a series of papers between 1893 and 1912 entitled *Mathematical Contribution to the Theory of Evolution* (Pearson 1938). Pearson later became the Galton Professor of Eugenics at University College in London from 1911-1933 (Numbers 1999) having successfully articulated a form of Social Darwinism that appealed to the public's sense of progress by declaring that racial struggle provided the very means of improving civilization. For Pearson (1901), "this dependence of progress on the survival of the fitter race...gives the struggle for existence its redeeming features; it is the fiery crucible out of which comes the finer metal" (p. 21). Clear about the role of science, Pearson called his view "the scientific view of a nation" and argued that society could only be "kept to a high pitch of internal efficiency by insuring that its numbers are substantially recruited from the better stocks" (p. 27).

In order to achieve this level of efficiency Pearson employed elaborate statistical analysis to Galton's law of ancestral heredity and predicted that a population could, within a few generations of selective breeding, "breed true" for selected characteristics (Pearson 1894). Anticipating the development of the first intelligence test by Binet in 1905, Pearson enthusiastically took on Galton's (1889) contention that mental ability was determined by heredity and began to apply his newly developed statistical tools to the problem of inherited mental ability. This work sparked a great deal of further research, especially in the newly developing field of psychology, and became a primary tool in efforts to limit immigration and create more efficient schools.



Of great consequence to our parsing of the operation of ideologies from the past in the present is an understanding of the extraordinarily porous nature of terms such as *progressive* and *conservative*. Pearson was a socialist, but despite his leftist political leanings he thought “such measures as the minimum wage, the eight-hour day, free medical advice, and reductions in infant mortality encouraged an increase in unemployables, degenerates, and physical and mental weaklings” (Kevles 1985 p. 33). By obscuring the racial and class basis of poverty and advancement in America eugenicists were able to embrace a Social Darwinist conception of the human condition at the same time as it drew in a broad spectrum of supporters. The role of progressive reformers like Margaret Sanger illustrate the extent to which eugenic ideology cannot be understood within a simple progressive v. conservative matrix.

Founder of *Birth Control Review* in 1916, Sanger incorporated the American Birth Control League in 1922, an organization that became Planned Parenthood Federation of America in 1942. In 1921, she declared birth control to be the “entering wedge for the eugenic educator” and considered “the unbalance between the birth rate of the 'unfit' and the 'fit' is admittedly the greatest present menace to civilization [indeed,] the most urgent problem today is how to limit and discourage the over fertility of the mentally and physically defective” (Sanger 1921 p. 5). That eugenic ideology was promoted within a progressive context and offered to the public as a way to make the world a better place, speaks to a complexity which cannot begin to be examined when the majority of the educated public in America know nothing of it. What would have happened if during the women’s movement of the 1960s and 1970s the roots of one of the most empowering tools of the century for women were brought into the light? What if,

when thousands of white college students boarded busses for Mississippi to register voters and start Freedom Schools part of the conversation was the internalized nature of ideological tenets from the past? Would we be further along?

Margaret Quigley (1991) tells us that the “eugenics movement was not monolithic: conservatives, progressives, and sex radicals were all allied within a fundamentally messianic movement of national salvation that was predicated upon scientific notions of innate and ineradicable inequalities between racial, cultural, and economic groups” (p. 3). That policy decisions of all types as well as public opinion was predicated on a hierarchical conception of human worth that long preceded the concerns of the times requires us to accept that the stuff of assumptions is far more insidious than mere ignorance.

The remodeling of opinion was bolstered by a veritable public hysteria born of the pathologization of poverty and demonization of immigrants verified for the public by scientists and professors, lecturers and social workers. Newspapers, lecturers, and public displays warned of a ‘rising tide of feeble-mindedness’ while white Americans feared an “infertility crisis” as the birth rate continued to decline. President Theodore Roosevelt warned in 1903 that immigrants and minorities were too fertile, and that Anglo-Saxons risked committing “race suicide” by using birth control and failing to keep up baby-for-baby. Since charities, breadlines, and orphanages were interfering with the natural weeding out of the unfit described by Social Darwinist tenets, the pathologization of poverty was not difficult. Prominent eugenicists such as Stanford University president David Starr Jordan (1851-1931) (remembered popularly as an ichthyologist and a peace activist) echoed a view that must have, for many, been something of a relief:

No doubt poverty and crime are bad assets in one's early environment. No doubt these elements cause the ruins of thousands who, by heredity, were good material of civilization. But again, poverty, dirt, and crime are the products of those, in general, who are not good material. It is not the strength of the strong, but the weakness of the weak which engenders exploitation and tyranny. The slums are at once symptom, effect, and cause of evil. Every vice stands in this same threefold relation (Jordan 1911 p. 35).

According to eugenicists, positive (increasing the birth rate of 'high grade' persons) and negative eugenics (preventing reproduction among the 'dysgenic' classes) was critical to the improvement of the human race, and the weeding out of "idiots, imbeciles, morons, criminals, inebriates, and paupers" (Southern Historical Collection). Although twelve states already had mandatory sterilization laws on the books, Harry Laughlin, leading America eugenicist, authored a 'model law' which provided for eugenic sterilization of those persons deemed feeble minded, insane, criminal, epileptic, alcoholic, as well as blind, deaf, deformed, and indigent persons. This law, eventually passed in 30 states, was less susceptible to arguments of constitutionality (and was subsequently adopted by the Nazis who sterilized between thirty five and eighty thousand people during the first year, a number which grew to 350,000 by the end of WWII) (Black 2003). Laughlin was awarded an honorary degree by the University of Heidelberg for his work on the 'science of racial cleansing' (Kuhl 1994).

The eugenics movement put forth coherent, consistent social programs in which sterilization, anti-immigrant and anti-miscegenation activism were predominant. Despite these successes, however, research disputing the claims of heritability began to find increasing purchase in the press. One common inaccuracy (or perhaps, something else is at work here) holds that once its self-proclaimed scientific legitimacy in the form of Mendelian genetics was disproved, eugenics was discredited and denounced by society at

large. Not only is this characterization wholly inaccurate, it is dangerous for its capacity to blind us to the deep and abiding impact of eugenic ideology on American culture. While it is true that the scientific validity of many of the claims made by eugenicists were called into question as early as the 1910s (Paul 1998), this did little to dispel the momentum garnered by initial campaign tactics. The movement became, as Quigley characterized, “primarily a political movement concerned with the social control of inferior groups by an economic, sexual, and racial elite” (p.1) and education had a major role to play.

It was within this context that the so-called ‘Fathers of Curriculum’<sup>iii</sup> developed a system of education designed largely to classify and sort students according to their perceived societal worth. Prior to the 1920s, eugenicists focused on breeding and the goal of ‘weeding out the unfit’ from the national stock within three generations. The strategic goal was to be thwarted, however, by the increasingly activist progressive public sentiment as well as new research from geneticists which showed that many of the claims of heritability of various traits (from pauperism to sexual deviance) were patently false. The great compromise for eugenicists was to shift the focus from breeding to sorting and organizing people according to their predetermined standing on the hierarchy of human worth. Scientific validation was no longer necessary, so deeply entrenched into the popular mindset were the concept of eugenics. In any case, the public was in the throes of positivistic ecstasy at the time so that anything with a graph or a percent sign was granted legitimacy

Education provided just the captive audience that Galton (1883) had originally conceived might benefit from “the science of improving the stock [in which] the more

suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing speedily over the less suitable than they otherwise would have had” (p. 23). Having clearly articulated a hierarchy of human worth which held that Blacks were entirely inferior to white races and that Jews were capable only of ‘parasitism’ upon civilized nations, Galton (1904) refined his earlier definition of eugenics to “the study of agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations, either physically or mentally” (quoted in Chase 1975 p. 14). Testing, tracking, vocational and gifted programs, curricular control over history, biology, civics, health and hygiene, a retooling of the aims of education, and finally, after WWII, life adjustment education were but some of the ways eugenic ideology entered into public education and the collective memory of the nation.

### **Education ‘of service to eugenics’**

Eugenical truth is the highest truth men will ever know. The climax of all natural processes is the evolution of man. And if man can, by the use of the intelligence which that evolution has given him, aid in his further evolution, it will certainly be the highest achievement which the powers given him by nature will ever enable him to make. Eugenics will not solve all the problems of society; but it hopes to aid in producing a race that can solve them (Wiggam, 1927 p.5).

Eugenicists had in mind a critical role for public education in America. The enactment of compulsory education laws in every state by 1918, along with recent developments in the field of intelligence testing provided the movement with a new vista. Indeed, when the World War I-era IQ testing of all soldiers indicated that almost fifty percent of all white recruits and eighty-nine percent of black recruits were morons according to the newly developed Stanford Binet test, the eugenics movement seemed more important and believable. In their enormously influential textbook *Applied*

*Eugenics*, used for decades in high school and college courses, Popenoe and Johnson (1918) reflect the widespread eugenicist stance on the promise of education with their contention that

Compulsory education, as such, is not only of service to eugenics through the selection it makes possible, but may serve in a more unsuspected way by cutting down the birth rate of inferior families (p. 371).

Education of service to eugenics allowed for the “very desirable” condition that “no child escape inspection,” (p. 371) a goal that in 1918 had yet to be realized by the public educational system. Further, Lewis Terman (1916) had recently re-tooled the Stanford-Binet intelligence test and, upon administering it to Spanish speaking and non-schooled African American children he found that

High-grade or border-line deficiency... is very, very common among Spanish-Indian and Mexican families of the Southwest and also among negroes. Their dullness seems to be racial, or at least inherent in the family stocks from which they come...Children of this group should be segregated into separate classes...They cannot master abstractions but they can often be made into efficient workers...from a eugenic point of view they constitute a grave problem because of their unusually prolific breeding (p. 91).

This scenario was, and continues to be, replicated virtually unabated for nearly a century now. The characterization of poor, and non Aryan children as unable to master abstraction echo through the Ruby Payne phenomena currently sweeping school district professional development programs across the country. Although decades of research has discredited the ‘deficit approach’ to explaining opportunity and access in education, Ruby Payne is indoctrinating a generation of teachers with a series of books which contain “a stream of stereotypes, providing perfect illustrations for how deficit-model scholars frame poverty and its educational impact as problems to be solved by “fixing” poor

people instead of [focusing on] the educational policies and practices that cycle poverty” (Gorski 2005 p. 8). Even more redolent of eugenic rhetoric Payne explains that

the typical pattern in poverty for discipline is to verbally chastise the child, or physically beat the child, then forgive and feed him/her ... individuals in poverty are seldom going to call the police, for two reasons: First, the police may be looking for them... (quoted in Gorski 2005 p. 37).

It seems likely that the resilience of these themes is due, in part, to the trend during the latter half of the nineteenth century in which psychology became a popular subject pursued by men of means in top European universities. German psychologist Wilhelm Wundt was particularly influential, having trained a generation of young American psychology students in experimental methodology. These students included G. Stanley Hall and James Cattell, who created the field known as educational psychology, distinguished from child study and pedagogy by its focus on mental testing. By relying on biological assumptions, Wundt's emphasis on the organism's physiology and the experimental method deeply influenced American social science by basing psychological thought on Darwinian premises (Pickens, 1968). By 1914, American psychology was a well defined discipline with clear cut fields whose promoters were prolific and popular writers and did much to spread the popularity of instinct psychology and its role in education the echoes of which are clearly evident today.

They echo through the work of Linda Gottfredon (2005), Professor Education at the University of Delaware (whose research is funded by the Pioneer Fund, established in 1937 by wealthy eugenicist Wycliff Draper and presided over by Harry Laughlin) argued in her article *What if the Hereditarian Hypothesis is True?* that those with lower intelligence’ relative risk for “multiple health and social problems” might be lowered if “education and training were better targeted to their learning needs (instruction is more

narrowly focused, non-theoretical, concrete, hands-on, repetitive, personalized, and requiring no inferences); (p. 318). How redolent this is of the sentiments of Henry Herbert Goddard, a student of G. Stanley Hall, the first American psychologist to recognize the potential of intelligence testing for furthering eugenic ideals. Goddard first entered the public eye with the publication of his book *The Kallikaks* (1912) wherein he traced the progeny resulting from a dalliance between a misguided revolutionary soldier and a 'feeble-minded' barmaid. Goddard's book was immensely popular and was used in educational psychology classrooms for decades after its publication (Selden, 1999).

Differences in children required different educational responses, Goddard (1912) wrote, and furthermore, the greatest threat to society, was the 'high grade', or 'moron' type of feeble mind because although they were unfit (but not unable) to reproduce, they nevertheless were able to function in society and thus were a threat to the gene pool.

Here we have a group who, when children in school, cannot learn the things that are given them to learn, because through their mental defect, they are incapable of mastering abstractions. They never learn to read sufficiently well to make reading pleasurable or of practical use to them. Under our present compulsory school system and our present course of study, we compel these children . . . and thus they worry along through a few grades until they are fourteen and then leave school, not having learned anything of value or that can help them to make even a meager living in the world (Goddard, 1912 p. 16).

Thus was the central dogma of eugenics, that "poverty and its pathologies, like affluence and its comforts, were in the blood - and not in the environment in which human beings were conceived, born, and developed" (Chase 1975 p. 149). Goddard is also famous for his revision of the Binet test and in particular for his system of classification which gave a mental-age value to imbeciles, morons, and idiots. The tests, according to Goddard's interpretation, proved the inferiority of Jews, Italians, Hungarians, Poles, Russians, and



others with blood 'known' to be inferior (Goddard 1911; Goddard 1914; Goddard 1915; Goddard 1916). Goddard's ideas appealed to the public because for the first time there seemed to be evidence that connected hereditary determinism with mental ability. Past and present, we are compelled by our own ideological roots to seek out a scientific way to establish difference, and to establish divergent paths for students that have different abilities, both of which require, and enjoy, public support.

Although educational historians (Curti 1935/1959; Tyack 1974; Kliebard 1975/1997; Kliebard 1986/1995) have focused much of their attention on the influence of psychologists G. Stanley Hall and Edward Thorndike, somehow they have managed to omit the profound degree to which both were steeped in eugenic ideology. The prolific careers of both men is well documented; Hall published three hundred and fifty papers and fourteen books and Thorndike published an equivalent number of papers and over thirty books (Curti, 1935/1959). A core component of Halls philosophy was his recapitulation theory (ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny) wherein non-white people were in a stage of evolutionary development the pinnacle of which was European-American and, since all groups were evolving, the hierarchical division was permanent. Hall believed that the best stock was likely to come from the middle class who should be provided adequate educational opportunities to ensure continued success. Society, meanwhile, if protected from the 'degenerate and criminal minded' among us, would by default begin to solve its problems (Curti, 1959/1935).

Having spent nearly his entire career at Teacher's College, Columbia, American psychologist E. L. Thorndike (1874-1949) was enormously influential through both the provision of the Alpha and Beta tests administered to WWI Army recruits and his

specifications for the design and choice of teaching materials, instructional organization, methods of individualizing instruction and assessment. So great was Thorndike's influence that Cremin (1961) claimed "no aspect of public school teaching during the first quarter of the twentieth century remained unaffected" (p. 114). Using chickens, in boxes, with levers, Thorndike developed a theory of learning based on the premise that outcomes could be produced on scientific production of stimulus and response. What is significant about this Cremin tells us, is that "in one fell swoop it discards the Biblical view that man's nature is essentially sinful and hence untrustworthy; the Rousseauan view that man's nature is essentially good and hence always right; and the Lockean view that man's nature is ultimately plastic and hence completely modifiable" (p. 112). In this way, Thorndike was able to redefine human nature as simply a mass of 'original tendencies' ready to be exploited for good or bad depending on what learning takes place.

Selden (1999) tells us that E.L. Thorndike and Leta Stetter Hollingworth, (of gifted education fame) popularized eugenics to generations of prospective classroom teachers and that by using flawed racial interpretations of the intelligence test data after the First World War, psychometricians Carl Brigham and Robert Yerkes were persuasive in making the connection between educational objectives and eugenic proscriptions. Thorndike, oft quoted in the present as saying "everything that exists exists in quantity and can be measured" had as his goal a comprehensive science of pedagogy on which all education could be based. Neither did Thorndike limit his vision for the impact of science on education to methods but ultimately believed that the aims of education could be scientifically determined as well (Cremin, 1961).

Despite different ideas on the appropriate scope of individual freedom (particularly in their own lives), many believed in the necessity of strong social controls for some groups of citizens, who were seen as fundamentally different and inferior. Thus, the idea that social problems could be addressed through the social control of children and peoples of less evolved ancestry was widespread in America. Among eugenicists, Halls approach is distinguished by what Curti called his near "sentimentality" for "backward peoples, whom he thought of as in the adolescent and therefore peculiarly sacred stage of racial development" (p. 412). Looked at through this lens, and given that the inheritance of acquired characteristics was generally accepted as well, the concepts of 'child-centeredness' and 'individualized education' so popular during the Progressive era and used so prolifically today compels us to investigate our use and internalization of these meanings. This language of race, class, and gender based oppression was developed by eugenic ideologues in educational psychology, is used today, often cloaked and lauded as the 'progressive' (equated in the popular lexicon as 'most likely to awaken appreciation for social justice issues' approach).

Author of the classic curriculum policy text *The Curriculum* (1918), John Franklin Bobbitt articulated his early ideas on the subjects of race, class, and ability in an article entitled *Practical Eugenics* (1909). Bobbitt shared the view common among eugenicists and Social Darwinists before them that social policy should seek to remove the protective characteristics of civilized society and allow the forces of nature to take its course in sorting human worth. Claiming that "our schools and charities supply crutches to the weak in mind and morals," Bobbitt's early writings further asserted that schools and charities "corrupt the streams of heredity which all admit are sufficiently turbid"

(Bobbitt 1909 p. 387). Social turbidity was the topic of the day in 1909 and the confluence of science and racist ideology was well established in the minds of many as the key to racial purity and subsequent societal betterment. In this article, which appeared in the journal *Pedagogical Seminary* (edited by colleague G. Stanley Hall), Bobbitt was confident that the problem of child training would be solved by limiting the right to procreate to individuals of “sound sane parentage” since there was little to be done for the children of “worm-eaten stock” (p. 385). In order to purge society of the unfit, Bobbitt proposed the abolishment of the public school system, all charities, and any other public agency that went out of its way to “preserve the weak and incapable” (p. 393). We will see that Bobbitt later learned to tone down his rhetoric while the essential elements of his early philosophy remained intact.

Curriculum theorists conceded, over the course of the following decade, that eradication and elimination of the unfit was both an unrealistic and increasingly unpalatable goal. Bobbitt and others set about developing a theory of education that exerted social control within these newly realized parameters. Regarded as perhaps one of the most influential curriculum texts in American educational history, Bobbitt's *The Curriculum* (1918) defined curriculum in two ways:

1. It is the entire range of experiences, both undirected and directed, concerned in unfolding the abilities of the individual; or
2. It is the series of consciously directed training experiences that the schools use for completing and perfecting the unfoldment (p. 43).

In what I contend is a direct reference to his eugenic theoretical stance, Bobbitt (1918) further stated that "education must be concerned with both [directed and undirected training experience], *even though it does not direct both*" (p. 43 emphasis mine). In other

words, 'undirected' experiences are those that are imbued by heredity, be they functional ability or economic status.

Schools, according to Bobbitt's curricular philosophy, should act as a societal hub for organizing and sorting children according to their relative worth to society. In what was to be a long relationship between business and industry and the field of education, Bobbitt developed a model of what he called *scientific curriculum* in order to exert control into what he considered an "era of contentment with large, undefined purposes" (p. 41). "The controlling purposes of education," Bobbitt continued,

have not been sufficiently particularized. We have aimed at a vague culture, an ill-defined discipline, a nebulous harmonious development of the individual, an indefinite moral character-building, an unparticularized social efficiency, or, often enough nothing more than escape from a life of work (p.41).

We see that the sorting, testing, and tracking developed by eugenicists is rooted in the melding of scientific efficiency with educational objectives. Bobbitt went on to extol the great progress being made in the development of scientific method for "every important aspect of education" along with the discovery of "accurate methods of measuring and evaluating different types of educational processes," so that educators might be better equipped for "diagnosing specific situations, and of prescribing remedies" (p. 41).

We might be tempted to just stop here, so familiar is the ring of the proscriptions, so clearly are they linked to the substance of "the nightmare that is the present" (Pinar 2004). To do so, however, would be to gaze at the window rather than seeking to unfetter it. Bobbitt knew that it was within the curriculum that deep control would be wrought. It is, he said, the "primordial factor" (p. 41). "The central theory is simple," Bobbitt explained, "human life, however varied, consists in the performance of specific activities.

Education that prepares for life is one that prepares definitely and adequately for these specific activities. However numerous and diverse they may be for any social class, they can be discovered (p. 42). We know from Bobbitt's 1909 writings, his membership in the America Eugenics Society (Selden 1999), and the context of the times just how the inherent hierarchy of capabilities and future professions was determined.

To discover the "appropriate" education for "any special class," Bobbitt believed, required a close inspection of the "total range of habits, skills, abilities, forms of thought, valuations, ambitions, etc., that its members need for the effective performance of their vocational labors" (1918 p. 43). Bobbitt's use of *habits and proclivities* as a tool to discover appropriate education for members of various groups effectively brings together curriculum form and function with dominant racial and class definitions of difference. The possibility that appropriate education could be discovered through measurable individual markers rested on the presupposition that education was "established on the presumption that human activities exist upon different levels of quality or efficiency" (Bobbitt 1918 p. 48). Education had always functioned as a form of societal promise and progress, only now education did so within the boundaries of an ideology that described learning and ability in terms of race and class limitations. It was Bobbitt's contention within the confines of this definition, that "education should aim at the best" and "scientific investigations as to objectives should seek to discover the characteristics of only the best" (p. 50). Bobbitt was to get his wish in the form of testing.

We have seen that, for eugenicists, the great compromise (having re-prioritized the ultimate goal of racial cleansing) when it came to the institution of education was that it direct students, according to their inherited lot, into the workplace. These end products,

what have come to be known as curricular objectives, have proved to be one of the most enduring legacies of scientific curriculum as it was originally conceived. Another enduring element of Bobbitt's curriculum theory was his ability to combine specificity and ambiguity into a coherent whole. Perhaps reflecting the cultural perspective from which eugenic ideology was derived, Bobbitt's theory was simultaneously specific and ambiguous. It is interesting to note that Bobbitt's proscription for curriculum provided specificity for practical and clearly desirable skills, but his theory was vague and ambiguous where value issues were concerned (Kliebard 1975/1997). Although Kliebard never mentions eugenics specifically, he nevertheless felt suspicious enough to refer to Bobbitt's combination of specificity and ambiguity as reflective of a "submerged ideology" (p. 34).

During the 1920s and 1930s, America's youth in particular was subject to a saturation of information from every facet of their lives. From the chapter on eugenics in high school biology texts that recommended sterilization of the unfit, immigration restriction and a justification of racial segregation, to the Saturday night showing of *The Black Stork* at the local movie house young people were charged with carrying the nation to a more eugenic future. Local newspapers heralded the winners of *Fitter Family Contests* in which entrants submit their genealogical charts vying for a medal proclaiming 'Yea, I have a Goodly Heritage' (Selden 1999). How far have we come? To what extent does ideological residue coat our own imaginings and filter the light that might be?

### **How we might proceed...Achieving escape velocity**

We are living in a dangerous historical moment when state repression is openly being bartered for supposed security from enemies within and without ... A historical dialectic is beginning to unfold. A nascent social movement is building as the full ideological and material force of the state

and the avaricious goals of transnational capital bear down on us (Lipman 2004 p. 189).

Confusion, hopelessness, and invective all characterize the current debate over human agency, the role of the past, ideological transmission and seemingly endless examples of historical repetition. The implications of this for our nation's schools, in light of the state of affairs outlined by Lipman above are grave. An investigation into these implications might be approached from many angles; this one seeks to elucidate the role of a deeply embedded racialized scientism which has long characterized American society. Tied to the natural theology of secularism and its basic principals of human classification, inheritance, and development, scientific racism, past and present, has been used to endorse progressive pedagogic and disciplinary practices, and has operated to define and enforce access in society.

Over thirty years ago, in *Heightened Consciousness, Cultural Revolution, and Curriculum Theory: The Proceedings of the Rochester Conference*, edited by William Pinar (1974), Maxine Greene contemplated Freire's notion of educational liberation as existing in acts of cognition. Greene (1974) wondered "whether anything can be done in schools and what curriculum ought to signify in a world so dominated by bureaucracies and inhuman technological controls" (p. 69) and found that Freire's phenomenological approach suggested new vantage points. Curriculum ought to be conceived, Greene concluded, "in terms of possibility of individuals, all kinds of individuals" (p. 69). What is interesting is that here, at the birthplace of the reconceptualization, the focus was on the fact that the curriculum was "increasingly structured by the schemata of those who think in terms of behavioral objectives, achievement testing, and management capability" (p. 69).



Pinar argues that curriculum studies experiences a sharp shift during the 1990s to a cultural studies orientation, a shift the abruptness of which may prove to be untimely because a “disciplinary throughline” has yet to be articulated. Perhaps a preliminary step to such an articulation consists in identifying the disciplinary throughline that has irrevocably defined the American public sphere from the very beginning. The foundation consists of a presumption of white supremacy in the decimation of native populations, and the relentless acquisition of land, along with a hierarchical and puritanical paradigm for the formation of a new nation. Built upon this substrate, we might begin the tracing with the contention of English physician and surgeon Charles White in 1799 who claimed that "on the basis of anatomical and physiological evidence ... blacks are a completely separate species, intermediate between Whites and apes" (quoted in Tucker 1994 p. 10) a notion which Thomas Jefferson, lauded for his attempts to pass the “Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge,” used to justify both slavery, and the exclusion of non-Whites from his educational aims.

Fast forward though the next century where the disciplinary throughline is refined and strengthened by the Civil War, the publication of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, the subsequent application of ‘survival of the fittest’ mandate to social problems in the form of Social Darwinism, the coining of the term *eugenics* by Darwin’s cousin Sir Francis Galton in 1883, and the development of the Progressive era at the turn of the century. Now we are ready to identify the throughline as it has existed over the past century, providing the primary lines of demarcation for the system of education within which we, our parents, grandparents, and children all have been educated.

Anticipating the rhetoric of ‘standards and accountability’ in the twenty-first century, Charles Davenport declared in 1911 that “the relation of eugenics to the vast efforts put forth to ameliorate the condition of our people, especially in crowded cities, should not be forgotten” (p. 254). Davenport aptly reflects the deeply embedded ideological throughline that has defined the public debate over education ever since:

Education is a fine thing and the hundreds of millions annually spent upon it in our country are an excellent investment. But every teacher knows that the part he plays in education is after all a small one ... the expert teacher can do much with good material; but his work is closely limited by the protoplasmic makeup – the inherent traits of his pupils (Davenport 1911 p. 255).

How shall we debate, argue, and despair over No Child Left Behind as an unfunded mandate, as over-reliant on standardized tests, and over the callous disregard for the social inequalities that are ignored? Perhaps not. I suggest that to engage in the details of the manifestation of an ideological throughline to which we are utterly opposed is to have our strength sapped, our vision subsumed, our complicity masked. We already know that the present historical moment is engaged in a systematic devaluing of everything that is not tested, that the authority of official knowledge remains unchallenged in the curriculum, and that broad, liberatory aims for schooling have yet to be realized. What we are less clear about is why. The debate has not identified the core of itself, and as a result, liberals, progressives, conservatives, and traditionalists have too often blurred, blended, and overlapped. Stephen Steinberg (1995) understands this, writing that

the enemy depends on the so-called liberal to put a kinder and gentler face on racism; to subdue the rage of the oppressed; to raise false hopes that change is imminent; to moderate the demands for complete liberation; to divert protest; and to shift the onus of responsibility ... from powerful institutions that could make a difference onto individuals who have been rendered powerless by those very institutions (Steinberg 1995 p. 135 quoted in Ordovery 2003 p. 131).

We are most dangerous, then, when we fail to look within. At the beginning of the reconceptualization of curriculum studies, Greene (1974) wrote that a “person brought to self awareness by means of dialogue, [and] made conscious of his own consciousness ... is likely to seek higher knowledge in the effort to organize his thinking and constitute with his brothers and sisters a richer, more unified, less unjust world” (p. 82). Pinar (2004), argues that “curriculum theory and the complicated conversation it supports seek the truth of the present state of affairs” and our motive should be “erudition, interdisciplinarity, intellectuality, self-reflexivity [we must envision] curriculum as complicated conversation [which] invites students to encounter themselves and the world they inhabit through academic knowledge, popular culture, grounded in their own lived experience: (p. 208). The disciplinary throughline has been articulated, by many, for a long time. What it has not been is internalized, not intellectually, but really.

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<sup>i</sup> I use the term eugenics, and refer to eugenic ideology, with the understanding that eugenics was but one of many iterations of hierarchical ideological mechanisms applied to human beings. In the United States, examples include Great Chain of Being theory, craniometry, phrenology, and Social Darwinism, all of which were predecessors of eugenic ideology and served to pave the way for its acceptance. Terminology for the current form of this race, gender, and class way of thinking has yet to be established firmly in the literature, although I often refer to it as racialized scientism.

<sup>ii</sup> Some contend that eugenics was supported by most scientists and social scientists up until the 1960s (Lynn, 2001). The pervasiveness of support was clear, ranging as it did from Nobel Prize winning scientists Herman Miller, Linus Pauling, Joshua Lederberg, and William Shockley to leading psychologists Edward Thorndike, Lewis Terman and William McDougall. Further establishing the legitimacy of eugenics for the public were a number of prominent figures such as Charles Wilson, Irving Fisher, and David Starr Jordan, presidents of Harvard, Yale, and Stanford Universities respectively, and finally, President Theodore Roosevelt and Oliver Wendell Holmes, Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court (Lynn, 2001).

<sup>iii</sup> This is outlined in my book and especially true of John Franklin Bobbitt, Granville Stanley Hall, W.W. Charters, E.L. Thorndike, and generations of school administrators educated in the science of efficiency by Elwood P. Cubberley.