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## Instituting a Hierarchy of Human Worth: Eugenic Ideology And the Anatomy of Who Gets What

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Instituting a Hierarchy of Human Worth: Eugenic Ideology  
And the Anatomy of Who Gets What  
Winfield, Ann G.

A study of the history of opinion is a necessary preliminary to the emancipation of the mind.

- John Maynard Keynes (quoted in Judt, 2010 p. 86).

One hundred years ago, the discourse among America's economic, political, and scientific elite focused on 'weeding out' the 'unfit' people of the nation in order to make way for 'well-born,' supposedly 'superior' people to flourish and achieve the so-called 'American dream. Today, we are living in a time which is defined by a neo-liberal agenda which, at its core, relies on the same devaluing of people. The push for privatization in virtually every social arena in the United States requires the fundamental assumption that some people are worth more than others. Profit margins outweigh humanity in the public sphere. The message we hear today may be less caustic, we do not talk about forced sterilization of the feeble-minded anymore, but the basic ideological rationale that allows us to live in a society that is so rewarding to the wealthy, and so punishing to the poor, remains intact. Where this rationale comes from is not a mystery: nineteenth century Social Darwinism and twentieth century eugenics spell out in stark terms who among us is worthy and who among us is not. The difference today is that the language is largely hidden: it is hidden in the language of social justice; it exists in corporatization of the social sphere. The fundamental assumptions embedded in the national identity about terms like 'equality' and 'freedom' have been sucked out of the fabric of the way our nation operates and instead we live in a 'brave new world' which enacts an ideological definition of basic human worth. This is evident in many places,

none more stark, or with more dire consequences for the future, than the current school reform agenda.

Be forewarned: it is no mere inkling you have that public education is under siege. We are not contending with some far-removed policy mandate without real world consequences, nor is this some gimmicky flash-in-the-pan political talking point that will fade away as so many have done before. This attack is real, it is deep, and it has been in the making for over a century. What we are witnessing is a modern manifestation of ideological opposition to the very idea of public education altogether, founded on the notion that the majority of the students, teachers and families with the least cultural capital are defective and in need of remediation. The opposition hinged, and continues to hinge, on the idea that there are those among us who are simply not worthy – the lowest fifty percent of the population economically (who control less than three percent of the nation's wealth) are characterized as lazy, uneducable, parasitic, promiscuous, and in need of surveillance, control, and to be harnessed in service to the capitalist imperative: profit. In fact, the ideological rationale goes, the 'unfit' segment of the population is not merely a nuisance, they are human beings who represent a grave threat to the well-being of the 'more deserving' among us. The fact that we can even be debating in such terms in the twenty-first century is because the neo-liberal reform movement cannot survive without the public buying-in to the idea that some people are more worthy than others.

The undercurrent of dissent toward the whole notion that all Americans are entitled to a free, quality public education, an undercurrent as old as the nation itself, is rooted in the decades of the early twentieth century when the modern school system was being formed within a societal context of dominant eugenic ideology. During this period

dissenters argued that schools were a form of charity that disrupted natural law and that success in society was nothing more than an expression of one's inherent, genetically endowed worth coupled with hard work and the right attitude. The ideological battle between democracy and capitalism has played out on the backs of schoolchildren for over a century and in order to effectively resist, we must first understand the ideological roots that have created this mess.

Throughout the history of public education, we have been obsessed with sorting and categorizing students according to their preconceived societal worth. We have, using test driven data, created schools for domestic servitude for Black and Hispanic girls, the mechanical arts for boys, boarding schools for Native American children. Then came the civil rights era when, beginning with desegregation, laws were passed to protect and include thousands of historically marginalized groups of students: non-English speaking students, disabled students, poor students, women, etc. now had access, mandated by law, for the first time. However, not everyone was eager to embrace these changes as evidenced by the landslide victory in 1980 of Ronald Reagan. With regard to school policy, it was as if, as historian James Anderson put it, even though we now had the chance to implement the best ideas public education that we had for so long avoided, we were all of a sudden tired of it. What followed was a dramatic reassertion of ideological power using the same tool that eugenicists had used a century earlier: schools. Virtually every social justice victory of the 1960s and 1970s, every Supreme Court ruling, every policy, has been either completely dismantled or severely undermined.

After thirty years of unprecedented testing and accountability policies that have beaten down the hopes and aspirations of countless schoolchildren, their families, and

teachers, the attack is now morphing into a new kind of ‘race.’ Today in urban school districts we have ‘hospitality academies’ that train students to work in the hotel and restaurant industry, only now the policies are formed using the language of social justice: we shall ‘leave no child behind,’ we shall ‘ensure that all children can learn,’; this is what inviting business interests to the school policy table has produced (in addition to billion dollar profit margins for testing and textbook companies).

Schools are being closed, teachers fired, and students disregarded and displaced in a relentless subterfuge that has been percolating and building pressure for decades. We blame the least powerful among us, we pathologize their struggle, and we cloak ourselves in a protective veil composed of the American Dream. We tell ourselves that success in America is the result of nothing more than intelligence coupled with hard work and the right attitude. Never mind poverty and its attendant problems. Never mind that the most recent spate of ‘reforms’ which slither in on gilded tongued language like ‘No Child Left Behind,’ ‘Race to the Top,’ ‘Transformation’ and ‘Turnaround’ models all attack schools which are predominantly populated with poor, black and brown children. Never mind the inconvenient resemblance to past ‘utopian’ visions that sought to sort, classify, and categorize students according to perceived racial purity -using tests as the mechanism to quantify and measure their ‘data.’ Never mind that the legislators and policymakers who dream up and implement these reforms typically choose for their own children to go to private schools where the specter of testing and all the state and federal mandates besieging schools are not required.

In May of 2009, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced the Obama administration’s intent to close down 5000 ‘underperforming’ schools across the country.

We know this means that this means the draconian firing of every teacher with no professional evaluation attached, occurs primarily in communities of non-white, poor, and immigrant communities: we would never dream of doing that in wealthier, privileged communities – just read the data. This bright idea, now being carried out across the country, comes as a result not of professional educator wisdom, but of Corporate Executive Officer ‘wisdom’. In communities where wholesale firings have already taken place, veteran teachers have been replaced with often uncertified, certainly less qualified newbie teachers who are forced to work longer hours, for much reduced pay, and who tend to be fearful of standing up for themselves or their students, and who are reluctant to participate in unions or other forms of organized articulation of an alternative vision.

Just as racial purification was touted as society’s best answer to poverty and disease one hundred years ago, policymakers have long used arguments that ring of social justice to justify mandates that are decidedly unjust. We seem to have a national blind-spot when it comes to the use of such language: as long as we claim to be advocating for poor, non-white, and otherwise marginalized students, the pattern goes, then we must be making the right argument. Must we wait for hindsight to see that relentless, testing, irrelevant and piecemeal curriculum, draconian policies that denigrate student’s lives and the rest are completely the wrong thing to do to promote students achievement? The mantra has been so clear and relentless, for so long, that the acceptance of the argument has become ubiquitous. What the mantra really is, though, is a form of ideological warfare, chipping away, weakening support over time, until the time to strike is upon us. It is upon us. For generations the majority of poor, black, brown, ‘socially deviant’ children and adults have been targeted by policies and practices developed on an

ideological foundation informed by eugenics. This chapter will trace the influence of eugenic ideology for its role in creating a hierarchy of human worth (in schools and elsewhere) in this country and will conclude with implications for the present moment.

### **Race to the Top – Old Style**

It was prolific English scientist and statistician Sir Francis Galton (1822-1911), cousin of Charles Darwin, who developed the term *eugenics* in 1883 to explain his scheme to improve the human race through selective breeding. Basing his theory of relative human worth on the success of the long lines of wealthy Englishmen on both sides of his ancestral tree, Galton believed that “if a twentieth part of the cost and pains were spent in measures for the improvement of the human race that is spent on the improvement of the breed of horses and cattle, what a galaxy of genius might we not create” (Galton 1865 cited in Spiro 2009 p. 121). Indeed, one of the first formal groups in the U.S. to form a committee on eugenics was the American Breeders Association who applied their knowledge of horse and cattle breeding to the improvement of ‘human stock.’ For reasons that will become clear, societal improvement through racial purification caught on quickly and it wasn’t long before the phrase *blood tells* was firmly embedded in the common lexicon. Galton’s epiphany that the success of his ancestral line was in his genes and, more importantly, not in the genes of the other ninety-six percent of the human race, served to expand and solidify the narrative of meritocracy and is reflected today in the nation’s wealth distribution.

From this curious beginning at the turn of the twentieth century, eugenicists during the 1910s and 1920s successfully pursued their goal of social betterment through

forcible sterilization, anti-miscegenation laws, immigration restriction, and the sorting, testing, and tracking policies implemented in schools across the country. The powerful legislators, philanthropists, social workers, and teachers on the front lines of the movement targeted both urban and rural unwed mothers, young boys who masturbated, and anyone whose race, poverty, isolation, language, or habits rendered them unacceptable by 'polite' society. These people were deemed mentally 'unfit' and those who were not blind, deaf, epileptic, alcoholic, or paupers were labeled with the dubious term 'feeble-minded'.

The basic tenets of eugenic ideology have long supplied, either consciously or subconsciously, an explanation for the establishment, evolution and perpetuation of inequality. One major spokesman for the eugenics movement was eminent psychologist and eugenicist Edward Thorndike. Thorndike is often referred to as one of the "Fathers of Curriculum" and he played a leading role in the establishment and form of our modern system of education. The eugenic explanation for human inequality is captured in Thorndike's 1927 New York Times article that coincided with the release of his book *The Measurement of Intelligence*. Thorndike wrote:

men are born unequal in intellect, character, and skill. It is impossible and undesirable to make them equal by education. The proper work of education is to improve all men according to their several possibilities, in ways consistent with the welfare of all.

Thorndike reflects a common belief that has persisted into the present, that social inequality is an expression of hereditary worth. This little nugget has served for nearly a



century as justification for governmentally sanctioned and perpetuated racism, xenophobia, discrimination and abuse for countless numbers of people. What today we identify as the racist fury of White Supremacist extremists was, for the first three decades of the twentieth century, the language of the dominant culture in the United States. Newspapers crowed about the winners of Fitter Family contests, and ministers extolled the virtues of eugenically harmonious life far from the crime, dirt and degeneracy of the poor and immigrant ‘unfit’ populations.

The common consensus was that American culture, defined as middle and upper class white culture, was under grave threat from the throngs of overly fertile ‘dysgenic’ poor, immigrant, and otherwise undesirable elements of the population. This consensus was the result of a clarion call of ‘progressive’ rhetoric supplied by America’s best known families, philanthropists, and top scientists and carried out by the nation’s teachers, social workers, and countless institutions and organizations who believed they were working for the ‘greater good’ of society. Education, largely formed during the height of the eugenics movement, has been a primary arena for the enactment of a publically embraced hierarchy of human worth.

Governmental uses of eugenically rooted ideology have imposed what Nancy Ordovery (2003) has called the ‘technofix’ on the underclass wherein policies and practices have routinely served to protect elite interests and prevent mobility for everyone else. Indeed, as the current economic meltdown reveals, the same arguments that focus on moral failings are brought to bear while the unadulterated greed and exploitation practiced by the economic elite continues despite publically expressed outrage. What will real change require? Well, for one thing, a thorough understanding from whence we came

is a start. The ruse of unprecedented testing, national standards, student control, and surveillance in our nation's schools, which has been foisted on the American public using the language of social justice, must be revealed for the ideological Trojan Horse that it is.

Systemic inequality is inherently at odds with democracy but it has nevertheless co-opted the public sphere. The elite in society are reliant on the status-quo, including the underlying assumptions which define eugenic ideology, and they have effectively defined, regulated, and enforced access in society for generations. They have done this by institutionalizing the notion that fairness and equity are found through the opportunity to prove one's worth – in other words that we are a meritocracy. A look at the history that is left out of the official narrative will reveal that meritocracy is a myth that has resulted in direct harm to generations of American people.

### **Societal Context: The breeding ground for eugenic ideology**

The notion that some humans are more worthy than others is nothing new. In fact, intellectual history has been saturated with it since Plato and Aristotle pontificated over 2000 years ago, making early 20<sup>th</sup> century eugenic ideology a mere blip in the grand scheme of things. Because of the way eugenicists were able to translate the deeply embedded racism that existed immediately prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century into the newly minted progressive sentiment in the 1910s and 20s, eugenic ideology is especially instructive of the way the past manifests itself in the present.

To understand the context of the times we must go back to the end of the Civil War, when Charles Darwin introduced his theory of evolution in his magnum opus *On the Origin of Species* (1859). For the next forty years, many scientists and policy makers

used the *survival of the fittest* language of Darwin's theory to craft decades of oppressive social thought and policy in the form of Social Darwinism. It was commonly accepted that those who possessed wealth, power, and influence in America did so because they were more evolved: they were, to use Darwin's terminology, *fitter*. At the same time as this Social Darwinist foundation was becoming entrenched in the public sphere, the industrial revolution was underway, capitalism was idolized, society was enamored with the promise of *science*, and public sentiment was becoming increasingly progressive. This combination of social phenomena provided a ripe new breeding ground for eugenic ideology to flourish and for the next generation to carry its tenets forward.

As is the case today, the early decades of the twentieth century saw an incredible centralization of wealth and power in which a few families controlled the majority of industrial and economic capital. A vast separation between the rich and poor existed, where the rich filled their time with art, music, literature, theatre, education and science. The modern environmental movement emerged during this period as eugenicists like Madison Grant (author of *The Passing of the Great Race* and longtime head of the Natural History Museum in Washington, DC), representing the purveyors of so-called 'high culture,' emphasized the importance of fresh air, clean water, and space in which to raise their large, vigorous families. These members of the economic and ideological elite were not subject, of course, to the squalid conditions the poor endured where poverty, abusive work conditions, and lack of sanitation led to disease and death.

Politicians and businessman were focused on creating political and economic stability, while the working poor searched for reasoned answers to societal problems, and vigorously protested the ravages of industrial working conditions and crowded cities. As

Zinn (1980) notes, a fervor was created by a “sudden economic crises leading to high prices and lost jobs, the lack of food and water,” spurred on by the daily reality of “the freezing winters, the hot tenements in the summer, the epidemics of disease, [and the] deaths of children” (p. 215). These uprisings were occasionally directed toward the rich, but just as often their anger was translated into “racial hatred for blacks, religious warfare against Catholics, [and] nativist fury against immigrants” (Zinn 1980 p. 216). Along both ends of the economic spectrum, racist hostility became an easy substitute for class frustration.

Finally, with these events and attitudes as a foundation, the late nineteenth century saw enormous economic growth and a level of corporatization that has continued into the present. Standard Oil, U.S. Steel Corporation, J.P. Morgan, Chase Manhattan Bank, and American Telephone and Telegraph all had profits in the millions by 1890. From the 1920s to the present, reformers and policymakers have sought to apply business practices to education, arguing that the efficiency innovations in industry that allowed the profit margins of giant corporate entities to swell would also effectively deal with the task of educating Americas children most efficiently. These policies have inevitably led to perpetuation of the perception that some students are defective or not as likely to result in the best product. This ongoing belief in, and dedication to, business practices in general, and in particular, the idea of efficiency has had tremendous consequences for generations of children.

The 1930s witnessed profound change as the population, reeling from the 1929 stock market crash and ensuing economic depression, responded with a new questioning of the status quo. Thousands of banks and businesses closed within months and “the

economy was stunned, barely moving” (Zinn 1980 p. 378). Just before laying off 75,000 workers in 1931, Henry Ford explained that the problem was “the average man won’t really do a day’s work unless he is caught and cannot get out of it. There is plenty of work to do if people would just do it” (quoted in Zinn 1980 p. 378). News clippings of the era provide a glimpse into the continued atmosphere of crisis and fear surrounding the poor and immigrant segments of the population:

*Chicago, April 1, 1932.* Five hundred schoolchildren, most with haggard faces and in tattered clothes, paraded through Chicago’s downtown section to the Board of Education offices to demand that the school system provide them with food.

*Boston, June 3, 1932.* Twenty-five hungry children raided a buffet lunch set up for Spanish War veterans during a Boston parade. Two automobile-loads of police were called to drive them away (Zinn 1980 pp. 380-381).

Government response to the Depression did little to affect Black Harlem where 350,000 people lived, 233 persons per acre as compared with 133 for the rest of Manhattan. In twenty-five years, its population had multiplied six times. Ten thousand families lived in rat-infested cellars and basements and needless to say, tensions ran very high and race riots ensued (Zinn 1980). Despite how difficult the Depression was for millions of Whites, the extent of the blinders worn by White Americans for those not of their race or social class became readily apparent. The reality for the corporate elite of this period, however, was that an economic argument for inequality was not in their best interest. While promoting the argument that hard work and attitude will lead to success and that America’s best feature was that it was fundamentally a meritocracy, the wealthy didn’t

believe this themselves and needed a way to argue that grinding poverty was an expression of something else besides corporate greed: enter genetics.

### **All Men are Created Equal, but.....**

We all remember learning about inheritance in school: smooth and fuzzy peas, brown eyes versus blue, the ability to curl one's tongue. This is the stuff of Mendelian genetics, used by eugenicists at the turn of the twentieth century to forward to the notion that governmental control of reproduction would lead to a utopian society governed by a master race. Popular culture was rife with the dangers of unrestricted breeding as eugenicists claimed that everything from criminality to poverty was heritable. The veneer of scientific legitimacy (graphs and percentage signs were popular) served the movement well as a way to explain social stratification by race and class. No longer would they have to rely, as did Charles White in 1799, on the conclusion that, "on the basis of anatomical and physiological evidence ... blacks were a completely separate species, intermediate between Whites and apes" (quoted in Tucker 1994 p. 10). Emerging out of these assumptions were whole new fields of scientific specialization such as craniotomy (study of skull shape) and phrenology (study of bumps on people's heads to predict personality) (Gould 1981). These and other scientists devoted to the measurement of human worth were eventually replaced by the new science of genetics. The rediscovery of Gregor Mendel's theory of inheritance was prominent in early eugenic rhetoric and continued to have an enormous influence on public willingness to embrace the ideas despite the fact the geneticists rather quickly (1915) disproved the specious claims of eugenics regarding the heritability of various behaviors and social positions (see Paul, 1998).

Originally, eugenicists claimed that it was possible to ‘weed out the unfit’ members of the population within three generations. Much attention was paid to when and how young people were socialized and introduced to the idea of marriage and family, and concern over who was having children with whom. With the abdication of the genetic scientists, however, this three year goal had to be amended. Eugenicists recalibrated and began to set their sights on America’s schools as the ideal places to effectively sort and classify the dysgenic parts of the population through the testing, tracking, and social control policies and practices made possible by compulsory education laws. At the same time, legislative priorities continued to include the goal of controlling breeding as much as possible through positive (promotion of large families among ‘high grade’ families) and negative (mandatory sterilization laws passed in thirty states) eugenic campaigns, and limit immigration (through the passage of the Johnson-Reed Immigration act in 1924). Countless organizations, journals, research agendas, lecture series, books, pamphlets, contests, and curricula were developed to promote eugenic ideology. Illustrative of this the way eugenicists saw their cause as part of a complete societal takeover is the Eugenics Tree logo, long the symbol of the movement.

A giant tree is depicted, with the words ‘Eugenics is the self direction of human evolution’ appearing across the trunk. The roots are visible and to every root is ascribed a body of thought, a profession, or a subject including statistics, biology, medicine, surgery, biography, geology, history, law, and mental testing. Along the bottom are the words “like a tree eugenics draws its materials from many sources and organizes them into an harmonious entity” (American Philosophical Society). Eugenic ideology had, and

continues to have, a long reach. Of course, in a capitalist society such an achievement requires capital.

### **A Natural Affinity – Funding Scientific Racism**

Racism and capitalism have been inextricably linked in America from the very beginning. This relationship has been effectively removed from the rags to riches narrative that the nation tells itself, to the benefit of the dominant white wealthy elite. Among activists and scholars on the political left, a longstanding argument has raged with the issue of race consuming one side and a Marxist analysis consuming the other, leaving the extent to which race and capital are connected grossly underestimated. It was, after all, the economic, political, and academic elite who funded, articulated, and popularized an economic and racial hierarchy that has dominated domestic and imperialist foreign policy for the last century. During the 1910s and 1920s, the juxtaposition of tremendous riches with low paid workers, slum housing, un/underemployment, and deep indebtedness required an explanation that would quell the frustration and rage fomenting in churches and union halls, on the pages of journals and at the meetings of various socialist and populist parties.

In order to fully appreciate the link between race and class, and the extent to which their intertwining has been largely responsible for carrying eugenic ideology forward, we must go back to the economic elite of a century ago. The Carnegies and Charles Davenport, who I will elaborate on in this section, are but one example of an impressive network of philanthropists and scientists working in concert to fund research and disseminate the message. This relationship carries on into the present largely due to the funding provided by the Pioneer Fund, established in 1937 by philanthropist Wycliffe



Draper. As the eugenics movement was drifting underground due to the rise of the Third Reich, Wycliffe Draper founded the Pioneer Fund as a foundation which has promoted research on racial betterment for over seventy years.

One of the leading proselytizers of eugenic rhetoric in the United States was Charles Benedict Davenport (1866-1944) who is credited with giving form to the eugenics movement for decades (Spiro 2009). Beginning with Davenport's establishment of the Eugenics Record office, backed financially by the Carnegies, dissemination of this ideology developed into an army of society's most highly regarded scientists, philanthropists, clergy, academics, social workers, and teachers. Eugenacists advocated a multipronged approach that would "dry up ... the streams that feed the torrent of defective and degenerate protoplasm" (Davenport 1924 cited in Ordovery 2003 p. 5).

In 1904, thirty miles from New York City on Long Island's North Shore, Charles Davenport set up the Cold Spring Harbor research station dedicated to the study of eugenics. Convinced that the explanation for human difference in society was an expression of heredity, Davenport dedicated the rest of his career to the study of inheritance with a goal of having data on every man, woman, and child in America covering everything from eye, hair, and skin color to a broad range of personality traits (Haller 1963). Unable to experiment on human beings directly, Davenport set about collecting inheritance data by developing a "Family Records" form and distributed hundreds of copies to medical, mental, and educational institutions, as well as to individuals, college alumni lists, and scientists (Kevles 1985). By 1910, Davenport had streamlined his techniques and he sought the financial backing of Mrs. E. H. Harriman who had recently assumed management of her late husband's immense railroad fortune

(Chesterson 1922/2000; Hofstadter 1944; Haller 1963; Pickens 1968; Ludmerer 1972; Chase 1975; Kevles 1985; Hasian 1996; Selden 1999; Allen 2000; Black 2003).

Mrs. Harriman's daughter Mary was a social activist with a liberal bent who worked in Davenport's laboratory while an undergraduate at Barnard. Mary brought her mother together with Davenport and the result was that Mrs. Harriman bought 75 acres up the hill from the Cold Spring Harbor station and funded the establishment of the Eugenics Record Office. So pleased was she with the work that she supplied the Eugenics Record Office with twenty-thousand dollars per year until 1918, at which time she turned the institution over to the Carnegie Institution (Kevles, 1985).

The family records forms distributed by Davenport, funded by the wealthy, eventually formed a large repository of data which provided the basis of Davenport's (1911) book *Heredity in Relation to Eugenics*. Davenport (1911) devoted over half the pages of his book to a discussion of the inheritance of dozens of human characteristics including mental deficiency, pauperism, feeble-mindedness, sexual deviance and laziness. Additionally, Eugenics Record Office data served as "the source of bulletins, memoirs, and books, on such topics as sterilization, the exclusion from the United States of inferior germ plasm, and the inheritance of pellagra, multiple sclerosis, tuberculosis, goiter, nomadism, athletic ability, and temperament" (Kevles 1985 p. 56). Furthermore, Davenport was cited by more than one-third of high school biology texts between WWI and WWII (Selden 1999) and the book is considered by many to be the era's most important treatise on eugenics (Ludmerer 1972). The work of Charles Davenport and the Eugenics Record Office provided the eugenics movement with a focal point that acted as a "center for research in human genetics and for propaganda in eugenics" (Haller 1963 p.

64). Between 1920 and 1938 the Eugenics Record Office published the “avidly racist and restrictionist” (p. 149) tract *Eugenical News*. In short, the message was everywhere.

### **Race and Economics – Making the Case**

It was to sources such as these that policymakers turned for guidance in dealing with society’s most intractable problems. As we have seen, industrial workers had existed in grinding poverty long before the economic crash of 1929, squeezed into tenements without the benefit of toilets, garbage removal, sewers, fresh air, or water, all of which contributed to continual epidemics of typhoid, typhus, and cholera (Link 1955; Hofstadter 1963; Zinn 1980). The government’s response was to criminalize poverty, making it equivalent to immorality. Poverty and the living conditions it engendered were thought to reflect some kind of inborn animalism on the part of the people. Eugenic leaders like Davenport and Kellogg, obsessed with purity and often dressed in white (Spiro 2009), offered proclamations which frequently contained warnings about the importance of hygiene, equating it with purity and breeding, through multiple channels of disseminations including advertising in children’s books and teachers manuals (Shannon 1904/1915; Sanger 1922; Scheinfeld 1939).

Eugenicists used their influence to promote the idea that criminality extended beyond mere heredity in families to mental digression on the part of the mother. This is evidenced by a story in Shannon’s tome *Eugenics* published for decades (1904/1915) with gilded edges and a black leather cover looking very much like a bible. The story tells of the mother of a young man recently hanged who admits that she had tried to get rid of him before he was born and wished that she had succeeded. “Does it not seem probable,” wrote Shannon, “that the murderous intent, even though of a short duration,

was communicated to the mind of the child, and resulted in the crime for which he was hanged?” (p. 228). Demonizing and pathologizing the ‘other’ was the way to convince the public that deterministic, hereditary explanations were the solution all societal ills from poverty and crime to mental illness and disease.

It is important to note that in their conception of race and difference eugenicists were careful to declare that not all Caucasians were of equal heredity. Descriptions often contained references to cultural stereotypes. Shannon (1904/1915) is typical, writing that “The Irishman is as unlike the German as the Jew is unlike the Swede. The brawny, cautious Scot is the opposite of the vivacious Frenchman, and the sturdy, slow-going Englishman can not sympathize with the irascible Spaniard” (p. 226).

Frequently, the connection was made between bad heredity and a threat to economic livelihood as with a display chart<sup>i</sup> (HHL) circa 1921 entitled *Relative social inadequacy of the several nativity groups and immigrant groups of the U.S.: all types of social inadequacy*. The chart depicts a racial hierarchy with Scandinavian and Northern European countries on top (as least economically dependent on charity and least likely to commit crimes) down to Eastern European and South American countries where the rates of crime and dependency are highest.

Another example of the ubiquitous imagery created by the eugenics movement is a “flashing light sign” used in displays to promote Fitter Families Contests (APS). In large white lettering in the middle of a large black board, the sign features the words “Some people are born to be a burden on the rest” with smaller signs above and below this message. The smaller sign above says “This light flashes every 15 seconds: Every 15 seconds \$100 of your money goes to the care of persons with bad heredity such as the

insane, feeble-minded, criminals, and other defectives.” Two smaller signs use lights to explain that every 16 seconds a person is born in the United States and that every seven and a half minutes, “a high grade person is born in the United States who will have the ability to do creative work and be fit for leadership. About 4% of all Americans come within this class” (APS). You might be wondering, with the cards stacked against most people reading the sign, what prompted them to accept this schema? The answer of course was that no matter where you landed on the spectrum, *someone* was lower than you, unless of course you were Black. Americans scrambled to express their superiority, relatively speaking.

Tacked onto the above display is a piece of paper advertising a local *Fitter Families Contest*. Here we see Uncle Sam with a cloaked, presumably eugenically ‘fit’ person standing in his hand gracing the poster in a thinly disguised suggestion of patriotic duty. People submitted their pedigrees, won medals, and were featured on the front page of local papers. Eugenicists were able to redefine the Progressive inclination towards charity by encouraging people to reevaluate their own potential to burden or contribute to society. Eugenicists developed a three-pronged response to the perceived societal threat of wanton breeding by those believed to be unfit to reproduce, the infiltration by millions of immigrants, and ‘the Negro problem’ by pursuing public and legislative campaigns to achieve mandatory sterilization laws, increasingly restrictive immigration laws, and laws governing the granting of marriage licenses to mixed race couples. New England philanthropist and heir to the Proctor and Gamble fortune, Clarence Gamble, was a longtime contributor to eugenic causes. So passionate was he on the subject that he was moved to write a poem,<sup>ii</sup> excerpted here, about the threat:

And one day he met  
another MORON  
who wasn't any cleverer than he was.  
But SHE was nicer to him  
than anyone had ever been  
And so he MARRIED HER.  
And soon there was a BABY  
and then ANOTHER,  
and ANOTHER  
and ANOTHER.  
And the welfare department  
had to pay the family  
MORE of the TAXPAYER'S  
MONEY  
and MORE  
and MORE  
and MORE (HBL-SHC).

The pursuit of mandatory sterilization, couched in terms of economic justification and morality, became a signature campaign of the eugenics movement. Beginning with Indiana in 1907, over thirty states eventually passed mandatory sterilization laws while eugenicists took great pains to provide the measurements and standards defining feeble-mindedness and degeneracy (Carlson 2001). Eugenicists used the constructs of

heredity and race to define normalcy in society in virtually every aspect of public life. A great deal of scholarship<sup>iii</sup> exists tracking the foundational nature of eugenic ideology in an array of organizations like Boy Scouts of America, the Young Men's Christian Association, and a wide array of 'Human Betterment' associations as well as a proliferation of state and federal policies and legislation.

The bringing to bear of fear to forward political and ideological agendas is nothing new. Eugenicists articulated their ideas as the solution to the perceived 'perils' of the time; immigration, the Great Migration, and miscegenation were obsessed over by the press (Ordovery 2003). Threats of 'Race suicide' and 'mongrelization' were waved around in hundreds of cultural venues, while depictions of poverty were pathologized as the result of 'feeble-mindedness,' a term developed to expand the threat beyond people who were black and brown, single mothers, epileptics, boys who masturbated, the blind, deaf, and poor, the sexually promiscuous, morons, idiots and imbeciles. It was an easy sell: it all came down to heredity. In 1911, Stanford University President David Starr Jordan (1851-1931) (remembered popularly as an ichthyologist and a peace activist) explained poverty this way:

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).

Virtually every person that did not fit with the dominant cultural portrayal of societal fitness was to be so characterized. From the United States Supreme Court to the halls of the local elementary school, a newly vigilant America was enthralled with eugenics as the promise to solve society's problems. After all, they had scientific proof, in the form of IQ tests, that inequity was inevitable.

### **The Establishment of Testing as a Tool – The Intelligence Ploy**

When we consider current research on, for example, the disproportion of Black and Hispanic students in special education, race and graduation rates, race and incarceration rates, and race and college attendance, we see that the present is infused with the past. The reality for poor and non-White children in the United States seems to have been anticipated by Herbert Henry Goddard, the first American psychologist to recognize the potential of intelligence testing for furthering eugenic ideals. 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).

The new field of psychology was a Petrie dish of eugenic invective. IQ psychologists were steeped in eugenic ideology and to a large extent it shaped their science (Gersh 1981). At the turn of the twentieth century, the most prestigious Psychology Department was led by G. Stanley Hall at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. Hall, long considered to be one of the *Fathers of Curriculum* (along with John Franklin Bobbitt, E. I. Thorndike, and James Cattell), came to prominence at the age of thirty-seven with the publication in 1883 of his *The Content's of Children's Minds*. This, along with his subsequent appointment as full professor of pedagogy at Johns Hopkins and his "soaring reputation as a scientist" (Kliebard 1990/1997 p. 37) led, in 1909, to his presidency of Clark University (where Franklin Bobbitt, another of the *Fathers* received his degree). Hall trained a generation of educational psychologists who, it might be noted, were a very close group, often attending the same schools and joining the same organizations, and who were to become the nation's testers. Hall felt strongly that class divisions were inherited, writing that each child:

will be not only tested from childhood on, but assigned his grade, and be assured the place that allows the freest scope for doing the best that is in him ... some are born to be hewers of wood and drawers of water, and are fortunate if they can be made self-supporting; practical slavery under one name or another must always be their lot ... Ranks and classes are inherent in human nature ... and each must accept the rating that consigns him his true and just place in the hierarchy of the world's work (Hall 1924 p. 465).

Psychologists, many of whom were part of the economic and cultural elite, were motivated to produce a measurement tool that would 'prove' the intellectual superiority of whites. Such superiority was, for them, evidenced by history; the 'failure' of Reconstruction and the obvious 'backwardness' of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, showed that beyond a doubt, Nordics were the only race capable of governing themselves (Gossett 1963). Accounts of the early days of testing show that endemic in the practice was a tendency to re-interpret data to fit prior beliefs rather than the other way around (Gersh 1981). Even when a recognized measure of high intelligence found, for example, that a group of 500 Black school children did slightly better than 500 white school children on a memorization test, a shift in focus would be used to explain the results. The experimenter explained that "in both races, of course, the memory is in decadence from primitive conditions, but as the blacks are much nearer to those conditions I naturally expected to find a much greater auditory mnemonic ability than is possessed by whites" (Stetson 1897 p. 288 cited in Gersh 1981 p. 22).

The quest for a ‘normal distribution’ infused decades of educational psychology research. Their mission was twofold: to provide the public with a scientific understanding of heredity, and to develop a test that would ‘prove’ hierarchical inequity. The effort to educate the public having been in place for some time, Herbert Henry Goddard sealed the deal (followed by Grant’s *The Passing of the Great Race*; and Stoddard’s *The Rising Tide of Color: Against White World Supremacy*) with his 1912 publication of *The Kallikak Family: A Study in the Heredity of Feeble-mindedness* which “functioned as a primal myth of the eugenics movement for several decades” (Gould 1996 p. 198). It was Goddard, in his capacity as head of the Vineland Training School at Vineland for the Feeble-minded Boys and Girls in New Jersey, who introduced the Binet intelligence test to America. Goddard worked on revisions of the test for American use, along with a number of other psychologists. Most notable of these was former student of G. Stanley Hall, Lewis Terman, who developed the Stanford-Binet test which was the standard upon which IQ tests were measured for decades (Gersh 1981).

America had long clung to its meritocratic narrative, and it is ironic that the pressures of the new industrial economy created a snag for the purveyors of the narrative. Unequal distribution had always been explained as a manifestation of talent coupled with hard work, but the fact that workers on the factory floor were doing essentially the same things in a common environment meant that “convincing measures were necessary to justify the hierarchical arrangements and unequal rewards” (Marks 1976 p. 4 cited in Gersh 1981 p. 50). Goddard (1920) reflected the national sentiment in a series of lectures at Princeton where he explained that “the disturbing fear is that the masses – the seventy or even the eighty-six million [of 105 million U.S. population] - will take matters into

their own hands” (cited in Gersh 1981 p. 49 n.5). Having established, as a result of the Army field tests, that “half the human race [is] little above moron,” Goddard provided an example that has alarming ‘blame the victim’ familiarity: “it is said that during the past year, the coal miners in certain parts of the country have earned more money than the operators and yet today when the mines shut down for a time, those people are the first to suffer. They did not save anything” (p. 102). Goddard and Terman worked to provide the rationale for a capitalist economy: that each was in his or her assigned place according to measurable intelligence. The fact that social class in America reflected racial and ethnic groupings was an added bonus since polarized groups represent much less of a threat to the status quo.

Using a five point scale of social class, ranging from Very Inferior to Very Superior, Terman found what eugenicists had been saying all along: that a small portion of individuals were superior and that the vast majority fell in the lower half of the scale. It is just here that capitalism’s dependence on racism and classism is revealed. The problem with Terman’s findings was that “capitalism needs as much perceived differences among individuals as possible ... for both on-the-job divisions of labor and for social divisions” (Gersh p. 49). A test which showed a wider range of difference among the working classes would get support because “if it could be made to look as though inequality were natural, as proven by science, rather than economic [in origin], then that was the test which would get funding and publicity” (p. 51). Throughout World War I, funding was plentiful and the wide use and publicity made testing respectable. Pre-war wariness on the part of the public evaporated and by 1920 Yerkes, who oversaw grand-scale field testing of IQ tests on Army recruits, “was inundated with ‘many hundreds’ of requests for

information about the alpha and beta examinations” while “extensive use of the tests began in primary and secondary education. Universities adopted them in admission’s folios... moreover; American business demonstrated a much increased interest in personnel testing” (Kevles 1985 p. 581). It is interesting to note that, although the use of the Scholastic Aptitude Test was, at least originally, a legitimate foil to the control on higher education by the nation’s economic elite by identifying ‘geniuses’ wherever they might be and ushering them into Harvard and Yale, performance on those tests rather quickly became predictable by social class (better schools, more access to test prep materials, coaches, etc.) and thus any meritocratic advantage was quickly subsumed by the dominant context.

Terman articulated the reason tests were needed in education by invoking monetary thrift and reminding the country of the real culprits in inequality: students. In his classic book *The Measurement of Intelligence*, Terman (1916) explains that the tests have “afforded convincing evidence of the magnitude and seriousness” of the problem, that “between a third and a half of the school children fail to progress” and that the United States is spending more than ten percent of the four hundred million dollar education budget for instruction that is “devoted to re-teaching children what they have already been taught but have failed to learn” (p. 3). Terman argued that while reforms around individualized instruction, promotion, and health might be admirable, they were unrealistic because they were “too often based upon the assumption that under the right conditions all children would be equally, or almost equally, capable of making satisfactory progress” (p. 4) which Terman adamantly did not agree with. Blacks, immigrants, and the poor had long been the losers in the burgeoning field of mental

testing. Terman must have felt comfortable, despite the fact that there were no non-whites in his sample, claiming that “their dullness seems to be racial” and that the frequency of “Indians, Mexicans, and negroes” will no doubt cause future researchers to come to the conclusion that there are “enormously significant racial differences which cannot be wiped out by any scheme of mental culture” (p. 91). These students ought to be “segregated in special classes” and “given instruction that is concrete and practical” because although they cannot master abstractions, “they can often be made efficient workers” (p. 92).

The quest for the ‘normal distribution’ having supposedly been achieved, Terman proudly proclaims in the opening pages of his book that “standardized intelligence tests have shown [that] children fall into two well-defined groups, the ‘feeble-minded’ and the ‘normal.’” Furthermore, he wrote,

there are many grades of intelligence, ranging from idiocy on the one hand to genius on the other [and schools are] wasting energy in the vain attempt to hold mentally slow and defective children up to a level of progress which is normal to the average child (p.4).

In what can only be regarded as eerily familiar, Terman recommends that “tests and forethought must take the place of failure and patchwork ... it is time to leave off guessing and to acquire a scientific knowledge of the material with which we have to deal. When instruction must be repeated, it means that the school, as well as the pupil, has failed” (p. 5).

Intelligence tests were seen as a form of societal protection not only against the drain of “the feeble-minded, the physically defective, the merely backward, the truants, the incorrigibles, etc.” but also from the previously overlooked “majority of high grade defectives” (p. 6). These “real defectives” were of particular concern to eugenicists and IQ testers because their ability to blend in and relative attractiveness made them most likely to reproduce with more ‘eugenically healthy’ individuals. “They may be able to drag along to the fourth, fifth, or sixth grade,” Terman explained, “but even by the age of 16 or 18 years they are never able to cope successfully with the more abstract and difficult part of the common-school course of study [but may] master a certain amount by rote learning ... but they cannot be taught to meet new conditions effectively or to think, reason, and judge as normal persons do” (p. 6). How relieved, then, the thousands of high school and college students, the field of psychology, and the general public who read Terman’s book must have been when they read the next sentence:

It is safe to predict that in the near future intelligence tests will bring tens of thousands of these high-grade defectives under the surveillance and protection of society. This will ultimately result in curtailing the reproduction of feeble-mindedness and in the elimination of an enormous amount of crime, pauperism, and industrial inefficiency. It is hardly necessary to emphasize that the high-grade cases, the type now so frequently overlooked, are precisely the ones whose guardianship it is most important for the State to assume (p. 7).

In light of the present demographic makeup of the prison industrial complex, the dropout rate, and the nation's wealth distribution, it seems as if Terman and the eugenicists have won.

### **The Infrastructure Prevails**

In order to move beyond what Powell (2008) refers to as premature attempts at 'post-racialization,' and unproductive attempts to identify individual prejudice, what is needed is a systemic analysis. Over the course of our history as a nation, policies and practices have changed, but underlying assumptions from the past remain intact. Whether we are examining the justice system, healthcare, economics, or education, the result is the same: historical residue embedded therein. The problem is that most times when we look back, we are focused on what seem like dramatic differences between then, and now. We are, perhaps, defensive, when we assure ourselves and each other that *we* would never think like that, or behave in such a way toward fellow human beings. We ought, instead, to focus on where the ideas went, the manner and form by which they were absorbed and institutionalized by society, and the extent to which they have become the stuff of bedrock assumptions (albeit in a less overtly racist and thus seemingly more palpable form). Systemic analysis allows us to step aside from our defensive posturing and look introspectively at the role each of us plays in perpetuating old ideas.

Let's contextualize again: if we take the twentieth century as a whole, we see that during the first three decades, eugenic ideology was explicit, popular and saturated the media, largely molding the way people conceived of social welfare. In addition to influencing virtually every major social institution, the racialized tenets of eugenics had a dramatic influence on the field of education and psychology up until the mid-1930s when



news from Europe started to dampen people's enthusiasm. As the realities of Hitler's policies and practices started to penetrate the national consciousness, eugenic organizations, journals, and proselytizers couldn't distance themselves quickly enough. The resulting absence from the national consciousness can be explained in multiple ways, but anyone familiar with the debates over history curriculum in school (Wineberg, 2001, Winfield, 2007), knows that much attention has been paid to the painting the United States in the most righteous, benevolent light possible.

The story we tell ourselves is the reflection we want to see, and is largely framed by the collective memory of the generations that preceded us (Memory cites). Take, for example, the 1954 United States Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education* which targeted legal segregation in schools. This was, there is no doubt, a monumental moment in our nation's history, but to focus solely on this moment is to lose the avalanche of additional information that is needed to understand the present.

For example, much is made of the postwar opportunities provided to returning soldiers in the form of the GI bill and of the establishment and growth of suburbia. What is less well known is that by the time the Brown decision was handed down, society was already adapting and finding ways to reestablishing a familiar social fabric. In anticipation of the loss of legalized segregation, "the housing market was being restructured so that whites were more likely to end up in suburbs. The Federal Housing Administration subsidized migration to suburbs and the Federal Highway Act of 1956 further facilitated the process of 'white flight' and disinvestment from urban areas" (powell 2008). This was not the work of some extremist white supremacist group, but

rather it was the federal government that provided racial language that infused the policies directing these social phenomena.

During the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) rewrote the terms of home loan mortgaging (from 50% down 50% in five years to 10% down 90% in thirty years) allowing a generation to purchase a home backed by billions of dollars in underwriting provided by the federal government. What is not discussed is the extent to which this economic opportunity did not extend to non-whites (less than 2%). Between 1934 and 1962 race was codified in America by controlling where people lived through zoning laws and racist policy guidelines put out by the FHA. Of \$120 billion in home loans, less than 2% went to non-whites which helps, in part, to explain why today, due to the influence of home equity and family inheritance the average white family has ten times the wealth of the average black family.

The resulting segregation has defined the quality of public education in low-income neighborhoods ever since. These policies, along with the predatory real estate practices known as block-busting and redlining were written into federal guidelines issued by the FHA until 1974 when President Lyndon Johnson signed the Fair Housing Act into law. Between the 1950s and 1970s we saw civil rights, tremendous judicial and legislative change, and proof that social change is possible in a pretty short period of time. We missed, however, the opportunity to examine the ways in which the system was racialized, or carried within the rhetoric of white liberalism, and whites never really personally resolved the extent to which they were beneficiaries. No clearer evidence is the extent to which the current sub-prime lending catastrophe that preceded the current economic meltdown was rife with racial overtones. In fact, sub-prime loans issued in the

1990s were “three times more prevalent in low-income areas and five times more likely in African American neighborhoods than in predominantly white neighborhoods” (powell 2008). As powell puts it, "The slick thing about whiteness is that whites are getting the spoils of a racist system without themselves being personally racist."

When Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980, the nation was close to bursting with pent up racist hostility and resentment in response to civil rights gains of the previous decades. The discontent was global and launched what is now referred to as the ‘conservative restoration’ orchestrated by Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. Starting with the 1983 *A Nation at Risk* report on the state of public education issued by a Reagan appointed presidential commission, it was effectively communicated to the public that the reforms (put in place for poor, non-white, immigrant and disabled children) of the past two decades had weakened us as a country, that we need fear of a *rising tide of mediocrity* (echoing the *rising tide of feeble-mindedness* of earlier decades). All this led to generations of labeling ‘at risk’ children and ever-thickening layers of so-called *standards* and *accountability* in education purportedly set up to achieve equity. School reform ever since has been consumed by the business of tracking, testing and sorting students just as before, yet with a new veneer of the language of social justice.

Since 1980 we have seen a reestablishment of the pre-Keynesian wealth distribution charts of the 1920s and 1930s where the top five percent of the population control over 50% of the wealth and the bottom 50% of the population control less than 3% of the wealth. During the 1960s and 1970s, wealth distribution actually evened out some and we know that even the slightest elevation in socioeconomic status can have tremendous positive effect on the lives of millions (and is reflected in school success –

see Berliner 2005). And of course, we continue to fund schools primarily through property tax, as we have done since the early 1800s, which in itself is a built-in system of inequity.

A survey of current trends reveals that it is this same emphasis toward efficiency that characterized the application of eugenic ideology to school reform during the 1920s and 1930s. The application of factory models of efficiency result in piecemeal curriculum, bite-sized chunk of decontextualized information delivered in a fashion most suitable for memorization and regurgitation. Our deep mistrust for students, their families and communities has been expressed by an increasingly Panoptic model of surveillance in schools (Kohl). From cameras in every hallway and classroom, to practices that require elementary students to march from place to place in school with their wrists behind them as if they have handcuffs on, our school administrators are expressing their unexamined fear and contempt in ever more controlling and suggestive ways.

Embedded eugenic ideology exists, too in the scripted, proscriptive, curriculum encased in slick packaging by textbook monopolies like McGraw Hill (Kohn). Teachers in 'failing schools,' and, by default, their students, are subject to manuals that dictate what they say, and when and to whom they say it, all timed and monitored by emissaries from the front office with little variation in form, severity or implementation. Underlying contempt for public education and educational theory altogether is expressed as well in the dramatic rise in slipshod teacher certification programs. Presumably, the thinking is: since teachers are told what to do, timed to the second, and surveilled anyway, who needs teachers who think, or who have a grasp of the historical, sociological, and philosophical realities of their chosen profession? Over half a century has passed since the passage by

the Supreme Court of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* and yet we have created a school system which is more segregated than it was during the 1950s when the *Brown* decision was handed down (Kozol).

The human hierarchy created by eugenic ideology is evident in the very solutions we seek to dismantle seemingly intractable problems like the impact of poverty. Take, for example the Ruby Payne phenomenon as an example of both corporate profit-mongering and pathologization. Despite decades of research that 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” (Gorski 2005 p. 8). District superintendents intent on solving the ‘poverty problem’ in their schools are paying millions of dollars to Payne’s company Aha!, Inc. for the textbooks and workshop trainings for thousands of teachers nationwide.

Payne’s overall message is that poor people are slow processors, that they can’t be made to think critically and that the best way to teach them is to know their ‘culture’ which she presents as the most stereotyped, steeped in history driven imagination. Payne sounds like a eugenicist right out of the 1920s as she 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). Poverty in this conception, a conception that is being delivered en masse to teachers in 2010, is a problem that needs to be fixed not systemically or through social policy, but by fixing the people themselves. Let us dismantle the system where students are being

encouraged to vie against each other and ‘Race to the Top’ and release them from mandatory school assemblies that promote competitions for high test scores between towns and offer picnics for winners (Marlowe 2008). Let us stand with teachers all over the country who are being required to sit through professional development trainings that are spurious at best and downright racist and classist at worst.

The pathologization and corporatization of humanity goes on. A profound co-optation of public knowledge is in operation not just about people, institutions, and corporations but also about representations of the past, harnessed by a deeply rooted racialized scientism known as eugenics. Eugenic ideology is insidiously intertwined in fabric of the nation, yet the thread is invisible. Progressives on the left opine about whether the preeminent issue is race or capitalism while the ideology of the empire, which is firmly rooted in both, chugs on. Eugenic ideology hasn’t re-emerged, it never left, and should be considered as the foundational root for much of the neo-liberal agenda and the deepening corporatization of the public sphere. The current assault on public education is a push towards a larger ideological agenda that will serve to substantially deepen the degree to which capital gain outweighs human solidarity. The assumption that some are more worthy than others, or that access to wealth and privilege is indicative of moral stature, is a premise that needs to be immediately exposed and resoundingly rejected. Let us begin, on behalf of our children, to stand for all humanity and to reject any further perpetuation of the oppression, segregation, experimentation, denigration, and disregard we have silently lived with for too long.



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<sup>i</sup> Documents from the Henry H. Laughlin archives were obtained as above. The collection is housed at the Pickler Memorial Library, Special Collections Department, Northeast Missouri State University, Kirksville, Missouri. The documents used here are from Section C, Shelf 2, Boxes 1-7, Section C, Shelf 4, boxes 1-7. Documents from this collection will hereafter be referred to as HHL.

<sup>ii</sup> The Southern Historical Collection is housed at Wilson Library on the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill campus. Documents used here come exclusively from the collection identified as Human Betterment League of North Carolina and will hereafter be referred to as HBL-SHC.

<sup>iii</sup> See, for example, the work of Chesterton 1922/2000; Hofstadter 1944; Blacker 1952; Link 1955; Haller 1963; Ludmerer 1972; Chase 1975; Kevles 1985; Degler 1991; Gould 1996; Paul 1998; Lemann 1999; Selden 1999; Stoskopf 1999; Allen 2000; Black 2003; Hollandsworth, 2008; Spiro 2009;.