



EUGENICS AT THE EDGES OF EMPIRE

NEW ZEALAND, AUSTRALIA, CANADA AND SOUTH AFRICA

*Edited by Diane B. Paul,
John Stenhouse
and Hamish G. Spencer*



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Hamish G. Spencer
Editors

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FOREWORD

This is a history of eugenics written from New Zealand outwards. Its antipodean editorial and substantive location helps us to understand eugenics in fresh ways. Most importantly, it brings us close to scholarship on settler colonialism, and the sense in which population quantity and quality was core to that historical project. Vital nationalism in settler colonies was fundamentally driven by the future prospects for, and progressive achievement of, hygiene and population health through purposeful reproductive management. This was quite different from the degeneration anxieties that drove so much European eugenics. As these chapters show, health, race, sex and nation were conflated in settler colonial nations in the antipodes, North America and southern Africa. No wonder eugenics thrived. Lands of freethinkers, progressives, and social welfare experiments, these were new world political and cultural contexts in which managed reproduction and heredity became deeply civic matters.

This book deepens our understanding of just how and why eugenics was such a familiar idea in the early twentieth century. We learn how eugenics morphed into quotidian public health and mental health and welfare structures of the era, and into seemingly progressive education plans. Chapters also clarify the eugenic measures over which there was consistent concern and anxiety; in particular sterilization and legislation to regulate marriage. Sterilization is the historical and historiographical touchstone for scholars of eugenic policy and practice. Inventories of states which did or did not enact compulsory laws are standard in the scholarship. Yet here we learn much more about the spectrum

of arguments, how easily state legislatures in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Canada might have passed more pressing eugenic laws, but equally why they often did not. This is part of the history of liberalism in the British world: at the end of the day, the Canadian states which did pass and enact sterilization laws were the outliers. To understand eugenics fully, we do need to comprehend local as well as shared political and social debate about consent and coercion within a liberalism that was being tested in the early twentieth century. Especially—as I have argued elsewhere—the power of the idea of voluntariness for eugenicists (and even, counterintuitively, ‘freedom’), is critical to address.

New Zealand, Australian, Canadian and South African eugenics is often analysed by social and cultural historians of race, gender and nationalism, and this collection displays that particular historiographical strength. Yet Diane Paul, Hamish Spencer and John Stenhouse together approach the history of eugenics from a slightly different scholarly tradition: through the history of genetics. I fully agree with, and applaud their insight set out in the Introduction, that we need to rethink the idea that eugenicists were bad scientists. That was a somewhat lazy analytical position that historians of eugenics held for many years: a convenient critique when the mathematics and genetics were hard, but hardly a supportable one. It is true that eugenics was easily and successfully popularized into better baby contests, maternal and infant welfare schemes, and widespread support for immigration restriction based on mental health, physical health and racial criteria. This is the terrain of the cultural, social and political historian. But so many of the twentieth-century’s great population geneticists were drawn to the prospect of the social application of their theories. This was an era when being a biologist and being political—and often on the left—was a common enough proposition. The history of eugenics is impoverished when we underestimate the complexity of the genetics that underwrote and drove forward the social and legal application of eugenic measures. Historians of science and geneticists are required.

This new history of eugenics offers a range of historical actors, both unexpected and familiar. We learn about Māori—Āpirana Ngata and Peter Buck—who shaped biological anthropology, an expertise related to eugenics, but not necessarily coterminous. We learn about social reformer and politician William Pember Reeves, and about Truby King, the iconic New Zealand figure in that archetypal early twentieth-century

enterprise, ‘mothercraft’. The sometimes facile finger-pointing to historical figures declared to be a ‘eugenicist’—the common tendency to perform a eugenic exposé—is here itself exposed. But nor is this an apology. Rather, we see the value of subtle argumentation from historians alert to the spectrum of changing and disputed ideas about heredity and environment.

The history of eugenics always requires, and invites, the careful study of race. The chapters herein show that crude arguments that ‘eugenics’ was coterminous with ‘race science’ are insufficient. Indeed, we learn that eugenicists were perhaps least influential in the polity in which race science was most influential in policy terms: in segregated and apartheid South Africa. There, it is argued, pre-existing rationales for policies based on racial differences diminished eugenics’ power, or at least made eugenics less necessary. At the same time, maintaining and improving the health and purity of a threatened white population was a declared imperative. For settler-colonies-turned-new-nations, the quality and quantity of ‘whiteness’ was paramount, as many chapters here detail.

Crucially, eugenics’ heyday happened to coincide with the formation of new national polities—Australia in 1901 and South Africa in 1910—and dominion status for Canada, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa in the aftermath of the Imperial Conference in London in 1907. Nation-building within a racially alert transnational context is the key context for understanding eugenics in the Dominions. There is thus a particular history of eugenics in this British world, at least as much about the early twentieth-century period as anything else. This is perhaps the most significant rationale for a collected history of eugenics in New Zealand, Australia, South Africa and Canada. It is long overdue, and I commend the editors and contributors for seizing the opportunity, the rich challenge and the intellectual reward of bringing these histories together.

Jesus College, Cambridge

Alison Bashford

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The papers have all been substantially revised for the volume, with several new contributions solicited to fill geographic and topical gaps.

The editors are most grateful to Alison Bashford for writing the Foreword to the book. We would like to thank Molly Beck and Oliver Dyer at Palgrave Macmillan for their work in helping the project to a successful conclusion, and Erika Dyck for her insightful contributions to the Introduction.

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Introduction: Eugenics as a Transnational Subject: The British Dominions

Diane B. Paul, John Stenhouse and Hamish G. Spencer

In recent years, scholarship on the history of eugenics has taken an increasingly comparative and international turn.¹ In part, this trend reflects the realization that the central ideas of eugenics surfaced ‘more or less simultaneously across many parts of the world’, with enthusiasts in various countries attending the same congresses, reading the same texts, exchanging ideas, and monitoring developments elsewhere.² It also reflects a recognition that long-standing generalizations about the nature and trajectory of eugenics have typically rested on only a handful of cases, notably those of the US, Britain and Germany. Insights derived from studies of the movement in other countries and regions (combined

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with new scholarship on the classic cases), have challenged many conventional assumptions, in particular, that modern eugenics began with Sir Francis Galton in the latter half of the nineteenth century, began to lose scientific support in the 1920s, and came to an end with the defeat of Nazism. In contesting the standard periodization, scholars have noted that concerns with the transmission of hereditary defect and responsible reproduction were rife in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries,³ have underscored the ways in which the disintegration of old empires and creation of new nations and nationalisms acted as a stimulus to eugenics in the years around World War I,⁴ and have challenged the common view that World War II was a watershed event, following which enthusiasm for eugenics evaporated.⁵

Recent scholarship has also disputed the view that eugenicists were invariably racial essentialists and bad scientists. It has broadened attention from what had been a near-exclusive focus on state policy, on 'negative' measures such as segregation, sterilization and immigration restriction, and on the movement's enthusiasts and successes, to include arenas such as education, religion, the arts, and popular culture, pro-natalist 'positive' practices such as baby contests and marriage counseling, and the movement's critics and policy failures. And it has been far more attentive than earlier scholarship to ways in which eugenics' meaning has varied over time and in space and to its co-optation for other purposes, such as women's use of sterilization to obtain access to otherwise-unobtainable birth control.⁶

In general, new research on eugenics internationally has reinforced the view, first importantly argued in Daniel Kevles's comparative study of Britain and the US, that the movement was remarkably diverse in respect to the practices advocated—ranging from free love (abolition of marriage) and access to birth control to what was euphemistically called 'euthanasia'—and also the politics of its proponents.⁷ It is by now a commonplace that enthusiasts could be found across the ideological spectrum, with eugenic aims applauded not just by champions of the political and social status quo but (for example) by many Fabian socialists in Britain, social democrats in the Scandinavian countries, and agrarian reformers in the Canadian western provinces. In many countries, feminists were prominent supporters. Thus, scholars have increasingly stressed eugenics' wide appeal; what the historian Molly Ladd-Taylor has characterized as its 'ordinariness' and adaptability.⁸

Never monolithic anywhere, eugenics evolved quite differently in different contexts. In accord with recent research highlighting the importance of place in the history of science,⁹ Stephen Garton notes in his essay for this volume that, although eugenics was a transnational movement, ‘its success and impact in specific national and State contexts was shaped by local factors of class, race, religion, social structure and political and judicial institutions’. By exploring the trajectories of eugenics in the British white-settler colonies, we hope to contribute to the ongoing effort to broaden the geographical scope of the history of eugenics and, in so doing, deepen our understanding of eugenics’ protean forms, purposes and meanings.

NEW ZEALAND IN THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF EUGENICS

This book developed out of a project organized by geneticist Hamish Spencer and historians John Stenhouse and Diane Paul that initially focused on the history of eugenics in New Zealand. It is a common belief that New Zealand, which never enacted a sterilization law, was inhospitable terrain for eugenics. Given this assumption, the country has been given relatively short shrift by historians of eugenics, who rarely treat it as a subject in its own right. Although scholars interested in the histories of feminism, the family, birth control, disability and other topics have certainly discussed their eugenic dimensions, these discussions rarely involve research in primary sources; after all, the authors’ chief aim is not to shed new light on eugenics but rather on other social movements, structures or practices.

The history of eugenics in New Zealand is sometimes also referenced in studies primarily focused on Australia. But despite these countries’ (relative) geographical proximity, they differ in several relevant and significant respects. In particular, New Zealand had a smaller Catholic population than Australia and a quite different history of relations with its indigenous population. Indeed, New Zealand was a distinctive laboratory of racial science, where Māori actively shaped eugenic discourse and practice. In contrast with the situation in Australia, anxieties associated both with the ‘convict stain’ and of the impact of the tropics on white men were also absent. But of course, there were also shared concerns, especially around Asian immigration, and a common pride in the vigour of their citizens and belief that as young and enterprising colonies, they represented a vanguard that could show even Britain the way.

Many New Zealanders viewed their country as a ‘Better Britain’, possessed of a healthier and more invigorating climate and as free from slums and a pauper class. As was true elsewhere, enthusiasm for eugenics in New Zealand was expressed across the political spectrum. Nina Barrer, a political conservative, leading figure in the Women’s Division of the National Farmers’ Union, and author of the 1933 pamphlet *The Problem of Mental Deficiency in New Zealand*, was a zealous and influential advocate, as were a host of prominent political and social progressives, including the Fabian socialist William Pember Reeves (the subject of John Stenhouse’s essay), whose successful advocacy of a series of labour and industrial laws importantly contributed to New Zealand’s reputation as ‘the social laboratory of the world’, and the land-reformer and religious freethinker Sir Robert Stout (the subject of Emma Gattley’s essay), who served both as Premier and Chief Justice of New Zealand. What these and other eugenic enthusiasts shared were assumptions about the superior quality of New Zealand’s white settlers and the forces that threatened it; most notably that the settlers were especially fit, vigorous and resistant to degeneration, that the Empire was the entity that a fit body would serve, and that a young and malleable country needed protection from corrupting imports. These attitudes, widely endorsed by the political and professional elite, seem to link New Zealand more closely to other self-governing colonies of the British Empire, or Dominions as they were collectively known, than to the US, the countries of continental Europe, or even Britain.¹⁰

EUGENICS IN THE CONTEXT OF BRITISH IMPERIAL HISTORY

New Zealand, Australia, Canada and South Africa were linked as colonies in a highly-interconnected British world. The history of eugenics in those white-settler countries thus intersects with the history of the British Empire. And as with the burgeoning scholarship on eugenics, the field of British imperial history is in ferment, with new research challenging longstanding assumptions.

For much of the twentieth century, historians saw the empire from the perspective of London or, less often, Oxbridge or northern industrial cities. Ideas, influence, money, people and power flowed from the imperial centre to the colonial peripheries. Economic historians Peter Cain and Tony Hopkins reinforced this view during the 1980s, arguing that ‘gentlemanly capitalists’ in southeast England drove both formal colonization

and informal penetration of places such as China and Argentina.¹¹ Late in the decade, feminist historians such as Catherine Hall, Antoinette Burton and Mrinalini Srinha began drawing Britain and the colonies into a single analytic framework to show how colonialism depended on and reshaped gender ideologies at home and abroad.¹² Although such scholars recognized that influence and agency flowed from colony to metropole as well as vice versa, they still tended to prioritize ‘vertical’ links between metropolis and colonies. The metaphor of the wheel, whose hub lay in Britain with spokes radiating out into the colonies, continued to shape, often unconsciously, much of the new imperial history.

In a series of essays now collected in *Webs of Empire: Locating New Zealand’s Colonial Past* (2012), Tony Ballantyne reimagined the empire as more like a spider’s web than a wheel. By highlighting the ways ideas, information, money, people and power flowed between colonies, the web metaphor highlighted such ‘horizontal’ connections—without denying the importance of ‘vertical’ links to the metropole. The web model also implied that colonial cities such as Wellington, Sydney and Cape Town might be peripheral in relation to London, but central in their own regions and localities; ideas, information, people and power flowed within as well as between colonies.¹³

A second approach to empire developed partly independently of this new network theory. During the 1960s and 70s, as decolonization advanced in Africa, Asia and Oceania, the white settler colonies of Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand fell out of scholarly favour as fields of empire. During the 1980s and 90s, however, historians such as James Belich, Marilyn Lake, Henry Reynolds and Saul Dubow published new histories of these places that highlighted their imperial dimensions.¹⁴ Beginning in the 1990s, a series of international conferences and a successful new journal, *Britain and the World*, established an approach to imperial history that focused on the reciprocal connections that drew settlers together into a larger, transnational ‘British World’. As the essays that follow demonstrate, this approach has much to offer historians of eugenics in British colonies.

We believe that this volume makes a distinct contribution by looking at the margins of empire. Several of the essays show how the ‘metropole’ idea existed in some ways *within* the colonies. While the British Empire was part of what framed eugenic thinking in Canada, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa, the colonies also adapted the models to suit their own governing ideas about citizenship, which broke

down along racial and ethnic (and gender) lines as well. British eugenicists focused on class, an approach that did not translate well to these colonial populations. In the colonies, ideas from the metropole were adapted to suit regional circumstances, such as the need to deal with indigenous populations.

Local attitudes towards fitness also seep into the discourse. If the British engaged in a kind of urban eugenics exercise, these colonial examples suggest that there was also a strong agrarian response that borrowed some of the principles, but appealed to local communities using a different logic—whether that of animal husbandry or agrarian feminism. Importantly, these were generally not urban elites or Fabians, but rather colonials who adapted the intellectual strains of eugenics into a practical—even populist—movement. Teasing these elements apart adds nuance to the literature. These were not merely copy-cat societies, but rather places that incorporated elite elements of eugenics ideology into an agrarian logic.

THE ‘WHAT’ AND ‘WHERE’ OF EUGENICS

In exploring distinctive features of the British white-settler colonies, the authors aim to contribute to ongoing historiographic discussions over what Philippa Levine and Alison Bashford have called the what, when, and where of eugenics.¹⁵ The essays in this volume, focused on countries at the edges of the British Empire, obviously bear on the issue of where, several that take their stories into the postwar world also bear on the issue of when, and because these colonies generally lacked sterilization laws, they speak to the issue of ‘what’.

The ‘what’ question is at the core of Charlotte Macdonald’s essay, which traces chronological shifts in the ideas and practices characterized as eugenic as they played out in New Zealand. She notes that ‘national fitness’ would become a byword for racial purity, associated with the worst kind of eugenics as practiced by the Nazi regime. But in the 1930s, the resonances of the phrase were very different in New Zealand and other Dominions. Premised on the assumption of the improbability and malleability of the adult human body, national fitness campaigns seemed the antithesis of eugenics. A state of unfitness was taken to be characteristic of most adults, who could profit from more exercise, rather than the pathological state of a minority. Fitness campaigns were not linked to breeding or to assumptions that some lives were worthier than

others. In a similar vein, Caroline Daley argues that baby contests both pre-dated and post-dated the existence of any organized eugenic movement; in her view, those who automatically equate such contests with eugenics miss most of the story. And Diane Paul traces shifting interpretations of Frederic Truby King and his infant and maternal-welfare agenda, showing how a ‘eugenicist’ label that would have been considered preposterous to King’s contemporaries came by the 1980s to seem obviously appropriate to many.

On the issue of ‘where’, Stephen Garton notes that, except for two Canadian provinces, the British Dominions—like Britain—never enacted sterilization laws despite the ardent support for such initiatives expressed by numerous scientists, doctors, politicians and other influential figures. Since these laws have traditionally served as a measure of the strength of eugenic sentiment, it is often assumed that eugenic enthusiasm in Australia and New Zealand must have been muted. However, as Garton has elsewhere argued, eugenicists in these countries had ‘significant and lasting effect’ in several domains,¹⁶ a point supported by Ross Jones’s essay showing that post-primary education in Victoria was strongly shaped by eugenic beliefs.

More generally, historians have become increasingly sceptical of generalizations based on the passage of sterilization statutes. One reason for scepticism is recognition that a few votes or even a single official’s decision to veto a proposed bill could determine whether a bill would become law. Several essays in this volume indicate just how easily the cards could have fallen the other way. Thus, Hamish Spencer shows that New Zealand in fact came very close to enacting a sterilization provision, while Alex Deighton argues that the level of support for eugenics in Saskatchewan was comparable to that of Alberta and British Columbia, the two Canadian provinces that enacted sterilization laws. Indeed, in 1930, a motion to the Saskatchewan legislature in support of sterilization of mental defectives passed with only a single dissenting vote. Its ultimate defeat was largely attributable to opposition by a particularly powerful Catholic figure. Garton also notes that Western Australia, where a sterilization bill made it to the third reading in 1929, could easily have passed such a law and Erika Dyck that only a lack of consensus over the exact design and implementation of a sterilization law prevented its enactment by the Canadian province of Ontario. Thus, in many places, legislative outcomes could well have been different, in which case

scholars would aim to explain why support for eugenics was so strong rather than why it was weak!

Deighton's recognition of the key role played by a powerful Catholic opponent in the narrow defeat of eugenic sterilization in Saskatchewan highlights a thread running through several other essays. In relatively small-scale colonial societies, committed individuals and minorities could make a difference to the success or failure of particular eugenic proposals. Several of our contributors show that able individuals could significantly shape the course and consequences of eugenic debates, especially in state bureaucracies, legislatures and medical and welfare institutions. If not for the determined opposition of J.M. Urich, a devout Catholic and experienced politician, Saskatchewan would probably have joined Alberta and British Columbia in legally sterilizing people considered mentally defective after 1930. The equally well-informed and passionate opposition of Labour politician Peter Fraser, several of whose siblings had spent time in Scottish mental institutions, was probably equally important in the narrow defeat of eugenic sterilization in New Zealand in 1928. Similarly, committed individuals played important roles in galvanizing public support for eugenics. Politically active Protestant women such as Irene Parlbay and Nina Barrer kept eugenic enthusiasm alive, especially among rural women, in Canada and New Zealand respectively during the 1920s and 30s. Whether they supported or opposed eugenics, powerful individuals might be seen as important nodes in global eugenic webs, importing into their own context ideas and practices from other places, reconfiguring these for local purposes, and spinning new connections—webs within webs—across local, regional and national boundaries.

There are other concerns about the tendency to draw broad generalizations from the fact that a jurisdiction legalized or declined to legalize sterilization. One consideration is that the relation of law to actual practice in this domain was far from straightforward. Thus sterilization procedures appear to have been common in institutions in some jurisdictions that had no enabling laws, and in others, such laws apparently limited what had been customary practice, and indeed, were sometimes opposed by physicians for this reason.¹⁷ Referencing Michel Foucault's concept of 'tacitly tolerated illegalities', Garton notes that in institutions in both Australia and New Zealand, sterilizations took place outside the law, and that some doctors felt that legislation was unnecessary and potentially complicating.¹⁸ Erika Dyck similarly notes that despite the lack of authorizing legislation, Ontario schools for feeble-minded

children engaged in sexual sterilizations. Another caveat is that motivations for sterilization, both among doctors and patients, could be mixed. In particular, patients, sometimes in collusion with doctors, could turn the laws to their own ends, using them to gain access to a safe form of birth control.¹⁹ Dyck comments that women who effectively subverted the eugenics laws are included in the numbers of people sterilized through eugenics programmes, a situation that ‘reminds us that we cannot simply rely on the numbers or the policies alone to help us understand the motivations behind sterilization operations, or to categorize them as eugenic or not’.

We note that the cases that dominate this collection are not the typical examples of jurisdictions that enacted sterilization laws or developed explicit eugenic programmes, although in some cases legislation was debated and nearly enacted. They instead illustrate features that distinguish eugenics in these white-settler nations from eugenics in the US and Europe, where as Alison Bashford notes in her Foreword, fear of degeneration drove the movement and accounts for its wide popular support. These new, agrarian nations were optimistic, marked by confidence in the future and the belief that they were especially healthy, open, experimental, vigorous and socially progressive. Management of reproduction was seen as crucial in maintaining these qualities and hence the societies’ associated vanguard status. But concerns about population quality were expressed more in the shaping of health, welfare and educational policy and in religious and popular culture than in state measures to prevent ‘degenerates’ from breeding. They were also expressed in policies to ensure the racial purity of settler populations (which in New Zealand incorporated Māori) through measures to protect against contamination by outsiders—a point that brings us to the vexed topic of eugenics and race.

COMPLEXITIES OF RACE

An important thread in the essays is reflection on eugenicists’ attitudes toward racial purity and racial mixing. In general, the contributors to this volume support Levine and Bashford’s claim that:

Eugenics and racism have become almost interchangeable terms, but the association is perhaps too simplistic. Historical work on eugenics shows that much, if not most eugenic intervention was directed at ‘degenerates’

who already ‘belonged’, racially or ethnically: ‘internal threats’ or ‘the enemy within’, whose continued presence diluted the race. ... To be sure, these were projects of racial nationalism and indeed racial purity – eugenics was never *not* about race – but the objects of intervention, the subjects understood to be ‘polluting’, were often not racial outsiders, but marginalized insiders ...²⁰

Support for this claim is provided by Susanne M. Klausen, who shows that in South Africa, eugenic concerns and intervention focused largely on poor whites, whose racial weaknesses were seen to render the system vulnerable to swamping by the immensely larger black population. Klausen notes that because poor whites were a much smaller group than Africans, they were also far easier to target for eugenic intervention, and they were indeed the targets of a campaign to establish birth-control clinics, the only instance of a successful campaign initiated and led by eugenicists. In the Antipodes, attitudes towards racial purity and racial mixing were also complex and perhaps surprising. Garton notes that, in Australia, the major threats to the nation were seen as external rather than internal. Australian aboriginals were considered a ‘doomed race’, and hence of little eugenic concern. Asians were another story. The new nation was founded on a ‘White Australia’ policy, which required fending off the Asian hordes and, as Ross Jones notes, preventing the immigration of inferior whites. As a result, pro-natalism was a strong strand in Australian eugenics, with quantity trumping the quality of births.

In New Zealand as well, eugenicists did not target the indigenous population. Here we want to emphasize New Zealand’s distinctiveness and its significance for the ‘where’ of eugenics. Existing studies of British colonial eugenics rarely pay much attention to the ways in which the colonized shaped eugenic thinking and practice, partly because primary sources are often lacking. Chloe Campbell’s study of colonial Kenya, for example, focused largely on the eugenic attitudes and practices of British settlers.²¹ The essays by Stenhouse, Wanhalla, Brookes and Spencer show that educated Māori leaders actively participated in debates about population, health reform, racial science and eugenics, shaping the kinds of biopolitical discourses and practices that proved acceptable in New Zealand.

The ‘webs of empire’ model illuminates better than does a ‘British world’ approach why this was the case. Before explaining why, we note that one of the strengths of the former lies in recognizing the continuing

saliency of religious institutions and movements in modern imperial webs. Historians such as Ballantyne, Chris Bayly, Sujit Sivasundaram, David Hempton, Rowan Strong, Hilary Carey and Colin Barr have contributed in diverse ways to a growing body of scholarship acknowledging that religious as well as secular people, institutions, networks and processes helped make the modern world.²² Much ‘British world’ scholarship, by contrast, pays at best passing attention to religion. Neither James Belich’s *Replenishing the Earth* nor Gary Magee and Andrew Thomson’s massive *Empire and Globalisation*, for example, contain entries for churches or religious organizations.²³

With religion also returning to the agenda of historians of eugenics recently, we suggest that it may be timely to integrate religion, eugenics and race with the new network-oriented imperial history. New Zealand illustrates the uses colonized people made of British religious networks. Anglican missionaries founded Te Aute College for Māori boys (as well as Hukarere College for girls) in 1854 to train future Māori leaders. The schools’ founders did not want Māori either to die out or to become nothing more than ‘hewers of wood and drawers of water’ for white settlers—a subjugated and potentially dangerous underclass. A group of able young Māori men—Māui Pōmare, Āpirana Ngata, Te Rangi Hīroa (Peter Buck), and Rēweti Kōhere—used their Te Aute education to go on to post-secondary education and leadership in church, state and society, where they worked to revitalize Māori society.

Yet these Māori leaders did not confine their search for intellectual and social resources to British religious networks. They also forged links with America. While studying at Te Aute, for example, Māui Pōmare met American Seventh-day Adventist missionaries who urged him to become a medical missionary. Training under Adventist health reformer John Harvey Kellogg, a eugenicist, at Battle Creek, Michigan and then at the Adventists’ Medical Missionary College at Chicago, Pōmare obtained a medical degree in 1899 before returning to New Zealand in 1900 and working as a Māori health officer to improve health and sanitation among Māori communities. After serving as minister of the Cook Islands from 1916 to 1928, Pōmare became New Zealand Minister of Health between 1923 and 1926, where his efforts, along with Truby King’s, substantially enhanced maternal welfare and infant mortality among both Māori and Pākehā (New Zealanders of European origin). In 1924, Pōmare established the Committee of Inquiry into Mental Defectives and Sexual Offenders. Buck, who worked with Pōmare as a Māori health

officer, also exploited American connections to become professor of anthropology (1932–1934) at Yale University and director of the Bishop Museum in Hawaii from 1936. As the essays by Stenhouse, Wanhalla and Spencer make clear, thanks to the efforts of Te Aute-trained Māori leaders such as Pōmare, Ngata and Buck, no New Zealand eugenicist in the 1920s, when enthusiasm peaked, ever advocated sterilization, segregation or marriage restriction for Māori or mixed-race New Zealanders. These men would have given such proposals short shrift.

As Barbara Brookes shows, from the beginning of European settlement, Māori had aimed to incorporate the newcomers into their own society, with intermarriage a means to this end. But by the 1920s, even men who were themselves offspring of Māori–Pākehā unions had become alarmed by the prospect of liaisons between Chinese market-gardeners and their female Māori employees. According to Brookes, Ngata, Buck and others devised hierarchical racial sciences and eugenic policies, the latter targeting Chinese. Erika Dyck's essay similarly highlights indigenous agency in Canada, where some First Nations and Inuit women with large families used eugenic laws to opt for sterilization. The colonized sometimes used the eugenic ideas and practices of the colonizers to enhance their own welfare and that of their families, local communities, tribes/bands and nations. Thus, the history of attitudes toward racial purity and mixing in New Zealand and toward eugenic sterilization in Canada illustrate Bashford and Levine's point that the links between eugenics and racism are anything but simple.

Māori leaders were not the only colonial eugenicists who looked beyond the British world. Thus in 1927, Theodore Gray, Director-General of New Zealand's Mental Hospitals Department, went on a thirteen-country tour of mental institutions and special schools specifically to enquire into which eugenic measures might be suitable for his country. As well as Britain and Canada, Gray visited Belgium, Germany and the United States. William Pember Reeves was one of several Australasian labour politicians to argue that Britain's involvement in India and East Asia made her immigration policy too Asian-friendly. He argued that the more exclusionary and anti-Asian immigration laws of American states such as California offered a better model for progressive colonies Down Under. Later New Zealand eugenicists often had contact with their peers in the US and followed the American literature and American developments. Thus Charles B. Davenport, director of the Eugenics Record Office at Cold Spring Harbor, New York, lectured in

New Zealand in 1914, and the works of Lothrop Stoddard, especially his *The Rising Tide of Color against White World-Supremacy*, were frequently cited by New Zealand eugenicists obsessed with the threat of swamping by Asians. Opponents of eugenics also kept up with American literature and developments. Many in the Dominions read and cited Franz Boas, the German-American anthropologist. Peter Fraser, the main New Zealand Labour Party critic of eugenics, attacked California's enthusiasm for eugenic sterilization as scientifically dubious and morally repulsive.

Racial anxieties instead focused on Asians, especially Indians and the Chinese, the latter characterized by William Pember Reeves (whose racial views are analysed by Stenhouse) as the 'scum of the earth'. Unlike Māori-Pākehā intermarriage, unions involving Asians were assumed to produce degeneration. Racial purity would be ensured through immigration restriction and a host of other discriminatory policies such as the denial of pensions to the Chinese whether they were naturalized or born in New Zealand. Immigration regulations would preserve settler quality not only by keeping the Asian hordes at bay but by preventing the entry of inferior whites. That perspective is encapsulated in the closing passage of Theodore Gray's 1927 report on his overseas tour, which quotes from J.H. Curle's *Today and Tomorrow: The Testing Period of the White Race*: 'Australians and New Zealanders still have it in their power, by excluding colour, limiting entry to the best whites, and preventing the unfit from breeding, to become, and remain, about the finest white strains in the world.'

Here we note another theme appearing in several essays. Traditional imperial history tended to be Eurocentric and value-laden, as the language of British or European metropolitan 'centres' and colonial 'peripheries' suggests. But where did the centre of modern civilization really lie? Could the colonies teach the Old World a thing or two? Were they becoming vanguard nations, showing the way to the future? As Gray's enthusiasm for Curle suggests, Gray believed that Australia and New Zealand were ideally placed to lead the Old World into a better future, providing citizens took their eugenic responsibilities seriously. Similarly, William Pember Reeves believed that the enlightened state experiments undertaken in Australia and New Zealand, less encumbered than the UK by social hierarchies, religious divisions and history, were blazing a trail for the world to follow. Building exemplary democracies in the Antipodes, of course, required keeping out aliens and undesirables of all kinds. Similarly, as Ross Jones notes, anatomy professor R.J. Berry

promoted eugenic educational reforms in Victoria because he believed that Australia's more open and egalitarian society had weakened the English class system enough to build an equal opportunity meritocracy. Modernizing nation-builders such as Gray, Reeves and Berry saw the dynamic young democracies of the south as leading the world into a better future.

As one of the chief architects of the colony's anti-Asian immigration laws, Reeves pioneered a 'white New Zealand' policy that, extended during the early twentieth century, resembled 'White Australia' more nearly than many New Zealanders, including some historians, have acknowledged. As this example suggests, the burgeoning field of whiteness studies galvanized by the pioneering research of American labour historian, David Roediger, has much to offer the student of eugenics.²⁴ Its central premise is that the category of whiteness, politically potent in the many parts of the modern world, is a contingent historical formation requiring careful critical analysis in time and place. An important collection by Boucher, Carey and Ellinghaus (2009), *Re-Orienting Whiteness*, has sought to move the field away from its American origins and focus by systematically reconnecting whiteness as a racial category to the history of settler colonialism.²⁵ By showing that eugenists in South Africa, reflecting long-standing tensions between white settlers of British and Dutch descent, mainly targeted poor white Boers, Susanne M. Klausen's essay in this volume illustrates how fruitfully histories of whiteness and of eugenics may interact.²⁶ As Barbara Brookes shows, even after a distinguished career as a physician-turned-anthropologist, during which he favoured Māori-Pākehā marriage and reproduction and constructed Polynesian racial hierarchies topped by Māori, Buck was classified as an Oriental (a category into which all Polynesian peoples were lumped) and denied citizenship by American authorities. Yet whiteness has limits as well as uses for the student of eugenics. According to Diane Paul, although Truby King's maternal and infant welfare work won admiration throughout the British world, his innovative approach was inspired partly by a visit to Japan, where mothers routinely breastfed their infants for much longer than in the West. Japanese mothers, from whom Truby and Bella King were not too proud to learn, were important nodes in the Plunket knowledge webs that spanned the world.

We hope to have shown that, in fact, nothing about the history of eugenics is simple, and that the more we learn about little-studied countries and regions, the greater is our appreciation of the complexities.

Those whose scholarly or political agendas are promoted by a simple narrative about this history will not necessarily welcome the caveats that result from this new knowledge. As the story becomes more complex, its lessons for current policy inevitably become less obvious. The compensation for the loss of immediate policy-relevance is a far more surprising and interesting story than one of bad people using bad science to promote bad practices, a narrative that makes eugenics' wide appeal—in the British Dominions as elsewhere—literally incomprehensible.

STRUCTURE OF THE VOLUME

The volume is divided into three parts, moving from the narrowest and least contested to the broadest and most unsettled conceptions of eugenics. The opening chapters by Stephen Garton, Erika Dyck, Alex Deighton and Hamish Spencer, have as their primary focus debates over compulsory sterilization. All discuss not only the sources of support for legislation but also the existence of countervailing forces, contestation and resistance.

The next set of chapters by John Stenhouse, Ross Jones, Caroline Daley, Angela Wanhalla, and Emma Gattey shift to other eugenic or eugenics-inflected policies, practices and attitudes. These include laws to restrict immigration and to regulate marriage and also practices and views in such non-legislative arenas as education, religion and the general culture.

The final chapters by Diane Paul, Susanne Klausen, Charlotte Macdonald, and Barbara Brookes concern the 'borderlands' of eugenics. In some form, they all emphasize conundrums of boundary-drawing, the difficulties of demarcating what counts as eugenics from what does not. They are thus not only about contested policies but contested meanings, making explicit the always disputed but also historical and changing character of the concept itself.

The distinctions among these categories are not necessarily clear-cut, and several essays could plausibly fit in more than one. For example, Caroline Daley's chapter on baby contests relates to eugenics in the general culture, but at the same time questions how much of the appeal is attributable to eugenic preoccupations. Also, we have not included a specific section on issues of racial mixing and purity because these are interrogated in nearly all the essays either in respect to anti-Asian sentiment and policy or relationships with indigenous populations or both.

Indeed, because these were settler populations, issues related to the latter are inescapable. We believe that its attention both to eugenicists' attitudes toward indigenous peoples and the latter's (diverse) attitudes toward eugenics is one of the distinctive contributions of this volume.

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‘Liberty of the Nation’: Eugenics in Australia and New Zealand and the Limits of Illiberalism

Stephen Garton

There is now a rich and extensive historiography on eugenics in Australia, and to a lesser extent New Zealand, much of it outlining the pervasiveness of eugenic ideas and practices, emerging in the last decade of the nineteenth and first decade of the twentieth centuries and flowering in the inter-war years.¹ Rob Watts has seen this as ‘the age of eugenics’ in Australia and others have echoed this claim for New Zealand.² The focus of many historians has been on the importance of eugenics in the development of a range of ‘progressive’ social policies such as child welfare, infant health, marriage guidance, mental health facilities and treatments, educational testing in schools and the treatment of criminals; and also in the thinking of key Australian social reformers and politicians—people as diverse as Richard Berry, Professor of Anatomy and W.E. Agar, Professor of Zoology at Melbourne University,

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Harvey Sutton, tropical disease and public health expert, Richard Arthur, child endowment advocate and Minister for Health in the NSW Bavin Government (1927–1930), birth control advocate, Lillian Goodison and feminist, Marion Piddington. Similarly, in New Zealand the list of prominent figures influenced by eugenics is impressive—Sir Māui Pōmare, Minister for Health (1923–1926), Sir Truby King, prominent child health and mental disease expert, Theodore Gray, Inspector-General of Mental Hospitals, feminists, such as Doris Clifton Gordon and Ettie Rout, and Hilda Northcroft, President of the Auckland Branch of the National Council of Women.³

The increasing interest in eugenics in Australia and New Zealand has been part of a more general growth in critical social and cultural histories of medicine, where the focus has been on medicine's role in shaping social policy, particularly with respect to 'problem populations' (criminals, delinquents, the poor, mental and intellectual disability) and how it in turn produced discourses that helped shape class, race and gender in specific imperial, colonial and post-colonial contexts. A number of historians both overseas and in Australia have noted that interwar eugenics developed a more sophisticated reform agenda, one focused on the regulation and control of the mentally deficient, usually termed 'negative eugenics', while also promoting 'progressive' social reforms, 'positive eugenics' as it is commonly called, for the improvement of those suffering social disadvantage. While there was a strong strand of environmentalist and positive approaches within reform eugenics, Ross Jones has stressed the continuing strength of hereditarian ideas, the increasing resort to rigorous segregation measures and the popularity of sterilization as a vital measure to combat social inefficiency.⁴ In this context negative eugenics has generally been seen as a dark chapter in the history of early twentieth-century medicine, a tragic instance of medicine overreaching itself.⁵

The Australian and New Zealand historiography on eugenics parallels international trends. In this wider context historians have highlighted the ways eugenics both promoted positive environmentalist reforms but also supported more coercive trends, challenging long standing legal principles and practices safeguarding individual rights in the pursuit of 'national fitness'. Desmond King, for example, has argued that eugenics was at the heart of a growing illiberalism in western culture.⁶ Prominent medical authorities, reformers and politicians, frustrated by the checks and balances of liberal political cultures and

the subservience of social policy to political expediency and populism, urged the State to base its deliberations on science rather than electoral success. Key reformers, doctors prominent among them, argued that certain democratic rights (liberty, habeas corpus, free association, the presumption of innocence) be set aside in particular contexts and for specific problem populations in the national interest. Ironically, Joseph Goebbels captured the transnational mood of reformers rather well in his address to foreign delegates at the 1935 International Prison Congress in Berlin, arguing that Germany was now 'opposed to liberalism' because it focuses on the individual, whereas 'we focus on the nation ... liberty of the nation'.⁷

In a transnational context, the evidence for illiberalism is apparent, most clearly in relation to the compulsory incarceration of many deemed irredeemable—the 'racially' or 'mentally unfit'—regardless of the threat they posed to the wider society or the severity of their offence (or even the existence of an offence in the first place). By the 1920s, most western nations and states had mental-defectives legislation, facilitating the permanent segregation of the 'unfit' in specialized institutions. Britain had a comprehensive system after the 1913 Mental Deficiency Act, as did many European nations and states in the USA. They were also increasingly common in parts of Asia and Latin America.⁸ Forms of eugenic segregation were commonplace. In addition to the armoury of mental-defectives legislative provisions around the world, there were related mechanisms with eugenic intent, such as the increasingly common resort to 'habitual criminal' provisions in some jurisdictions, notably the UK and some parts of the USA, where offenders who committed a series of offences (commonly three felonies) could be confined for longer periods (well beyond the standard sentence for the relevant offence) to allow authorities the opportunity to assess whether the criminal was irredeemable and might warrant permanent incarceration. In some contexts, such as New York and New England, such experiments had a 'progressive' therapeutic impulse, but where inmates failed to respond the prospect of permanent incarceration after committing a criminal offence loomed.⁹

The major difference between nations was over sterilization. The list of states and nations introducing sterilization legislation before 1939 is impressive—Germany, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Japan, Puerto Rico, Panama, over 30 states of the USA and two provinces in Canada, among others. And lest we think these are questions of anti-quarian interest, it is important to note that compulsory sterilization is

still practiced in the Czech Republic, Peru and Russia to name but a few places. Between 2006 and 2010, 150 women in Californian prisons were also sterilized.¹⁰ Equally noteworthy, however, is the list of those states and nations that failed to pass sterilization legislation, despite intense lobbying by influential citizens to do so—most notably Britain and its Dominions, with the exception of those two provinces in Canada (Alberta and British Columbia).

In the Antipodes, despite the positive and environmentalist focus of many eugenisists, the same trends towards illiberalism are also apparent. Britain set the pace for the permanent segregation of the mentally deficient with the 1908 Royal Commission into the feeble-minded, which subsequently led to the 1913 Act enabling permanent segregation under certain conditions. Australia followed suit. In 1913, South Australia also enacted mental defectives legislation and by 1920, Tasmania had legislative provisions for the detention of the mentally deficient, modelled on the British precedent, creating an independent Board of Control for mental defectives and establishing a number of institutions under its control.¹¹ Both Victoria and NSW, however, were comparatively tardy, failing to pass similar legislation until 1939. In Victoria, there were three major attempts, in 1926, 1929 and 1939, to pass comprehensive eugenic legislation involving the creation of an overarching independent board of control governing the segregation of mental defectives. The first two bills made it through the Legislative Assembly and the third was passed by both the lower and upper houses but was never proclaimed, the outbreak of war creating more pressing concerns.¹² Similarly, in NSW legislative efforts to segregate ‘defectives’ floundered before an Act was passed in 1939. As a result, both states had to juggle an imperfect system whereby juveniles could be detained in mental defective institutions controlled by the Education Department until the age of eighteen when they then had to be released or kept under state control through a different mechanism. For bureaucrats and state authorities the way around this legislative constraint was to certify as insane those reaching the age of 18 deemed to be a potential eugenic and social threat. Thus, through the awkward framework of two acts, and two institutional systems, Victoria and NSW managed a process of permanently confining some of the more severe cases of mental deficiency, frustrating eugenists who argued that the certification of insanity test was too high a bar enabling many feeble-minded to return to society.¹³ Across the Tasman Sea, the passage of eugenic legislation sanctioning segregation was comparatively less

complicated. New Zealand passed a 1911 Mental Defectives Act and a further amendment Act in 1928, which facilitated the permanent segregation of those deemed mentally defective.¹⁴

While NSW might have been slow in comparison to some other Australian states and New Zealand, in other areas of eugenic legislation, notably the extended incarceration of supposedly 'irredeemable' criminals, it was ahead. The NSW Parliament passed a Habitual Criminals Act in 1905, three years before similar legislation in Britain, to confine those convicted of a third felony offence for an extended period, well beyond the normal sentence for such a crime. The aim was to observe 'hardened' criminals for longer periods to see if they demonstrated signs of reform, and if not to keep them incarcerated to protect society and prevent their propagation.¹⁵ Similarly, Australian police forces and criminal justice systems eagerly embraced new techniques, such as anthropometric measurements and fingerprinting, for identifying criminals. Fingerprinting, a sophisticated form of criminal identification, an improvement on older Bertillon tests, was pioneered first in British India before being introduced to Britain itself after 1905 and various Australian states quickly adopted this new technique for identifying the 'criminal class'.¹⁶ The colonial periphery was by no means always behind, and, in some contexts, was ahead of, the imperial centre in the rush to illiberalism. Nonetheless, what is striking is that Britain and its Dominions, with the exception, as indicated above, of two Canadian provinces, resisted the on-rush of enthusiasm for sterilization sweeping many parts of the West, despite numerous influential citizens, scientists, doctors and politicians earnestly supporting this initiative.

In this transnational context, the failure of Britain and its Dominions to pass sterilization legislation is striking. What were the aspects of British and Dominion political culture that militated against the efforts of influential citizens to enact sterilization of the mentally defective? Was it the relative strength of positive eugenics? This may have been a factor but cannot be the entire story. Positive eugenics was also evident in many states and nations that passed sterilization legislation. Here there seems to be two important lines of inquiry. One, and the dominant one in the historiography, is that of presence: the who, why, how and when, of eugenics. Who took it up, why did it prosper, how did it impact on national politics, and when was it influential? These have all been important questions in the Australian and New Zealand historiography and we now have, as suggested above, a very good idea about the influence,

impact and reach of eugenic ideas in Australian and New Zealand. Second, and more importantly, is the question of absence. When we take up the problem of eugenics in a transnational context, what is striking are the differences in impact, most clearly evident in those states that enacted sterilization legislation and those that didn't. In other words, in an age of illiberalism, why did liberalism survive and inhibit the on-rush of anti-democratic sentiment in some nations and not in others? It is this second question that is the focus of this chapter. Why sterilization failed stands to offer crucial insights into the limits of illiberalism, the political institutions that stymied such tendencies and the specific national, social, cultural, political and economic contexts and factors that differentiated nation states in relation to the question of eugenic legislation.

THE CAMPAIGN FOR STERILIZATION

There were a number of influential advocates for sterilization in the Antipodes. Many of the key eugenics organizations in Australia, such as the Eugenics Society, the Victorian Eugenics Society, Australian Natives Association and the Racial Hygiene Association, had members and supporters of the campaign to legalize sterilization of the 'defective classes'. In pamphlets, talks, meetings and journal articles, prominent members of these organizations such as Victor Wallace and Richard Berry, Angela Booth, Sir James Barrett, Sir Benjamin and Lady Fuller, and leading politicians such as Richard Arthur, Stanley Argyle and others, pressed the case for sterilization, in an effort to alert the public, and parliaments, to the threat posed by the unchecked reproduction of the 'unfit'. Their arguments were bolstered by scientific research. Prominent academics and doctors, such as Richard Berry, W.E. Agar and others, pressed the case for sterilization. Sir George Syme, in his Presidential Address to the 1923 Australasian Medical Congress, supported voluntary sterilization. The pervasiveness of eugenic ideas is even more evident in the light of the range of reform groups that embraced it and incorporated it into a wider social agenda. In Australia and New Zealand, maternal feminists and birth control advocates, like Lillian Goodisson, Ettie Rout and Marion Piddington, campaigned for marriage and infant welfare reform with a strong eugenic element.¹⁷

While the push for better legislative provisions to govern the segregation of the mentally deficient received widespread support, sterilization was more controversial. In Victoria, during the 1926 and 1929 debates

about mental defectives legislation, many advocates of the legislation, inside and outside Parliament, proclaimed the utility and importance of sterilization. Yet as Ross Jones points out, despite this support, sterilization was not actually part of the legislation before the Victorian Parliament. Even advocates were hesitant, suggesting that Australian society was not yet sufficiently mature to deal with such a policy. Stanley Argyle, one of the Parliamentary proponents of the Victorian bills felt that sterilization had to await a 'more educated society', before it could be enacted. Segregation was the higher priority.¹⁸

Nonetheless, the push for sterilization legislation gained some traction in the interwar years. In 1929, a Bill proposing a comprehensive framework and Board of Control for the management of defectives, modelled on the 1913 British and South Australian legislation, but one which also contained a clause authorizing compulsory sterilization, made it to the committee stage and the third reading in the Western Australian Parliament. Although there were critics of such 'experimental legislation', and concerns expressed that the provisions would prove costly, give too much power to the State psychologist and might potentially open up the State to a flood of 'defectives' brought by families from other parts of Australia, the Bill and the sterilization clause made it through every stage of the legislative process till the penultimate one in the upper house. The death of the chief proponent of the Bill, Dr. Athelston John Menton Saw, Member of the Legislative Council, just before the final reading, however, seems to have opened up the space for the critics to triumph. Growing concerns about the worsening economic climate empowered others to argue that the Bill could not be afforded at this time. Finally, the Government called a sudden election and Parliament was prorogued. Despite the return of the Government the Bill was never brought before the Lower House again. Sterilization may have fallen at the final hurdle in Western Australia but it came very close to enactment.¹⁹

Legislative success also came close in New Zealand. In 1924, the Reform Party (Conservative) Government of William Massey established a Committee of Inquiry into Mental Defectiveness and Sexual Offences, chaired by journalist, editor and Legislative Councillor, William Triggs. The Committee had a distinguished list of members, including Truby King, Donald McGavin, Director-General of Medical Services, J. Sands Elliot, Chairman of the New Zealand branch of the British Medical Association and Ada Patterson, Director of the Division

of School Hygiene. The 1925 Report of the Committee recommended the establishment of a Eugenics Board to oversee the management of the mentally defective, and also advocated a number of provisions for the control of mental defectives, such as segregation, the maintenance of a register of all those deemed mentally defective discharged from State institutions, immigration restrictions on the feeble-minded, prohibition of marriage for those on the Eugenics Board register, as well as sterilization in certain circumstances, particularly when parental consent could be obtained or as a condition of release for sexual offenders. A vigorous campaign of support for legislative provisions to implement the recommendations ensued. In response to the rising public interest in eugenic policies and practices the Minister for Health, Alexander Young, sent Theodore Gray, Inspector-General of Mental Hospitals, to Europe and the USA to inspect eugenic programs there. Gray's 1927 Report, *Mental Deficiency in New Zealand*, provided considerable support for a number of the measures proposed by the earlier committee, and supported sterilization in particular circumstances, especially when it was voluntary or for the control of sexual offenders.

In 1928, the Coates Reform Party Government tabled a Mental Defectives Amendment Bill containing a number of clauses, including marriage prohibition of registered persons and a sterilization provision. It faced vigorous opposition inside and outside Parliament, particularly from the Labour Party and the Catholic Church. An election was looming and, while the evidence suggested the Government was well ahead, it clearly did not want a potentially noisy controversy so close to a vote. In this context, the Government withdrew the two controversial clauses on marriage restriction and sterilization. The legislation passed but the subsequent 1928 election resulted in the surprise defeat of the Coates Government, the United Party winning government, with the support of the Labour Party. Despite ongoing campaigning for sterilization legislation throughout the 1930s, sterilization never made it onto the legislative agenda thereafter.²⁰

Sterilization had its fierce proponents in Australia and New Zealand, mainly among the Protestant professional classes, particularly those interested in social reform. In two instances, Western Australia and New Zealand, the proponents came very close to success. A critical question with important historiographical implications is whether the failure of sterilization in the Antipodes owed as much to chance and serendipity as it did to the strength, or the imagined strength, of the opposition?

If elections in Western Australia and New Zealand had not been in the offing at the time of these debates would sterilization have become a reality? And to push the counterfactual further, would it have been possible that other Australian states might have taken the lead from Perth and Wellington and followed suit, emboldened by success elsewhere and fearful of being left behind?

While chance and circumstance, and the influence and political will of particular individuals, play a part in all this, as it does everywhere, the fact remains that in Britain and her Dominions, with the exception of two Canadian western provinces, sterilization legislation failed, in striking contrast to many other western jurisdictions in the interwar years. It was not for want of trying. Moreover, chance and circumstance must also have operated in the many countries and American states that did enact sterilization. My starting point is an argument that there were larger, structural, factors, not just happenstance, which shaped the failure of sterilization in the Antipodes. Below I try to sketch out some of these factors, highlighting critical elements of the political culture in Australia and New Zealand, some drawing on British ideas and traditions, that created a climate especially cautious about sterilization, even though at the same time eugenics was widely supported among the professional classes and segregation, at least, embraced by all governments in the Antipodes. It was sterilization that proved a bridge too far for liberalism 'Down Under'.

WHY DID THE STERILIZATION CAMPAIGN FAIL?

If it wasn't just missed political opportunities due to bad timing and the unfortunate conjunction of tabling proposed sterilization legislation when elections loomed, then what were some of the wider contextual factors that constrained sterilization reform in Australia and New Zealand? There is some oblique reflection on this issue in the existing historiography, but in the Antipodes, this question of the failure of sterilization has received remarkably little sustained attention. Ross Jones expressed surprise at the lack of opposition to eugenics in Victoria from traditional quarters such as the Catholic Church and the labour movement.²¹ Moira Fitzpatrick has highlighted the muted criticism of sterilization in Western Australia from these same two groups. Labour opposition was divided on the controversial 1929 Mental Defectives Bill, one of the reasons it made it so far in the legislative process.²²

The focus of Jones and Fitzpatrick on labour and the Catholic Church arises from the fact that historians, overseas and in Australia, have traditionally pointed to religious objections and labour's concern for the working class as two major forces opposing the on-rush of enthusiasm for eugenics. These factors were important in Australia. The Eugenics Society of Victoria saw the Catholic Church and the labour movement as key forces in the opposition to eugenic legislation.²³ But there was more than this.

Nations and states with sizeable Roman Catholic populations and strong Catholic Church institutions are notable absences in the list of states passing sterilization legislation. In the interwar years, the Vatican frequently expressed its opposition to sterilization (although the Papal encyclical of Pius XI against sterilization was not issued until 1930).²⁴ Protestant states and nations, in contrast, generally embraced sterilization. The complex theology behind all this would require detailed explanation and argument but in summary Protestant doctrines of predestination, grace, piety, election and the like tended to diminish the standing of those deemed incapable of achieving these states of being. Protestantism had also closely aligned itself to science over the centuries. Catholicism, by contrast, was strongly opposed to any interference in reproduction and its focus on saving souls also gave it a zeal for the redemption of all 'God's children'. These are crude distinctions but the evidence shows that the Catholic Church was prominent in the opposition movements to sterilization, even in predominantly Protestant nations and states, such as Britain, Australia, New Zealand, those Canadian provinces with a sizeable French/Quebecois population and the North East and New England states of the USA. The fact of a substantial Irish population in Britain, Australia, New England, New York, but less so in New Zealand, gives sociological depth to the theological opposition.

Similarly, opposition from the labour movement, particularly key trade unions, is commonly cited as crucial in stiffening opposition inside parliaments to sterilization. This was commonplace in the United Kingdom. In 1934, for example, the Mental Hospital Workers Union passed a motion through the British Trade Union Congress protesting any measure supporting sterilization legislation.²⁵ In Australia the significant presence of Irish Catholics in the labour movement meant traditional labour concerns about potential wrongful incarceration of working-class youths was bolstered by theological ambivalence about interference in reproduction. More importantly labour seemed more concerned to keep

cheap labour from overseas from undermining wages in Australia than threats from mental defectives.²⁶ Catholicism and labour were undoubtedly factors underpinning opposition to sterilization. Nonetheless, we need to look further for explanations in the context of Britain and her Dominions, especially Australia and New Zealand.

The first is the emerging late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Australian belief that the major threats to the nation were external rather than internal. Alison Bashford has done much to highlight the critical importance of the idea of the *cordon sanitaire* in Australia. Australian quarantine legislation was some of the strictest in the world, keeping threats at bay by ensuring foreign pests and diseases did not enter the country. This quarantine ethos was integral to the emerging national culture. Some of the important colonial legislation of the late nineteenth century restricted immigration of the sick and insane and in the early twentieth century the new Commonwealth Parliament and bureaucracy took control of many aspects of immigration, quarantine and other forms of health legislation to safeguard the population.²⁷ The founding legislation of the new nation was the white Australia policy. Some saw the external threat as economic, keeping Australian wages high to protect the workingman's paradise, but for others there were alternative factors and anxieties at play—protecting the race from contamination and holding back the potential hordes of Asia. Part of this involved expelling those, such as the Kanakas, who had already breached the borders. But a strong theme in Australian political culture in the early twentieth century was maintaining racial purity and in the hands of boosters like E.J. Brady this meant populating the centre of Australia to prevent Asian hordes from streaming into our unoccupied territories.²⁸ Pro-natalism was a particularly strong strand in the Australian population debate; where quantity of births trumped the quality of those births. Thus, eugenics was only one part of a broader spectrum of racial and population ideas enlivening and jostling for pre-eminence in Australian political culture.²⁹

A related factor shaping the Australian response to eugenics was the nature of Indigenous populations in Australia. The demographic decline of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the first century after European colonization has been well documented. By the late nineteenth century the idea of the 'doomed race' had taken hold. This meant that Australians perceived few internal racial threats to the homogeneity of the Australian population. All the major threats were seen to be external. In the early twentieth century rising Aboriginal

and Torres Strait Islander birth rates, and the emergence of noticeable *metis* populations necessitated a significant revision of policies towards Indigenous Australians. This underpinned what has become known as the ‘stolen generations’ policies of Australian states; the establishment of reserves and restricted areas for Indigenous populations to isolate them from other Australians and the removal of mixed descent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their mothers and their confinement in juvenile homes and reformatories where they received rudimentary education and training in manual and domestic labour. These were extreme policies of racial policing, but as Warwick Anderson and Russel McGregor have argued, the demographic intent was not eugenic in inspiration. On the contrary, well into the 1940s scientists, politicians and administrators believed that mixed descent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples could, over time, merge into the general population on the lower rungs of the social ladder. Far from being a permanent eugenic stain these theories of absorption and part-whiteness, where colour was bred out, meant that assimilation rather than eugenics dominated race theory and policy in relation to Indigenous Australians.³⁰

Racial theory in New Zealand similarly did not see the Māori as an inferior race that had to be eradicated. On the contrary, the Māori in New Zealand were seen theoretically and scientifically in relatively favourable terms. Edward Tregear’s influential text, *The Aryan Māori* (1885), argued on the basis of detailed linguistic and anthropological evidence that the Māori were in fact Aryan, related to European races.³¹ Thus New Zealanders, like Australians, did not see a racial threat posed by indigenous populations. Rather, the key concerns were external and the focus more on exclusion of undesirables.

A third factor was the tendency of Australian doctors and eugenicists to adopt an eclectic and pragmatic approach to problems of race pollution. While there were some hard-line eugenicists in Australia, the mainstream of the movement, particularly among medical practitioners, was characterized by a belief that both hereditary and environmental factors played a role in the production and effective management of problem populations, such as delinquents, the insane, criminals, sexual deviants and the like. Some saw a hereditary and eugenic dynamic at the heart of these social problems. Permanent segregation, and for some, sterilization was an answer. But others also saw gradations of ‘stain’ or in some contexts forms of criminality, insanity, delinquency and psychopathology that had no eugenic basis and could be addressed through environmental

interventions—probation, parole, education, psychotherapy, healthy outdoor activities, sunshine, rural labour, better nutrition and so on. Prominent psychiatrists such as Ralph Noble, John Bostock and Henry Maudsley saw that both physical and psychological factors worked in different ways on each patient and that heredity was at the extreme end of the spectrum affecting only a minority of patients. As Noble argued ‘both physical and psychological causes interact’.³² If this was the case then the eugenic obsession with heredity missed much in understanding psychological, mental and intellectual disorders. Indeed, it was part of the Australian national consciousness that the outdoor culture of Australia made Australians intrinsically healthier than those from the slums of Britain. Many saw environmentalism as more germane to the colonial environment than eugenics.³³

Others, like prominent Melbourne doctor and social reformer J.W. Springthorpe, felt that reformers could have more impact focusing on the environmental factors, because hereditary conditions were so hard to change. Reform movements, such as mental hygiene, carried great favour in Australian medical and reform circles, complicating single-minded adherence to eugenics. Australian Ralph Noble became a major figure in the US mental hygiene organization. Moreover, there was considerable confusion and debate about the dividing line between heredity and environment. The trope of curable and incurable conditions was integral to Australian medicine and social reform. Importantly many of Australia’s most prominent eugenicists were at the same time supporters of environmentalist solutions for curable populations. Eugenics and environmentalism were not polar opposites but points on a continuum of interest in problem populations.³⁴

This ambiguity about hereditary and environmental factors, and the debates among experts about the dividing line between them, provided the basis for a fourth factor, which weakened extreme eugenics in Australia. For politicians and legislators scientific debate was an anathema. What they required was certainty. If they were to go out on a legislative limb, then a scientific consensus was preferable. But this was not forthcoming. In Britain and America there were influential critics of eugenics, notably G.K. Chesterton and Franz Boas. In Australia, similarly, prominent doctors questioned the utility and pertinence of eugenic approaches. In 1938, when the Eugenics Society of Victoria invited J.K. Adey, Superintendent of Royal Park Mental Hospital, to give a lecture to the Society on hereditary factors in insanity he responded declaring ‘it

would be like asking a communist to lecture before a Fascist society: I do not think hereditary factors have a great influence.’³⁵ More importantly the Victorian Branch of the British Medical Society also expressed concern about sterilization, fearing that the scientific evidence supporting it was contested and that this might bring medical practitioners into dispute.³⁶ In the mid-1930s authorities, such as W.S. Dawson, Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Sydney, were still arguing that ‘as regards sterilization, I agree we are still ignorant as to the precise qualities which we propose to study in heredity’.³⁷ Similar concerns underpinned British debates about sterilization. The 1934 Report of the Research Committee into Mental Disorders, for example, stressed that the scientific basis for sterilization, and more importantly the psychological effects on the individual of such a procedure, were still a matter of experiment and debate. The Report urged further research rather than precipitate action.³⁸ In the absence of scientific consensus legislators were reluctant to enact controversial legislation that potentially infringed the rights of individuals and might be subject to contest in the courts.

The caution of politicians was reinforced by advice from public servants. In 1929, for example, the NSW Crown Solicitor wrote to the Inspector-General of Mental Hospitals advising that sterilizations could only be performed on the inmates of the State’s mental institutions if the procedure was for the ‘benefit’ of the patient.³⁹ This echoed similar advice from British civil servants during the interwar years. In essence the advice being offered to politicians behind the scenes was suitably cautious and conservative but also grounded in critical legal principles. In the UK and Australia, the advice was essentially that a legislative basis for sterilization could not rely solely on the principle that it would benefit future generations (by eradicating the reproductive potential of those with a flawed genetic makeup). The grounds for compulsory medical intervention could only be based on benefits for the individual undergoing the operation. In the absence of scientific consensus on the benefits of sterilization, a narrow legal focus on the protection of individuals from unnecessary intervention except where it benefitted the patient directly undermined eugenic arguments about the future of the race.

The liberal principles invoked in such contexts were the cautious protective ones embodied in Berlin’s notion of ‘negative liberty’—freedom from interference—not the positive affirming ones of self-realization more common in our contemporary debates on disability.⁴⁰ In the early to mid-twentieth century, a cohort of influential bureaucrats and

politicians in Britain and the Dominions, often trained in the humanities and law, sustained a focus on the civic and constitutional importance of checks and balances against equally influential voices proclaiming the need for social engineering and intervention for the national good. The former, however, were often in the interstices of governments, advising ministers and governments, counselling political caution where there was doubt and the importance of protecting individuals from unnecessary interference by the state. Within these cautious legal, bureaucratic and political frameworks, the state should act only in the interests of the individual unless there was compelling evidence that the state was threatened. For these bureaucrats and politicians that lack of scientific consensus on eugenics undermined the argument for excessive intervention, except when actual crimes had been committed (hence the ease with which habitual criminal legislation was passed in many jurisdictions). These ideas and dispositions provided an important discursive and legal bulwark against illiberal discourses. Far from illiberalism sweeping aside liberalism in the West, in jurisdictions with robust democratic and liberal political institutions—elected governments, independent judiciary, strong civil and public service institutions—there were powerful countervailing forces inhibiting eugenics.

One response to these protections was to push for voluntary sterilization legislation. This was the recommendation of the 1934 UK Brock Report, a departmental inquiry closely followed by the NSW Premier, who asked the government's Agent General in London to keep him informed of developments in this committee and any legislative provisions it might propose.⁴¹ But as critics of sterilization, including key ministers in UK Governments, pointed out, there was a clear contradiction in the idea of voluntary sterilization. Consent had to be based on mental capacity and yet the grounds for seeking sterilization in the first place was mental incapacity.⁴²

In this climate of debate, several Australian and New Zealand doctors who looked to Britain for precedent on policy, were reluctant to risk the controversy of pushing too hard for sterilization. Some believed that it would open doctors up to legal contest if patients changed their minds and sued doctors for a wrongful procedure. Reports in the British press of families of patients sterilized suing doctors and hospitals for 'alleged trespass of the person, negligence and breach of contract' heightened concerns of the potential legal pitfalls of operations when there were doubts raised about the 'consent' that had been obtained.⁴³

Psychiatrists in particular were anxious about their professional status within the medical profession and wanted to avoid issues that might expose them to criticism and controversy. Prominent doctor and mental hygiene expert, Harvey Sutton, argued that until the legal situation became clear ‘no hospital would permit doubtful operations’.⁴⁴

A final factor is that some astute doctors felt legislation was unnecessary. In recent decades, reports for the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission have indicated that the practice of sterilizing young women in institutions deemed defective had a long history in Australia and continued down into the 1990s.⁴⁵ Although not formally legal, sterilizations did take place in Australia. Patients in mental hospitals, reformatories and other institutions were subjected to sterilization operations. Similarly, it seems highly likely that some private patients were also sterilized. What was required was the consent of parents or guardians. In some instances, doctors could obtain consent and proceed on this basis. Governments and courts turned a blind eye to medical procedures obtained on the basis of consent. So, for some, the eugenic campaign to extend the capacity to undertake sterilization was unnecessary and threatened to compromise the doctor/patient/parent/guardian relationship and their current freedom to act in the best interests of their patient.

CONCLUSION

What does a focus on the absences or failures in eugenics tell us more generally? First, it suggests that while eugenics was a transnational movement, where eugenists around the world collaborated, swapped ideas, participated in international congresses and monitored international developments, its success and impact in specific national and state contexts was shaped by local factors of class, race, religion, social structure and political and judicial institutions. Second, it points to the fact that British institutional frameworks, in Britain and its Dominions—parliamentary democracy, independent judiciary, rule of law, respect for individual rights safeguarded in the courts and a disinterested public or civil service safeguarding traditions regardless of who was in government—were an additional bulwark against social engineering and illiberalism. Finally, the sense that the Antipodes were less prone to the hereditary taints of a decaying, urbanized West, where a healthy, vigorous outdoor people thrived, and hence where most of the threats

were external—immigrants and Asian hordes—fostered a much stronger sense that environmentalism was more important for social progress. Heredity explained much but studies commissioned by governments or the medical profession consistently found that the threat seemed far less than many a eugenic jeremiad suggested. Far from sources of contamination, as long as the borders were well policed, Australian and New Zealand citizens felt they were relatively immune to hereditarian taints and eugenic legislation was less urgent.

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Eugenics in Canada: Choice, Coercion and Context

Erika Dyck

This essay considers how eugenics played out across Canada over the course of the twentieth century. I argue that by refocusing our attention on eugenic practices, and moving away from eugenics as defined by legal definitions or Acts, we begin to see how the law or its absence has shaped our understanding of Canada's relationship with population control and reproduction. Moreover, by concentrating on the activities only of formal eugenics programmes, we risk distorting our understanding of this past. This essay explores Canada's history of eugenics by situating the historical debates over population control within concurrent discussions about feminism, birth control and sovereignty. Drawing from federal government records and eugenics programme documents, I argue that attitudes towards eugenics and birth control were far from uniform across the country, particularly when considering eugenics as part of birth control measures, whether demanded by a white middle class, or encountered by Aboriginal women in Canada's North.

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By examining cases that bent or subverted the law, I argue that Canadians participated in eugenics in unanticipated, even subversive, ways. However, the power dynamics involved in these cases, that of oppressors and victims, or resisters and survivors, is similarly complicated. Moving beyond a definition of eugenics as a form of sexual sterilization provides a more penetrating look at how elements of mental hygiene, colonialism, Catholicism, feminism and sovereignty used the language of eugenics to further their own goals. This blended set of influences took hold in a region of the British dominion that explicitly aimed to transplant Anglo-Saxon Protestant values on populations where French Catholicism and indigenous resistance to colonialism complicated the ideas of sovereign bodies.

In Canada, most provinces entertained eugenic ideas in the first few decades of the twentieth century, but only two provinces ultimately enacted sexual sterilization laws. Historians of eugenics in Canada have emphasized the activities in the two western provinces, British Columbia (BC) and Alberta, which maintained eugenics programmes from 1933–1973 and 1928–1972 respectively.¹ While this focus is partly warranted, it has nonetheless distorted our understanding of eugenics discourse and practice by reinforcing a definition that is tied specifically to coercive surgical sterilization. As others in this volume ably demonstrate, eugenics took several different forms in practice, including the use of institutionalization or segregation to limit the reproduction of certain groups or to stimulate reproduction among others. Furthermore, by looking at eugenics and birth control together, interpretations of coercion and choice regarding sterilization become deeply contested concepts.² Adding these features to the analysis widens the scope of this history by concentrating on how eugenic ideas played out on different bodies.

Despite the similarities between the sterilization acts in BC and Alberta, the programmes differed considerably. According to historian Angus McLaren, BC's legislators quickly descended into debates over consent that rendered the programme relatively inactive despite its forty-year tenure. Although the archival records have allegedly been lost or destroyed, McLaren argued that the BC programme was responsible for a few hundred sterilization operations.³ Alberta, by comparison, maintained a more robust programme that ultimately sterilized 2822 people, the majority of whom had been identified through the mental health system. While these two provinces have deservedly received the most

scholarly and political attention for their participation in a global eugenics movement, the absence of formal programmes in the other provinces and territories has left an impression that these other regions did not subscribe to eugenic ideas.

In fact, all four western Canadian provinces drafted bills for eugenics programmes, based around sterilization, as Alexander Deighton shows in his chapter for this volume, ‘[The Nature of Eugenic Thought and Limits of Eugenic Practice in Inter-War Saskatchewan](#)’, in the case of Saskatchewan.⁴ Legislative support for a sterilization programme has become reified in the literature as proof of a eugenics movement, while the lack of a programme conversely indicates popular or political resistance to the ideas of eugenics. A closer historical reading reveals, however, that the absence of a sterilization law does not mean a lack of support for eugenic practices. As the other contributors convincingly demonstrate, mental hygiene programmes throughout the Commonwealth pulsed with eugenic ideas despite the lack of a specific policy or law guiding their application.

EUGENICS IN CANADA

Canadian mental hygiene reformers in the early decades of the twentieth century fit within a broader international movement of intellectuals and activists interested in testing eugenic theories of social degeneration, the heredity of delinquency and criminality, and the associations between ‘mental abnormality’ and ‘illegitimacy, prostitution, and dependency.’⁵ The Canadian National Committee for Mental Hygiene (CNCMH) formed in 1918 with a mandate to survey facilities and programmes across Canada that catered to the mental health needs of the population. It developed in some measure as a result of the goodwill, volunteerism and spirit of social reform that had taken hold among middle- and upper-class Canadians at the turn of the century and merged with the international eugenics movement.⁶ Its provincial mental hygiene surveys later served as a baseline for the introduction of social and moral reforms aimed at reducing the numbers of individuals in the asylum and prison populations, which from the beginning forged a bond between eugenics and institutions.

Psychiatric hospitals, or asylums, and prisons emerged as the two key institutions in need of attention and possibly reform. The CNCMH supported a public health movement predicated on assessing the severity of mental health problems across the country.⁷ Although it formed

part of an ethos of progressivism, its focus was not on individuals in need of mental health services. Rather, the mental hygiene movement maintained an interest in the collateral socio-political consequences of unchecked mental diseases and the spread of feeble-mindedness, which tended to reinforce class and ethnic values. Fundamentally, like their US counterparts, Canadian reformers believed there was a strong correlation between mental abnormalities, or levels of intelligence, and criminal or immoral behaviour, and likened these categories to a social disease or epidemic that threatened to infect mainstream society. Families in the lowest categories of intelligence tended to have more children, which alarmed reformers and fuelled their argument that such families were poised to overwhelm the ranks of the intelligent. Ontario-based feminist physician and reformer, Helen MacMurchy, played a key role in inspecting institutions but also as the author of advice books for mothers. Her famous 'blue books' urged mothers to avoid working outside the home, to breastfeed, and to provide maternal care in an effort to stem the tide of moral degeneration, which she argued ensued from delinquent or deficient mothers. She ultimately became a vocal proponent of eugenics, insisting that feeble-minded women made poor mothers and should be prevented from reproduction altogether.⁸

Although the national committee attracted men and women who were chiefly interested in preventing further social and moral degeneration, the mental hygiene movement assumed different forms across the country. In Alberta, the CNCMH attempted to categorize individuals and predict their value or, conversely, their cost to society based on the severity of their abnormality or deviation from middle-class values. The survey suggested that '[a] mentally defective individual is one who through failure of brain development never reaches the adult standard of intelligence and personal control. Three sub-groups are generally recognized as idiots, imbeciles and morons.' The survey went on to state, '[i]n other words, once a mental defective always a mental defective. The question might then be asked if treatment is of any avail. In answer the point should be stressed that although mental defectives cannot be made whole as far as brain capacity is concerned, it is nevertheless true that the majority of morons can attain fairly successful life in the community when suitable training and supervision are instituted.'⁹ These reformers attempted to devise a sophisticated triage approach that allowed people to be siphoned into different treatment, rehabilitation or penal institutions based on the prognosis associated with their deficiencies

and the resources available in each region to manage its feeble-minded population.

One underlying concern of the mental hygiene movement was the potential problem posed by liberal immigration policies. The rather open-door policy that had been in place in Canada since the turn of the century had worried reformers who felt that other countries were using Canada as a dumping ground for unwanted members of their society, including individuals who exhibited mental defects, who were considered insane, or who were unable to work due to physical or mental deficiencies. Although early immigration attempts claimed to be avoiding the problems experienced in urban European centres by carefully selecting hard-working, British subjects, the aims were quickly subverted and immigration officials complained that Canada was consistently receiving the wrong kinds of immigrants.¹⁰

The Alberta provincial survey reported, in relation to immigration, that '[i]t is particularly desirable to reject the insane and mentally deficient because they often prove a greater menace than any other group'. It further claimed that, '[i]n other words, immigrants have contributed more than their fair share to the insane and feeble-minded population, and to other undesirable groups'.¹¹

These early stages of mental hygiene reform borrowed from the international discourse on eugenics and comfortably moved between institutional, sterilization and anti-immigration solutions to solve the so-called problem of social degeneration. Over time, however, the circumstances shifted to produce more diverse and regionalized responses to eugenics, revealing particular affinities to British and later American influences on public policy and eugenic science.

Nova Scotia established the League for the Protection of the Feeble-minded in 1908, which functioned as the first eugenics society in the country.¹² The Maritime region of Canada had significant political and familial ties to Britain and New England, even more so than with the rest of Canada, which influenced the shape of eugenics discourse in eastern Canada. Leslie Baker has argued that eugenic reformers in Atlantic Canada were primarily wedded to the idea of institutionalizing people to restrict reproduction, and were almost never interested in pursuing sexual sterilization as part of their plan to implement eugenic programmes. Until recently, these actions were not really considered part of this history, but as she demonstrates, eugenists in the 1920s and 1930s saw themselves as part of the wider contemporary eugenics discourse, even

arguing that institutionalizing eugenics had particular advantages over sterilizing undesirable individuals.¹³

Other provinces similarly relied on a combination of surgical and institutional applications of eugenic thinking. In Ontario eugenicists incorporated a mixture of segregation and sterilization, and the province was home to vocal champions of sterilization for people deemed feeble-minded, alongside birth control advocates who lobbied for better access to contraception for everyone, including superintendents of hospitals for people considered intellectually, physically or psychiatrically disordered. Ontario never passed an official law on sterilization, which historians have argued boiled down to a lack of consensus on how precisely to design the law and what balance of mental hygiene, institutionalization, birth control, and medical surveillance to include in a formal programme. In spite of this outcome, Ontario schools for feeble-minded children engaged in sexual sterilizations as a matter of institutional practice, not as a specific provincial programme or law.¹⁴ Meanwhile A.R. Kaufman, a Canadian industrialist and rubber factory owner, pedalled birth control to his working-class employees at a time when contraception remained illegal, making Ontario a critical place for debates over population control across the choice/coercion divide.¹⁵

In the predominantly French and historically Catholic province of Canada, Quebec, the Catholic Church played an especially important role in stimulating ideas about healthy families, which did not mean restricting fertility but instead focused on encouraging large families, especially among French Catholic communities.¹⁶ Although the Church did not condone surgical sterilizations, elements of positive eugenics stimulated a higher birth rate, tapping into a different current within eugenics discourse, that of positive reproduction.¹⁷ Concerns articulated by a French Catholic minority in an expanding nation of Anglo-Saxon Protestants in the rest of Canada adopted a pro-natalist agenda that fused elements of fertility with sovereignty. Over time these ideas acquired additional cultural meanings as the idea of a separate and sovereign Quebec became a political movement.¹⁸

The history of eugenics in the northern territories of Canada has been more difficult to trace and has been complicated by competing interpretations about colonialism among Aboriginal people in Canada. The spectre of colonialism loomed large in debates about eugenics in Canada and the degree to which such programmes, both formal and informal, targeted Aboriginal people. Karen Stote, for example, has argued that

First Nations and Inuit women were singled out for sterilization policies, particularly in the 1970s after Canada relaxed its laws on birth control, which effectively meant that under the guise of liberalizing contraception the federal government coercively sterilized Inuit women in the northern territories.¹⁹ Aboriginal activists in the 1970s merged language from Quebec separatists with their own appeals for self-government and lambasted the Canadian government for engaging in genocide, defined by fusing elements of colonialism with the more pernicious and targeted acts of sexual sterilization and aggressive birth control. This colonial dimension of eugenics in Canada reached a boiling point in the mid-1970s as allegations of coercive sterilizations in the North reached the popular press and effectively reopened the debates on population control in a colonial context.

By moving beyond sterilization programmes as the defining edge of eugenics, it becomes clear that Canadians have had a longer and more complicated relationship with population control over the twentieth century. Moreover, given the uneven spread of lobbyists, both for and against sexual sterilization, a regional analysis helps to illustrate how the concept held different meanings across different places and over time.

ALBERTA: GROUND ZERO

Alberta distinguished itself in Canadian eugenics history as having the longest and most aggressive sexual sterilization policy in the country; it operated from 1928–1972 recommended surgeries for 4725 people and sterilized 2822. Like elsewhere in the British Commonwealth, some of the leading advocates for the Sexual Sterilization law were early feminists, the ‘mothers of the race’ who found particular expression in the creation of a new political party: the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA), which came to power in 1921 through the combined interests and frustrations of disempowered farmers and labourers.²⁰

Part of the United Farmers’ initial success depended on its bringing women into the political fold. Women were formally admitted to the party as full voting members as early as 1914, and in 1916 the United Farm Women of Alberta (UFWA) was established. In many ways the women’s wing functioned as an advisory group to the main party, especially on issues considered specific to women or family, initiating bills on marriage, inheritance and family allowances; it was instrumental in forwarding the sexual sterilization issue.²¹ Once these debates solidified into proto-bills,

they carried the force of the women's association in the caucus chambers and, ultimately, at the ballot box. The Sexual Sterilization Act was discussed at length and approved by the women's wing before it landed on the desks of the male representatives, and the initial reading of the bill in 1927 consequently met little resistance. Within two years, the programme was in place, and a powerful group of supporters were in position to ensure its implementation.

Passionate speeches by leading members of the UFWA appealed for women to have a role in politics, in particular to add moral authority to the political culture in general and to extend legislative discussions to domestic issues. UFWA members linked campaigns for women's rights—defined chiefly as suffrage, property ownership, and inheritance—with what they identified as a pressing need to develop policies governing communities at the familial level. UFWA president Irene Parlby and leading party activists such as Emily Murphy, then chief magistrate for the Edmonton courts, articulated a desire for policies that emphasized the importance of family law and provided the province with legal means to intervene in family affairs.

These early feminist reformers linked poverty and reproduction even more explicitly with feeble-mindedness, and eugenics became a significant part of their campaign in Alberta, embracing the ethos of eugenics as a progressive approach to improving the province's families. Eugenics discourse, however, became connected to women's rights in a manner that privileged middle-class family values. The reformers first targeted their sisters in the working and lower classes, suggesting that these women were disproportionately responsible for social degeneration. The Committee for Social Hygiene reported that, 'of unmarried mothers 85% are feeble minded and should not be allowed to go on reproducing their kind. Mrs. Murphy had little sympathy with maukishly [*sic*] sentimental folk who shed tears over these people. Sterilization is being urged to prevent the crime which allows the insane to bring into existence innocent victims.'²² Moreover, placing such women in institutions in Alberta was considered costly and inefficient.

UFWA president Irene Parlby delivered a speech in 1924 directly on mental deficiency and prostitution in which she spoke of the grave concerns surrounding the subject and the urgent need for the public to consider its role in assuaging the calamitous effects of prostitution, illegitimacy, drunkenness and criminality on society. To that end, she recognized that modern society assumed that people considered mentally

deficient required care and support: 'then it seems only reasonable that those who have to carry the added taxation to provide this care should be interested in learning all they can about it, and have a word to say as to how they wish the problem handled'²³. The main problem, she continued, remained the high birth rate among people in the defective category, for which she recommended regulation of marriage, segregation of all mental defectives, and sterilization: 'Curious, is it not, that we cull our flocks and herds, allowing only the finest and most physically perfect to breed, and yet when it comes to the human race we allow the mating of the most diseased and imperfect both mentally and physically?'²⁴ Like agrarian feminists elsewhere, including Nina Barrer in New Zealand (discussed in Hamish Spencer's chapter '[Eugenic Sterilization in New Zealand: The Story of the Mental Defectives Amendment Act of 1928](#)'), farm women's organizations made explicit links between animal husbandry practices and social hygiene. They were not only appealing to their male counterparts, but to members of an agrarian culture, replete with experiences of livestock breeding techniques and the science of heredity. Parlby concluded with a special plea to women: 'as women, as mothers of the race, we should be considering this subject very seriously indeed. We should have every sympathy for those who are so unhappy as to have brought defective children into the world, through perhaps no fault of their own, except that of marrying into an unwholesome stock, a fact of which they may have been in entire ignorance, at the time of marriage. Our sympathy, however, should not allow sentiment to blind our commonsense.'²⁵ Parlby's comments demonstrate her commitment to eugenics, but also reveal the agricultural basis of her politics and, in this case, her arguments for sterilization.

Unbeknownst to her colleagues at the time, Parlby had direct experience with sterilization, having had a hysterectomy in 1918 after her physician discovered tumours in her uterus. The operation nearly ended her political career altogether, but rather than cultivate feelings of self-reflection, Parlby's operation appeared to cement her ideas that sterilization and eugenics had separate paths and that one did not entail the other.²⁶

In 1928 Alberta passed the Sexual Sterilization Act, Canada's first such legislation. Historian Bradford Rennie suggests that, in addition to tapping into international trends, the impetus for this policy represented the unique blend of maternal feminism and agrarian democracy that existed in the UFA.²⁷ Both the party and the UFWA gave political expression to a deeper set of fears about race suicide and moral degeneration, and Albertans moved forward with plans to improve their society by weeding out those who appeared to contribute less and cost more.

The medical definitions of defects were quickly adorned with social and cultural perceptions of difference, made particularly acute when considering the forces of assimilation. As western Canada increasingly became a destination for immigrants travelling particularly from eastern Canada, Europe and the United States, a hierarchy of desirability formed in the minds of reformers and politicians who designed programmes to weed out difference.

Ukrainian immigrants in Alberta were among the first to attract negative attention. A 1921 report by the provincial Department of Public Health identified Ukrainians as having a particularly difficult time assimilating Canadian values. Recognizing that most Ukrainian families in Alberta had been ‘victims of the most abominable social system the world has seen’ under the communist regime, the report also claimed that the Ukrainian language and customs put these families at higher risk of feeble-mindedness and made them more susceptible to disease: ‘the districts are not well supplied with medical men, add to that ignorance, and you have an ideal soil for the spread of venereal disease’²⁸. Moreover, the fact that Ukrainian women often worked in the fields alongside the men, though laudable for its display of work ethic, attracted criticism for their supposed neglect of their domestic duties, including rearing children.²⁹ The home, the report averred, was a key ingredient in the development of good Canadian citizens. This observation justified an aggressive focus on educating parents about social and mental hygiene and dissipating the cloud of ignorance that was thought to dilute assimilation strategies aimed exclusively at school children.³⁰ Lectures and sermons directed at Ukrainian parents attempted to convince them that they ‘are not mere “foreigners”, but that they form an integral part of this great Dominion, and that they must share its responsibilities as well as privileges. Once they catch the flame of enthusiasm, they will consider it their sacred duty, as Canadian citizens, to conserve their own health and the health of their children.’³¹

Unlike the eastern European immigrants, the case against First Nations and Métis communities is more difficult to substantiate. By the late 1960s, however, that situation changed dramatically. Leaders of an emerging indigenous rights movement accused the federal government of having been engaged in a form of cultural genocide through the period of colonialization. Untangling the politics of birth control, eugenics and colonialism introduces several contested layers of authority and should make us uncomfortable with a more rigid or static historical interpretation of eugenics as something that happened before World War

II, or something that occurred primarily to prevent people in custodial institutions from reproducing. It might also encourage us to look more closely at the relationship between residential schools for First Nations children and institutional eugenics.

But there were other ways that the law was inverted too. Alberta's eugenics programme maintained an official policy of sexual sterilization surgery for women and men deemed incapable of responsible parenthood. It also created opportunities, however, for healthy and, arguably, resourceful, and more empowered women and men to challenge these laws and to negotiate access to medically sanctioned birth control in the form of surgical operations. By considering these goals of the eugenic programme in tandem, it becomes clear that operations such as tubal ligations (salpingectomies), hysterectomies and vasectomies were foisted upon certain people and denied to others depending on who was asking and who was in charge. Rereading this history as the precursor to birth control invites a more empowering image for some individuals and raises questions about how we might historically assess consent within the doctor–patient relationship.

VOLUNTEERING FOR STERILIZATION

Alberta's eugenics programme was amended twice. The first amendment in 1937 widened the scope of the Act to include more categories of disease, and removed the need for informed consent for people considered mentally defective. This category was reserved for people whose intelligence quotients fell below 70; statistics suggest that this change also corresponded with an increase in the number of children diagnosed in this category. Alberta, it seems, was the only jurisdiction in the Commonwealth to remove its consent clause and not revisit the issue, even after the Nuremburg Code was in place.

These amendments to the programme brought other players into scope, by developing a greater reliance on the medical community that served in some ways as gatekeepers to the institutions. As historian Amy Samson has pointed out, however, this shift to a different set of authorities had a domino effect as it then engaged new levels of professionals, from nurses to social workers, teachers and even parents, in a more comprehensive and normalized matrix of surveillance over people deemed 'unfit' who brought eugenic practices into the community.³² This change in practice corresponded with another amendment to the Act

in 1942, which widened the mandate to include non-institutional candidates. Prior to 1942 candidates were selected from within psychiatric hospitals or the Provincial Training School for mentally defective children. After 1942, children were siphoned into travelling guidance clinics from schools, home visits from public health nurses and through social services.

While the official policies concentrated on feeble-minded children, the programme in Alberta also opened the door—if only a crack—to requests for voluntary sterilizations. Contraception and birth control remained illegal in Canada until 1969, despite a growing acknowledgement that women sought and used birth control devices.³³ The Canadian Medical Protective Agency weighed in on this issue in the 1940s, reminding Canadian physicians that ‘Voluntary sterilization of the healthy is a wholly separate and different problem. Excluding from the discussion those cases covered by one or two provincial acts allowing sterilization under specific conditions, voluntary sterilization of the healthy must be considered wholly illegal.’³⁴

Nonetheless, information about sterilization surgeries circulated and appealed to some families who were eager to secure safe, physician-assisted and permanent contraception. Caesarean section deliveries provided timely opportunities for these operations. Reports in the *Alberta Medical Journal* indicated that several sterilizations took place during C-sections.³⁵ By this time, women were increasingly giving birth in hospitals, rather than at home, which of course increased the chance of having such an operation.³⁶

In 1952 the *Alberta Medical Journal* responded to allegations of a near-epidemic of ovarian cancer in southern Alberta, which had necessitated sterilization operations. The article indicated that 48 cases of married women with children had been sterilized in the region, and the clinical notes all simply mentioned menstrual complaints.³⁷ The *Journal* editor asked, ‘why are so many requests for sterilization being made by patients: Are they spontaneous? Do they originate with the patients? Or are they the result of suggestions made by the doctor?’ The editor then reiterated that sterilization was strictly illegal unless it was absolutely necessary for the preservation of health.³⁸ (However, if the family resided in Alberta or British Columbia, eugenics programmes were in place and, at least from the medico-legal position, such a procedure might be procured.) This ‘epidemic’ suggests that the definitions of eugenics, whether contemporaneous or historical, are inadequate for assessing how people

interacted with eugenic programmes, particularly when it came to controlling their own fertility.

ABORIGINAL STERILIZATIONS

First Nations and Métis people made up only 2.7% of the Alberta's population in the 1920s and 1930s, and many families lived away from urban centres and thus outside the direct surveillance of local eugenicists and public health officials.³⁹ Medical historians and anthropologists have suggested that officials assumed that such populations were already in a state of natural decline. The notion of a 'dying race' likely contributed to the idea that by assimilation and a high rate of mortality, Aboriginal people were already engaged in a natural eugenics exercise, one illuminated by theories of social Darwinism.⁴⁰

As successive generations of First Nations people persevered on reserves, the relationship between eugenics and Aboriginal bodies developed in a more complicated fashion. Historian Maureen Lux's study of health services for Aboriginal people shows this feature very clearly. In her study of Indian hospitals, she argues that Canada has long maintained a segregated health system for Aboriginal people.⁴¹ The system is characterized chiefly by a lack of resources and a consistent desire on the part of Canadian governments, at all levels, but particularly within the federal government, to find cost-effective ways of providing a bare minimum of services, regardless of any treaty obligations, citizenship rights or essential needs in Aboriginal communities. Food historian Ian Mosby recently uncovered a set of experiments conducted in Residential schools on children who were used as test subjects for gauging how few calories were required to sustain children. These economic arguments may have also applied to sexual sterilizations; it was simply too costly to provide services that required medical specialists, and it was cheaper to restrict health care provisions altogether. In other words, sterilization operations were more expensive than a more passive form of eugenics, fostered through cultural denigration, starvation, and limited or no public health services.

By the late 1960s, however, the circumstances changed considerably. Aboriginal people who had been sterilized at a rate of 3.6% for the first forty years of the programme rose to the highest racial group represented at 25.7%.⁴² The timing is significant. The eugenics law and the decriminalization of contraception overlapped during these three years:

1969 was also the year that the federal government introduced the White Paper, which provided a roadmap for dismantling the Indian Act and removing the status associated with First Nations identity. Essentially, this policy paper was poised to end any special status or benefits conferred on Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people across Canada resisted this move and fought back with their own 'Red Paper', which although it was informal, played an important role in reversing the decision to enact this policy. One of the loudest voices of dissent on that issue was Harold Cardinal, a Native lawyer from Edmonton, Alberta, who accused the federal government of engaging in a form of cultural genocide. The language of genocide soon became a focal point in the ensuing discussions related to elements of status, but also brought the eugenics programme into the limelight.

The politics of the 'south', particularly those centred in Ottawa, were caught up in a clash of social movements in the 1970s that converged on ideas of reproduction. On the one hand the federal health bureaucrats were responding to a vocal middle-class, white feminism that increasingly demanded decriminalized birth control—including sterilizations—as a matter of choice, which worked to distinguish itself as a progressive movement, shaken free from the more draconian language of eugenics. On the other hand, bureaucrats were confronted by a somewhat male-dominated red power movement claiming to represent a pan-Indian set of grievances, including agitation for sovereignty, and identity politics that put race and First Nations' status on the political agenda. Meanwhile, Indian Health Services looked northward and applied policies developed in the southern urban centres of Canada on the sparsely populated and under-serviced Inuit women living in Canada's Arctic north. The language of birth control and choice, decoupled from the historic relationship between eugenics and coercion, moved north, but not without the cultural baggage associated with both colonialism and eugenics.

Federal health bureaucrats defended their decisions to make contraception available in northern communities after 1969, when the Canadian Criminal Code was changed to allow for contraception and abortion. Bureaucrats admitted, however, that they encountered difficulties in distributing clear information. For example, Indian Health Services bureaucrats asked a group of Inuit women of 'above average education for the eastern Arctic' to translate a consent form for sterilization written in Inuktitut syllabics. Of the 9 women, 2 thought it meant

to have an abortion, 5 thought it meant to have an operation and have no more babies, and 2 had difficulty determining what the message was. As one bureaucrat put it, 'Under the circumstances it would seem that the form needs a bit of re-drafting to ensure that people are fully aware of what they are agreeing to.'⁴³

The cultural, historical and regional meanings of sterilization, consent and even feminism were contested regionally and temporally, operating against the idea that there was a universal understanding of either eugenics or liberal feminism and its relationship to reproductive choice. American feminist scholar Laura Briggs published a revealing study in 1998 where she examined the discourses of 'forced sterilization' in Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico was one of the testing sites for the birth control pill, is overwhelmingly Catholic, and has a long colonial relationship with the United States. American historians had described Puerto Rican women as victims of a vicious US foreign policy that had used these women for experiments and also facilitated sterilization surgeries in accordance with eugenics theories. Briggs conducted oral interviews in Puerto Rico and uncovered a local feminist movement that challenged this conceptualization. She found women who had requested sterilizations, in spite of their Catholicism. By letting these women speak for themselves, Briggs found that feminism in Puerto Rico had a more nuanced interpretation of reproductive rights for Catholic women, which included using birth control and sterilization.⁴⁴

In contrast with this perspective, American scholar Lisa Udell argues that Indigenous feminism is fundamentally different from non-Native women's activism and has long held pro-natalist views. Those views are in part a reaction to colonial experiences that have degraded motherhood by forced and non-consensual sterilizations, alongside a history of removing children from families, and high infant mortality rates.⁴⁵ She suggests that Indigenous women in North America had fundamentally different views of feminism that are tied to mothering and a holistic sense of power, and are not individualized or rights-based, like western feminists.

Unfortunately, recovering the voices of Inuit in northern women in these debates has been difficult, as more often than not men have spoken on their behalf. In 1973 the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation aired a programme suggesting that Aboriginal women in the North West Territories were being coercively sterilized and that no one was paying attention. Oblate missionary Robert Lechat published a provocative

article in the *Montreal Gazette* called 'Is Canada murdering its unborn?' where he argued that the federal government had been coercively sterilizing Inuit women.

The Canadian government responded to these allegations by doing surveys of the communities in the North and collecting, often retrospectively, data about the numbers of sterilizations conducted. According to those federal surveys white women in the North were sterilized at a much higher rate than Inuit women (in spite of their much smaller numbers in the population); male vasectomies were extremely rare and when they did take place, they occurred among white men; and finally, the reported numbers for Inuit women indicate that many of the sterilizations took place after the birth on average of 9–13 children, and at times after serious health complications for the mothers. The methods of collecting this information were dubious but did more to support the federal government's interventions than to disprove the claims of genocide, while distancing the federal government from the language of eugenics by embracing the language of choice.

The records rarely contain women's voices directly. However, a committee claiming to represent a women's health coalition from the Eastern Arctic wrote to the federal inquiry in 1976:

We the Health Committee members of the Hall Beach Public Health Committee are going to write our minds regarding sterilization. We hear a lot about sterilization. We believe that sterilization should not be judged purely on moral reasons. There are people like us here in Hall Beach [Nunavut] who have had such operations done to them so we know the doctors do not perform operations on people without making sure that the person understands what they are being operated for. In this case the doctors do not decide whether to sterilize a person or not. There are those who especially ask for it. There are those who need it but if they do not want it they cannot be operated on. Those people who are talking now on the radios regarding sterilization are saying that the doctors perform sterilizations on people without telling them that they are getting sterilized. We think that those statements are false, because the doctors can operate only after consulting with the patient.⁴⁶ (signed by six women)

Similarly, in British Columbia, a newspaper called the *Indian Voice*, which claimed to be run by and for Aboriginal men and women, added its comments to the debate. Wedged between articles on Inuit sterilization, the women's pages included letters to the editor about a pressing

need for better health services, including reducing infant mortality and improving maternal health. Another article endorsed a local woman running for government who, among other things, included in her platform improved access to abortions for her community of First Nations women. An urban home for Aboriginal women, the Nasaika Lodge, also run by Aboriginal women, advertised its services to young women—including safe, confidential health services and birth control.

These small fragments of women's actions reveal a more nuanced and sophisticated women's movement as it collided with the dwindling features of eugenics in popular discourse, but where the actions remained in some cases indistinguishable from earlier applications of population control. Canadian Aboriginal women were not necessarily united with the mainstream feminist movement in the 1970s, but these sources help to show us that they may have also been engaged in developing their own reactions to the debates over family planning and wrestling with the relationship between individual autonomy and coercive eugenics.

CONCLUSION

Canadians have an uncomfortable relationship with their eugenic past. In places such as Alberta contemporary debates over this history have a focal point because a law existed to anchor discussions as well as to formalize and define practices. In most provinces, however, eugenics existed on the margins or in less clearly defined ways due to the absence of a law. Historically we have interpreted these gaps in legislation as gaps in practice. Cleaving too closely to legal definitions, however, risks losing sight of how eugenic thinking applied more broadly and even defied uniform interpretations of power dynamics, which changed over time. That is, defining eugenics as a form of coercive, even unconsented sterilization, denies a history of eugenics that might sit more comfortably with a history of birth control. Reframing this history then as one of tension between birth control choices and eugenic control reconsiders how traditional victims may have expressed resistance. This is not to suggest that there were not victims, but rather to argue that without a broader interpretation of this history, we risk oversimplifying this complicated past, casting moral doubt on those who endorsed eugenics and uncritically analysing those who appeared to be on the right side of the law.

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The Nature of Eugenic Thought and Limits of Eugenic Practice in Interwar Saskatchewan

Alex Deighton

In 1933, a young student living in the small city of Weyburn, Saskatchewan in western Canada submitted a thesis entitled ‘The Problem of the Subnormal Family’ as part of the requirements for a master’s degree in Divinity. In it, he traced the lives and progeny of 12 women whom he took to be ‘subnormal;’ that is, those whom he believed had ‘a low mental rating’ and poor moral standards who, if left to their own devices, would inevitably spread social disease and become a public charge. The author proposed several solutions to the problem of ‘sub-normals,’ among them, eugenic sterilization.¹

This call for eugenic measures is relatively unremarkable, echoing as it did the pioneering family studies by eugenicists such as Henry Goddard and suggesting the kind of eugenics legislation that had already been put in place throughout much of North America. Its source is more

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interesting. 'The Problem of the Subnormal Family' was written by 29-year-old Tommy Douglas, a young socialist who would later go on to become Saskatchewan's longest serving premier and the father of socialized medicine in Canada. In 2004, he was voted 'Greatest Canadian' in a viewers' poll conducted by the CBC, the country's national public broadcaster.

Douglas' adherence to eugenics is occasionally brought up by those who seek to discredit his legacy,² but little has been said about the wider context for his beliefs. As Hamish Spencer and Erika Dyck point out in their essays for this volume, eugenics scholarship has generally focused on places that enacted sterilization legislation. In Canada, the majority of eugenics scholarship has focused on Alberta, the only Canadian province to enact an ambitious programme of eugenic sterilization. Saskatchewan, Alberta's eastern neighbour, has been largely ignored. At first glance, a historical investigation into a province that did not enact a sterilization law may not appear to be a productive way to study eugenics. However, a close analysis of conditions in Saskatchewan can challenge the way we think about the shape and scope of eugenics, its supporters and detractors, and the process of turning eugenic theory into practice.

At its height, the popularity of eugenics in Saskatchewan was comparable to Alberta, which passed legislation in 1927 that would eventually facilitate the sterilization of 2822 people.³ Support for eugenics in Saskatchewan went far beyond Douglas and his contemporaries on the political left. Progressives, socialists, fiscal Conservatives, nativists and Catholics were only some of the groups whose members subscribed to eugenic ideals. Eugenic measures were seldom argued for in isolation and were typically proposed as part of larger state initiatives to cultivate ideal citizens. Despite enthusiasm for eugenics across ideological lines, eugenic practice in Saskatchewan never progressed beyond institutionalizing a limited number of people deemed mentally defective in one of the province's mental hospitals. Fortunate political circumstances allowed the province's Catholic minority to block sterilization. Meanwhile, the Great Depression prevented the construction of the necessary institutional infrastructure for a eugenics programme based on segregation. These political and economic constraints more than strong moral objections prevented Saskatchewan from following the same path as Alberta, and the end result could have easily been different.

Prior to the 1920s, eugenics was present in Saskatchewan in both theory and practice. Small institutions existed for women and children who

were deemed 'delinquent' and the provincial mental hospital housed some individuals who were deemed 'mentally defective.' However, the long-term institutionalization of people deemed mentally defective was rare. For most people in Saskatchewan, it was non-Anglo immigrants, not mental defectives, who posed the greatest threat to the quality of the population. Many of the province's English settlers intended for Saskatchewan to be a thoroughly British province, often contrasting the province with the American 'Wild West' as a place where British law and order prevailed and where the finest British institutions would be transplanted to the Canadian frontier.⁴ As more non-Anglo immigrants arrived, tensions rose and critics of non-British immigration worried that the so-called 'grand round-up of European freaks and hoboos' would compromise the British character of the province.⁵

People across the political spectrum proposed solutions to deal with the 'foreigner.' Some English settlers were optimistic that non-Anglo immigrants would assimilate into Canadian society. Many believed, for example, that the public school system could remove children from the corrupting influence of their foreign parents and instil Canadian values. Some Protestant church leaders were similarly optimistic, establishing programmes to help immigrants integrate with the wider society. Others proposed less sympathetic solutions that operated on the assumption that non-Anglo immigrants would never assimilate. During and after the First World War, anti-immigrant sentiment increased and Canadian Prime Minister Robert Borden was bombarded with letters demanding the mass deportation of 'enemy aliens'. The government decided against such a plan, but temporarily banned immigration from 'unsuitable' countries with the 1919 Immigration Act.⁶

Only rarely did anti-immigrant rhetoric draw on eugenic ideology. Much as Susanne M. Klausen has shown was the case with the British in South Africa, Anglo-Canadians in Saskatchewan did not need to draw on eugenics to legitimate their racism. However, discussions of non-Anglo immigration, shifting between sympathy and contempt, optimism and pessimism, had much in common with the discussion that began to take shape around people deemed mentally defective during the 1920s. As the mentally defective became increasingly identified as a problem population requiring state intervention, politicians and reformers offered solutions that varied between harsh eugenic measures on one hand and training programmes aimed at community integration on the other. Eugenics would not become popular enough to influence legislation

until the late 1920s, but the opening of a new mental hospital for the province was a turning point for eugenics as the asylum administration continually portrayed the hospital's mentally defective patients as a threat to the public.

Opened in 1921, the Weyburn Mental Hospital became the province's second asylum for people deemed mentally ill and its main institution for the confinement of people deemed mentally defective. The entire defective population of the Battleford Mental Hospital was transferred there, along with 'defective' residents living in other government institutions. After four months of operation, the hospital housed 88 mental defectives, mostly transfers. A year later, that number had risen to 136 and by 1925 it was 178.⁷

An increase in the number of mentally defective people being institutionalized was accompanied by an increase in eugenic rhetoric from the asylum administration. The asylum's superintendent, Robert Menzies Mitchell, and Assistant Superintendent, Dr. A.D. Campbell, blamed the mentally defective population for a range of social ills. Campbell believed that somewhere between 50% to 85% of women who were 'morally degraded' were feeble-minded whereas Mitchell believed that 90% of people in jail were 'morons' or 'high-grade mental defectives'. Like other eugenists in Saskatchewan, those affiliated with the new mental hospital portrayed their mission as one of national importance. Campbell claimed that the so-called feeble-minded should be 'weeded out at childhood and removed to places where the contamination of normal people would be impossible' and that failure to do so would constitute 'a great threat to the well-being of our country'.⁸ Similarly, the teacher at the hospital's 'School for Defectives' quoted American eugenicist Henry Goddard when she stressed the importance of training the mentally defective for 'useful citizenship'.⁹ As other historians have shown, including Ross L. Jones in this volume, eugenists were often concerned with issues of national efficiency and producing effective citizens. In Saskatchewan, anti-immigration activists and eugenists had these goals in common.

Despite the inflammatory rhetoric, the increase in the number of mental defectives to the hospital was not dramatic. The asylum administration struggled to commit people given the patchwork legislation pertaining to the defective population. The provincial government was also hesitant to reach into the community too much when it came to incarcerating defective children. Mitchell's superiors warned him that parents may not tolerate Campbell conducting examinations of children in

public schools for the purpose of finding mentally defectives to remove to the asylum.¹⁰ Mental defectives were increasingly identified as a problem population requiring state intervention, but eugenic theory was not always expressed in eugenic practice.

Developments in the late 1920s further increased the popularity of eugenics in Saskatchewan. In 1927, the US Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of compulsory sterilization laws in the case of *Buck v. Bell*, energizing eugenists on both sides of the border.¹¹ The same year, the Saskatchewan government passed the Child Welfare Act to increase control over children suspected of being mentally deficient and reform groups in the province began to call for a law restricting the marriage of people deemed feeble-minded.¹² These measures were a far cry from the sterilization legislation being passed south of the border, but reflected an increasing willingness to extend state authority over people deemed mentally deficient, legally defining people of lower intelligence as a threat to public order.

After Alberta enacted the first Canadian sterilization law in 1928, some people in Saskatchewan believed the province should follow suit. In Weyburn, the city health officer urged the City Council to support sterilization, claiming it would have far-reaching effects on the 'social fabric' of the province, preventing 'indigents' from breeding successive generations of feeble-minded people who would constitute a public charge and a detriment to the community. The council agreed, claiming that insanity and mental deficiency had been proven to be hereditary and 'the cost of maintaining institutions for the care of these deficients [*sic*] is a heavy burden on the municipalities of the province'.¹³ Other Saskatchewan organizations passed similar resolutions.¹⁴ Though people in Saskatchewan generally viewed the Weyburn Mental Hospital in a positive light, the growing popularity of eugenics resulted in the emergence of a more negative depiction of the hospital and its patients. In the closing years of the 1920s, idealized images of the hospital existed alongside the more negative portrayals of eugenists, who saw the hospital and its patients as a nuisance and a drain on public finances.

Eugenics grew increasingly popular, yet people did not always agree on what form it should take. The province's Catholics, for example, generally rejected eugenic sterilization as immoral along with other bodily interventions aimed at controlling reproduction. The Catholic fear of sterilization combined with the severe overcrowding at the Weyburn Mental Hospital was likely what led the Liberal Minister of Public

Health, J.M. Uhrich, to table a new mental hygiene plan for the province in early 1929. The recent decision to add a new wing to the Weyburn Mental Hospital effectively legitimized the argument of sterilization advocates who claimed that the province was spending too much on ever-expanding mental institutions and needed to implement sterilization as a solution instead to reduce future generations of would-be patients. Uhrich, a staunch Catholic, needed to offer an alternative.

He called on the Canadian National Committee for Mental Hygiene (CNCMH) to help him devise a mental hygiene plan for the province. Formed in 1918, the Committee described itself as ‘a movement for the conserving of the mental and nervous health of the Canadian people’. Members took it upon themselves to promote the latest methods in caring for people deemed mentally ill or defective.¹⁵ Uhrich worked with the Committee to design a three-part mental hygiene plan. Doctors from the provincial university would conduct mental hygiene research, such research would help establish a mental hygiene clinic in Saskatoon, and arrangements would be made to provide employment for those with ‘a mild form of disability’ to render them self-supporting. He hoped that after one clinic had been established, others would be constructed throughout the province.¹⁶ Other Canadian provinces had implemented similar plans, often with the help of the Canadian National Committee for Mental Hygiene.¹⁷

Soon after Uhrich pitched the mental hygiene plan, the Liberals lost power, preventing him from enacting any reforms. The new government was a coalition of Conservatives and Progressives that had come to power somewhat unexpectedly in the 1929 election, unseating the Liberals for the first time in the province’s history. The new ‘Co-operative government’ was successful partly because the agenda of both parties appealed to the anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic sentiment in Saskatchewan at the time. Certain nativist elements of the government’s platform were strikingly similar to the goals of the Ku Klux Klan, an organization that was growing increasingly popular in the province.¹⁸ However, Civil Service reform also factored high on the list of priorities for the new government—indeed, it had formed the basis of their alliance. The Conservative leader of the coalition, J.T.M. Anderson, vowed to work with any party that would help him ‘break the machine’ of Liberal corruption.¹⁹ One of the first actions of the new government was to establish a Civil Service Commission to weed out Liberal patronage in public institutions.

At the centre of the Co-operative government's campaign to root out Liberal corruption was the Weyburn Mental Hospital. Superintendent Mitchell was a committed Liberal who had used the mental hospital to further his own political interests. He staffed the institution with only the most loyal Liberals and crafted an attractive public image for the mental hospital that reflected favourably on the government. Mitchell stepped down as superintendent when his party was defeated in the election, but that did not stop the Co-operative government from shining a light on Mitchell's, and by extension the Liberal government's, methods of managing the mental hospital.

The resulting scandal made national front-page headlines. As readers of the Toronto daily, *The Globe*, read, Mitchell was charged with 'Maladministration, inefficiency, neglect, flagrant breaches of the law, and connivance at such with political activities on every hand.' The new Minister of Public Works, J.F. Bryant read a declaration in the Saskatchewan legislature accusing Mitchell, among other things, of stealing money from the hospital, exercising influence over the Weyburn City Police, and plotting the escape of a patient known as 'Bill the Barber'.²⁰ Mitchell's accusers painted a dark portrait of patient life where unclothed patients lived in filthy wards and were subjected to forced restraint, abuse and unsafe working conditions.²¹

The scandal was a major political victory for the Co-operative government. However, the charges brought against the Liberals also presented the new government with some significant challenges. They needed to prove that they could do better, and so called on the Canadian National Committee for Mental Hygiene to come to the province and make recommendations concerning the care of people deemed mentally ill or defective.

The CNCMH conducted a mental hygiene survey of the province in which it reiterated its previous recommendations for mental hygiene clinics, community treatment, and improvements to existing institutions, and also suggested that the government consider eugenic sterilization.²² The Committee's recommendation of sterilization raises an interesting question about where the line was drawn between pro-eugenic and anti-eugenic opinions. Under the previous government, the CNCMH had helped design a mental hygiene plan that was intended by Uhrich to serve as an alternative to sterilization. Relying instead on environmental interventions, it was posited by Uhrich as superior to eugenicist policies rooted in theories of heredity. Though it is well documented that many

members of the CNCMH advocated sterilization at the time, their reading of the political situation clearly revealed that the government would not stand for it. Eugenics was part of, but not central to, the mental hygiene outlook. It was simply one of many desired reforms, and one that mental hygiene reformers were willing to compromise on. Upon their return to the province after the fall of the Liberal government, the Committee accurately sensed a change in the government's attitude towards sterilization and included it in their recommendations.

The CNCMH's pragmatic and flexible approach to eugenics was similar to that of many reformers in Saskatchewan. Eugenics was rarely argued for in isolation, but instead as part of a wider set of reforms that were intended to improve the province's approach to people deemed mentally ill and defective. Alberta's sterilization law had resulted in calls for eugenic sterilization based on understandings of patients as a social menace. The scandal at the hospital further underscored the need for eugenic reforms in order to curb the ever-growing hospital population, but also cultivated sympathy towards the hospital's residents.

Speeches at the opening of the new wing of the Weyburn Mental Hospital in 1930 demonstrate how the government took the Committee's advice, endorsing a mental hygiene programme that advocated sympathetic treatment on one hand and eugenic measures, including sterilization, on the other. The first speaker of the afternoon was J.F. Bryant, Progressive minister of public works in the new Co-operative government. Bryant directed an impassioned speech towards the new hospital superintendent, former assistant superintendent Dr. A.D. Campbell, stating, 'may the doors of the institution ever be open to the weak and suffering [and] may kindness and human sympathy govern yourself and all of your attendants in all their dealings with the patients of this institution'. The new superintendent echoed Bryant's expression of sympathy towards the patients, praising the government's investment in the hospital and claiming, 'most of the patients in the hospital are normal in most respects and are inmates of the hospital only because of some unfortunate occurrence in their lives'.²³

While Bryant and Campbell worked to restore public faith in the hospital and promote sympathy towards the patients, other speakers focused on different aspects of the government's proposed mental hygiene plan. S.R. Leslie, the MLA for Weyburn, expressed his hope that eugenic sterilization would soon be part of a solution to the problem of a constantly growing hospital population. Dr. F.D. Munroe, the Minister of

Public Health, looked forward to the new institutions the government had planned. A new psychiatric ward in Regina, he claimed, would provide patients with early treatment and prevent long-term committal while a new and separate institution for those deemed mentally defective would see this category of patient removed from the Weyburn institution altogether.²⁴

Outside the ranks of the elected government and the CNCMH, the idea of incorporating eugenics into a wider reform agenda was supported by some western Canadian socialists. Like the speakers at the opening of the hospital's new wing, a young Tommy Douglas turned to those who had been admitted to the Weyburn Mental Hospital as a potential target for eugenic policies. For his Master's thesis he consulted the hospital's patient files with the help of Superintendent Campbell to find the cases of 12 women who fitted his definition of 'subnormal'. Douglas then went on to demonstrate that these women raised large subnormal families, whom he blamed for a variety of social ills. To halt the spread of such degeneracy, he recommended marriage restrictions, segregation and sterilization for those who were mentally defective or incurably diseased. However, these typical eugenic measures made up a relatively small component in his overall plan. He ultimately favoured a more empowering approach for many 'subnormals', whom he believed could thrive in the community with the help of churches and schools.²⁵

Douglas would later go on to run in the Weyburn constituency as a candidate for the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), a socialist party whose first leader advocated a similar combination of environmental and eugenic interventions. J.S. Woodsworth looked primarily to the inequalities inherent in capitalism to explain social ills amongst the working-class and immigrant populations he worked with. However, he occasionally entertained eugenic explanations and emphasized the need for Canada to enact tighter restrictions on immigration so that only those of the best 'genetic stock' would settle in the west.²⁶

The approach that incorporated eugenics with other mental hygiene measures formed part of a movement towards framing mental illness and deficiency as issues of public health. One of the Co-operative government's first reforms was to move the jurisdiction of the province's mental hospitals from the Department of Public Works to the Department of Public Health. Throughout their respective histories, eugenists and public health advocates have often clashed, disagreeing as to whether heredity or environmental factors offered the best explanation of and

remedy for social and medical problems. Those who subscribed to a Social Darwinian or Malthusian interpretation of eugenics, for example, scorned public health advocates for artificially preserving the lives of people they believed were 'unfit', allowing people of inferior stock to perpetuate further generations of degenerates.²⁷ Campbell's assertion that people only arrived at the hospital after an unfortunate event in their lives and Leslie's plea for sterilization seems to suggest a similar difference of opinion over environment versus heredity. Yet, as historians have recently noted, eugenics and public health have not always been mutually exclusive, with eugenic measures often being incorporated into public health reforms as one means of improving the overall quality of the population.²⁸ Such was the case with the new government's platform, where 'the sterilization of mental defectives' was listed as a public health measure along with 'free consultative medical clinics' and the 'early consideration of a State Health Insurance scheme on a contributory basis'.²⁹

Interventions aimed at environment and heredity were not seen as contradictory, but rather as complementary parts of a mental hygiene strategy that aimed to sort prospective patients into two groups: those who could be made into useful citizens and those who needed to be 'weeded out' of the population. For the first group, vocational training for individuals deemed feeble-minded, or of low intelligence quotients, and early treatment for those considered insane, or mentally ill, were thought to be the most hopeful means of reintegrating patients into the community. For chronic, incurable conditions, segregation and sterilization were the proposed solutions. It was this combined approach that led Campbell to express sympathy for the patients while later voicing support for the ambitious sterilization policies of Nazi Germany, passed in 1933.³⁰ Similarly, Leslie called for sterilization while still advocating for the humane treatment of those deemed insane or mentally defective.

An understanding of patients as objects of sympathy and of their conditions as a matter of public health did not replace older notions of patients as a social threat. If anything, eugenicists portrayed mental deficiency as even more insidious than had been previously realized, necessitating the expansion of the state's power to bring 'defective' elements of the population under control.³¹ Nor did everyone who supported eugenics do so from the standpoint of public health. At school and City Council meetings, fiscally conservative rhetoric seemed to be most persuasive, whereas the Saskatchewan KKK offered a rare example of eugenics that was directly related to the anti-immigrant stance. One

Klan pamphlet read: 'The first danger is that we shall be overwhelmed by the alien's sheer force of breeding ... Why not spend some money to keep our native boys instead of bringing in these, which is the largest contributor to crime lists and by far the largest proportion of the inmates in our insane asylums.'³² Eugenics may have had its main political expression as a public health and mental hygiene measure, but people found other reasons to support it.

Given the election of the Co-operative government, the recommendations of the CNCMH, and the popular appeal of eugenics in the province, Saskatchewan seemed to be heading in the direction of eugenic sterilization. However, opposition to sterilization was growing amongst the province's Catholics. Just two months after the CNCMH had made its recommendations, the Pope condemned sterilization in his holy encyclical, *Casti connubii*, along with other methods of birth control.³³ The growing enthusiasm for sterilization collided with Catholic opposition on 3 April 1930, when S.A. Horner, the Progressive MLA for Francis, made good on his party's promise to push for eugenic sterilization and proposed the following motion to the legislature:

That in the opinion of this Assembly, the function of parenthood should be denied to mental defectives. To this end strict regulations for the issuing of marriage licenses should be combined with social supervision of the mentally incompetent, together with sterilization in the interest of eugenics.³⁴

Horner likened eugenics to sound animal breeding practices employed on the farm. The least the government could do, he claimed, was apply such principles to human society and ensure every child was entitled to a 'proper birth'.³⁵ As Erika Dyck has shown in her chapter '[Eugenics in Canada: Choice, Coercion and Context](#)' for this volume and elsewhere, comparing eugenics to animal breeding practices was also a common justification for eugenics in Alberta and other rural areas.³⁶ Horner also claimed that the new legislation would save the government money. S.W. Arthur, the Independent MLA for Cannington, seconded the motion, claiming that eugenic sterilization would ensure a better class of citizenship.³⁷ Both Horner and Arthur were considered to be part of a left-wing faction in the Co-operative government, but the vote cast on the motion reflected the acceptance of eugenics across the political spectrum. The motion was carried with only one dissenting vote.

A single dissenting vote against a motion in the legislature may seem inconsequential, but the man who cast it was a powerful voice against sterilization. Uhrich, who had recently been relegated to the opposition benches for the first time in his career, delivered a scathing rebuttal of the motion. He questioned the scientific basis of eugenics, claiming that tests administered during the war had found that 47.3% of American soldiers fell within the category of 'feeble-minded', surely a testament to the flawed methods used to determine who was worthy of sterilization. More recent studies had also questioned the hereditary nature of mental deficiency. One claimed that 95% of mental defectives were born to 'normal' parents. Such an infringement of the rights on individuals, subjecting people to 'barnyard methods,' could not be justified on such shaky scientific grounds.³⁸ As Hamish Spencer's chapter 'Eugenic Sterilization in New Zealand: The Story of the Mental Defectives Amendment Act of 1928' in this volume also demonstrates, opponents of eugenics have often appealed to scientific arguments to cut across religious or ideological lines. Like many Catholic opponents of sterilization, Uhrich realized he was trying to persuade a largely Protestant audience and drew on arguments outside of Catholicism to support his position.³⁹ He also argued that many of the problems eugenicists attributed to bad heredity actually had social causes, leading him to claim that 'the best and soundest eugenics program is elimination of war, poverty, [and] irreligion'.⁴⁰

It is possible that Uhrich's speech persuaded some members of the legislature to change their stance on sterilization. Or perhaps his capable defence of his position effectively intimidated his opponents. In Alberta, sterilization had strong advocates and a powerful political presence whereas in Saskatchewan, the loudest voices supporting sterilization came from the Progressives, a small and relatively inexperienced minority in the provincial legislature.⁴¹ Pushing for sterilization also threatened to disrupt the Co-operative government's larger political strategy when it came to the province's Catholic population. While it is true that the government owed its electoral success in part to anti-Catholic sentiment in the province, many sitting members within the government were careful not to antagonize Catholics.⁴² Though some scholars have speculated that it was the larger proportion of Catholics in Saskatchewan relative to Alberta that led the province to reject sterilization,⁴³ an analysis of census statistics suggests otherwise. The proportion of Catholics in Saskatchewan was only slightly higher than in Alberta, about 25% and 23% respectively.⁴⁴ However, in Alberta, sterilization tended to unite people of disparate political stripes and Catholics were politically

marginalized.⁴⁵ In Saskatchewan, Catholics had a strong political voice with Uhrich, and the issue of sterilization threatened to further divide the province along its religious fault lines.

Though Catholics and Protestants differed on the question of sterilization, they had plenty in common. Like his eugenic opponents, Uhrich was hopeful that many mental defectives could be trained to live within the community, yet believed there were some for which this was not an option. In such cases, however, he argued that sterilization was unwarranted, since it might tempt authorities to release so-called defectives into the community who, though unable to procreate, would spread 'social disease'. For Uhrich, it was segregation, not sterilization, that adequately addressed the problem; he claimed that 'segregation accomplishes all that sterilization does in preventing propagation'.⁴⁶ Like Uhrich, many Catholic opponents of sterilization were not opposed to achieving eugenic ends by different means. When J.S. Woodsworth called for the sterilization of criminals and mental defectives on the grounds that they would breed future generations of criminals, one Catholic commentator remarked, 'had he suggested merely the segregation of these people, he would have been on perfectly safe ground and would have assumed a position that admits of defence'.⁴⁷

The common ground held by both Protestants and Catholics on the question of eugenics was reflected in new legislation. Under the Mental Defectives Act, passed only a few months after the sterilization motion had been debated, anyone suspecting another of being mentally defective could lay information before a Justice of the Peace who might arrange for his or her committal.⁴⁸ The combined force of the Child Welfare Act and the Mental Defectives Act reflected a new confidence on behalf of the provincial government to exert greater control over people deemed mentally defective.

Catholics generally supported the Act. Some no doubt believed that a new institution for people deemed mentally defective, which would provide residents with training before integrating them back into the community, would soon be built. However, support for the Act also came from the fact that Catholics did not oppose, and indeed often endorsed, segregation for the purpose of eugenics. Catholics have often been portrayed as opponents of eugenics,⁴⁹ but in Saskatchewan this opposition rarely extended beyond sterilization. Through their rejection of sterilization and support of segregation, Catholics did not stand in the way of eugenics policy in Saskatchewan—they helped shape it.⁵⁰

As politicians debated the future of eugenics in the province, the Co-operative government moved forward with the less controversial aspects of its mental hygiene plan. In a 1930 mental hygiene survey, the CNCMH noted that the new government had already started to make improvements to the Weyburn Mental Hospital. Civil service reform ensured that employees were not hired on the basis of political patronage and a new training programme for attendants promised a higher quality of patient care. The government also made progress outside of the province's mental institutions. Superintendent MacNeill was appointed Commissioner of Mental Hygiene Services and tasked not only with overseeing the province's two large mental hospitals, but also with managing the range of other provincial institutions and mental hygiene initiatives the government had planned, such as psychiatric wings of general hospitals, child guidance clinics, and mental hygiene programmes in public schools. To help determine the course to take, the government hosted a conference on mental hygiene. A psychiatric wing was established at Regina General Hospital, finally providing those requiring short-term psychiatric care with an alternative to the asylum.⁵¹

Clarence Hincks, head of the CNCMH, was impressed at Saskatchewan's progress, writing in a letter to Bryant, 'as minister of Public Works you have won the admiration of all of us who are engaged in mental hygiene work. Your quick grasp of the problems involved and your readiness to do everything within your power to provide the necessary facilities has given us more encouragement than I can say.'⁵² However, Hincks' enthusiasm was short-lived, as the province's ambitious plans soon came face-to-face with the economic realities of the Great Depression.

The 1930s in Saskatchewan were a time of unprecedented hardship. Saskatchewan was among the hardest hit provinces in Canada and there was nothing comparable to Roosevelt's New Deal to help ease the burden. Farmers' fields turned to dust, commodity prices hit an all-time low, and the influx of settlers ground to a halt. Historians have shown that many places broadened eugenics legislation during the Depression, as the financial arguments in support of eugenic sterilization grew increasingly popular.⁵³ In Saskatchewan, however, another push for sterilization in 1934 met effective Catholic opposition, and the Liberal election victory later that year saw Uhrich taking over the public health portfolio, effectively ending any chance of sterilization legislation in the province. Eugenics in Saskatchewan would be restricted to segregation.

Under the expansive legislation in the form of the Child Welfare Act and the Mental Defectives Act, the number of people committed to the Weyburn Mental Hospital as mentally defective increased. From the time the new government took power in 1929, to 1937, the mentally defective population of the asylum more than doubled, from 255 to 562.⁵⁴ Yet the province's programme of eugenic segregation had its limits. Despite repeated promises, there was no separate institution constructed, limiting the number of people who could be institutionalized. Though eugenists projected long-term savings by insisting that controlling reproduction would decrease the number of 'defectives,' creating the institutional framework for eugenic segregation required a substantial expenditure that the government was not willing to make in uncertain economic times. The government abandoned plans for large-scale eugenic segregation and the larger mental hygiene plan that it had been a part of. Just as there was no money for more institutions, there was no money for mental hygiene programmes in schools, more psychiatric wards in general hospitals, mental hygiene clinics, or further research into mental hygiene initiatives. Though the new government had made some improvements to the Weyburn Mental Hospital shortly after becoming elected, the province's mental hospitals soon fell into disrepair. Visiting the province in 1937, Hincks exhibited none of his previous enthusiasm, encountering mental hospital conditions that he deemed 'inadequate for animals' and claiming, 'the present mental hospital situation constitutes a crisis'.⁵⁵

As the mentally defective population of the Weyburn Mental Hospital increased, active support for eugenics declined as former eugenics enthusiasts within the mental health system became increasingly disillusioned with eugenic ideology. Superintendent Campbell was well aware that people deemed mentally deficient were the most rapidly increasing segment of the hospital population and became convinced that they were not thriving within an institutional setting. By 1936, he had doubts about eugenics, claiming in a speech that recent studies had disproved eugenics and that it was possible for people deemed mentally defective to cope in the community.⁵⁶ Though he drew on scientific research to make his point, the conditions at the Weyburn Mental Hospital were likely the main impetus for his shift of opinion. The previous four years had been particularly difficult for the hospital's mental defective population, with deaths consistently outstripping paroles. In his 1934 annual report, Campbell recorded only 3 paroles, but 19 deaths, most of which were caused by

preventable diseases that spread quickly through the hospital due to overcrowding.⁵⁷ Campbell also lamented the effects of long-term confinement on the hospital's population. Foreshadowing later critiques of institutionalization, he claimed that the institutional setting itself had detrimental effects on the individual; that 'even a normal boy brought up in an institution shows the effect of it. He becomes standardized, as it were.'⁵⁸

The same year Campbell denounced eugenics, Tommy Douglas became disillusioned with the philosophy after visiting Germany and learning of Hitler's eugenic policies. Others in the province praised Hitler's eugenic policies, sometimes singling them out as a positive element in an otherwise inhumane political agenda.⁵⁹ But active support for eugenics amongst the general population declined as attention turned away from the hospital scandal and the 'menace of the feeble-minded' and towards the more immediate concerns associated with the Great Depression.

For both Campbell and Douglas, the sense of optimism that had initially motivated their adherence to eugenics faded during the 1930s as eugenic ideals collided with reality. Eugenics was supposed to be part of a larger reform approach to mental deficiency that ensured community integration for some, segregation for others, and an overall improvement in the quality of the population. Instead, from Campbell's perspective, eugenics legislation had not accomplished much apart from condemning an increasing number of people to a sad fate in an overcrowded mental institution. For Douglas, the outcomes of eugenics that he had learned of in Nazi Germany were likely much worse.

In the last half of the 1930s, Alberta and Saskatchewan, two provinces that had once shared a similar enthusiasm for eugenics, passed legislation indicative of the very different paths they had taken. Alberta became one among the long list of places to broaden eugenics legislation during the Depression, removing provisions for consent in the Sterilization Act in 1937. Saskatchewan went in the opposite direction, replacing the Mental Defectives Act with the Mental Hygiene Act in 1936, which provided more avenues for discharge from the province's mental hospitals, now severely overcrowded due partly to eugenics-inspired legislation. This pattern continued after the Second World War as then Premier Tommy Douglas rejected the recommendations of eugenicists and worked towards a system that emphasized training and community integration for people deemed mentally ill or defective. Meanwhile, the right-wing Social Credit government of Alberta continued to sterilize people deemed

mentally deficient, even as many states and provinces dismantled their systems of eugenic sterilization after the war as eugenics became increasingly associated with Nazi atrocities. Eugenic sterilization in Alberta did not end until 1972, the year after the Progressive Conservatives ended the 35-year reign of the Social Credit party.

Saskatchewan may not have passed sterilization legislation or institutionalized people by the thousands, but we should not let that blind us to the fact that people of many political stripes embraced eugenic ideas. Who should bear the label of 'eugenicist'? Tommy Douglas has often been deemed one, but what about Progressives, Nativist groups or fiscal Conservatives? Even Catholics, often lauded as opponents of eugenics, supported eugenic measures other than sterilization. Cultivating efficient citizens for the young province was a concern for people across the political spectrum and eugenics often played a part in achieving this goal, though eugenic measures were almost always proposed as part of broader political reforms.

Sterilization never became law in Saskatchewan, but the context surrounding its failure demonstrates how eugenic policy was often determined by political factors that had little to do with debates about eugenics. Everyone in the Saskatchewan legislature save one MLA was ready to pass sterilization legislation until it became clear that pushing the issue would alienate Catholic voters. Similarly, the fate of eugenic segregation in the province was determined by economic factors more than strong moral objections. The Mental Defectives Act reflected a broad consensus within Saskatchewan society that eugenic segregation was acceptable. Its objectives only failed to be realized once the province sank deeper into economic Depression during the 1930s. Considering its popularity in Saskatchewan and the fact that the province did indeed pass eugenic legislation, it would be inaccurate to say that the province rejected eugenics while its eastern neighbour established an ambitious eugenics programme. Rather, Saskatchewan should be viewed as a place that accepted eugenics and passed eugenics legislation, but then failed to implement it. In spite of this failure, studying eugenics in Saskatchewan illustrates how entrenched eugenic ideas were in discussions of nation-building, public health, and citizenship during the 1920s and 1930s.

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Eugenic Sterilization in New Zealand: The Story of the Mental Defectives Amendment Act of 1928

Hamish G. Spencer

New Zealand has a reputation among historians of being a social laboratory, often at the forefront of socio-political changes that would come later to other parts of the western world. The 1893 Electoral Act, for instance, gave women the right to vote, making New Zealand the first country in the world to do so, and the Old Age Pensions Act of 1898 provided financial support for many of the elderly. Later, as a response to the Great Depression of the 1930s, the 1938 Social Security Act introduced a welfare state that funded public medical care as well as family, invalid and unemployment benefits.

Nevertheless, New Zealand was apparently ambivalent about one of the most prominent progressive movements of the first half of the twentieth century, eugenics.¹ Notably, no explicitly eugenic sterilization law was enacted, even though many such laws were passed in North America, western Europe, and other regions of the world, and despite the association of eugenics with political progressivism. As historian Angela

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Wanhalla has noted, ‘segregation rather than sterilization ... became a key component of eugenics as it played out in early twentieth-century New Zealand’² and thus New Zealand is often viewed by historians as a country where eugenics gained little traction.³

Nevertheless, as in several other countries, states and provinces (see the chapters by Erika Dyck, Alex Deighton and Stephen Garton), it is clear that in New Zealand sterilizations were performed on eugenic grounds in spite of the questionable legality of such operations.⁴ Moreover, and perhaps more surprisingly, in 1928 New Zealand came very close to enacting a sterilization law. By outlining the history of the 1928 Mental Defectives Act and subsequent developments, I show that a eugenic sterilization law had broad support among New Zealand politicians, medics, the judiciary, several women’s organizations and academics. This support would have been sufficient to gain parliamentary approval had the government pushed the issue slightly harder. Hence, any account of the history of this Act and, more broadly, the history of eugenics in New Zealand, needs to be able to explain both the strong support for and the near success of the eugenic sterilization proposal, as well as its eventual defeat. Using the absence of an explicit eugenic sterilization law to characterize New Zealand as a place where eugenics had little effect is thus an oversimplification.⁵

THE LEAD-UP TO THE BILL

In the aftermath of World War I, the farming-dominated New Zealand economy boomed, but a sharp recession took hold in 1921 and a second economic contraction occurred in 1926. Support for prohibition was at an all-time high, coming close to being implemented, and not-unrelated religious tensions between Catholics and Protestants occasionally flared. The period saw a fundamental realignment of political parties and a growing influence of the union movement. The early 1920s also witnessed increasing public disquiet about the incidence of mental defect and the frequency of sexual offences, the most heinous of which seemed to involve the ‘feeble-minded’ (as people with mental defect were termed at the time).⁶ Concern was expressed by official bodies: for instance, in 1921 the Prisons Board, chaired by Chief Justice Sir Robert Stout, recommended changes to the Crimes Act to deal with such offenders.⁷ (See Emma Gattley’s chapter ‘[Sir Robert Stout as Freethinker and Eugenics Enthusiast](#)’ in this volume for a discussion of Stout’s eugenic views.) The

ground had been prepared by the efforts over the previous decade of several branches of the New Zealand Eugenics Education Society, the first of which was established in Dunedin in 1910.⁸ The Wellington branch, founded the following year, was particularly active, with public talks by Stout, the professor of biology at Victoria College, Harry Kirk, and Liberal politician, Sir John Findlay, among others.⁹ In 1914, the Society organized a national lecture tour by the foremost American eugenicist and founder of the Eugenics Record Office on Long Island, New York, Charles B. Davenport, which attracted large audiences.¹⁰ Moreover, popular publications, especially W.A. Chapple's influential *Fertility of the Unfit*, had long argued that the high fecundity of the feeble-minded meant that the problem was likely to get worse and the already substantial cost to the state would increase.¹¹ (See Charlotte Macdonald's chapter 'Revisiting Three Eugenic Moments: 1903, 1928, 1937: The Disappointments and Hopes of Antipodean Progressives' in this volume for an outline of the impact of Chapple's book.)

In response, Sir Māui Pōmare, who had become Minister of Health in William Massey's conservative Reform government in 1923, established a formal enquiry, with a brief to make broad recommendations about the treatment of mental defectives and sexual offenders. Pōmare, one of a small number of trained Māori doctors at the time, received his medical education between 1895 and 1900 at the Seventh-day Adventists' American Medical Missionary College in Battle Creek, Michigan. In this period he was exposed to the radical ideas of the college's founder, John Harvey Kellogg, who was an early proponent of eugenics.¹² (See Barbara Brookes's chapter "Aristocrats of Knowledge": Māori Anthropologists and the Survival of the "Race" in this volume for a discussion of the views of Pōmare and other Māori politicians of the 1920s.)

Pōmare's Committee of Inquiry into Mental Defectives and Sexual Offenders was chaired by W.H. Triggs, a member of New Zealand's upper house, the Legislative Council, who had also chaired the 1922 Committee of Inquiry into Venereal Disease. Triggs was a journalist, previously editor of Christchurch's *Press* newspaper and later to prove a strong public advocate for the provisions of the 1928 Bill. The other six members were prominent public servants and professionals: Sir Donald McGavin (Director-General, Medical Services, Defence Department), Sir F. Truby King (Director, Division of Child Welfare, Health Department), J. Sands Elliott (Chairman of the Council of the British Medical Association (New Zealand Branch)), Ada G. Paterson (Director,

Division of School Hygiene, Health Department), Charles E. Matthews (Under-Secretary for Justice and Controller-General of Prisons) and John Beck (Officer in Charge, Special Schools Branch, Education Department). Although the membership of the Committee was criticized¹³ as being overly medically oriented, with the first four in this list medically trained, it was qualified well beyond the status of the positions the members held. King, best known as the founder of the mother-and-child-welfare organization, the Plunket Society, was soon to become Inspector-General of Mental Hospitals (King's views about eugenics are elucidated in Diane Paul's chapter 'Truby King, Infant Welfare, and the Boundaries of Eugenics' in this volume); Elliott was editor of the *New Zealand Medical Journal* from 1911 to 1933; Paterson was the 'senior woman public servant of her day'¹⁴; Matthews was a member of the Prisons Board that had expressed its official concern about feeble-minded sexual offenders to the government in 1921; Beck had reorganized the care for orphans and other children in the care of the state, closing numerous industrial schools, and moving the children to foster homes.

The Committee travelled the country from Auckland south to Invercargill in 1924, hearing (and sometimes reading) submissions from numerous witnesses, especially academics, doctors and religious leaders. Much of the evidence focused on issues of sterilization and desexualization (castration), with several medics arguing in favour of such surgical solutions; Elizabeth Gunn, the health-camp founder, even advocated a 'lethal chamber' for 'imbecile children.'¹⁵ A number of academics, notably the professors of biology at Auckland, Victoria and Canterbury also supported sterilization on eugenic grounds, although their humanities colleagues, professors of philosophy, education and psychology, did not. Perhaps the most influential of the witnesses was the last, Dr. Theodore Gray, at the time Superintendent of the Mental Hospital in Nelson, soon to become acting medical superintendent of the Auckland Mental Hospital, and King's eventual successor as head of the Mental Hospitals Department.

The Committee's report, running to 34 pages, appeared the following year, and eugenic ideas were prominent.¹⁶ The report contained a number of recommendations about the treatment of the feeble-minded, the most important of which was the establishment of a Eugenics Board. The Board would maintain a register of the feeble-minded, epileptics, moral imbeciles and those discharged from mental hospitals; it would

recommend to the Minister the segregation, supervision or treatment of the different classes; and it would have the power to implement segregation and sterilization (which might be a condition of release, provided parental consent was obtained). Marriage and sex with registered persons would be forbidden, and immigration controls implemented to prevent the arrival of yet more feeble-minded. Finally, with respect to sexual offenders, the Board should investigate the question of their sterilization or desexualization.

Publication of the report was soon followed by public lobbying for action.¹⁷ Following the 1925 election, in which Reform won a resounding majority under the new vigorous leadership of Gordon Coates, Pōmare was replaced by Alexander Young as Minister of Health. Young, who was the Reform MP for Hamilton, sent Gray, by now deputy inspector-general of mental defectives, on an extensive tour to Europe and the US to inspect eugenic programmes. Gray's 1927 report¹⁸ echoed that of Triggs's Committee, recommending a Eugenics Board and register, the banning of marriage and sex of those registered, and the sterilization of the feeble-minded in some circumstances, but also their segregation in 'farm colonies'. Legislative action could be delayed no longer and the Mental Defectives Amendment Bill was soon drawn up.

PARLIAMENTARY PROGRESS

The Bill was a significant document of 10 pages, consisting of 27 clauses.¹⁹ Importantly, much of the Bill was uncontroversial. Clauses 1–6, for example, concerned a reorganization of the Mental Hospitals Department and the criteria for admission to mental hospitals, and had broad support both in and outside parliament. The more contentious clauses included Clause 7, which extended the definition of a 'mentally defective person' to include 'social defectives'²⁰; Clause 11, which established a Eugenics Board; and Clause 15, which compelled the Director of Education to furnish the names of mentally defective children to the Chair of the Eugenics Board. But most of the controversy surrounded Clause 21, which prohibited the marriage of persons registered with the Board, and, especially, Clause 25, which allowed for the Board to authorize sterilization—but not castration—of those registered. (See Angela Wanhalla's chapter '[Debating Clause 21: "Eugenic Marriage" in New Zealand](#)' in this volume for further discussion of Clause 21 and eugenic marriage in general.)

The Bill had its first reading²¹ in the (lower) House of Representatives on 17 July 1928, when it was introduced by Young. Peter Fraser, later to become Minister of Health in the first Labour Government, was in charge of his party's response to the Bill. He generally welcomed a Bill based on Gray's report (especially the reform of the Mental Hospitals Department), but warned against 'all sorts of wild theory in regard to eugenics'.²² Opposition to Clause 25 quickly came to the fore. When Young noted there was a sterilization clause (as recommended by Gray) and claimed sterilization would be 'purely voluntary', Fraser interjected 'What do you hope to achieve by this sterilization stunt?'²³

The second reading took place over 19, 20 and 24 July 1928. Fraser's frequent interjections during Young's speech focussed on the issues of marriage restriction and sterilization. Young hedged over sterilization, saying that the government would not force the issue, since, in his view, the public might not be ready for it.²⁴ Fraser gave a long speech criticizing the eugenic aspects of the Bill, claiming that the genetics of mental defect were unclear and the environmental effects critical.²⁵ The previous leader of the Liberal Party²⁶ and later prime minister, George Forbes, supported the early clauses, but argued that there was great need for caution over the establishment and operation of the Eugenics Board. Labour leader, H.E. (Harry) Holland followed, again claiming that the science was uncertain and adumbrating what would become a standard anti-eugenics argument, that eugenics would be inefficient in changing the gene pool.²⁷ The Opposition were joined by the Reform MP from Gisborne, Douglas Lysnar, who was concerned mostly about the criteria for admission to and discharge from mental hospitals. Young was subject to numerous questions and barbs, mostly from Fraser, Holland and Lysnar. When asked by Holland, 'Does the minister intend to stand by the sterilization clause?' Young again equivocated, 'I shall not say that at this stage. I would like to get it through, and will, if the House desires it.'²⁸ Eventually, the Bill was referred to the Public Health Committee.

The 10-man select committee met several times in August and September, with several senior public servants in attendance.²⁹ Gray (now Inspector-General of Mental Hospitals), Paterson and Dr. H.R. Hayes (Medical Superintendent of Mental Hospitals) attended all nine sessions that considered the Bill, giving evidence when requested. B.L. Dallard, Controller-General of Prisons, attended all but one session and gave evidence. T.B. Strong, Director of Education, Dr. M.H. Watt, Deputy Director-General of Health, and Winifred

Valentine, Supervisor of Special Classes for the Education Department, were also often present, the last also giving evidence. Fraser also attended three of the meetings, even though he was not a member. Three members of Triggs's 1924 Committee (Beck, McGavin and Paterson) gave evidence, as did a group of three educationalists and psychologists from Victoria University College (Prof. Thomas Hunter, Prof. W.H. Gould and Dr. Ivan Sutherland), who had not previously testified on the matter.³⁰ The Committee made numerous amendments to the Bill, but left Clause 21 unchanged. Clause 25 was amended to forbid ovariectomy (in addition to the original ban on castration) and for sterilization to require the consent of three medical practitioners on the Board. The committee reported the Bill back to the House on 18 September.

The committee stage saw furious opposition to the Bill. Starting at 4.30 p.m. on 25 September 1928, an adjournment was taken at 7 a.m. the next morning, before debate was restarted at 9 a.m., and the Bill was finally reported at 11.45 a.m. It took almost 12 hours simply to agree on the Bill's short title.³¹ During the debate Young conceded that he might hold over certain (unspecified) clauses, at which point Coates announced that the Bill was now a government measure and thus its members would be subject to the party whip. Michael J. Savage, who in 1933 would succeed Holland as Labour leader and go on to lead the party to a landslide election victory two years later, moved to delay implementation of the Bill by a year. This amendment was defeated, largely along party lines, 36–15, with Lysnar being the sole Reform MP to defy the whip. Those 15 Noes, however, included the next four prime ministers, which I argue below was a major factor in the failure of subsequent attempts to legislate for eugenic sterilization.³² Clause 7 was not passed until just before 6 a.m., when just 40 of the 80 members voted (30 to 10 in favour), several members having gone off to bed. It seemed as if the scene was set for hours more acrimonious debate. During the adjournment, however, the government decided to withdraw Clauses 21 and 25, and the committee stage was completed just before midday.³³

The third reading began immediately, but the Opposition were still not happy, attempting unsuccessfully to amend Clause 7. Much time was also spent criticizing the way the government had handled the passage of the Bill. Holland blamed Young for wasting House time by not alerting it to the forthcoming withdrawal of Clauses 21 and 25. Holland also noted that the number of MPs in the House was surprisingly low (much smaller than the number during a late-night session the previous week),

to the point that no division had a majority of the total number of MPs voting for it.³⁴ Coates attempted to blame the Opposition for the time spent on the Bill, claiming that they were well aware of the government's plans. The Opposition would have none of this. Forbes, especially, was vituperative in rejecting the Prime Minister's claim, compared him unfavourably to his predecessor, Massey, but was kinder about Young.³⁵ Forbes asserted that much of this opposition to the Bill came from widespread concern expressed by those normally supportive of the government³⁶; Coates argued that he (and Young) 'considered that the country should have time to consider the full significance of certain clauses, and they have accordingly been withdrawn.'³⁷ The Bill was finally passed just after 1.30 p.m.

Passage through the Legislative Council was (as usual) fairly fast and uncomplicated, the first reading taking place on 27 September, just two days after the third reading in the House, with the second reading the following day. Triggs spoke in favour, as did Stout. The only speaker to oppose the Bill was C.J. Carrington, who had been Coates's election committee Chairman and was a practising Roman Catholic.³⁸ The Bill received its third reading on 2 October 1928, and received the royal assent soon thereafter.

OUTSIDE PARLIAMENT: PUBLIC OPINION AND LOBBYING

The advent of the Mental Defectives Amendment Bill also generated significant public debate, with numerous organizations and individuals expressing their views in the national press, especially about Clause 25. In the month of July 1928, in Wellington's *Evening Post* alone, an editorial generally supportive of the Bill recommended that the sterilization clause be deferred³⁹ and a later editorial backed Fraser's parliamentary arguments.⁴⁰ The Auckland Branch of the Australasian Association of Psychology and Philosophy recorded their opposition⁴¹ and the professors of Education and Philosophy at Auckland, Canterbury and Otago called for a scientific enquiry.⁴² Catholic Archbishop Francis Redwood condemned the marriage-restriction and sterilization clauses⁴³ and the Wellington Branch of the New Zealand Howard League for Penal Reform criticized the definitions of mental deficiency and the sterilization proposals⁴⁴ (although the Auckland Branch supported the Bill⁴⁵). The Auckland Women's Branch of the Reform Party telegraphed their congratulations on the Bill to the Prime Minister.⁴⁶

The furore continued into August. Again, using the *Evening Post* as a barometer, we see that a meeting of the Society for the Protection of Women and Children resolved to write to Young in support of the Bill, but asking that more than one woman be appointed to the Eugenics Board.⁴⁷ Professional biologists were not unanimous in support of the Bill: Marguerite Crookes, an Auckland botanist and founder of the Auckland Natural History Club, attacked the scientific basis of eugenics under the headline 'A Biologist's Viewpoint'.⁴⁸ The Auckland branch of the New Zealand Educational Institute, the country's oldest teachers' organization, decided to oppose the Bill,⁴⁹ but Triggs wrote a series of three articles in support of it.⁵⁰ Auckland's philosophy professor, W. Anderson, wrote a letter against the Bill, notably, the sterilization provisions.⁵¹ He was later joined by a long list of Auckland academics (including a second biologist, W.H. 'Barney' McGregor), teachers, women and clergymen in writing another letter expressing general opposition, especially to the definition of mental deficiency and its supposed inheritance.⁵² These letters provoked responses critical of Anderson and in support of the Bill from Triggs⁵³ as well as the writer, penal reformer and prison visitor, Blanche Baughan.⁵⁴ In short, Clauses 21 and 25 were clearly controversial and debated prominently in the national press.

WHY WERE CLAUSES 21 AND 25 WITHDRAWN?

The obvious question at this point is why did the government withdraw Clauses 21 and 25 when it clearly had the numbers to pass them (using the party whip, if necessary)? Several reasons suggest themselves. First, public opinion about such radical legislation was divided. In Coates's and Young's views (as well as those of several letter writers to the *Evening Post*), the public was not yet ready, although perhaps, in a few years, things would be different.⁵⁵ Related to this caution was the vehement opposition from several quarters.⁵⁶ It was the job of the Opposition parties to scrutinize and critique government legislation, but the degree of parliamentary hostility to these two clauses might have dissuaded the Reform government from pushing home its numerical advantage. Forbes had claimed that those elements of the press normally supportive of the government had misgivings over these clauses, and the trenchant criticisms from the Roman Catholic Church may similarly have frightened the government.⁵⁷ Even Coates's trusted and long-standing friend Carrington was publicly critical of the Bill (and that was the Bill as it

emerged from the House, with Clauses 21 and 25 gone), presumably because of his Catholic faith. An election was just two months away, and no government wants to be seen enacting controversial, weakly supported legislation or alienating a small but critical portion of the electorate at such a point. The dearth of Reform MPs in the House when the Committee Stage was progressing may have been an indicator of a lack of enthusiasm by rank-and-file MPs and Coates would not have wanted to risk having more members joining Lysnar in defying the whip had Clauses 21 and 25 come to a vote. Finally, it is worth remembering that Reform was a conservative party, one that did not want to be too far ahead of public opinion on controversial matters⁵⁸: it was the Liberal Party that had enacted the ‘social laboratory’ laws of the 19th century and Labour that would introduce the welfare state the following decade.

AFTER 1928: THE CAMPAIGN FOR REINSTATING THE TWO CLAUSES

Both Young and Coates probably expected that the proposals on marriage restriction and sterilization could be revisited during the term of the new parliament. The 1928 election, however, saw the unexpected defeat of the Reform government and the establishment of a United government, led by the Catholic Sir Joseph Ward, with parliamentary support from Labour. The two clauses did not lack public support, however, with a number of leading citizens campaigning for their legislative passage. Notably, many of those arguing for the eugenic cause were women, something also true in other parts of the world.⁵⁹

One of the most prominent pro-clause activists was Nina Barrer (see Fig. 5.1), a teacher and educational administrator, who was active in numerous organizations (WEA, the Red Cross, the League of Nations Union of New Zealand, CORSO, the United Nations Association of New Zealand, and, later, the National Party, the result of the 1936 merger of the Reform and United Parties),⁶⁰ but most especially the WDNZFU, the Women’s Division of the New Zealand Farmers’ Union (the forerunner to Federated Farmers). Barrer was Dominion Vice President and Advisory Board member, 1925–1947, President of the Masterton branch, 1927–1930, and, from 1933 to 1935, Editor of the Division’s magazine, *New Zealand Countrywoman*, in which she



Fig. 1 Nina Barrer in middle age. There are almost no publicly available photographs of Barrer (there is not one in her online entry in the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*). The image is taken from the autobiography of her early life, *The Misty Isle*, published posthumously in 1966 by Whitcombe and Tombs, Christchurch

authored a number of pro-eugenic articles.⁶¹ Eugenics clearly appealed to rural women in a farm-based economy where breeding better animals was routine. (As Erika Dyck's chapter 'Eugenics in Canada: Choice, Coercion and Context' in this volume shows, farming played a similar role in Canada.⁶²) In 1932 Barrer and the Dominion President comprised a delegation to Young, who had returned to the position of

Minister of Health in the United-Reform coalition government that followed the 1931 election, arguing for the reinstatement of the two clauses.⁶³ It was evident that Young was sympathetic but he did not act, in spite of the warm exchange of letters over subsequent years.⁶⁴ In 1932, with the support of the WDNZFU, she published a pamphlet entitled *The Problem of Mental Deficiency in New Zealand*, advocating the enactment of the two clauses and eugenics in general. The pamphlet was widely distributed, especially through Barrer's contacts in the WDNZFU. At the 1933 WDNZFU annual conference Barrer successfully opposed the election of Florence Polson as Dominion president.⁶⁵ Polson had been the inaugural president and was well known as an opponent of eugenics, having voiced her opinion in a number of pseudonymous articles in magazines aimed at rural women.⁶⁶ Barrer promoted several remits at the 1937 annual WDNZFU conference, notably ones on immigration, eugenics and abortion.

Barrer was joined in her efforts by the redoubtable Dr. Doris Gordon, a Taranaki GP and obstetrician, whose husband was also a GP.⁶⁷ Gordon was ardently pro-natalist ('in the womb of British womanhood lies the Empire's progress and her strength'⁶⁸) and vehemently anti-Catholic.⁶⁹ She and Barrer spoke in the affirmative in a debate on eugenics at the 1937 WDNZFU Annual Conference.⁷⁰ Gordon was a frequent public speaker on the topic and disparaged the way the 1928 Act was administered, calling for its full powers to be used, for example, to enforce segregation of the mentally deficient.⁷¹ Despite her campaigning for a eugenic sterilization law, Gordon was firmly of the view that sterilization was already legal.⁷² Her pronouncements on the subject brought a stinging response from Gray,⁷³ who in 1937 had obtained an informal opinion from Solicitor-General, H.H. Cornish, that they were not. Gordon, however, remained unrepentant,⁷⁴ citing a 1932 opinion of Watt, who by then was Director-General of Health.

In spite of their (and others') efforts, the campaign for the return of the two clauses failed. The most obvious reason for this failure was the lack of political support at the highest levels. After the 1928 election, Sir Joseph Ward became Prime Minister. He had opposed the Bill in 1928, presumably not least because he was Catholic. Moreover, his government relied on Labour votes to pass legislation, and his deputy was Forbes, another opponent of the 1928 Bill. Forbes effectively led the government as Ward's health declined and became Prime Minister on Ward's resignation in 1930, remaining in that role after the 1931 election,

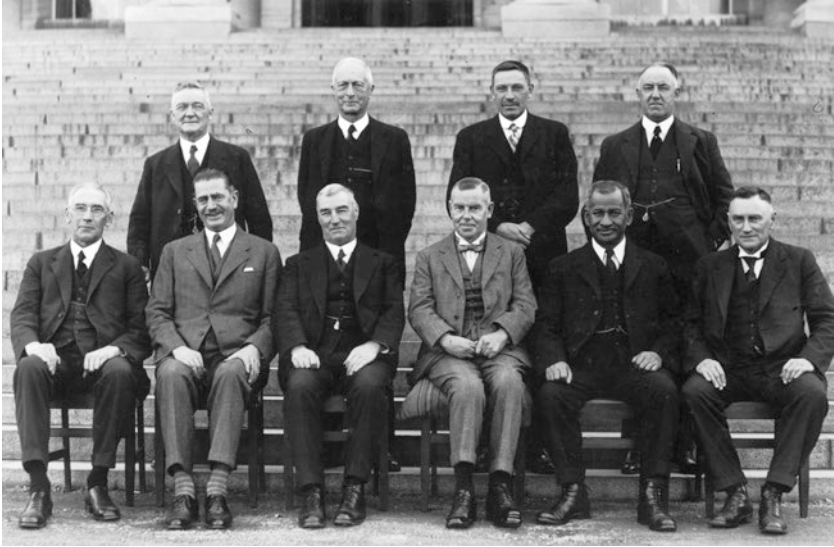


Fig. 2 The New Zealand coalition cabinet of 1931. Young is seated at the right; Coates is seated second from the left and Forbes third from the left. The Eastern Maori MP, Sir Āpirana Ngata, is next to Young. http://find.natlib.govt.nz/primo_library/libweb/action/display.do?ct=display&doc=nlz_tapuhi621720

which United and Reform contested as a coalition (see Fig. 5.2). The Labour victory in the 1935 election made Savage Prime Minister and gave Fraser the post of Minister of Health. By the time Labour lost government in 1949, eugenics had become politically unpopular. Thus at no time after 1928 did eugenic sterilization ever again have the support of the prime minister; 1928 can be seen, in retrospect, therefore, as the ‘high-water mark’ of the eugenics movement in New Zealand.

In short, therefore, New Zealand only just failed to pass a eugenic sterilization law. Certainly, the country came much closer to enacting such a law than is generally recognized. To suggest that eugenic ideas fell on stony ground in New Zealand ignores that fact that there was strong support for sterilization from important sections of the community, including medics, biologists, women’s organizations and the judiciary. More generally, to use the passage or otherwise of eugenic sterilization laws as a dichotomous classification of whether or not different

countries, states and provinces embraced eugenics is overly simple. Such a taxonomy avoids a closer examination of the history of eugenics in these different places and clouds comparative analyses. In the case of New Zealand, for example, eugenic ideas clearly influenced the treatment of those considered mentally defective, to the point where sterilization did occur in spite of its questionable legality.⁷⁵ Tracing the reasons for these events leads to a richer, more nuanced view of the history of eugenics that is significantly more explanatory, illustrating the ‘limits of illiberalism’ that Stephen Garton’s chapter “[“Liberty of the Nation”: Eugenics in Australia and New Zealand and the Limits of Illiberalism](#)” in this volume argues underlay the restricted reach of eugenics in Britain and its dominions.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The items eugenics, sterilization and Mental Defectives Amendment Act do not appear in the indexes of standard New Zealand histories, such as Sinclair, K. (1980) *A History of New Zealand* (rev. & enl. ed.), (London: Lane); King, M. (2003) *The Penguin History of New Zealand* (North Shore: Penguin), or Rice, G., Oliver, W.H. and Williams, B.R. (1992) *The Oxford History of New Zealand*. (2nd ed.) (Auckland: Oxford University Press).
2. Wanhalla, A. (2007) ‘To “Better the Breed of Men”: women and eugenics in New Zealand, 1900–1935’, *Women’s History Review* 16, 163–182.
3. Garton, S. (2010) ‘Eugenics in Australia and New Zealand: Laboratories of racial science’, ch.13, pp. 243–257 in Bashford, A. and Levine, P. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics* (New York: Oxford University Press).
4. For example, a letter dated 20 September 1937 from Dr. Doris Gordon, GP of Taranaki, to Dr. Theodore Gray outlines the sterilization of a 22-year-old woman with four illegitimate children after the intervention of a Child Welfare Officer. Gordon argues that this operation was perfectly legal provided the patient was over 21 and capable of giving consent. (Legislation—Mental Defectives Register (R16195921), Archives New Zealand. See also Nina Barrer papers (0182–044), Turnbull Library, Wellington.) A number of boys were sterilized at the Burnham Industrial School (Epileptics, *Press* 58 (17595): 4, 26 October 1922; Moral Murder, *Evening Post* 105 (51): 4, 1 March 1923; See also testimony of Thomas Archey, previously manager of the School, to the Committee of Enquiry into Mental Defectives and Sexual Offenders (transcript of evidence). R22300642: 648–653. Archives New Zealand.).

The legality of sterilization was denied, for example, in a letter from the Deputy Director-General of Health to the Superintendent of the Child Welfare Branch of the Education Department, dated 15 September 1938, which said that there existed no authority for sterilization operations and it would be a crime under current law (Archives New Zealand; Mental Patients—Sterilisation (R16195647)). A slightly different view was expressed in a letter of 13 November 1928, from the Crown Law Office to Gray, saying that the operation would be legal if consent were given, but that such consent would not be possible if the patient were mentally defective (or in the case of children), which would have rendered eugenic sterilizations of the feeble-minded unlawful (Archives New Zealand; Mental Patients—Sterilisation (R16195646)).

5. A related point is made by Largent (2008: 8), who noted that the importance of which states passed compulsory sterilization legislation in understanding the history of eugenics in the USA is confounded by the fact that patients were sterilized in some states lacking explicit sterilization laws. (See M.A. Largent (2008) *Breeding Contempt: The History of Coerced Sterilization in the United States* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press).
6. The perceived problem and calls for innovative solutions, such as sterilization, were discussed in numerous newspapers (e.g., ‘The Degenerate and the Unfit’ *NZ Truth* 911, 4, 12 May 1923).
7. See Prisons Department: Prisons Board (Annual Report of) for 1920. *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, 1921 Session II, H-20A: 4. The Prison Board’s comments on the feeble-minded and sexual offences were reported in both the *Evening Post* (Sexual Offences: Prison Board’s Attitude: Recommendation to Government, *Evening Post* 102 (86): 9, 8 October 1921) and the *New Zealand Herald* (Sexual Offences: Prison Board’s Proposal, *New Zealand Herald* 58 (17914): 3, 17 October 1921). Similar concerns are outlined in the introductory remarks to *Mental Defectives and Sexual Offenders*. Report of the Committee of Inquiry Appointed by the Hon. Sir Maui Pomare, K.B.E., C.M.G., Minister of Health. *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, 1925 Session I, H-31A: 2.
8. The Eugenics Education Society. *Otago Daily Times* 14919: 6. 23 August 1910.
9. ‘Mind and Body: Efforts to Improve the Race: Eugenics Society Formed’, *Evening Post* 81 (111): 3. 12 May 1911. ‘Should Cousins Marry? Heredity and Environment’. *Evening Post*, 82 (60): 2. 8 September 1911. ‘Road to Ruin: National Life Threatened’, *Evening Post* 83 (116): 3. 16 May 1912. Eugenics Society: Report of the Year’s Work. *Evening Post* 85 (112): 3. 13 May 1913.

10. 'Heredity and Eugenics: Dr. Davenport's Views', *New Zealand Herald* 51 (15702): 4. 1 September 1914. 'What Makes a Race: From Generation to Generation: Dr. Davenport on Heredity', *Evening Post* 88 (59): 2. 7 September 1914. 'Heredity and Eugenics: Lecture by Dr. C. Davenport', *Press* 50 (15069): 10. 10 September 1914.
11. Chapple, W.A. (1903) *Fertility of the Unfit* (Melbourne, VIC: Whitcombe & Tombs). More formally, the 1908 British Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble-minded reported that the defective couples produced an average of seven children whereas their normal-minded peers had just four.
12. In 1906, Kellogg, along with economist Irving Fisher and geneticist Charles B. Davenport, founded the Race Betterment Foundation, which strongly promoted eugenic ideas in the US.
13. See p. 202 in Taylor, T. (2005) 'Thomas Hunter and the campaign against eugenics', *New Zealand Journal of History* 39, 195–214.
14. Margaret Tennant, 'Paterson, Ada Gertrude', from the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara—the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 7 January 2014. <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/3p13/paterson-ada-gertrude>.
15. Committee of Enquiry into Mental Defectives and Sexual Offenders (transcript of evidence) (R22300642), Archives New Zealand, p. 81.
16. *Mental Defectives and Sexual Offenders*. Report of the Committee of Inquiry Appointed by the Hon. Sir Maui Pomare, KBE, CMG, Minister of Health. *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, 1925 Session I, H-31A. The Introduction argued that 'unrestricted multiplication of feeble-minded members of the community is a most serious menace to the future welfare and happiness of the Dominion', and it was of the 'utmost importance that mental defectives should be prevented from reproducing'.
17. One prominent lobbyist was the president of the Auckland branch of the National Council of Women, Hilda Northcroft, a trained doctor active in Reform Party. (See Linda Bryder. 'Northcroft, Hilda Margaret', from the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara—the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 10 December 2013. <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/4n13/northcroft-hilda-margaret>. Northcroft had given evidence to Triggs's Committee on behalf of the Auckland Branch of the British Medical Association (see *Mental Defectives and Sexual Offenders*. Report of the Committee of Inquiry Appointed by the Hon. Sir Maui Pomare, KBE, CMG, Minister of Health. *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, 1925 Session I, H-31A: 3).
18. *Mental Deficiency and its Treatment*. Report on Visits of Inspection to Various Institutions in Great Britain, America, and the Continent,

by Dr. Theo. G. Gray, Inspector-General of Mental Hospitals in the Dominion of New Zealand.—Part I. *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, 1927 Session I, H-07A.

19. Minute Book, Public Health Committee, 1928.
20. Social defectives were defined in the draft Bill as ‘persons who suffer from mental deficiency associated with or manifested by anti-social conduct, and who require supervision for their own protection or in the public interest’. (Minute Book, Public Health Committee, 1928.) The definition was subsequently modified and in the Act reads, ‘persons who suffer from mental deficiency associated with anti-social conduct, and who by reason of such mental deficiency and conduct require supervision for their own protection or in the public interest’. (Mental Defectives Amendment Act, 1928, Clause 7.)
21. At the time, the usual procedure for legislation was passage through the lower House of Representatives followed by the now-abolished upper Legislative Council, before royal assent by the governor general. At the first reading in the House of Representatives, the Bill was introduced and briefly outlined; extensive debate often took place during the second reading, which would take place a few days later, and the Bill would normally be referred to an appropriate select committee of MPs, which would hear public submissions, and then examine and possibly amend each clause. The Bill would then be reported back to the House, and examined and debated clause by clause during the committee stage, which was followed, sometimes immediately, by the third reading, during which further debates and amendments may have been proposed. The Legislative Council followed a similar procedure of three readings, but in practice seldom amended the work of the House.
22. ‘Mentally Unfit: New Proposals: Register to be Compiled: Surgical Treatment’, *Evening Post*, CVI: 13, 18 July 1928, p.12.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Young said, ‘The Government does not propose to force the issue as far as sterilization is concerned, but it desires to give a lead to public opinion. Whether public opinion is ready for such a step remains to be seen, but I feel convinced that it is only a matter of time when the step must be taken. If, however, there is a strong public opinion showing that the country is not yet ready, I am prepared to accept any reasonable amendments to make the Bill a workable measure and a credit to the country.’ NZPD 217: 618.
25. Fraser specifically cited the work of King and the Plunket Society in improving the lot of children as a reason to first concentrate on environmental interventions before worrying about eugenic solutions to possible genetic defects. NZPD 217: 634.

26. Now being called United, but under the leadership of Sir Joseph Ward.
27. This argument, sometimes found in modern textbooks, is originally due to Cambridge Professor of Genetics, Reginald C. Punnett, who was, however, ardently pro-eugenic. He proposed that the apparent inefficacy of eugenic selection could be avoided if carriers of undesired genes could be identified. (See Paul, D.B., and H.G. Spencer (1995) 'The hidden science of eugenics', *Nature* 374, 302–304.)
28. NZPD 217: 702.
29. Minute Book, Public Health Committee, 1928. This committee of MPs was chaired by the Reform member for Wairau, William Girling, and included Young, 'Tim' Armstrong (Labour, Christchurch East; later Fraser's successor as Minister of Health), Allen Bell (Reform, Bay of Islands), David Buddo (United, Kaiapoi; a previous Minister of Health under Ward), William Jones (Reform, Marsden), Henry Holland (Reform, Christchurch North; not to be confused with the Labour leader, 'Harry' (H.E.H.) Holland), James Horn (United, Wakatipu), Bill Parry (Labour, Auckland Central) and Stewart Reid (Reform, Waikato).
30. A more detailed account of Sutherland's submission, in particular, can be found on pp. 142–145 of Oliver Sutherland (2013) *Paikea: The Life of I.L. G. Sutherland* (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press).
31. 'The Day in Parliament', *Evening Post* VI, :64, 26 September 1928, p. 8.
32. Ward, Forbes, Savage and Fraser. The only United/Liberal to vote against delay was the Eastern Maori MP, Sir Āpirana Ngata. He was joined by the other two voting Māori MPs of the Reform Party (Henare, Northern Maori and Uru, Southern Maori); Pōmare was ill and did not vote. Lysnar was the only Reform MP to defy the whip and vote for the delay, although William Spiers Glenn (Rangitikei) and Alexander Harris (Waitemata) had said they favoured postponement. (Harris was by this time an independent MP, having resigned the Reform Party whip, but he normally voted with the government, as he did in this case.) NZPD 219: 491. 'A Long Sitting: Mental Defectives Bill: Solid Opposition in House: Vital Clauses Withdrawn', *Evening Post* 106 (64): 11. 26 September 1928.
33. 'The Day in Parliament', *Evening Post* 106 (64): 8. 26 September 1928. See also 'A Long Sitting: Mental Defectives Bill: Solid Opposition in House: Vital Clauses Withdrawn', *Evening Post* 106 (64): 11. 26 September 1928.
34. Holland claimed that the Opposition knew nothing of Young's intention to compromise on the contentious clauses. NZPD 219: 498.
35. Forbes fulminated, 'the Prime Minister utterly failed in his duty as leader of the House, because, after all, the Opposition has a right to the confidence of the Prime Minister as to the work it is called upon to do. It is

- treating the House in a most childish way to say that the Bill has passed through the House just as the Government wish it to go through, that the Government had its own ideas about what it is going to do, and was not going to give the Opposition any information as to the clauses of the Bill it was serious about and those which were to be withdrawn.' NZPD 219: 508.
36. Forbes claimed, 'In a very strong Government paper which I received this morning it was urged that this Bill should be shelved. It was not a question of opposition or of party difference, but that newspapers which strongly support the Government were just as strong in their condemnation of the measure as were those opposed to it. With the knowledge that there was this strong opposition in the country they claimed that the Bill should be postponed.' NZPD 219: 508.
 37. NZPD 219: 506.
 38. Eastwood, B. 'Carey Carrington: Forgotten Citizen?' *Kaipara Lifestyler*, 14 July 2009. Carrington explicitly referenced Catholicism in recording his opposition to eugenics, criticizing the amended definition of 'social defectives' in Clause 7, the registration of the feeble-minded and the establishment of the Eugenics Board. *Evening Post* 106 (70): 11. 2 October 1928.
 39. 'Topics of the Day', *Evening Post* 106 (13): 10. 18 July 1928.
 40. 'Topics of the Day', *Evening Post* 106 (17): 8. 21 July 1928.
 41. 'Mental Defectives: Opposition to Bill', *Evening Post* 106 (15): 13. 19 July 1928.
 42. 'Request for Inquiry: Mental Defectives Bill', *Evening Post* 106 (21): 12. 26 July 1928.
 43. "'Very Dangerous": Statement by Archbishop Redwood', *Evening Post* 106 (19): 10. 25 July 1928.
 44. 'Mental Defectives: Suggested Amendments to Bill', *Evening Post* 106 (24): 4. 31 July 1928.
 45. 'Mental Defectives Bill: Support for the Measure', *New Zealand Herald* 65 (20021): 13. 10 August 1928.
 46. 'Bill Commended', *Evening Post* 106 (17): 10. 21 July 1928. The branch was then led by the ubiquitous Hilda Northcroft.
 47. 'Women in Print', *Evening Post* 106 (25): 13. 1 August 1928.
 48. Crookes, M.W. 'A Biologist's Viewpoint', *Evening Post* 106 (31): 26. 11 August 1928.
 49. 'Conference Wanted: Mental Defectives Bill', *Evening Post* 106 (44): 14. 30 August 1928.
 50. Triggs, W.H. 'Social Problem: Mental Defectives', *Evening Post* 106 (34): 9. 13 August 1928; 'Social Defectives: Classes on Register: Proposed Bill: Hereditary & Environment', *Evening Post* 106 (32): 10.

- 14 August 1928; ‘Race Building: Modern Civilisation: Problems and Perils: New Zealand’s Opportunity’, *Evening Post* 106 (33): 12. 15 August 1928. Fraser responded with a series of three opinion pieces in September: Fraser, P. ‘Back to Biology: Mendelism and Man: Warnings of Science’, *Evening Post* 106 (52): 10. 10 September 1928; ‘Mental Deficiency: Mystery of Mutations: Heredity & Hybridisation: “What We Cannot Do”’ *Evening Post* 106 (53): 11. 11 September 1928; ‘Mental Deficiency: Heredity and Disease: Clouds of Misconception: A Dead Doctrine’, *Evening Post* 106 (55): 6. 13 September 1928.
51. Anderson, W. ‘Mental Defectives’, *Evening Post* 106 (36): 8. 20 August 1928.
 52. Anderson, W. et al. ‘Mental Defectives: Is Legislation Justifiable?’, *Evening Post* 106 (42): 8. 28 August 1928.
 53. Triggs, W.H. ‘Mental Defectives: Proposed Legislation: The Professors’ Catechism’, *Evening Post* 106 (46): 8. 31 August 1928.
 54. Baughan, B.E. ‘Mental Defectives’, *Evening Post* 106 (38): 13. 23 August 1928. Baughan had previously given evidence to Triggs’s committee in her role as Official Visitor to the Addington Reformatory (see *Mental Defectives and Sexual Offenders*. Report of the Committee of Inquiry Appointed by the Hon. Sir Maui Pomare, KBE, CMG, Minister of Health. *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, 1925 Session I, H-31A: 3).
 55. During the 2nd reading, Young said, ‘If we don’t get it [sterilization] now, we will get it at some later period.’ ‘Mental Defectives: The Government Bill: Evidence to be Heard’, *Evening Post* 106 (19): 10. 25 July 1928.
 56. Tony Taylor gives primary credit to the opposition from academic psychologists, philosophers and educationalists, an explanation that seems implausible to me, especially given the reception received by their letters to newspapers. (See Taylor, T. (2005) ‘Thomas Hunter and the campaign against eugenics’, *New Zealand Journal of History* 39: 195–214.) For example, Triggs derided ‘the professors’ for their impractical suggestions, their ignorance of recent research and for pushing their own barrow (experimental psychology). (See Triggs, W.H. ‘Mental Defectives: Proposed Legislation: The Professors’ Catechism’, *Evening Post* 106 (46): 8. 31 August 1928.) Moreover, as we have seen, intellectuals were divided on the matter, with many medically and biologically trained academics in support of the proposals.
 57. The timing of this Catholic opposition to eugenics is interesting. Mark Largent has argued that Catholic opposition to sterilization in America did not crystalize until about 1927, after the American Supreme Court’s ruling in *Buck v. Bell*, which validated Virginia’s sterilization law.

- Before that time Catholic writers were divided on the issue. Pope Pius XI did not issue his encyclical denouncing sterilization until the end of 1930. (See pp. 102–113 in M.A. Largent (2008) *Breeding Contempt: The History of Coerced Sterilization in the United States* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press)).
58. See Young's comments above (endnote 20).
 59. Young had previously noted, during the debate on the 2nd reading of the Bill, the prominence of women's social-welfare organizations in lobbying for the implementation of the Triggs Committee's report. NZPD 217: 695. For a fuller discussion of these matters see Wanhalla, A. (2007) 'To "Better the Breed of Men": women and eugenics in New Zealand, 1900–1935', *Women's History Review* 16, 163–182. To give an overseas example, in Alberta, Canada, for instance, prominent members of United Farm Women of Alberta strongly supported that province's eugenic legislation (see Claudia Malacrida (2015) *A Special Hell: Institutional Life in Alberta's Eugenic Years* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), esp. pp. 198–199).
 60. Christopher van der Krogt. 'Barrer, Nina Agatha Rosamond', from the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara—the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 4 June 2013. <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/4b6/barrer-nina-agatha-rosamond>.
 61. See Nina Barrer papers (0182-107, 0182-112), Turnbull Library, Wellington.
 62. See endnote 59.
 63. 'Mental Defectives: Sterilisation Question: Deputation to Minister', *Evening Post* 114 (12): 20, 14 July 1932.
 64. See Nina Barrer papers (0182-044, 0182-124), Turnbull Library, Wellington. In March 1935 Young wrote a ministerial letter of introduction for Barrer for use on her trip to Britain.
 65. Delyn Day. 'Polson, Florence Ada Mary Lamb', from the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara—the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 8 January 2014: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/4p14/polson-florence-ada-mary-lamb>.
 66. Polson wrote as 'Martha Marie' in the *New Zealand Farmers' Weekly and Farm & Home Journal*.
 67. Linda Bryder. 'Gordon, Doris Clifton', from the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara—the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 1 October 2013: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/4g14/gordon-doris-clifton>.
 68. Ibid.
 69. A number of her speech notes contain anti-Catholic comments, which are also to be found in several of her letters. See, for example,

correspondence with Gray, dated 20 September 1937, with attached speech notes in Legislation—Mental Defectives Register (R16195921), Archives New Zealand.

70. 'Women's Division: Problem of the Unfit: Dr. Gordon's Views', *Evening Post* 124 (12): 16, 14 July 1937.
71. *Ibid.*
72. See endnote 2.
73. Letter from Gray to Gordon, 11 October 1937, in Legislation—Mental Defectives Register (R16195921), Archives New Zealand.
74. Letter from Gordon to Gray, 14 October 1937 in Legislation—Mental Defectives Register (R16195921), Archives New Zealand.
75. See endnote 4.

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Debating Clause 21: ‘Eugenic Marriage’ in New Zealand

Angela Wanhalla

When first read before New Zealand’s House of Representatives in July 1928, the Mental Defectives Amendment Bill included two controversial clauses. Clause 21 proposed to prohibit the marriage of individuals classified and registered with a Eugenics Board as ‘mentally and socially defective’ and to make the procurement and solemnization of a marriage involving a registered individual an offence.¹ It was withdrawn in committee on 25 September 1928, along with Clause 25, which proposed a programme of sterilization.² Their removal came after significant opposition led by Labour politician Peter Fraser, who in debate on the bill described eugenics as a discredited line of thought and ‘hardly a science at all’.³

Although much of the controversy focused on sterilization, both clauses were removed because they ‘formed the main feature of the Bill’ and were ‘interdependent’.⁴ Withdrawing them, said Prime Minister Gordon Coates, signified the government’s intention to give the country more time to ‘recognize the significance of the powers and intentions’ of

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both clauses.⁵ Three days later, when the bill was read in the Legislative Council, William H. Triggs, who had presided over the government's 1924–1925 Committee of Inquiry into Mental Defectives and Sexual Offenders, expressed his regret at the loss of Clause 21, but felt confident 'that when this [Eugenics] Board has got into working order, and when the public see the benefits of its operations, they will insist that some provision – at any rate, for the prevention of the marriage of defective persons – shall be carried into law.'⁶ If 'carried into law', Triggs felt these clauses would 'place it [New Zealand] more than ever in the forefront for its progressive humanitarian legislation'. His vision was never to be achieved.

Marriage has been described as a 'much-ignored' aspect of eugenics, even though in most countries where eugenics gained popular, scientific, and political attention, governing marriage was regarded as foundational to any effective eugenic-based reform programme.⁷ A similar absence marks the small but vibrant scholarship on eugenics in New Zealand where Clause 25 has attracted some attention, as have the subsequent attempts by social reformers, intellectuals and some doctors to reinstate that clause in the 1930s. In contrast, there has been little examination of marriage within eugenic thought. This chapter, therefore, explores New Zealand debates over 'eugenic marriage', defined as direct intervention into marriage for the purpose of race improvement by limiting the marital opportunities of those classified as 'unfit' and by encouraging, through social policy and eugenic education, a view of marriage as a civic responsibility involving a duty to the state and nation. It details the strategies proposed for bringing about eugenic marriage, such as divorce liberalization, and demonstrates there was little consensus over how eugenic marriage was to be achieved, even among eugenists themselves. It is particularly notable that race-based marriage restrictions were never raised by New Zealand supporters of eugenics but, as the chapter shows, in a country with a long history of intermarriage between Māori and non-Māori, this absence is not surprising. Eugenic-inspired schemes of 'scientific matchmaking' were also rejected by the public and politicians because these proposals threatened individual liberty and went against a predominant view that marriage was a private matter. In practical terms, as Coates realized, marriage restriction could not work without a programme of sterilization, and so by the 1930s efforts to bring about eugenic marriage focused upon the provision of marital advice and education about sexual health.

EUGENIC MARRIAGE STRATEGIES

Attempts to bring about eugenic marriage took place across the world, and the various practical strategies deployed to achieve it all generally stressed 'physical purity in marriage and the necessity of preventing the perpetuation of social diseases in future generations'.⁸ As Greta Jones notes, in places where eugenics found support, and had an organisational infrastructure, a shared international ideology was not necessarily followed by uniformity in application.⁹ Eugenic marriage programmes took a number of forms: the most common approach was the marriage health certificate, which required a couple to have a medical examination to prove their mental and physical fitness for marriage. The American states of Michigan, Delaware, Kentucky and Connecticut were early experimenters, all introducing medical certificates for marriage in the nineteenth century. During the progressive era at least thirty states passed laws restricting marriage of the 'unfit' by a range of means, ranging from medical examinations, medical certificates or complete prohibition.¹⁰ Many US states also enacted laws barring first cousin marriages, even though, as Diane Paul and Hamish Spencer have shown, most prominent eugenists doubted their effectiveness.¹¹ In certain parts of the United States, eugenic marriage restrictions were also based on race, most notably the Virginia Racial Integrity Acts of the 1920s, whose existence owed much to a campaign launched by two eugenists.¹² Variations on the marriage health certificates included a notification system for transmissible diseases that emerged out of social-hygiene campaigns against venereal disease (VD), in addition to affidavits or declarations attesting to fitness.

Divorce reform, where the grounds for divorce were widened to include a range of illnesses, the most common being insanity, was also regarded as having positive eugenic outcomes. In 1919, for instance, Czechoslovakia (as it was then known), following Switzerland (1907), introduced mental illness and epilepsy as grounds for divorce, as did Turkey in 1926. Cuba allowed insanity as a ground for divorce, as did England (1938). Mexico and Panama did the same in 1928, but included a wide range of other 'illnesses' like incurable impotence, and contagious and incurable diseases. Other jurisdictions sought complete prohibition of marriage for those certified as suffering from a physical, mental or transmissible disease.¹³

Eugenists also supported educational and sexual health campaigns, as well as marriage-counselling programmes. When the Cuban government's bill requiring couples to obtain a certificate of health before marriage failed in 1940, eugenic supporters turned instead to a platform of public health education.¹⁴ Cuban eugenists, notably medical professionals, turned away from relying on the state to enact eugenic legislation and instead took up a campaign of public education, particularly targeting married couples, and promoted a view of relationships based on sexual compatibility.¹⁵ In the United States, Paul Popenoe combined his support for sterilization programmes with his role as the father of marriage counselling.¹⁶

New Zealanders debated eugenic marriage within this international context, for advocates of eugenics, as well as sympathetic politicians, were very aware of international practices and debates about the effectiveness of marriage restriction in those jurisdictions that had trialled restrictive laws in the first decades of the twentieth century. American legislative action was widely reported and, although much of this followed a cut-and-paste style of journalism, over time editors increasingly commented upon, approved or critiqued eugenic platforms of reform.¹⁷ The *Auckland Star*, for instance, supported eugenic interventions, proclaiming in 1912 that 'it is absolutely an urgent moral duty for the Government of every civilised country to impose restrictions upon the indiscriminate reproduction of physically and mentally damaged stocks'.¹⁸ In a January 1914 editorial, the *Wanganui Chronicle* explained the science of eugenics to its readers, how it differed from hygiene campaigns, and lent its support to eugenic education.¹⁹ Others advocated caution and careful research. Describing the restrictive marriage legislation in some US states as a 'eugenics craze', the *Wairarapa Daily Times* reflected in 1913 'that the conclusions of the eugenists require to be received with extreme caution'.²⁰

Supporters of eugenics in New Zealand generally agreed that marriage was an important tool for controlling the growth of the 'unfit' population, but they diverged over how to best put it into practice. Some felt providing married couples access to contraception would bring about better eugenic outcomes, while others favoured early marriage in order to prevent the spread of transmissible sexual diseases, and thereby protect the health of the family. Some felt marriage prohibition would have little impact, and if combined with a sterilization programme, would only serve to encourage unrestrained sexual immorality, particularly among

'feeble-minded' girls and women who were popularly understood to lack sexual self-control. Many felt the scientific case for eugenic marriage law was weak, because not enough was known about heredity and genetics to have confidence that a restrictive marriage law would target the right people. Another concern was how to decide which people were eugenically fit or not, and who ought to make those decisions: the medical profession, or the state? Caution about extending and widening state intervention into private lives was informed by debates over whether marriage was an individual and private matter, or a state institution that underpinned the collective health of the community, society and the nation. Church leaders also engaged in this debate, arguing against greater state intrusion into a religious institution and proposals that ministers ought to be legally required to prevent marriages between people who were 'unfit'.²¹

William A. Chapple, doctor and politician, was an early advocate of eugenic marriage reform in New Zealand. He was particularly concerned about the plummeting birth rate (and a declining marriage rate), but also its differential nature, neatly encapsulated in the title of his 1903 book, *The Fertility of the Unfit*. Unsurprisingly, as a medical man Chapple turned to his own profession as best positioned to govern marriage, proposing a system of marriage health certificates, issued by a central board that would review 'confidential medical reports upon the health, physical condition, and family history of the parties to a proposed marriage contract'.²² Those found unfit would be issued with a certificate of sterilization, which, once completed, would then entitle them to marry, reinforcing the interdependent connection between sterilization and marriage reform in the minds of eugenicists, but also consolidating marriage as a key social and economic institution.

Journalist Arthur N. Field, then employed at the *Dominion*, also supported marriage health certificates. He read a paper on the topic to the Wellington branch of the New Zealand Eugenics Society in 1912 and subsequently published it in the *Eugenics Review*. Although Field admitted that 'when two people, presumably more or less in love, get to the stage of applying for a marriage license, no doctor's views as to their physique are likely to have much weight with them', he was convinced that having such a scheme would encourage 'the whole population to think more seriously about this important question, than it ever has in the past. A direct national premium, as it were, is placed on good health. People assess most factors in a marriage, and here would be a new one

that not only the parties themselves, but their relatives also, would show a keen interest in.²³ Field was firmly of the view, as were most advocates of marriage restriction, that marriage was a state institution and in need of proper management. Given its importance to the nation, the decision to marry could not be left to individuals alone, and certainly ought not to be entered into for purely emotional or selfish reasons.²⁴ Field reasoned that his marriage-certificate system would have educational benefits, operating to draw the attention of individuals to their duties and responsibilities to society. Field wanted this to be a state-run scheme, free of charge, and a requirement of getting a marriage license.²⁵ His scheme was based on a grading system: an 'A' ranking represented a 'thoroughly sound and well-developed person'; a 'B' was 'tolerable'; 'C' were weaklings and 'D' was, to quote Field, 'a pity'.²⁶ Not only would the grading system alert people to their physical health, and to their marital duties, but a fitness grade linked to the marriage certificate meant statistics could be compiled with a view to tracking marriages within and across these grades so as to assess the relationship between marriage and growth in the 'degenerate' population. This data, argued Field, would provide the empirical evidence on which any future eugenic legislation could be based.

In a 1910 article praising the establishment of a Eugenics Education Society in Dunedin, the *Ensign* newspaper described a scheme similar to Field's involving state-run pre-marital medical exams, but noted that 'such a reform would take some time to put into operation, particularly in a democratic country in which the liberty of the subject is so much to be considered, but upon consideration it must be admitted that the proposal has everything to recommend it, and if New Zealand moves along these lines the future welfare of her sons and daughters will be assured'.²⁷ By 1917, the question of whether medical certificates proving fitness for marriage ought to be instituted was 'a question that is being freely asked in New Zealand at the present time', for the current 'haphazard' way in which marriages were contracted undermined the 'virility and vitality of the race'.²⁸

There was also support for a system of compulsory health declarations before marriage, which, like Field's scheme, would educate individuals about the social importance of marriage in contributing to the 'health of the race'.²⁹ Health declarations drew upon the notification system advocated by feminist and social hygiene campaigners seeking to control the spread of VD and its impact on women and children, which

was instituted under the Social Hygiene Act 1917.³⁰ Ettie Rout, a campaigner for greater knowledge of sexual health among women, regarded the eradication of VD as a 'eugenic measure.' In her book *Safe Marriage: A Return to Sanity* (1922), which was banned in New Zealand, Rout connected knowledge of sexual hygiene to the betterment of individual, public and national health, and dramatically described marriage as 'easily the most dangerous of all our social institutions.' An advocate of early marriage, Rout also favoured the 'general application of birth control by voluntary contraception, and the particular application of voluntary and compulsory sterilisation of the feeble-minded and unfit.'³¹ However, few New Zealanders supported birth control as a eugenic tool.

Others concentrated on finding measures to encourage the 'fit' to marry. In a 1911 editorial, the *Wanganui Chronicle* proposed abolishing the marriage-license fee, regarding it as a tax and effectively a disincentive to marry, especially among 'healthy couples'. Because marriage was a 'direct asset to the State' and an 'obligation', the *Chronicle's* editor suggested each unmarried adult had to provide a 'good reason' for their single status, and also suggested a tax on bachelors as an inducement to marry.³² Given the heightened awareness and anxiety over VD during and after World War I, it is unsurprising that those 'healthy' individuals refusing to marry and do their duty for the 'race' sparked debate.³³ Single men were regarded as especially problematic, for they could spread VD, as opposed to single women, whom it was assumed would remain celibate.³⁴ War had heightened concern about physical fitness and national health. Surely, wrote a correspondent to Dunedin's *Evening Star*, 'war must have opened the eyes of everyone to the value of such a science, when the fit stand so far ahead of the unfit in value to their country'. Its aim, 'A True Eugenicist' continued, 'is plainly to teach people to choose their mates rather from the point of view of good health and strength than from that of good looks or wealth.'³⁵

It was in divorce reform where eugenic thinking had some impact in New Zealand, reflected in attempts to introduce insanity as a ground for 'loosening the marriage bond' from the 1880s.³⁶ This was finally realised in 1907, but to meet this ground one spouse had to have spent ten years out of the previous twelve in an asylum, which was reduced to seven out of ten years in 1912. Some divorce reformers argued for the introduction of this ground on the basis of its eugenic outcomes. The 'chief point of the [1907] Bill' for Thomas Wilford (Hutt), was to 'guard this colony against the fertility of the unfit'. Being a 'believer of heredity', Wilford

explicitly supported the new ground as a eugenic measure.³⁷ George Laurenson (Lyttelton) also gave the reform a eugenic purpose, citing it as an example of how the government was ‘extending our humanitarian laws in every direction. We are allowing the unfit to live’, he said, ‘but I think we should take a step further, and say that we will not allow them to become mothers and fathers.’³⁸

Efforts at effective eugenic reform, however, required a marriage law to halt the ‘reproduction of the unfit’. Any attempt to improve the quality of the population through divorce, noted one member of the house in 1905, was a ‘mere paving of the nails of the monster of degeneracy, and only meets the wishes of those few who want to get married again’. Divorce reform was a start, but ‘I firmly believe that the day is not far distant when the Legislature of this colony will have to deal with a Bill regulating the marriage relations of the people altogether.’³⁹ The insanity clause was a eugenic failure, though, because few people used this as a legal ground to obtain a divorce, given the length of time one needed to wait before filing a petition.⁴⁰ Other grounds, such as the three-year separation rule introduced in 1920, offered a more effective option for those wanting to end their marriage. Ettie Rout recognized this, making the case in *Safe Marriage*, that ‘Unhappy and unsuitable marriages necessarily foster immorality and promote disease, and the community as a whole gains by their being dissolved in a ready and responsible and dignified manner.’⁴¹ She urged religious institutions to regard divorce as a tool for racial betterment.

Other legal measures for governing reproduction and marriage existed in the form of the criminalization of sex (carnal knowledge) with a person certified as ‘mentally defective’ under section 127 of the Mental Defectives Act 1911. In what was described as an ‘unusual case’ John Leonard was charged in October 1921 with having had ‘carnal knowledge of a female who was detained at Sunnyside Mental Hospital as a mental defective’.⁴² The charge arose from the fact that Mrs. Leonard had given birth to a child in September, which Sunnyside staff, counting back the months, attributed to the visit of Mr. Leonard on Christmas Day 1920, when he was given permission to ‘take her for a walk through the grounds’. Leonard was found guilty in November 1921, but took his case to the Court of Appeal, arguing that the marriage contract existed outside the language of the act. On the Bench were Chief Justice Robert Stout, Justices Stringer, Sim, Hosking and Adams. Eugenics arose in the case, with Stout, a noted public supporter of eugenic reform, describing

section 127 'as purely eugenic'. The Crown lawyer argued that section 127 had a eugenic element to it too, because it related to the 'question of protecting patients from harm to themselves and to the succeeding generation'.⁴³ The court delivered its verdict in early May 1922 and upheld the conviction.

CRITIQUES OF EUGENIC MARRIAGE

In the first decades of the twentieth century marriage was perceived to be under strain and seen to require protection, particularly from a rising divorce rate, an increasing pattern of later marriage, women's greater economic opportunities, and broader anxieties over sexual and moral behaviour. Aware of these changing social patterns, eugenicists gave much thought to methods of encouraging the 'best stock' to marry, in an effort to maintain traditional marriage as the foundation of society and to contain sex within the bounds of the institution, while at the same time controlling the reproductive capacity of the 'least fit'. Eugenicists were divided on how to bring about eugenic marriage. Field's lecture, mentioned earlier, was politely applauded at the time, but many in the audience were not supportive of any scheme that prohibited or restricted marriage due to the imposition upon personal liberty.

Most eugenic reformers in New Zealand sought to shore up marriage, and counter the alternatives like 'free love' arrangements, whose supporters wanted couples to be allowed to exercise sexual selection based on mutuality and sexual compatibility.⁴⁴ Free love views were not widely supported in New Zealand, and certainly not among New Zealand eugenicists. At a public meeting at the Dunedin Town Hall, which took place before the official establishment of the New Zealand branch the Eugenics Education Society in 1910, William Benham assured the audience the society did not propose to eradicate marriage, but to defend the institution, and in this they differed from 'a branch of eugenics in America' that 'does not hesitate to challenge marriage's value as an institution'.⁴⁵ Benham stressed that 'far from desiring the abolition of marriage, [the society] seeks by the education of the public mind on eugenic principles to preserve the sanctity and permanence of the marriage tie'.⁴⁶ When it came to marriage, Benham publicly supported positive eugenics by encouraging marriage of the fit, and advocated for early marriage.⁴⁷

Within eugenic circles the usefulness of marriage restriction schemes was contested, some regarding them as an 'unwarrantable interference

with personal liberty' and an 'extreme policy'.⁴⁸ Even where there was agreement that reproduction needed to be restricted among certain classes, it was felt that there was too much uncertainty over who ought to be deemed unfit, and also if it was appropriate for the state to decide this.⁴⁹ If one did manage to identify who were 'unfit', many questioned whether preventing their marriage would result in race betterment.⁵⁰ The editor of the *Dominion*, while supportive of controlling the reproduction of the unfit, disagreed with his colleague Arthur N. Field on the benefits of marriage restriction. 'State interference with the liberty of marriage', he wrote, 'can only be justified by the most urgent necessity, and ought not to be based upon doubtful theories which fuller knowledge may modify or overturn.'⁵¹ Two years earlier, the *Observer* newspaper described the Wellington Eugenics Society, comprised largely of public servants and medical professionals 'seized by the Eugenic itch', as amateur scientists unqualified to judge who should be prohibited from marriage. While agreeing that individuals suffering from transmissible diseases and mental illness ought to be prevented from marrying, the writer argued that certainty was needed before 'the rights of human beings could be taken from them'.⁵²

Underpinning these concerns was an uncertainty and lack of confidence in hereditarian solutions to control population. It was simply impossible, even socially dangerous, to attempt to judge fitness. As one critic writing in the *Free Lance* noted in 1904, if the 'State, wants to weed out the persons unfit to marry in this country, he or it has the biggest task that was ever tackled'.⁵³ Similar arguments continued to be made in the following decades, and were particularly prevalent in the debate over the marriage and sterilization clauses in 1928.

Marriage restriction was not popular among the public, or even within eugenic circles, but it had support among politicians and government bureaucrats. Even though only twelve of the 92 witnesses before the 1924–1925 Inquiry into Mental Defectives and Sexual Offenders supported marriage regulation, and only a small number of doctors surveyed by the committee also expressed support, the Inquiry panel recommended the implementation of marriage restriction.⁵⁴ At the inquiry itself, those who raised marriage restriction viewed it as one strand in a suite of eugenic strategies of control, and for it to be effective usually coupled it with sterilization. Rev. Jasper Calder advocated absolute prohibition of marriage for the mentally defective, but also thought 'an operation' was necessary because 'married or unmarried, that type is

inclined to reproduce its species'. Alexander Patterson, a Dunedin social worker, suggested prohibition of marriage for those with sexual diseases, but also wanted prevention of marriages between the blind and deaf, unless they were sterilized, and between the 'feeble-minded' and between 'incurable degenerate types'.⁵⁵ Dr. Fenwick, representing the British Medical Association, felt the 'chief aim should be to prevent marriage and intercourse between mental defectives', based on knowledge of heredity.⁵⁶ Fenwick approved of a medical certificate of health, gained before marriage, but stressed that this would only work for a portion of the population, because 'a large number of mental defectives are the outcome of illegitimate unions'.

Generally, though, marriage restriction received little support, and most who spoke on the topic gave evidence similar to that of the Auckland Stipendiary Magistrate, J.W. Poynton: 'if it is insisted upon that couples must not marry unless each can show a medical certificate of freedom from consumption or any other disease, they will live together without marriage'. He argued for life-long segregation.⁵⁷ Dr. McKillop, from Dunedin, also thought the 'feeble-minded' would have children regardless of marriage, and favoured segregation for life.⁵⁸

Dr. Theodore Gray, who is discussed more fully by Charlotte Macdonald in Chap. 11, this volume, provided the most comprehensive eugenic vision of sexual and reproductive control to the committee. He wanted the registration of all 'unfit' individuals, to make carnal knowledge of a registered person an indictable offence, and marriage with a registered person illegal, as 'it seemed to me better that we should do it that way than to get medical certificates of fitness for marriage'.⁵⁹ In their recommendations, the committee replicated Gray's evidence, which he would repeat in his 1927 report titled *Mental Deficiency and its Treatment*, which itself underpinned the framing of the 1928 bill. Based on his visits to institutions in thirteen countries, Gray's report detailed how to manage and control existing categories of 'mental defectives', but also set out plans for a comprehensive system to curtail reproduction through sterilization, segregation, marriage laws and eugenic education of the public. A believer in the hereditary nature of physical and mental disease, Gray felt only a comprehensive programme of reproductive control could be effective: 'Registration and prohibition of marriage will not prevent procreation, but registration plus supervision plus prohibition of marriage plus sterilization after due consideration of each case by the Eugenics Board will certainly render procreation less easy than it is at

present.⁶⁰ Gray got his register, and a Eugenics Board, but not the comprehensive system of control he desired.

One notable absence from the eugenic, political and medical debates around eugenic marriage in New Zealand was the question of miscegenation, or race mixing. This was a matter that New Zealand eugenists did not discuss, nor did they seek marriage restrictions based on race, and nor is there any evidence that New Zealand eugenists sought or undertook investigations into race mixing, in the manner of the British Eugenics Society.⁶¹ Quite simply, New Zealand eugenists lacked the institutional structure and resources of its parent society to support research of this kind. Added to this, New Zealand had a long history of intermarriage, particularly between Māori and Pākehā (European), and the state never legally prohibited such relationships.⁶² Further, any hint of such a policy from eugenists would have lost them vital political support, for several Māori men of mixed ancestry, two trained as medical doctors, were prominent national politicians, one of whom was the Minister of Health and had established the 1924 Inquiry into Mental Defectives and Sexual Offenders.

This is not to say that the relationship between race mixing and claims about the physical, social and mental degeneracy of ‘half-castes’ did not occupy the minds of New Zealand intellectuals during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By the interwar years, as Damon Salesa has noted, ‘the well-known figure of the half-caste gained a new kind of relevance as, among others, eugenists, racial biologists, colonial experts and governments found newer ways of considering them’.⁶³ But certain kinds of ‘racial crossings’ were tolerated in New Zealand. Māori–Pākehā intermarriage was regarded positively by the state, characterized as a tool for promoting assimilation, but marriages to ‘Asiatics’ were seen in a different light, and usually linked to social, moral and racial degeneration.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, no witness at the 1924 Inquiry presented evidence for or against intermarriage and race mixing, and the committee asked no questions on the subject, and nor did it rate a mention in the final report. Gray’s 1927 report avoided it altogether, preferring to stress the need to establish measures to maintain New Zealand’s white status through immigration control, and to find avenues to improve the quality of the European population already resident in the country.⁶⁵

THE FATE OF CLAUSE 21

After the withdrawal of the clauses, Nina Barrer, president of the Women's Division of the Farmer's Union (WDFU), supported by E.B. (Edward Benjamin) MacGregor Walmsley, who had briefly revived the New Zealand Eugenic Society in 1934, campaigned to have the dropped clauses reinstated. Barrer took up a letter writing and lecture campaign, using her role as editor of the WDFU's magazine *NZ Countrywoman* to generate support, and also published a book in 1933, but she ultimately had little impact in the political sphere. With the Labour government demonstrating little appetite for enacting eugenic legislation, Barrer and Walmsley looked to solutions beyond the state, including education and research campaigns.

'Eugenic marriage' was, at the very least, to involve a couple who were aware of their civic responsibilities, so education in eugenic philosophy, particularly the implications of heredity, was not an uncommon strategy. It is not known if there is a direct link between government-supported marriage guidance counselling (begun in 1939) and eugenics, but it is worth exploring, for eugenics did give marriage advice and popular psychology a language of expertise and a veneer of scientific authority, which gained increasing public acceptance in the interwar period.⁶⁶ Certainly, eugenicists like Barrer and Walmsley favoured education in marital citizenship and parenthood.

Echoing Paul Popenoe's American Institute of Family Relations, in June 1937 Walmsley proposed the establishment of a National Institute of Family Relations, which would collaborate with the Eugenics Society (England), the Eugenics Research Association and Eugenics Record Office (USA), and be independent of any political organization. Its stated priority was public education and advocacy for the practice of 'racial betterment through well-considered choice of partners in matrimony', and it hoped to achieve this by researching 'past and future proposals for improvement in the physical, mental and moral condition of humans through principles of heredity', to publish this research, and to use this information to make recommendations to religious bodies and the medical profession on how best to govern marriage, in addition to advocating for legislative reform.⁶⁷ Walmsley's National Institute never became reality.

Under Barrer's leadership the WDFU made several resolutions at their 1938 national conference that echoed Sydney's Racial Hygiene

Association (SRHA), Australia's 'largest and most enduring eugenic organization'.⁶⁸ The SRHA, whose activities Barrer followed with interest, advocated for sex education, the eradication of VD and eugenic education. They opened Australia's first birth control clinic in 1933, which offered women advice on 'suitable mating' and in 1936 they established a Marriage Advisory Centre to provide premarital medical examinations.⁶⁹ Following the Sydney group's lead, Barrer sought the establishment of responsible birth control clinics, which would dispense contraception and offer advice. In 1936 New Zealand's Sex Hygiene and Birth Regulation Society was formed with similar goals to the Sydney group, including advocating birth control for eugenic outcomes.⁷⁰ In private correspondence Barrer envisioned these clinics as places where sterilization operations could be performed, certificates of health issued to couples, in addition to providing public talks on parenthood and eugenics.⁷¹ At this time though, the First Labour Government (1935–1949) began setting up a welfare state based around pro-natalist policies so that by the end of the 1930s, marriage was indeed, as mainstream eugenicists had argued, a vital foundation for creating a better and new society, but not in the way some had hoped: through the direct intervention of the state in the form of a system of marriage restriction.⁷²

While scholars of eugenics have demonstrated the widespread uptake of eugenic language associated with race improvement among social organizations, feminist groups, and within scientific, medical and political circles, far less is known about the degree to which hereditarian eugenic language and ideas impacted upon people's marital choices. Did some individuals choose to remain single, or couples childless, in order to reduce the risk of passing on what were understood to be heritable diseases?⁷³ Prominent intellectuals and scientists certainly urged couples to think about heredity when contemplating marriage. In his lecture before the Canterbury School Committees' Association in September 1923, Dr. A.C. Sandston acknowledged it 'was a great joy to have children' but warned potential parents 'it could be a joy to no one to have rickety or tubercular children'.⁷⁴ It is quite possible some individuals took the widespread discussion of inherited disease in the print media seriously; such was the level of shame and stigma associated with disability and mental illness.⁷⁵ Although feelings of shame are difficult to measure, John Weaver's research into suicide across the twentieth century shows it did operate in the lives of individuals, for at coroners inquests

the 'public craved physical evidence and family members and doctors even "discovered it", because it lifted the stigma of mental illness'.⁷⁶

Eugenic-inspired debates about marriage and sexuality throw into relief deep civic anxieties about the changing landscape of gender relations. Eugenic reformers sought to reframe the institution, tying its transformation to the creation of a new society, but there was little public support for their brand of negative eugenic marriage reform, particularly at a moment when marital happiness was increasingly interpreted as involving love, mutuality and sexual compatibility.⁷⁷ As Claire Langhamer has noted for Britain, the years after World War I were 'marked by a conscious and distinctively pervasive sense of public and private modernity. Love and marriage were remade in this context.'⁷⁸ In an era characterized as undergoing an 'emotional transition' in which love and mutuality were increasingly recognized as the basis for happy and enduring relationships, eugenic reformers were out of step with the expectations ordinary New Zealanders attached to marriage.⁷⁹ One female correspondent to the *New Zealand Herald*, responding to a report that the government was preparing to bring in a eugenic marriage law in 1911, expressed her belief that 'Every woman and every man has her or his ideal', and while 'it rarely comes true', nevertheless 'we have the right to marry where our heart or our feelings dictate'.⁸⁰ Public feeling in 1920 was summed up by the popular newspaper *Truth*: 'The day may come when men and women will mate scientifically and regulate their emotional nature by reason and rule on the most approved eugenic principles, but that time is not just yet.'⁸¹ Sentiment, emotion and feeling rather than scientific rationality was the order of the day.

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77. A medical practitioner advised an audience of 250 young men attending at lecture at Auckland's YMCA hall that a happy marriage was based on mutuality: *Auckland Star*, 19 August 1927, p. 16. On the relationship between marriage counselling and eugenics see, Natalia Gerodetti (2008) 'Rational subjects, marriage counselling and the conundrums of eugenics', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*, 39, 255–262.
78. Claire Langhamer (2013) *The English in Love: The Intimate Story of an Emotional Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 4.
79. See Lea Doughty (2015), '25 Words or Less: Matrimonial Advertisements in New Zealand Newspapers, 1900–1935' (BA (Hons): University of Otago). Doughty found that by the 1920s advertisers started to place a greater emphasis on physical attractiveness, but this was rarely expressed in racial or eugenic terms.
80. *New Zealand Herald*, 14 December 1911, p. 4. The writer was responding to a Eugenics Education Society Lecture given by Sir John Findlay, Attorney-General and honorary president of the society, in January 1911. Of marriage Findlay said: 'we are told marriage is a private affair, and the State in these cases no right to interfere. Nothing is a private affair to the exclusion of State control which, without that control, threatens the physical and mental health if not the existence of the community. The physical fitness of the coming generation is supremely a matter of State concern.' *Evening Star* (Dunedin), 25 January 1911, p. 7.
81. 'Our Divorce Laws', *New Zealand Truth*, 29 October 1921, p. 4.

Undesirable Bill's Undesirables Bill: William Pember Reeves and Eugenics in Late-Victorian New Zealand

John Stenhouse

According to historian Stephen Garton, eugenics in Australia and New Zealand was everywhere, nowhere and, eventually, somewhere. Pervasive among reformers, it shaped debates about national fitness, racial decline, miscegenation, invasion and many other issues. Yet legal and political achievements were few; neither country passed sterilization laws, built gas chambers, or even systematically segregated the feeble-minded. Eventually, eugenics made 'headway mainly behind the scenes, in government bureaucracies such as prisons, lunacy, health, education, and child welfare, where innovation without legislative sanction was always possible'. Immigration constituted the movement's success story. A *cor-don sanitaire* excluding undesirable outsiders, especially Asians, trumped attempts to prevent the propagation of the unfit within. But why, asked Garton, did such a powerful movement fall so far short of achieving its aims? Why were Australia and New Zealand 'stony soil for a seed that many saw as essential for the survival of white civilization'?¹

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This chapter investigates these questions by exploring the eugenic views of William Pember Reeves, a Fabian socialist minister in New Zealand's Liberal government of the 1890s, who introduced the eugenically-inspired Undesirable Immigrants Exclusion Bill into parliament in 1894. After outlining Reeves's motives and aims in introducing it, I investigate its reception. Who supported the measure and why? Who criticized it and on what grounds? What light can it shed on the early history of eugenic ideas and practices in Britain's southernmost colony?

Reeves occupied a strategic site at the heart of the colonial state. As Minister of Justice, Education and Labour, he connected an expanding state with the health, welfare, education and labour bureaucracies where eugenics made most headway. Reeves forged important relationships with several heads of these bureaucracies, notably Duncan MacGregor, Inspector of Lunatic Asylums, Hospitals and Charitable Aid, and Edward Tregear, Secretary of the Department of Labour.

Although historians of eugenics have paid increasing attention to religion recently,² doing so might seem unnecessary in New Zealand, where freethinkers, agnostics and rationalists flourished, earning the country a reputation as a secularists' paradise. It was more secular than the United Kingdom in some ways, lacking an established church, for example. It was also highly Protestant. Roman Catholics, mostly opposed to state-directed eugenics, constituted a smaller proportion of the population by 1900 (around 13%) than in Australia, Canada or the United States. Despite the relative paucity of Catholics, I argue that religious communities and traditions, including Māori ones, must be taken into account in order to understand why advocates of hard biological determinism met considerable resistance. I focus on two varieties of determinism that Reeves embraced: the claim that the Māori race was dying out before the incoming white colonists (a variant of a 'dying native' ideology that flourished elsewhere); and the idea that 'tainted' heredity caused most serious mental and moral defects, which would be passed on to the next generation unless stopped.

When Reeves introduced his Undesirables Bill in 1894, he had already alienated many religious voters: Catholic campaigners for state aid to private schools, Protestant Bible-in-Schools advocates, and evangelical prohibitionists. They joined conservatives, businessmen, liberals and white workers to attack the Undesirables Bill and its author as arrogant, authoritarian, elitist and illiberal. Premier Richard Seddon, a populist Anglican sensitive to the concerns of religious voters, kicked

'Undesirable Bill' upstairs to London as New Zealand's Agent-General in 1895. The limits of eugenics in late-Victorian New Zealand cannot adequately be understood apart from the religious communities that sustained a lively liberal political culture.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF REEVES

Born into a prosperous English Anglican family in Christchurch in 1856, Reeves went to school at Christ's College before studying law at Oxford. But his health broke down and he did not graduate. Returning to Canterbury, he worked as a journalist for his father's liberal *Lyttelton Times* newspaper before entering parliament in 1887. Reeves became minister of Education, Justice and Labour in the Liberal government of John Ballance, which, winning power in 1890, ruled until 1912. A Fabian socialist, Reeves devised progressive labour and industrial laws that won New Zealand a reputation as 'the social laboratory of the world'. He also supported the campaign that in 1893 made New Zealand the first country in the world to give women (Māori as well as Pākehā) the right to vote (although he initially wanted to confine suffrage to women who had matriculated). In 1895 Reeves went to London as New Zealand's Agent-General, later High Commissioner. Serving as the state's best-paid public servant, he became New Zealand's first major historian. His friendships with English Fabians such as Sidney and Beatrice Webb helped him win appointment in 1908 as first director of the London School of Economics and Political Science.³ Reeves retired in 1919 and died in 1932.

In order to understand his ideas and career, the close connections Reeves forged with a group of progressive colonial intellectuals require attention. Key allies included freethinking Liberal politicians Robert Stout and John Ballance and civil servants MacGregor and Tregear. Reeves, MacGregor and Stout were university-educated, MacGregor earned medical degrees, and the others were largely self-taught. Although none practiced science as a profession, all read widely in the latest science, philosophy, history and politics. Despite occasional disagreements, they shared important beliefs and values that set them apart from more religiously conventional colleagues. Although raised Protestant, they saw themselves as moving beyond Christian dogma to embrace more rational, enlightened, scientific and modern outlooks. Placing more faith in science, reason, politics and the state than in

revelation, Judeo-Christian tradition and the churches, they poured their energies into this-worldly visions of improving race and nation. Aware that some Christians argued that irreligion would lead to immorality, these men, secular puritans, took care to present themselves as upright and respectable citizens. In 1908, for example, H.G. Wells, a Fabian socialist and married man, began an affair with Reeves's beautiful and talented daughter, Amber, who became pregnant. Her father exploded in fury.⁴

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Reeves's historical writing requires attention because the celebratory nationalist historiographical tradition he founded, embraced by many subsequent scholars, helps to explain why eugenics remains poorly integrated into general New Zealand history. The poem with which he introduced his stylish general history, *The Long White Cloud: Ao Teā Roa* (1898), captured its central message. By minimizing if not eliminating the class, religious and racial divisions that troubled other places, New Zealand under the Liberals, an exemplary social democracy, was leading the world into a better future:

And the stars watch her lamp newly lighted
And its beams shot afar o'er the sea
With a light of old wrongs at length righted
By men who are free.⁵

This lofty, almost messianic, vision of New Zealand as an example to the world, a modern secular 'city upon a hill', delighted readers. The most influential New Zealand historians of the next two generations—J.C. Beaglehole, Keith Sinclair and W.H. Oliver—followed Reeves's progressive nationalist model. Focusing on the nation-state, they privileged politics, marginalized religion (Oliver partly excepted), praised Reeves and ignored eugenics. In a 1965 biography depicting Reeves as 'the first great European New Zealander', Sinclair skated over the Undesirables Bill.⁶

Revisionist views emerged during the 1970s, when Oliver argued that concerns about national efficiency, social discipline and racial improvement inspired Liberal social policy as surely as compassion, benevolence and humanitarianism.⁷ In developing this case, Massey University

historians such as Margaret Tennant and David Thomson made much of Duncan MacGregor. The Liberals aimed to build a world without welfare, Thomson argued, with MacGregor pressing a 'crude social Darwinism and an ugly eugenics' into service.⁸ Although Oliver noted Reeves's paternalistic attitude toward workers, no Massey historian explored his racial or eugenic views, or his links with MacGregor.

The southern province of Otago, where hundreds of Chinese gold miners arrived after 1865, generated further critical perspectives. University of Otago historian Erik Olssen argued that, although numerically few, the Chinese played a symbolically significant role as a 'scape-goat' community on which the wider society discharged its internal tensions.⁹ Linking sinophobia with eugenics, Brian Moloughney and John Stenhouse argued that Reeves saw the Chinese as enemies of the progressive modern nation the Liberals were building.¹⁰ Similarly, Tony Ballantyne argued that Reeves founded a tradition of nationalist historiography in which 'Asian New Zealanders were essentially written out' or appeared 'briefly only as the objects of white racism'.¹¹

Yet Reeves remains for many today an almost saintly exemplar of the democratic radicalism of the 1890s.¹² James Belich's general history, *Paradise Reforged*, depicted Reeves as a 'brilliant young socialist, architect of both the Liberals' labour policy and their image in history'. Noting his anti-Chinese views, Belich minimized the significance of eugenics by depicting it as conservative and pseudoscientific.¹³ Michael King's best-selling general history, by contrast, depicted Reeves glowingly, never mentioning his racial or eugenic views.¹⁴ Do New Zealanders remain reluctant adequately to integrate eugenics into the nation's past?

THE DYING MĀORI: BIOLOGICAL DETERMINISTS AND THEIR CRITICS, 1830s–1890s

Lofty visions of New Zealand as an exemplary nation first emerged in Christian circles before the Treaty of Waitangi (1840) made it a British colony. Humanitarians and missionaries hoped to make New Zealand an exception to what the Buxton Report of 1838 had identified as the generally destructive impact of colonization on native peoples. Learning to speak Māori while sailing south in 1842, George Selwyn, the first and only Anglican bishop of New Zealand, knew that already some Britons

were claiming that Māori posed no obstacle to colonization because they were dying out. He wrote to his friend William Gladstone that he aimed ‘to take care that none of those damnable crimes, by which the coloured races of other lands have melted away before that pest which he calls civilization, shall be cloaked under the name of a decree of Providence or an inevitable law of nature’.¹⁵ Edward Shortland, a trained physician and anthropologist linked to Selwyn’s ‘church party’, noted in 1851 that ‘many’ Britons considered the ‘ultimate extinction of the Aboriginal race’ a ‘matter of certainty’. Shortland condemned this ‘fallacy’ as an attempt to ‘mislead the intending colonist’ into believing that Māori were ‘merely sojourning for a time on the earth’. The colonists’ real ‘duty’, said Shortland, was to treat Māori as ‘highly intellectual human beings’ destined to ‘take their place side by side with the white man, as equals in civilization’.¹⁶

Christian chiefs expressed similar views. In 1851, Wiremu Tamihana Tarapipipi Te Waharoa, senior Ngati Haua chief, condemned the ‘evil talk’ of Wellington settler-politicians such as William Fox and Isaac Featherstone, out to ensure that the ‘Maories of New Zealand’, like the ‘Maories of America’, would ‘be seen no longer in the land of their fathers’. Tamihana urged Queen Victoria ‘never to give up to the White Men the Maori men she promised to protect’ because the former ‘wish to possess our lands’. The Aborigines Protection Society published this and similar letters from Christian chiefs in the *Colonial Intelligencer and Aborigines’ Friend*, published in London.¹⁷

Tamihana’s target, Fox, the New Zealand Company’s chief agent from 1848, dismissed as ‘shallow, flimsy sophistry the Treaty of Waitangi’ (1840), which guaranteed Māori all the rights and privileges of British subjects and full possession of their lands, forests, fisheries and other treasure. A low church Anglican who believed that the church must submit to the state on temporal matters, Fox argued that Māori only had rights to land they inhabited or cultivated.¹⁸ Statistics ‘prove the fact of the progressive extinction of the natives’, he trumpeted in 1851, giving the race fifty years at most.¹⁹ Auckland settler Charles Southwell, early Victorian Britain’s most militant atheist, regularly predicted Māori extinction in the *Auckland Examiner and People’s Voice*, a populist newspaper he founded in 1856. Calling for rapid economic development, Southwell savaged the ‘foolish Treaty of Waitanga [*sic*]’ and the unholy alliance between church leaders and Māori Christians that kept land and power away from the (white settler) people. The ‘native population’

might 'be exterminated, but never can be civilized', wrote Southwell in 1857. Through a 'wrong advocacy of native rights', the missionaries aimed to win 'for themselves the undisputed sovereignty of these fair islands' and would then 'graciously permit the Maoris to govern the Government'.²⁰

During the early 1860s, as war between the government and some Māori tribes spread from the Taranaki province across the North Island, colonists began reading Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859). The editor of Auckland's *Southern Monthly Magazine* told readers in 1863 that 'whatever may be thought of Mr. Darwin's views concerning natural selection and the origin of species'—he showed little interest—'no one will be disposed to deny the existence of that struggle for life which he describes, or that a weak and ill-furnished race must give way before one which is strong and highly-endowed'. Adopting 'the fitness of things' as 'the basis of all rights and obligations', the writer urged settlers to 'admire' the 'natural laws' effecting 'the decline and extinction of the inferior race'. Applying the 'scientific curiosity of zoologists' to 'human society' might seem 'frigid', he acknowledged, but 'enlightened benevolence' and 'sound reason' showed that 'to squander money, and waive our just rights in the attempt to save from extinction a declining race' was pointless: 'Our war is a war of colonization, and justifiable on that ground.'²¹

In 1867, as the cost of war between the government and North Island tribes began to irk the wealthier southern provinces, William Reeves senior reprinted in the *Lyttelton Times* an article from *The Spectator*, a liberal English weekly. Probably written by Richard Hutton, the *Spectator's* editor, 'Mr. Darwin at the Antipodes' developed observations made by Joseph Hooker, a leading Darwinian, who noted that introduced European plants often 'destroy the native vegetation, and prove themselves better suited to local circumstances than the aboriginal plants of the country'.²² From Hooker's impressive 'array of facts' Hutton drew the 'natural inference' that 'our plants and animals show as much colonising capacity as man himself when they emigrate with him to New Zealand'. The success of introduced European plants and animals illustrated the 'general law' that the 'hardier and subtler vitality of "selected,"—i.e., civilized—nature, soon beats the luxuriance of wild nature' in the struggle for existence, a conclusion Hutton commended to readers as 'entirely in the spirit of Mr. Darwin's great work'.²³

W.P. Reeves grew up in a scientifically literate and racially liberal Anglican household. Was he as 'markedly sympathetic' to Māori as his

biographer claimed?²⁴ Reeves supported his government's decision to resume large scale buying of Māori land during the 1890s to facilitate closer settlement. Although too young to participate in the early racial debates surveyed above, he did so by siding in *The Long White Cloud* with the New Zealand Company against Māori and their missionary supporters. Describing Company purchases of 20 million acres of Māori land in 1839, Reeves noted that 'Henry Williams and other missionaries urged the chiefs not to sell.' At 'the bottom of all the mischief' over land lay 'the attempt of missionaries and officials at home, to act as though a handful of savages—not then more, I believe, than sixty-five thousand in all, and rapidly dwindling in numbers—could be allowed to keep a fertile and healthy Archipelago larger than Great Britain.' The 'mulish obstinacy' of these 'careless or irrational people' forced 'haste, secrecy and sharp practice' on the Wakefields.²⁵ Siding with the Company, Reeves blamed missionaries and humanitarians for irrationally defending the land rights of dying 'savages'. His claim that he wrote history impartially, 'without letting personal likes and dislikes run away with my pen', must be taken with a grain of salt.²⁶

By the 1890s, a new generation of young, well-educated Māori leaders attacked the dying Māori in theory and practice alike. Educated at Te Aute College, founded and run by Anglican missionaries, members of the Young Maori Party, as they called themselves, served as missionaries of science and medicine to their own people. Mostly of mixed-race ancestry, but identifying as Māori, several worked in the early twentieth century as Native Health Officers to improve health, sanitation and hygiene in Māori communities. After meeting American Seventh Day Adventist missionaries in Napier, Māui Pōmare studied medicine under Adventist health reformer John Harvey Kellogg, a eugenicist, at Battle Creek, Michigan, and at the Medical Missionary College in Chicago. Serving as Minister of Health in William Massey's Reform government between 1923 and 1926, Pōmare reduced maternal and infant mortality among Māori and Pākehā and established the 1924 Committee of Inquiry into Mental Defectives and Sexual Offenders. Although many witnesses embraced some form of eugenics, none advocated sterilizing Māori or half-castes. Anyone bold enough to do so would have received short shrift from these Māori leaders.²⁷

But they did not reject eugenic ideas. During the late 1920s, Āpirana Ngata warned young Māori women against relationships with the Chinese market gardeners they worked for around Auckland (see Barbara

Brookes's chapter "Aristocrats of Knowledge": Māori Anthropologists and the Survival of the "Race" in this volume).

SCIENCE, THE STATE AND POOR WHITES

In the southern province of Otago, founded by Scottish Free Church Presbyterians in 1848, debate over evolution's social implications peaked during the 1870s. At the University of Otago, Duncan MacGregor sparked controversy when in 1871 he took up the chair of Mental and Moral Philosophy, partly endowed by the Presbyterian Synod. A charismatic teacher, MacGregor inspired many students, several of whom, such as Robert Stout, T. W. Hislop and John Findlay, remained loyal to MacGregor and his ideas. Appointed inspector of the Dunedin Lunatic Asylum in 1873 and its chief medical officer in 1876, MacGregor, a trained physician, dealt regularly with troubled patients.²⁸

In 1876–1877, as a global economic depression reached Australasia, MacGregor addressed the problem of poverty in the *New Zealand Magazine*, a Dunedin journal. A social evolutionist inspired by Darwin, A.R. Wallace, Herbert Spencer and Walter Bagehot, MacGregor declared the 'fundamental fact in human as in all organic life' to be 'a struggle, first of all, for bare life and its necessities, thereafter for fullness of life or well-being'. New Zealand had an 'unparalleled chance' of 'turning over a new leaf in the history of nations' by solving the problem of poverty. It enjoyed 'advantages possessed by no other country': a healthy environment, pleasant climate and, 'incomparably more important', hardy settlers who 'had run the gauntlet of a natural selection, which only the fittest survive'. Solving the poverty problem, however, required citizens to embrace 'the great law of Heredity': that the 'sinner' must pass on to his 'hapless' offspring 'the unspeakable curse of a diseased and degenerating organization'. A eugenicist *avant la lettre*, MacGregor spelled out the implications of his conviction that, for defectives, heredity was destiny. The 'law must extend its definition of insanity, so as to include hopeless drunkards, hopeless criminals and hopeless paupers', whose repeated failures proved them unfit 'for liberty, which they can only abuse, to the general injury of society'. It must incarcerate for life the 'hopelessly lazy, the diseased, and the vicious' in order 'to prevent their injuring society either by their crimes or by having children to inherit their curse'. Rejecting the 'unreasoning dread of encroaching upon the liberty of the subject', MacGregor attacked as 'profoundly immoral'

those churches opposed to compulsory state education designed to equip children ‘intellectually and morally for the battle of life.’²⁹

Although some reviewers agreed,³⁰ critics outnumbered supporters. Two ministers urged the Presbyterian Synod to withdraw divinity students from MacGregor’s classes. Rumors, largely unfounded, began circulating that the Synod was about sack its own professor for heresy.³¹ Unimpressed by MacGregor’s ‘abstract theorising’, the *Auckland Star* considered his views too pessimistic.³² His philosophy offered ‘cold comfort’ and ‘no practical solution,’ agreed the *North Otago Times*.³³ The professor ‘signally fails’ to provide a ‘practical remedy,’ echoed the *Southland Times*, dismissing MacGregor’s argument that ‘State schoolmasters’ would ‘set everything right’. The prospect of a powerful ‘State poking its nose into everything’ the *Times* considered ‘evil’.³⁴

Writing in the Presbyterian *Evangelist*, the Revd D. M. Stuart, the widely-admired minister of Knox Church and chancellor of the University of Otago, respectfully disagreed with MacGregor’s views on the poor.³⁵ The *Mt Ida Chronicle* rejected ‘apparent success’ as MacGregor’s ‘standard measurement for good’ and ‘apparent poverty as his standard measurement for evil’.³⁶ Dunedin’s *Evening Star* attacked the assumption that ‘to be poor is to be vicious’ and that ‘moral respectability’ depended on ‘the amount of money in a man’s possession’.³⁷ The Christchurch *Press* rejected the suggestion that the state should classify ‘hopeless paupers’ as legally insane and crush ‘the unoffending poor’.³⁸ Calling MacGregor a ‘Scotch Malthus gone mad’, Patrick Moran, Irish Catholic bishop of Dunedin, argued that ‘utilitarian reformers’ of the ‘Robert Stout and Dr MacGregor school’ intended to give ‘no aid to anyone except under the most stringent terms’, and really wanted to wipe poor people ‘out of existence’. Moran also disliked MacGregor’s attack on the Catholic campaign for state aid to private schools.³⁹

Bishop Moran recognized the close ties between MacGregor and his star student, Robert Stout, the first law lecturer at the University of Otago (the subject of Emma Gattley’s chapter ‘[Sir Robert Stout as Freethinker and Eugenics Enthusiast](#)’ in this volume). Entering parliament in 1875, Stout, a strong secularist, fought in 1878, partly on MacGregor’s behalf, to transfer all rights to appoint and dismiss professors from the Presbyterian Synod to the University Council. The country’s leading freethinker, Stout became premier in 1884, forging a controversial alliance with Jewish financier Julius Vogel, partly to rescue themselves and the New Zealand Agricultural Company from serious

financial difficulties by shifting the burden to the taxpayer.⁴⁰ In 1885, Stout helped MacGregor move from Dunedin to Wellington to become Inspector of Lunatic Asylums and of Hospitals and Charitable Aid. Earning a salary of £1200 a year, MacGregor became one of the best-paid and most powerful bureaucrats in the country. Reporting to Stout, MacGregor exposed cases of welfare deception and fraud, and claimed that low-quality immigrants and their offspring were endangering the country. His 1888 report warned that Vogel's state-sponsored immigration schemes of the 1870s flooded the colony with 'vicious and degenerate people' who 'fill our gaols, our hospitals, and our asylums'. The 'evil ... caused by this class is never finished' because their 'impaired health, low morality, and insanity descend to the offspring, and are a continual drain on the community'.⁴¹

The close relationship between Stout and MacGregor illuminates the growing authority of the knowledge class—well-educated professionals for whom knowledge constituted a key form of social capital. The knowledge class tended to advance its interests over against rival groups (traditional landowning elites, churches and clergy, big business and manual workers). Members sought to promote their utility and importance to the state by making strong, sometimes exaggerated, claims about the reliability, relevance and sociopolitical implications of expert knowledge. In New Zealand, as elsewhere, the knowledge class was strongly represented in the eugenics movement.

Entering parliament in 1887, Reeves forged close links with the secular, freethinking wing of the Liberal party. At the request of William Reeves senior, Stout reviewed, favorably, Pember Reeves's first major history, *Some Historical Articles on Socialism and Communism*, in 1890.⁴² After the Liberals won the 1890 election, Ballance, the freethinking premier, appointed Reeves Minister of Justice, Education and, in 1892, Minister of Labour, the first in the British Empire. Battling cancer in 1892, Ballance intended Stout, his friend and fellow freethinker, to succeed him. Reeves supported this succession plan, which might have worked had Stout been in parliament when Ballance died in 1893. Instead, Anglican populist Richard Seddon adroitly kept the premiership.⁴³

After reporting to Stout, MacGregor reported to Reeves during the 1890s.⁴⁴ Heading the health and welfare bureaucracies of an expanding state, MacGregor aimed to build a world without welfare. Touring the country, he took lists of relieved persons from local charitable aid boards, visiting individuals in their homes, exposing as many 'vicious

and fraudulent impostors' as possible, and reducing relief lists to a bare minimum of the 'truly deserving'. A civilized state must prevent its 'incurable' and 'degenerate' inhabitants, 'unfit for free social life', from breeding, MacGregor warned. It should say: 'you must be the last amongst your feeble and degenerate family'.⁴⁵

Reeves's Undesirable Immigrants Exclusion Bill of 1894 echoed MacGregor's reports in tone and content, reflecting the latter's influence. MacGregor's reports also informed *The Fertility of the Unfit* (1903), a eugenic tract by W.A. Chapple, an Otago-trained physician and Liberal politician, for which Stout penned a preface (see Charlotte MacDonald's chapter 'Revisiting Three Eugenic Moments: 1903, 1928, 1937: The Disappointments and Hopes of Antipodean Progressives' in this volume).

As the Liberals extended the power and reach of the state, public concern about how Reeves was exercising his power, and at whose expense, began to bubble. Church groups committed to causes that Reeves opposed—Catholic state aid advocates, Protestant Bible-in-Schools campaigners and evangelical prohibitionists—mobilized. Moran told *Tablet* readers in 1891 that Reeves was 'little better than a heathen' for his 'extreme and unyielding secularism' in rejecting state aid.⁴⁶ In 1893 a Christchurch prohibitionist warned that Reeves was intent on becoming 'Grand Inquisitor, with power to poke his nose into the domestic affairs of two-thirds of the people of the colony'.⁴⁷ The Undesirable Immigrants Exclusion Bill, which Reeves introduced into parliament in June of 1894, fanned such fears into flame.

THE UNDESIRABLE IMMIGRANTS EXCLUSION BILL OF 1894

The Long Depression, beginning in the mid-1870s and worsening during the 1880s, encouraged the state to restrict immigration. The Chinese Immigrants Act of 1881 imposed a £10 poll tax on incoming Chinese. The Imbecile Passengers Act of 1882 required a bond from any ship-owner or master discharging any 'lunatic, idiot, deaf, dumb, blind or infirm' person who might become a charge on public funds. But the depression had not yet lifted when the Liberals took office; high unemployment concerned the young Minister of Labour, who tried to protect resident workers. Reeves's Undesirable Immigrants Exclusion Bill, privately drafted during a busy parliamentary session early in 1894, classified as 'prohibited persons' who could not enter the country a far wider range of people than any previous government: contract workers hired

overseas, imbeciles, idiots, the insane, paupers, cripples and the disabled, habitual drunkards, tubercular or leprous patients, anyone likely to become a charge on public funds, and anyone guilty of a criminal offence (carrying a sentence of at least 12 months jail). Pauper became the most contentious category. Reeves defined as a pauper any adult who, in addition to their goods and chattels, did not have at least twenty pounds, if single, and, if married, at least thirty pounds as well as ten pounds for each dependent child. The Bill imposed hefty fines on any master or ship owner who failed to identify prohibited persons or falsely classified them as tourists. It made the owner liable to pay government expenses if any legal immigrant became a charge on public funds within twelve months of arriving, and imposed a £100 fine for every 'Asiatic' passenger over the one per one hundred tons limit. Masters would be fined £200 for failing to furnish a list of all Asiatic or Chinese passengers. It raised the poll tax on 'Chinese or other Asiatic' passengers to £50. It exempted tourists, invalids not suffering from tuberculosis or leprosy, and returning residents who had been out of the country less than three years.⁴⁸

Determined to protect his ideal little democracy, Reeves had constructed a far more comprehensive and exclusionary *cordon sanitaire* than any previous government. He aimed to keep out anyone, including white 'paupers' from overseas, he considered a threat. If Reeves had his way, his exemplary nation would be tighter, smaller, more homogenous and less tolerant of difference, especially failure, than any other colony.

Although the Undesirables Bill, as critics called it, galvanized massive opposition, Reeves never backed down. He told parliament early in 1895 that his motives and intentions in introducing the Bill were entirely rational, responsible and humane. The departments of prisons, lunacy and hospitals and charitable aid—the last three run by MacGregor—cost the state the vast sum of £260,000 a year 'for the care, incarceration and punishment of undesirable members of the community'. Always parsimonious, Reeves considered the cost almost justification enough. But the Bill was also, he insisted, scientifically sound because 'distinctly based on the laws of nature'. If New Zealand allowed in 'the criminal, the pauper, the imbecile, the drunkard, the man of inferior race or of arrested civilization', then 'unquestionably paupers will breed paupers, criminals will breed criminals, lunatics will transmit lunacy, just as a man diseased will hand down disease to his children and his children's children'.⁴⁹

Such strongly deterministic claims, insisting that heredity was destiny for 'undesirables', went beyond what contemporary scientific studies had established. Here, Reeves was echoing, and probably relying

on, MacGregor's reports and memoranda, which he had been reading since February of 1893 if not earlier.⁵⁰ The state must 'care for our own people', insisted Reeves, by refusing to 'open our gates and doors to the scum of the earth and the dregs of the nations'.⁵¹ Determined that New Zealand blaze a trail 'ahead of others in the march of political progress', he insisted that rational legislation demanded 'unusual safeguards' to secure the happiness and security of the 'masses' already resident. If enlightened politicians failed to protect the nation, then 'destitution, crime, disease, and Asiatic labour, pouring in from outside', and passing on their defects to their offspring, would 'undo' the Liberals' grand 'socialistic experiments'. Aware of immigration restrictions recently introduced in Australia and the United States, Reeves warned that defectives excluded from such places would flood New Zealand unless stopped. A transnational outlook stiffened his eugenic nationalism.⁵²

RECEPTION

How did the public respond? One or two labour organizations, such as the Wellington Trades and Labour Council, supported the bill.⁵³ Congratulating Reeves on expressing 'opinions held by nearly every man in the colony' on the 'race question', the liberal Christchurch *Star* supported excluding 'Chinese and other Easterns' as well as the diseased and criminals. But the editor urged parliament to pass the bill 'with some modifications'—to the pauper clause—to promote 'the best interests of the colony'.⁵⁴

Critics from across the political and religious spectrum drowned out supporters. Perhaps predictably, the Auckland Employer's Association, speaking for business interests long hostile to Reeves, condemned the bill for deterring tourists, stigmatizing as paupers poor white workers, and exposing ship owners and masters to 'great financial risks'.⁵⁵

Other development-oriented critics attacked the bill for excluding the immigrants needed to develop an underpopulated land. The Christchurch *Press* condemned it as 'practically a proclamation of non-intercourse with the rest of the human race', an attempt to turn a 'noble cluster of islands' almost as large as the United Kingdom with as few people as a London suburb into 'a sealed land' like 'Tibet or Siam', Reeves was translating the fable of the dog in the manger into 'an Act of Parliament' just when the colony needed immigrants.⁵⁶ The bill aimed to 'pander to the selfish, short-sighted cry of "New Zealand for the

New Zealanders”’, echoed Wellington’s *Evening Post*, by ‘locking up the country for the exclusive use and benefit of the handful of people already in it’.⁵⁷

Many moderately conservative and liberal newspapers agreed. Dismissing the bill as ‘outrageously ridiculous’, the *New Zealand Herald* claimed that overseas observers would conclude that ‘Socialistic cranks of the very worst description’ governed the country.⁵⁸ The *Otago Daily Times* predicted, correctly as it turned out, that the ‘startling provisions’ of Reeves’s ‘very drastic measure’ would doom it; no government ‘ever did so much to exhilarate its foes’.⁵⁹ The Bill’s ‘provisions are so completely absurd that it is useless to point out their absurdity’, wrote the *Nelson Evening Mail*.⁶⁰ The *Thames Star* dismissed the Bill as ‘idiotic’.⁶¹

The Bill’s expansive definition of pauper provoked the fiercest and most widespread criticisms. The pauper clause ‘met with objection from nearly every quarter’, observed the *Auckland Star*.⁶² Many condemned it as illiberal, elitist and authoritarian. The *Hawera and Normanby Star* ‘strongly objected’ to the ‘most anti-liberal principle of judging a man’s worth by the amount of money he can show’; making £20 cash ‘the test of his desirability or undesirability as an immigrant’ the writer considered ‘monstrous’.⁶³ Dunedin’s *Evening Star* considered many people with less than £5 desirable immigrants and many with £1000 as undesirable; any ‘healthy white man able to read and write’ without a criminal record was ‘safe to admit’.⁶⁴ This ‘absurd law’ stigmatized as a ‘pauper’ every immigrant without £20, fumed the *Ashburton Guardian*; if enacted earlier, it would have excluded ‘thousands of men’, the ‘backbone of New Zealand’, who arrived ‘with scarcely enough to buy a meal’. By imposing a ‘virtual poll tax on his fellow country-men’, this ‘Enlightened Minister’ was proposing the ‘most extraordinary tinkering with the liberties of the people that ever was indulged in by any Government’, including ‘the Autocrat of the Russias’.⁶⁵ Characterizing Reeves as one of the ‘worst autocrats who ever lived’, an Auckland ‘Liberal’ attacked the Bill as an attack on the freedom of the people by a ‘blatant, crude-thinking socialist’.⁶⁶ This ‘libel on the heads, the hearts, the thews and the sinews of English working men’, *The Press* condemned as a ‘snobbish and unEnglish method’ for ‘keeping them out’.⁶⁷

Although Reeves aimed to protect the masses, many white workers saw the pauper clause as an insulting attack on people like themselves. Dismissing Reeves as ‘a political madman’ trying to turn New Zealand into ‘a second China’ by excluding ‘immigrants of our own race’, a

'Working Man' urged Premier Seddon to send Reeves to London, where his own bill would keep him from returning.⁶⁸ 'Artisan' considered the Bill one of several 'legislative monstrosities' that revolted 'former supporters, working men included' of the 'Seddon-Reeves government'.⁶⁹ According to the *Wanganui Chronicle*, the 'howls of execration' at a bill that made New Zealand the 'laughing-stock of the English-reading world' came mostly from Liberal supporters.⁷⁰ 'One of the People' sent this 'outrageous measure' to friends around the world to illustrate the 'narrow-minded, restricting, harassing measures intended to be forced upon the country by a so-called Liberal Government' whose 'domineering and audacity' promised 'national wreck'.⁷¹ 'Never in the whole experience of the colony has such an absurd law been proposed', thundered the left-liberal *Observer*, which pilloried 'Saint William' for making poverty 'A Disqualification, If Not An Absolute Crime'.⁷² A Wellington writer suggested that Reeves make the bill 'fully comprehensive' by requiring any New Zealand parent without a bank balance of £20 per child to either expel them or send them to a 'Government lethal chamber'.⁷³

Critics often attacked the bill on religious grounds. Reeves himself ruefully acknowledged that it would have classified Jesus and the Apostles as paupers, 'forbidden to enter New Zealand'.⁷⁴ If passed, it would prevent Wellington Anglicans from bringing out Bishop Wallis from England to serve them, complained the *Evening Post*.⁷⁵ A Catholic critic, possibly Bishop Moran, criticized Reeves as an 'advanced theorist' out of touch with ordinary people. Christ saw no undesirable immigrants, excluded no nation or tribe from 'His sympathies', and refused to cast out people with an 'infirmity' or even those who had committed a 'crime'.⁷⁶ The *Tablet's* position was distinctive but not unique. Dunedin's *Evening Star* criticized the Bill for excluding a 'perfectly healthy British cripple of irreproachable character' who might have £100,000 in cash.⁷⁷

This avalanche of criticism from across the political and religious spectrum forced Reeves to acknowledge early in 1895 that no government bill ever received 'more abuse or more ridicule or more indignation'.⁷⁸ Premier Seddon, an Anglican politician sensitive to voter sentiment, withdrew it in mid-October of 1894. Early in 1895, Seddon told voters at Hokitika, on the west coast of the South Island, that the Undesirables Bill would have classified him, too, as a pauper, prohibited from entry.⁷⁹ Under fire from Catholics, Bible-in-Schools activists, evangelical

prohibitionists, businesspeople, conservatives, liberals, and white workers, and even the leader of his own party, Reeves had, with the best intentions, shot himself in the foot. Critics dubbed him Undesirable Bill. Some wit named a racehorse Undesirable Bill.⁸⁰ Already, by late 1893, Protestant prohibitionists on the left wing of the Liberal party had significantly reduced Reeves's popularity with Christchurch's urban workers, his core support base.⁸¹ The furore aroused by the Undesirables Bill in 1894 damaged his reputation further, encouraging Seddon to kick him upstairs to London in 1895.

Undaunted, Reeves continued to defend the 1894 Bill as better than its successor, the Asiatic and Other Immigration Restriction Bill, which he introduced early in 1895. Shorn of the unpopular pauper clause, the new bill won more support, especially from the labour movement. Noting that it excluded the clause 'which met with objection from nearly every quarter', the *Auckland Star* considered it much more likely to pass.⁸² It raised the poll tax on 'Asiatics' to £100, doubled the tonnage required for each Chinese passenger (now one per 200 tons), and excluded cripples, criminals, habitual drunkards, lunatics and all those likely to become a charge on the rates, as well as most foreign contract labour.

In the parliamentary immigration debates of 1895 and 1896, several patriotic nationalists wanted to go further. Stout demanded 'a law against negroes and Kaffirs' as well as Asians.⁸³ Alfred Newman, a scientific materialist, wanted to keep out African blacks, Assyrian hawkers, Austrian gumdiggers, Chinese, Japanese, the diseased, lunatics and all those 'unable look after themselves'.⁸⁴ Some radical politicians urged excluding 'low-class Jews' from Eastern Europe as well.⁸⁵

Many religious believers criticized Reeves's 1895 bill as sharply as the old one. The new bill proved this 'an age whose liberality bears a strong resemblance to the illiberality, if not the oppression, of ages that have gone before', observed the *Tablet*, which also rebuked Stout for advocating 'intolerance' if not 'open persecution' of the Chinese.⁸⁶ 'Social' condemned the 1895 bill as 'most illiberal', opposed 'alike to Christianity and true Socialism', and 'especially hard on Asiatics'.⁸⁷ Praising the 'golden rule' as 'a safe guide for communities as well as for individuals', the *Wairarapa Daily Times* argued that 'the New Zealand legislature displays a weakness for undesirable bills ... founded on selfishness and framed with undiluted iniquity'.⁸⁸ 'I know what it is to be persecuted', Jewish businessman-politician Samuel Shrimski told the Legislative

Council. He called for immigration policy to follow God's law, quoting Numbers 15:16: 'One law and one manner shall be for you and for the stranger that sojourneth with you.'⁸⁹

At the National Council of Women's convention in Christchurch early in 1896, Lady Anna Stout, a leading feminist married to Sir Robert, led the opposition to Mrs. Emma Tasker's motion that the Council support the 1895 bill. Distancing herself from her husband's racial views, Stout defended the Chinese as ideal immigrants: honest, sober, industrious, thrifty and kind. Amey Daldy, a Congregationalist who founded the Auckland WCTU and fought for female franchise, rejected discrimination 'against people of other nations' as unjust. The convention narrowly rejected Tasker's motion, five votes to four.⁹⁰

The Dunedin Chamber of Commerce had invited Chinese miners into the Otago goldfields in 1865; southern Presbyterians remained among Reeves's most effective parliamentary critics. Thomas McKenzie, born in Scotland to a Presbyterian gardener and his wife, ran a store in Balclutha before joining a group of southern politicians that championed causes such as Bible-in-Schools that Reeves opposed. Attacking the 1895 bill, McKenzie argued that Chinese market gardeners provided cheap and high quality fruit and vegetables to working-class people, worked hard and obeyed the law, were declining in number, and posed no threat to white workers.⁹¹

Echoing such views, a 'Chinese Resident' from Greymouth argued that Reeves was picking on the Chinese in order to restore his 'popularity in Wellington'. The new bill was 'absolutely unnecessary' because government statistics showed the Chinese population falling to below two thousand. The Chinese 'never were' and 'never will be a burden' because they 'do not seek support from charitable aid, nor ask the Government to find them work'. Already forced to pay an 'abominable' poll tax, 'they are treated as dogs'.⁹²

The 1895 Bill also failed. Reeves continued to prefer the 1894 original, devoting an entire chapter of *State Experiments in Australia and New Zealand* (1902) to justify laws excluding 'aliens and undesirables' from Australasia's exemplary democracies.

CONCLUSION

The controversy over the Undesirables Bill does not prove that New Zealand was ‘stony soil’ for eugenics. Many critics objected more to the pauper clause than to the eugenic ideas that underpinned and inspired it. The Immigration Restriction Act of 1899, passed by Seddon’s Liberals when the economy was recovering, implemented much of Reeves’s vision by restricting Asian immigration and excluding any ‘idiot’ or ‘insane’ person and those with contagious diseases. That New Zealand came close to passing a eugenic sterilization law in 1928, as Hamish Spencer’s chapter ‘Eugenic Sterilization in New Zealand: The Story of the Mental Defectives Amendment Act of 1928’ in this volume shows, should not surprise us.

Eugenic views were popular among the high-minded Fabian socialists that Reeves joined in London, which suggests that his Undesirables Bill was no aberration in his political career. His repeated clashes with Catholic and Protestant activists, hostility to ‘defectives’, and to Asian immigrants suggests that he found many kinds of human difference troubling if not intolerable.

Today, debates involving immigration, religion, race and nation simmer almost everywhere, including relatively secular Europe. Although these differ in some respects from the eugenic debates in New Zealand around the turn of the twentieth century, they raise similar questions. How do governments secure the welfare of long-residents of the nation without excluding those that some, perhaps many, of the former consider undesirable ‘Others’? The growing intensity of such debates suggests that the evaluative logic at the heart of the eugenics movement has not disappeared.

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Thinking Dangerous Thoughts: Post-primary Education and Eugenics in Australia: 1905–1939

Ross L. Jones

In 1935, Frank Tate, first Director of Education for the Australian State of Victoria and the architect of the post-primary education system, warned that an uncontrolled extension of academic and literary secondary education leading to university could lead to social disorder:

Because of the privileges attached to it more frequently than for the sake of the general culture that it provides, secondary education is sought by large numbers of pupils who cannot profit by it, or who, if they do meet its standards satisfactorily, are unable to find employment which they regard as suitable either for their training or their abilities. The result is the development of an educated proletariat (*Hungerkandidaten*), which becomes the centre of political and economic agitation, or, as the Japanese say, thinks dangerous thoughts. The only country where this problem has been

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definitely attacked is Italy, which, profiting by experience, has adopted a highly-differentiated system of post-primary education intended to deflect an excessive crowding into the higher education and liberal professions.¹

Tate's views were not merely the musings of an old, retired schoolmaster. Many other educational and medical academics and public figures expressed similar views after the passing of the *Education Act 1910* in Victoria, one of the two most populous Australian states. Tate's friend, Richard Berry, Professor of Anatomy at the University of Melbourne and one of the leaders of the eugenics movement in Australia, railed for decades against free secondary education for all, or even a majority, of the population. Berry also spoke against free university education, claiming that the Carnegie endowment at Edinburgh University 'remains to this day, a colossal and stupendous failure'.² The main reason for Berry's determined opposition to free university education was that it would only result in:

the flooding of every profession, of every technical pursuit, and of many trades with a body of men and women who are not in the possession of sufficient brains for the task undertaken; but in time, by a process of evolution and the elimination of the unfit, that matter would right itself and the original *status quo* would be regained.³

These two individuals, a prominent educator and a leading medical academic, led the development of post-primary education for the whole population in Victoria in the first decades of the twentieth century.

EUGENICS AND THE EDUCATION OF ALL

The important role of eugenic thinking in forming educational systems in Australia has been overlooked, despite three decades of scholarship on eugenics in Australia and, beginning even earlier, wide-ranging and excellent scholarship on the history of Australian education.⁴ The reason for this lacuna illustrates clearly both the changing nature of eugenic scholarship (discussed in the '[Introduction: Eugenics as a Transnational Subject: The British Dominions](#)', this volume) and the elusive nature of eugenics in its myriad manifestations.

The study of eugenics in social life has often been hampered by its interstitial nature, straddling, as it does, social and scientific knowledge.

This has meant, as Stephen Garton once put it, that much of the history of eugenics in Australia has been characterized by eugenic ideas being taken out of context, making them:

into both more than they are—suggesting a powerful lobby group for the eradication of the defective—and less than they are—suggesting that they were a passing phase that disappeared when the association with fascism made these ideas unpalatable.⁵

In Australia, another problem has been the ghettoization of historians, meaning that a slippery doctrine like eugenics escaped the scrutiny of many mainstream historians in many major areas of Australian life, especially before 1980.⁶ This is not true simply for the study of eugenics. As Stuart McIntyre recently wrote: ‘the discipline of history as practised in Australia ... pays insufficient attention to the law’.⁷ Thus, the history of race and eugenics suffered until the writings of such historians as Warwick Anderson, Stephen Garton and Alison Bashford appeared at the turn of the century.

In educational history, the demarcation dispute that has dogged Australian historians is perhaps even clearer. As Bob Bessant wrote in 1990:

in the 1980s many historians of education in Australia were busily engaged in writing teachers’ union histories, biographies, school histories, etc. oblivious to the work of the revisionists and feminist historians. Other historians, if they were the product of history departments, were also oblivious to the writing in Australian history of education all together. I recently had occasion to examine an MA thesis on the history of a private school where there was no reference whatsoever to the work of Australian historians of education. Clearly the supervisors were unaware of such work or unwilling to give it recognition ... Historians of education who are mostly based in faculties of education, still have trouble being accepted as genuine historians by the very conservative members of history departments in the universities in this country.⁸

At the end of the twentieth century the story became, as Lewis Carroll wrote, ‘curiouser and curiouser’. This was because the story of the writing of the history of education seemingly passed away, a phenomenon discussed by Craig Campbell and Geoffrey Sherington.⁹ Before this, although some educational historians had enthusiastically jumped on the accelerating eugenics bandwagon in the late 1980s and 1990s, they

wrote about only selected areas: attempts to educate the public about eugenics; the growth of physical education, health and sex education in schools; and particularly attempts to segregate and educate the mentally defective.¹⁰ What they didn't write about was the broader picture of how eugenics formed the ideas that influenced the planning and development of the revolutionary and massive increase in education for the masses early in the twentieth century. It is telling that as late as 2010, of all the appearances of the word 'education' in the *Oxford Handbook of Eugenics*, only two refer directly but briefly to arrangements for the education of the whole population. All others refer to the themes above.¹¹

After a decade or so, the corpse of educational history has been twitching, with some recent work tentatively embracing eugenics, but mostly it carries on the old feud, discussed by Bessant, strangely ignoring the important work of historians who have developed a new history of eugenics, race and whiteness during the last decade. Phil Cormack, for example, writes on the educational system set in place early in the twentieth century without any reference to any recent literature on those themes.¹²

As many of the eugenists in Victoria were either doctors or teachers, the true nature of educational reforms in Victoria slipped between the disciplinary canyons separating different historical sub-disciplines.

At the beginning of the twentieth century significant reforms were begun throughout the English-speaking world leading to the development of secondary education provided by the State, thus increasing both the number and the social range of citizens gaining further education.¹³ Due to the constitutional arrangements of the nascent Australian nation, these developments were instigated and instituted by the various State governments. This essay intends to redress these inadequacies in the literature by emphasizing the complexity of the interface between eugenics and education in the states of Victoria and, more briefly, New South Wales.

SECONDARY EDUCATION IN THE COLONIES

In 1907 Frank Tate made a trip to the United Kingdom to observe developments in post-primary education. In England, Tate saw how an extensive state secondary system of education could be implemented. He wrote from Liverpool that '[t]he most striking fact about education here is the tremendous interest taken in the establishment of public secondary

schools, maintained at public expense and charging only very low fees'.¹⁴ Tate saw the expansion of secondary education as an important step in creating a unified system of education, 'the bottom of which will be in the gutter, and the top in the University'.¹⁵

During a visit to Liverpool University he wrote with enthusiasm of the 'refreshing and rather colonial way of looking at some educational problems'.¹⁶ But most of all he was impressed that the three arms of education (primary, secondary and tertiary) worked closely together: 'At the club [staff club at the university] I have met leading professors, secondary school men, and I see many instances of their mutual regard for one another. So ... must it be if national education is ever to be a reality.'¹⁷ In the decades following Tate's visit to the University club at Liverpool he emulated their approach, actively seeking out the support of a wide range of university professors and educationalists, as well as leading educated professionals (especially in the medical profession), to develop his version of a national education system in Victoria.

The system developed under Tate's guidance put into place an educational ladder from the lowest levels of society to the university 'so that every child who has the strength to climb may, by using that strength, reach the place for which *nature* intends him'.¹⁸ That the system was to become pyramidal was due to the eugenic notion of the inequitable distribution of talents amongst the population, as preached by Tate and Berry. As we shall see, the proposed restriction on places for the poorer social classes in academic secondary and university education reflected the belief that many of the fit members of society had already demonstrated their genetic superiority over the poor by joining the middle classes.

EUGENICS, BERRY AND TATE

At one of the very first meetings of the Eugenics Society of Victoria, on 30 November 1936, the founding members, including Professor Wilfred Agar and Angela Booth, discussed the need to attract eminent men and women with eugenic views. One such possibility was B.T. Zwar (Professor Berry's ally in the reform of the medical school at the University of Melbourne). But Zwar refused the offer of the position as vice-president in December, 'though he approved of the objects of the society'.¹⁹ Other possible vice-presidents were canvassed, including three educationists, Professor G.S. Browne, Dr. K. Cunningham and Tate.

Both Cunningham and Browne joined the society, but there is no evidence of Tate's acceptance of the offer at this date.

Nonetheless, a number of subsequent offers of senior positions were made to him over the next two years. In a letter to Agar on 31 March 1937, Tate refused to take an active part in the society, although he agreed to become an associate member as, he wrote to Agar, he was 'quite in sympathy with the proposal to form a Eugenics Society of Victoria, especially since it is to be guided by yourself'.²⁰ Agar held strong eugenic views. He was an active advocate of the sterilization of mentally defective children and believed that such a measure could eventually eliminate the unfit members of the race.²¹ The following year, in a letter to the secretary, Victor Wallace, Tate wrote that 'I shall be glad to interest myself in the work of the Society in future, but I am loath to take any more responsibilities as I find it not easy to attend evening meetings owing to a rheumatic affection.'²² Clearly those enthusiasts behind the founding of the Eugenics Society believed that, even with his poor health, Tate was a worthwhile person to recruit, approaching him again in late 1937 with an offer of a role on the Consultative Committee.²³ Again he wrote that 'I should like to be able to help the Eugenics Society'²⁴ but his rheumatic condition practically confined him to home and he was cutting down commitments, making it impossible for him to accept. He did, however, renew his membership.

It seems clear, judging from all the offers made to Tate in the relatively small professional and academic circles in Victoria that supported eugenic views in the 1930s, that he was recognized as a fellow traveller. Does this mean that eugenics was an important influence on Tate in the early years of the century?

It is possible that Tate's interest in the Eugenics Society of Victoria represented a typical example of the pessimism that some historians have argued was pervasive during the 1920s and 1930s.²⁵ In consequence, eugenics may have been of little or no significance in Tate's thinking and work during the early years of the century when he was actively extending State education into the secondary sphere.

Tate was, after the Great War, often pessimistic about the condition of Australian society, displaying the fear of degeneration and concern with the lack of national efficiency that characterised much eugenic thinking. He premised his need for the extension of secondary education in 1920 on the basis that Australian society could 'not ignore the widespread social discontent now manifesting itself. Much of it has its origin

in, and is maintained by, real or fancied social injustice', and he believed that 'our domestic troubles are probably more acute than at any time in our history'.²⁶ He had, however, expressed similar views much earlier at the 1912 Educational Congress in Melbourne (convened to debate the development of post-primary education), before the secondary system of education had been fully implemented. In a paper titled 'Our Neglected Opportunities', Tate argued that the reform of the State education system was a matter of urgency because:

there was no dearth of incompetent, ill-trained, Australian born workers ... and grievously must Australia answer for it in the end. No State could hope to prosper if she allowed the efficiency of her people to be less than the highest. (Applause)²⁷

The rot did not stop there, according to Tate, because 'what is true of our neglect to secure industrial efficiency is true when we consider other aspects of national efficiency'.²⁸

Tate was also an active public supporter of the craniometry research of Richard Berry and Stanley Porteus. He attended a lecture at the Anatomy School at the University of Melbourne in 1917 when the results of experiments were presented. They argued '[t]hat the inferior, that is the less well educated, classes of the community have an appreciably less amount of cubic capacity of brain than have the more highly educated ... [and] ... [t]hat amongst classes there is a distinctly measurable correlation between size of head and intelligence'.²⁹ Tate was singled out for a special welcome from those present by the chairman, who announced that, 'without his co-operation and assistance, the results of the work to be submitted to them by Professor Berry could not have been carried out'.³⁰ Tate also chaired the third of the Stewart lectures given by Berry on 21 November 1921 at the University of Melbourne. In this lecture, entitled 'The Psychological Failures of Life', Berry again reiterated his deep concern about the danger of genetically inferior members of society propagating their defective genes. He argued that 70 per cent of the mentally deficient members of society 'are in no way different from the intelligent man, and not only in outward appearance, but in conversation and bearing, these people often pass for normal'.³¹ He went on to argue that heredity was by far 'the most frequent and most potent predisposing' cause of mental deficiency, and that the mentally deficient, 'have, on the average, twice as many children as do normal

people', repeating his argument that a significant proportion of the population were inherently inferior and unable to benefit from higher education.³² Berry's public lectures were attended by leading liberal figures. In July 1917 a packed public lecture in Melbourne that included in the audience the Governor of the State (Sir Arthur Stanley), the Minister of Education, H.S.W. Lawson, George Swinburne (described as 'an Interstate Commissioner, and a leading technical educationist' and the founder of Swinburne Technical College) and Tate,³³ concluded with Theodore Fink (chairman of the Royal Commission into Education in 1901) moving the vote of thanks, remarking 'that the Minister for Education need not dig very deep down to find the solid substratum of people in favour of liberal education expansion'.³⁴ Stephen Garton writes in his chapter "["Liberty of the Nation": Eugenics in Australia and New Zealand and the Limits of Illiberalism](#)", about the problematic and changing interface between liberalism (or illiberalism) and eugenics.

Later, in the 1920s, Tate worked closely with Berry to draft the first Mental Deficiency Bill of 1926. According to Jones, the Inspector General for the Insane in Victoria, Tate was one of the driving forces behind this legislation, inspired by eugenic ideas.³⁵

Tate also shared with eugenic thinkers concern about the dysgenic potential of the fecundity of the 'lower' classes. In 1907 he wrote: '[i]f the degraded slum parents produce large families and the better class physically are given over to selfish neglect of duties what is to be the issue?'³⁶ The middle-class fear of degeneracy, commonly known at the time as 'race suicide', has been well documented for the United States and the United Kingdom.³⁷ It seems, then, that Tate's support for eugenic views cannot simply be dismissed as the pessimism of an old man. It was more a product of contemporary middle-class professional fear of the degeneration of society.

BERRY, TATE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF POST-PRIMARY EDUCATION

Tate's attendance at Berry's 1917 lectures, both in the Collins St. Presbyterian Hall and in the Anatomy Department at the University of Melbourne, were not isolated events but were part of a continuing professional association which took the form of a shared campaign to reform the educational system of Victoria. Berry had been an active advocate of

increased spending by the State for the purpose of expanding the post-primary education systems virtually from the moment he arrived in Melbourne in 1905. Most particularly, he had campaigned successfully to raise public awareness of the parlous state of the University.³⁸ The first recorded professional association between the two men was their membership of the Council of Public Education.³⁹ At its first public meeting, on 5 March 1912, the Council accepted Tate's suggestion that Berry, Tate and Donald Clark should form a subcommittee for the purpose of drawing up

a report showing the proportional expenditure upon the various grades of education in the chief countries of the world and in Victoria, and to prepare for the Council's annual report the latest figures showing the proportionate number of scholars who pass through the various educational grades in these countries.⁴⁰

Clark was the Chief Inspector of Technical Schools and a strong advocate of students making early career choices into vocational streams.⁴¹ This seems to have been the first move in a campaign by Berry and Tate, after the passing of the 1910 *Act*, to have expenditure increased on secondary and university education. Berry and Tate apparently believed that by making public the fact that post-primary education in Victoria was proportionately under-represented and under-funded, compared to comparable countries in Europe, they could embarrass the State government into increasing funding.

At a meeting of the Council on 5 June 1917, one month before his lecture in the Presbyterian Assembly Hall, Berry presented the evidence of his research on brain size and claimed that the State was 'putting a premium on inefficiency' because the brain of a child was only about 60 per cent developed at the conclusion of primary education. When the child reached the age of sixteen this percentage would increase to 80 per cent, the age at which every child would have completed secondary school in Tate and Berry's plan.

Another body on which Tate and Berry worked together for educational reform was the Educational Progress Association, an organization formed to carry into effect the recommendations put forward by the speakers at the 1912 Congress.⁴² Berry was elected President with Dr. James Barrett; John Lemmon and John Billson were vice-presidents. Billson was the Minister for Public Instruction and Lemmon a Labor

Member of the Legislative Assembly and soon after Minister for Public Instruction in the ill-fated Elmslie government. Tate and Dr. John Smyth (later Professor of Education at the University) were members of the executive.⁴³ Lemmon was the chief Labor Party spokesman on education throughout the 1920s. He vigorously advocated Tate's and Berry's view that the junior technical schools were the appropriate institutions for educating working-class children and when he became a member of the Hogan Ministry in 1927 he abolished the fees for junior technical schools, while leaving in place those in the selective high schools.⁴⁴ The *Herald* newspaper believed that the admission by the Educational Progress Association that there was a need to develop public interest in education frankly recognized

the unpleasant truth, that at present public interest in formal education is dormant. The high hopes of years ago have not been realized. The ubiquitous schoolmaster, the University professor with his extension, and the expert with his public lectures, the evening class and the rest, were to give us a thinking people. Deadwood Dick and Garvice hold the bookstalls, the picture shows and the music-hall are triumphant, and the gossip of the streets is of bets or bonnets. The middle-class man is indifferent to education, because he owes so very little to his secondary school, except the virile training its playground gave him.⁴⁵

The *Herald* continued by claiming that, as secondary education had been the monopoly of the wealthy, '[u]selessness from the money standpoint gave it its social value' and that this uselessness of its content had constituted the courses in the new secondary institutions set up by the State. The *Herald* called for the newly formed Educational Progress Association to encourage the adoption in secondary schools of new relevant courses that would teach the children of the State to think and reason as 'those who simply read and believe are doomed to failure in the struggle'.⁴⁶ As we shall see, Tate also believed that the state high schools should be more vocationally orientated than the private secondary schools.

In summary, the close association between Tate and Berry, and the striking unanimity of purpose they exhibited in the type of outcomes they desired for the development of post-primary education in Victoria, helped them succeed.

TATE'S PLANS REACH FRUITION

After the 1910 *Education Act* was proclaimed, it was not until 1914, after the initial activity of setting up secondary schools, that the main decisions were made concerning the direction taken in secondary education. The year 1912 was a great year of activity for building high schools and by 1914 the junior technical school system was in place. The trend after 1912 was, however, towards strengthening the junior technical school system at the expense of the high schools. Few new high schools were constructed in the remainder of Tate's time as director.⁴⁷

In his *Preliminary Report* of 1908, Tate had argued that there was a strong demand for technical education in Victoria, but no such demand for 'academic' secondary education.⁴⁸ He emphasised this at the 1912 Educational Congress. The Congress was held in a climate of uncertainty caused by private school opposition to the state infringing on their traditional role, as well as scare mongering by the press. At the opening of the Congress, Tate affirmed Berry's belief in the need for national efficiency when he announced that the aim of the Congress was 'to cultivate public opinion, so that any educational policy that might be adopted should not be spasmodic, and also that it should be thoroughly efficient (Hear, hear).'⁴⁹ In his editorial introduction to the published proceedings of the Congress, Henry Payne wrote that the 'idea of holding this conference originated with Professor Berry'.⁵⁰ Payne then explained how the Congress came about:

The First Educational Congress in the State of Victoria was the outcome of the general feeling in the community that education should be made a National ideal, irrespective of party or creed, and that after discussion a representative body should be formed with the object of steadily moulding public opinion and endeavouring to outline a concerted and balanced system of National education in the State.⁵¹

Tate and Berry's preferred system of secondary education, propounded vigorously at the Congress without any opposition, including vocational selection for all children at twelve years of age, was beginning to look settled by 1920. Berry had published his main research findings on head size and intelligence and, in 1920, Tate published his justification for the system. In his pamphlet on education beyond primary schooling, *Continued Education (From 14 years of age upward) Our Opportunity*

and Our Obligation, Tate railed against the conservative critics of the expansion of secondary education. He argued that ‘nowhere in Australia is the opposition to intermediate and higher education as the function of a State department more pronounced than in Victoria’.⁵² He believed that he knew of ‘no better way to minimize the class consciousness which is at present so great a hindrance to our social and industrial progress than to extend, improve, and popularize our State system of education’.⁵³

Tate did not, however, plan to reform the system of education for the benefit of individual self-expression or self-fulfillment. He wrote that:

The State provides education for the well-being of the whole State organization, and not for the benefit of the particular individual who is the subject of the teaching. The justification for this State expenditure is the strengthening of the State itself through more highly developed citizens ... and it is only an incident that the boy who takes full advantage of the opportunities provided is enabled thereby to better his position in life.⁵⁴

It seems that Tate was not interested in setting up a significant system of non-vocational high schools to compete with the private school system, but was interested in providing limited educational choice for the majority of the population after the age of twelve in the technical continuation schools.⁵⁵ Tate, however, in *Continued Education*, frequently attacked the conservative view that State secondary education should be narrowly vocational and technical.⁵⁶ Thus he referred sympathetically to the argument that the ‘effects of technical education at a very early age are undoubtedly injurious to mental development ... and the cramping effect of a purely utilitarian education upon intelligence and character renders it a poor preparation even for industrial life’.⁵⁷ This did not mean, however, that Tate believed in expanding the high school system. He still believed that student’s life vocational choices should occur at the beginning of their secondary education, either to attend a high school or a junior technical school. Writing from England during his 1923 trip to the Second Imperial Conference on Education in London, he described how he:

had many discussions in Club Rooms and elsewhere on the subject of pure secondary education, and secondary education with a vocational bias, and it is astonishing here how suspicious all classes are of any education which

tends to predetermine the after career of a boy or girl. As a matter of fact it has become a matter of political faith in the Labour Party here to resist all attempts to give an early vocational education on the ground that it is undemocratic. I therefore find myself in the queer position of arguing rather in the direction of practical subjects in secondary education, and the grouping of those pupils who are likely to take up a similar after career.⁵⁸

Tate claimed that it was possible to enrich the experience of technical students through the process of providing material added onto the core vocational curriculum. This would assist in the development of recreational interests and good civic values, an idea espoused by Berry in his 1917 lecture. Their aim was to make it less likely that the poor would be a disruptive or destructive force in society. The consequence of the narrow technical education system envisaged by Tate was a need for thorough citizenship training for the purpose of forming ‘a fine and still finer type of citizen’.⁵⁹ Such a system, while avoiding the stigma of being narrowly vocational, provided no escape from an early locking-into restricted opportunities. Tate wrote that ‘[s]urely it is wisdom to plan an education for all which embraces an adequate training for each of these three functions—work, leisure, citizenship. Each reacts on the other.’⁶⁰ The need for the development of a new, better citizen was, according to Tate, essential for the purpose of advancing national efficiency: ‘[t]he demand for increased national efficiency is everywhere insistent; and so, too, is the demand for national economy ... True efficiency is economy.’⁶¹ Tate argued, in 1920, that the secondary schooling offered to the student in the State system ‘should have more or less definite relation to the position which he is likely to occupy in the community’ and while a common primary course of education ‘may well be the same for all pupils ... for pupils over twelve years of age, differentiated types of schools with widely differing courses of study should be developed’.⁶²

In *Continued Education*, Tate set out his reasons for having three distinct types of secondary schools for the children of the State:

We need secondary education of various types to provide for one section of workers; we need sound and efficient technical education to provide for another set of workers; and, perhaps most important of all, we need a system of continuation classes of different types combining, with vocational training, general education, and education in civic duties and responsibilities for that large section of industrial and other workers who do not need

specialized technical knowledge and skill ... At least three well-defined types of schools are necessary—each type providing varied courses—Secondary Schools, Technical Schools, Continuation Schools.⁶³

This tripartite system of secondary education was based on a eugenic policy designed to sort all the population into their appropriate intelligence groupings and to provide different education according to the capabilities of the different groups and the national need. As the hereditary intelligence of each individual was believed to be apparent at the age of twelve, it was possible then, according to Tate and Berry, to allocate to each child a place in one or other of the three levels of secondary schooling, thus setting them on a sure path for life. It was not only also unnecessary to provide free university education; it was potentially dangerous and counter-productive.

Tate's work in providing a model of such a unified system of State-run primary, secondary and tertiary education in Victoria has been the subject of considerable debate and strong disagreement. Badcock, for instance, has written that 'Tate's directorship, from January 1902 to June 1928, was the most important in the history of the Victorian Education Department, for within that quarter of a century the main lines of the Department's organisation were set, some of them immovably.'⁶⁴ The multi-streamed, substantially vocational secondary system that developed out of the 1910 Education Act in Victoria, as well as the limited access of avenues to the university for state school children, fitted in well with Tate and Berry's plans. With the progressive introduction of the Junior Technical schools in Victoria after the 1910 Act and the post-1912 stagnation of the programme to build more high schools (especially in Melbourne),⁶⁵ the career path of every child was effectively laid down at the age of twelve. From that age the child moved into vocational courses in the Junior Technical schools or, alternatively, enrolled in much smaller numbers in the secondary High schools that provided courses that could lead to university and the professions.⁶⁶

VICTORIA VERSUS NEW SOUTH WALES

The contrast between the Victorian education system at this time and that of the other most populous state, New South Wales, is striking. In 1920, Sydney, with a population of 792,000, had twelve State high schools offering opportunities for a professional career to the less

wealthy, and had enrolments of 4000 pupils, whereas Melbourne, with a population of 723,000, had just 1946 pupils in five high schools as a consequence of Tate's policy.⁶⁷ A decade later, in 1932, although the Universities of Sydney and Melbourne had roughly equivalent numbers of students, there were 29,718 students enrolled in New South Wales State high schools while Victoria had only 11,364.⁶⁸ Another significant consequence of Tate's preference for a divided system was that in the years from the implementation of the 1910 Act until his retirement in 1928, £1,000,000 more was spent on technical education than on high schools.⁶⁹

When McCalman and Peel assessed the long-term effects of the establishment of different systems in New South Wales and Victoria they found that while the majority of leaders in Melbourne came from the elite independent schools, in Sydney 'the experiment of state secondary education seems to have worked. For a large part of this century, high schools took in and held on to students who would later become leaders in a variety of fields. More Australian leaders were educated in Sydney than anywhere else and only in Sydney did more go to state schools than to private schools.'⁷⁰

CONCLUSION

In 1935, in his contribution to the *Education of the Adolescent in Australia*, Tate defended the system he had put in place against the attack that it was undemocratic to stream students into vocationally orientated Junior Technical schools. He argued that the Victorian system allowed the State High schools to maintain higher academic standards than they would have if they had been open to all. Tate argued that the open and fee-free United States' model of secondary education was inferior because the 'single American school, which seeks to be all things to all pupils, does not to my mind offer a satisfactory solution, for, while it offers opportunities to all, it tends to level standards downwards without providing adequately for the gifted'.⁷¹ He attempted to counter the criticism that the Victorian system was undemocratic by arguing that the problem of offering a narrow technical education for most state secondary students could be overcome by offering similar general courses of study in both the high and junior technical schools in such areas as civics, and by allowing for the transfer of students to different institutions within the system. This rarely occurred.⁷² He also argued that the

great majority of students between the ages of twelve and eighteen were not fitted for the academic education in a high school system that was based on the private English grammar school model.⁷³ In retrospect, Tate was also concerned that, even for the small proportion of brighter students allowed into the State high schools, these institutions had mimicked the private, literary curriculum excessively, to the detriment of a greater variety of curricular offerings. He argued that, in comparison to the private secondary schools, the State high schools ‘contained a greater proportion of pupils not likely to enter the university’.⁷⁴ He based this argument on the view that not all students were, by nature, of equal intelligence and thus secondary education should be given to each individual ‘according to his capacity’.⁷⁵ The corollary, of course, was that Tate believed that the middle classes in fee-paying private schools contained a higher proportion of those with the ability to attend university.

In another chapter of *The Education of the Adolescent in Australia*, Tate’s colleague at the Australian Council for Educational Research (and president of the Eugenics Society of Victoria), the director Dr. Kenneth Cunningham, suggested that there were two models of post-primary education:

One view holds that education beyond the elementary stage should be general; the other holds that secondary education should be limited to the few. The first or comprehensive view is given verbal expression in the slogan, ‘Secondary education for all’; it achieves practical realization in many parts of the United States. The second, or eclectic view, stresses the importance of ‘*fitness for secondary education*’; it embodies the practice of England and most European countries. It will become abundantly plain in the following pages that Australia follows the second view rather than the first.⁷⁶

In fact, Cunningham’s research indicates quite clearly that there were significant differences between states, and that it was Victoria’s system, along with those in the smaller states, developed under Tate’s leadership, that was unique in stressing the ‘fitness’ of students for secondary education. While state high schools charged no fees in New South Wales, this was not the case in Victoria which also made available to its students only about a third of the places offered in New South Wales.⁷⁷ As well, a far greater proportion of secondary students could be found in private schools in Victoria than anywhere else.⁷⁸

The first Director of Education in New South Wales, Peter Board, further contradicted Cunningham's assertion that Victoria's restricted model was the national model. In *The Education of the Adolescent in Australia*, Board took a contrary view of secondary education to that espoused by Tate and Cunningham. Questioned as to 'whether an education system should be regarded as an agent in the vocational distribution of the population',⁷⁹ he answered in the negative, writing:

In an ideally organized community, every youth would be fitted into the vocational niche for which he is best suited, but this implies a regimentation of society which no British community has so far shown itself willing to accept. An investigation of the careers followed by boys after leaving school has shown clearly that the degree of schooling they have received has determined to a *very small extent* the nature of their future avocations.⁸⁰

Even earlier, in 1923, Board presented research in *The Australasian Journal of Psychology and Philosophy* that, he claimed, 'entirely disposes of the assumption that these non-vocational advanced schools are merely recruiting grounds from which the professions become overcrowded'.⁸¹ What his system of schools did, he claimed, was to give 'some capable boys an opportunity that would otherwise have been denied' in Tate's system.⁸²

Clearly the system of post-primary education in Victoria was planned and implemented with strong eugenic principles in mind. As such, this constitutes an important way in which eugenic thinking in Australia shaped society, providing another example of the ability of a small group of individuals to significantly influence eugenic policy in a colonial context.

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‘Of Eugenic Interest’? Baby Shows Before the Great War

Caroline Daley

In 1854, the organizers of Clark County Fair, in Springfield, Ohio, staged what is reputed to be America’s first-ever baby show. Billed as a ‘Grand National Convention of Babies’, it attracted 127 entrants and was said to be the main attraction at the Fair. Although ‘large and fat children seemed to predominate’—one five-month-old from Indiana tipped the scales at over 12 kilograms—weight alone was not enough to take the main prize. After much deliberation, the judges declared ten-month old Alfretta Ronemus the winner. Her prize was a rococo revival silver-plated tea service, inscribed with the legend, ‘Suffer Little Children to Come Unto Me’.¹

Neither the organizers of the baby convention, the mothers who paraded with their infants, nor the crowds that clamoured for a good look at the exhibits, could have anticipated that Alfretta’s win would one day feature in a number of historical works concerned with eugenics. Even though Francis Galton’s ideas had yet to be formed, let alone publicized, the 1854 Springfield baby show has been awarded a special prize in histories of eugenic baby shows, whereas the baby contest staged

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the following year by Phineas Taylor Barnum at his American Museum in New York is rarely mentioned.

Barnum's 1855 baby show was held over three days. Alongside several sets of twins and triplets, one hundred 'single' babies were on display. The *New York Daily Times* was intrigued by this 'unique' event; while others had claimed the show was immoral, the paper had to 'confess that we ache to get a vision of that troop of fat, healthy, hearty, and crowing babies'.² They were not alone. Tens of thousands of people crowded into the Museum, eager to see Charles Orlando Scott, the 'finest' baby on display, and winner of the \$100 main prize.³

Barnum's exploits and exhibits were often reported in the New Zealand press. A long way from New York, New Zealanders were nevertheless kept informed of the latest entertainments in America and elsewhere. They were aware of Barnum's great baby show, and also some of his more 'freakish' baby exhibitions, such as the 1855 display of an infant said to be only two years old, but already 'covered with hair' and sporting 'a full beard and whiskers'.⁴

Barnum soon returned to mass displays of babyhood, and New Zealand newspapers reported on his continued success. This time there were 1000 babies on show, including 'one of the fattest of all fat boys' and a three-month-old with 'more hair on his head than Mr. Barnum or any other man about the Museum'.⁵ Awarded \$10 for being so hirsute, he and the other babies on show had their three-day stay at the Museum extended due to the popularity of the contest.⁶

New Zealand's first baby show did not boast 1000 entrants and it was over within an afternoon. But it did take its lead from 'the immortal Barnum'. The organizers of Kaiapoi's 1864 show knew baby contests were a 'Yankee notion', but they seemed to take comfort from the fact that baby shows were now held in England, too. And so in the small Canterbury settlement, as part of a rural sports day, 30 'specimens' were 'gravely inspected and discussed' by Drs. Dudley and Beswick before Mrs. Porter's infant was declared the winner.⁷

Many newspapers around the country ran reports of the Kaiapoi sports day, noting that the baby show was 'undoubtedly the great event of the day'.⁸ But not everyone was pleased that baby contests had arrived in New Zealand. Referring to the Kaiapoi contest as an 'American monstrosity', one journalist hoped that such exhibitions 'will not be permitted to take root'.⁹ The good people of Kaiapoi were not deterred by the criticism. At their next sports day, Dr. Dudley was again called upon to judge the 'numerous' entries in the baby show, and in 1866, with

Dr. Dudley still at the helm, the baby contest remained 'one of the chief attractions' of the day.¹⁰

At the same time as the infants of Kaiapoi were prodded, poked and praised, babies in other parts of the empire were also being displayed at community and commercial events. In the colony of Victoria there were baby shows at the Castlemaine Sports' Association meeting and in East Collingwood, Melbourne, where baby contests became part of the Easter festivities.¹¹ Sydney staged a baby show as part of New South Wales' centenary celebration. The 1870 contest attracted 70 'very fat and big' babies.¹² At a show in London in 1869 in excess of 100 babies were exhibited, chosen from more than 2000 applicants. Over the course of four days, 30,000 spectators thronged the North Woolwich exhibition, offering sweets and money to the children they most admired. With upwards of £200 in prizes, mothers from as far away as Lancashire displayed their babies to best advantage, while the organizers celebrated their success. Each of those spectators paid one shilling to attend the show.¹³

These early examples of baby shows point to two enduring aspects of such contests: they were a way to celebrate and reward healthy, happy babies, and they were entertaining. Yet those who write about the history of such contests tend to focus on the former, and all but ignore the latter. Baby shows have come to be seen as the natural precursor to the 'better baby' and 'fitter families' contests held in North America in the first three decades of the twentieth century.¹⁴ Or as a New Zealand journalist noted in 1911, baby shows are 'of eugenic interest'.¹⁵ In this chapter, though, a question mark has been added to that statement. That question mark should not be understood as a denial of the link contemporaries and historians have made between baby shows and a form of environmental, public health-focused eugenics. Rather, it provides an opportunity to consider the various ways baby contests were viewed in the years before the Great War. Sometimes they were of eugenic interest; at other times they were an entertaining part of popular culture; occasionally they were both. If we only view baby shows through a eugenic lens we run the risk of missing all the fun of the fair.

OF EUGENIC INTEREST

Better baby contests, or 'Scientific Baby Contests', began to be held in North America in the early years of the twentieth century.¹⁶ With the aid of pediatricians, an evaluation form was used to measure each child in a scientific, standardized way. Alongside weight and height, the length

of the baby's arms and legs was recorded, as was the circumference of the head, chest and abdomen. The mental acuity of the child was also evaluated.¹⁷ Charles Benedict Davenport, director of the Eugenics Record Office, was very interested in those evaluation forms, and in ensuring that the United States raised not just better babies, but the best possible infants. Like Francis Galton, Davenport believed that 'better breeding' was at the heart of eugenics, and what better way to assess and encourage better breeding, than by staging a 'better baby' show?¹⁸

As Diane B. Paul states in her chapter, 'Truby King, Infant Welfare, and the Boundaries of Eugenics' of this volume, regardless of the definition, Davenport would qualify as a eugenicist. The same cannot be said for most of those involved in the better baby contests. Alexandra Minna Stern notes that 'the transformation of eugenics over time makes it imperative to define it in contextual, not absolute, terms'.¹⁹ Sometimes called 'eugenic baby contests',²⁰ better baby contests were eugenic in that they measured and evaluated children, defined what was 'normal', and informed mothers and members of the public how to improve children's mental and physical abilities.²¹ In this, they achieved some success: by 1914 it was claimed that over 100,000 children had been examined at better baby contests.²² Mary T. Watts, a stalwart of the American Eugenics Society, was pivotal to that success. Watts tried to organize 'Eugenic Expositions' alongside better baby contests, where talks were given on child welfare.²³ There was nothing hereditarian about better baby contests. The focus was on improving child raising; babies could be re-examined the following year to see whether mother's better understanding of infant health and well-being led to a better baby score.²⁴

Watts later extended the idea of the better baby contests into the fitter families movement, where all members of a family were evaluated. In both cases, she believed that the contests should be held at agricultural fairs and shows, to draw attention to the fact that farmers had worked out how to raise better livestock. According to Watts: 'While the stock judges are testing the Holsteins, Jerseys, and White-faces in the stock pavilion, we are testing the Joneses, Smiths, and the Johnsons'.²⁵ Over the course of three or so hours, those entering fitter family contests 'were examined by psychiatrists, psychometricists, physicians, nutritionists, nurses and dentists ... their bodily fluids [were] collected and analyzed' and a full 'eugenic history' of the family was taken.²⁶ Davenport was also keen to gather the evaluation forms from the fitter family contests.²⁷ Those forms, though, and the contests, were not just an exercise

in hereditarianism. Concerns with environmental factors, such as the home environment, exercise and diet, were a feature of the fitter family contests.²⁸ Indeed, Laura L. Lovett goes so far as to argue that, despite the name and Davenport's interest, environmental concerns were to the fore at fitter family contests.²⁹ As with the better baby contests, families who failed to take out a trophy were encouraged to return the following year, once they had improved their health and lifestyle, in the hope that they could improve their score.³⁰

New Zealanders read about the 'better baby' contests, and the American practice of judging infants alongside livestock and produce.³¹ But New Zealand shows did not adopt the 'better baby' language, and the closest locals got to a fitter family contest was a suggestion by the Early Settlers' Association of Palmerston North that a 'family show' should be held after its 1901 baby contest, with a prize being given 'to the family having the largest number of members and able to show the greatest weight'.³² The quantity, rather than quality, of the settlers seemed to tip their scales.

Although New Zealanders did not stage 'better baby' contests, it might be assumed that the involvement of Sir Frederic Truby King and the Plunket movement in baby shows was a local variation of some of the developments in North America. After all, in 1905, Dr. Truby King had told New Zealanders that a child 'might win a prize in a baby show, but still develop defects due to a faulty mode of nourishment'.³³ Looks alone were no guarantee of the health of the child, which, as Stern has pointed out, was the ethos that underpinned the judging at better baby contests in America.³⁴ Within two years of Truby King's baby show comment, and largely due to his efforts and enthusiasm, the Society for Promoting the Health of Women and Children was formed. Known as the Plunket Society, and with the motto 'to help the mothers and save the babies', Plunket quickly became central to New Zealand's infant protection and child welfare measures.³⁵ In part, they did this through participating in baby contests.

Plunket's involvement in baby shows ranged from providing the judges to staging their own contests. A Plunket nurse, for example, was called upon to do the honours at a baby show held in association with Petone's No-License League's bazaar in 1910,³⁶ while Dr. Daisy Platts-Mills, the first President of the Plunket Society in Wellington, was often asked to judge baby shows.³⁷ Examining the entrants at a Wellington Carnival contest in 1913, Platts-Mills awarded points to 'sun-browned

babies', since this indicated their mothers followed Plunket's emphasis on fresh air, while possession of a 'dummy' was said to be 'practically fatal to a baby's chances of becoming a prize-winner'. Plunket did not approve of pacifiers. But even though Platts-Mills attached 'more importance ... to muscle than fat', the overall prize in 1913 was awarded to Maynard Thomson, who at nine months and three weeks already weighed almost 17 kilograms, which was almost two kilograms more than any other baby in the show.³⁸ There were special prizes at the Carnival baby contest for Plunket babies—Thomson was not part of the fraternity—but even at baby shows run in conjunction with Plunket events, weight was to the fore. At the Plunket Society's baby show held in Napier in 1911, for example, 'judging was carried on under Dr. Truby King's method of weighing, etc.' In effect this meant that the heaviest child was crowned champion baby. In 1911 the honour went to Master Lopdell from Eskdale, who was over a kilogram heavier than the next heaviest child.³⁹

The involvement of doctors as judges for baby shows, and a focus on the weight and the overall health of the 'exhibits', were not new developments at New Zealand baby shows. Long before Plunket and knowledge of the better baby contests of North America, medics had been involved in Australasian baby contests. As noted above, Dr. Dudley was the regular judge at Kaiapoi's shows in the 1860s, Dr. Mackay was on hand in Castlemaine (and devoted most of his time to 'the dentition business'), and 'medical gentlemen' judged Sydney's centenary celebration baby show.⁴⁰ In 1876, Otago University's professor of Mental and Moral Philosophy, Dr. Duncan MacGregor, was called upon to judge a baby show in Dunedin. Referred to as a 'eugenist *avant la lettre*' in John Stenhouse's essay, MacGregor awarded prizes based on 'symmetry, shape of head, expression of the countenance'.⁴¹ Dr. Corbett, the judge of an Auckland baby show in 1884, used the opportunity to address the mothers, giving them an 'excellent "medical talk"' on 'the proper treatment of infants', much like Truby King would do decades later. The report on that contest noted that the public took 'a keen interest in the rising generation and all matters pertaining to their food, clothing, and proper development'.⁴²

It could be argued that New Zealand did not need US-styled better baby contests given the Plunket movement weighed and measured infants on a regular basis. Every child's 'Plunket Baby Record Book' could be seen as a running score sheet, noting whether and to what

extent the baby deviated from the norm, which is what the evaluation forms at better baby contests recorded.⁴³ In a country where 'positive' eugenics was so mainstream—a number of prominent members of the Plunket Society were key figures in the Eugenics Education Society of New Zealand, founded in 1910—separate 'Eugenic Expositions' alongside baby shows might appear redundant.⁴⁴ But such assumptions fall into some of the traps that have ensnared those writing about better baby and fitter family contests in North America.

Susan J. Pearson concludes her article about baby shows in nineteenth-century America with these words: 'Only by ignoring the transformations of the previous half-century could the new contest organizers see their call to treat children as livestock as revolutionary rather than redundant.'⁴⁵ It is a point that might also be made about the historical work on better baby contests. In order to understand scientific baby contests and the significance of Plunket's involvement in baby shows, we need to consider the longer history of the contests, and the social and cultural roles of the shows in the pre-eugenic and eugenic eras. In so doing we can contemplate the non-eugenic and extra-eugenic aspects of the competitions and challenge the claim that better baby contests replaced the infant beauty shows that were so popular in the nineteenth century.⁴⁶

ALL THE FUN OF THE FAIR

If there was a 'revolution' in baby shows it was not that they came to be of eugenic interest, or were used by eugenicists, however defined, to encourage the breeding and raising of better babies. Rather, it was that they ceased being an 'American monstrosity' that should be avoided at all costs, and instead became, very quickly, a fun part of popular culture.

From the outset, baby shows were associated with local fairs and livestock shows; this was not a new development in the age of eugenic baby contests. But initially this association was not always regarded as a positive, even in North America. Pearson notes that at Ohio's Grand National Baby Convention in 1854 journalists had fun referring to babies as 'specimens' and 'stock', but concerns were also raised: 'a Cleveland paper declared it "disgusting, when the contents of the cradle and the hog pen are judged by the same standard, when babies are estimated by the pound like fat calves"'.⁴⁷ In New Zealand, a journalist writing about the 1864 baby show in Kaiapoi thought it was 'degrading ...

to class ... children with ... fat pigs and sheep and exhibit them, to the criticism and remarks of strangers'.⁴⁸ Even if the baby contest was not associated with a livestock display, the negative connotations remained. The Woolwich show in London was an urban event, but that did not prevent porcine references. At multi-day baby shows, mothers and their infants sat in small, separate enclosures, which the mother could decorate. Those in the Woolwich enclosures were said to look 'disagreeably like pigs in their pens'.⁴⁹

Galton and his fellow eugenists might claim the credit for turning the animalistic references aimed at baby shows from a negative into a positive, but the mainstreaming of baby shows came about due to much wider societal changes in the second half of the nineteenth century. At a time when people began to enjoy more regular leisure opportunities, when consumption was celebrated at least as much as production, and women and children staked out spaces and roles in public, events like baby shows could, and did, flourish.⁵⁰

Once New Zealanders became aware of the 'Yankee notion', and baby shows enjoyed success in Kaiapoi, communities throughout the country began to stage baby contests. Often held in association with a picnic or sports events, baby shows were used to raise funds for school libraries and brass band uniforms, celebrate the Prince of Wales' birthday, entertain the crowds at a province's anniversary day celebration, and involve mothers and their babies at friendly society and trade union events.⁵¹ Sometimes there were lighthearted questions as to why baby shows had become de rigueur at sports days, given the 'babies will not run, nor walk, and they certainly will not wrestle',⁵² but the overwhelming response was that these shows were 'the great feature of the day', and that they 'gave rise to considerable excitement'.⁵³

Baby shows were not above ridicule. The final entrant in the contest held at an Oddfellows' fête in the 1870s was an adult male, weighing 95 kilograms, dressed in white and sucking on a bottle. He was not placed, but the Fire Brigade's dummy won the prize for quietest baby at a show held in Invercargill in the 1880s.⁵⁴ By then, though, even the churches had embraced baby contests as a harmless entertainment.⁵⁵ Judged by 'respectable' members of the community, often medical men or the wives of local dignitaries, baby shows celebrated 'local industry' and reassured the community that despite all the concerns being raised about infant mortality and the declining birth rate, the 'local produce' of Palmerston North or Nelson was 'sturdy, healthy and pretty looking infants'.⁵⁶

As well as being 'dimpled cheeked, bright eyed, chubby faced, saucy little specimens of humanity', the babies of Nelson were also held up as 'the lustiest, chubbiest, brightest-eyed, merriest-looking anti-immigration arguments that were ever collected under one roof'.⁵⁷ As other contributors to this collection have noted, the Dominions were particularly concerned about the quality of migrants reaching their shores. This was so before people had access to the language and ideas of eugenics, as well as during the eugenic era. Baby contests celebrated the locally-born; shows were sometimes limited to babies born in the colony or to colonial parents.⁵⁸ A 'leading citizen' went so far as to suggest that the government stage a national competition for colonially-born children, with a £100 prize for best all-round baby. Despite offering to pay for the second prize, the government showed no interest in his suggestion.⁵⁹ Other shows, which did take place, had prizes for best baby born in the district staging the show.⁶⁰ But if migrants were to join the settler society, then a baby contest during their voyage to the new land could reassure the colonials, while also providing some entertainment for those on board. When the *Leicester* arrived in Wellington, bringing with it 350 immigrants from England, locals could take comfort from the fact that the infants who took part in the ship's baby contest 'would compete very successfully' with New Zealand-born babies.⁶¹

Alongside the community-run baby shows there were also commercial contests. These began to be staged soon after the Kaiapoi sports' day shows, and, like the community contests, continued long after Plunket's arrival. For example, a hotel keeper on the West Coast advertised a baby show as part of the 1869 Christmas attractions at his establishment, and the American Theatre in Thames was the site of a contest in 1870.⁶² Following the US lead, the winner at Thames (Mrs. Thompson's six-month-old son) was awarded 'a beautiful plated silver teapot, sugar basin, and toast rack'. It was not inscribed with any biblical verse.⁶³

By the mid-1880s, thanks to the popularity of numerous community contests, baby shows became a mainstay at commercially run entertainments. Sometimes the shows were part of a vaudeville company's bill of entertainment. Wellington's Theatre Royal staged such a contest in 1885; two years later the Gaiety in Hawke's Bay included a baby show alongside a singing contest, a hot apple dumpling eating competition, and competitive concertina playing.⁶⁴ A baby show was held at the Wellington Skating Rink in connection with the sale of patent medicine, in Masterton the Good Samaritan Variety Company included a

baby show as well as an accordion competition, while various waxwork vaudeville companies held baby shows as part of the night's entertainment.⁶⁵ Even the most avid eugenist would be hard pressed to find anything of interest at such events.

Crowds might enjoy a baby contest alongside a bun-eating competition, as they did when the Crystal Palace Entertainers and Concert Company performed in Auckland, but baby shows were attractive enough to be the main or sole feature at some entertainment venues.⁶⁶ In 1884, for example, baby shows were major features in Dunedin and Auckland, the country's two largest cities. The Dunedin contest saw over 3000 people crammed into the Garrison Hall to pass judgement on the 140 'baby exhibits'. Like many such contests, there were multiple prize categories. The 'handsomest baby' was rewarded, as was the heaviest baby, the lightest baby, the best nine months baby, the child with the curliest hair, the baby with the most brothers and sisters, the most tastefully dressed child, the one with the darkest eyes, and even the one who cried the most. There were also prizes for twins and triplets. But still the mothers complained: one woman 'burst' into the judges' committee room and demanded to know why her child had not received the prize for the baby with the reddest hair. On being told that there was no such category, she replied, 'It's a blessed shame', before storming out.⁶⁷ The organizers of Auckland's contest made sure there was a prize for the child with the reddest hair and also offered a prize for the 'plainest' baby. The winner of that category was not named in newspaper reports. Like the Dunedin event, the Auckland show was popular with mothers and the general public: over 100 babies were entered into the competition, and the police had to intervene when the dense crowd prevented mothers and babies entering the venue.⁶⁸

Police intervention was also required in 1890, when Mr. R.H. Donnolly, showman and scoundrel, thought he could skip town without paying out the prize money from a baby show. Donnolly offered £100 in prizes at his Christchurch baby contest. Over three days and nights the public paid to attend the show, and mothers sat with their infants on show. Mrs. Rudd was delighted when her child won a cash prize, but was distraught to find Donnolly had skipped town before paying out, especially when she learnt that he was planning to leave the country. Donnolly had moved on to Wellington, where he was staging another commercial baby contest. Thanks to Mrs. Rudd's insistence, Donnolly was found by the police and she received her prize money. A few months later, the

'thorough rascal' tried the same swindle in London, but found that his "little game" would not work' there, so headed to South Africa where it was reported that he held a 'Grand National Baby Show' at Kimberley, Northern Cape.⁶⁹

There is no evidence to suggest that Donnolly tried the same trick in North America, but Pearson notes a number of similar scams in the States.⁷⁰ The popularity of baby shows with parents and the paying public was exploited by men like Donnolly; that popularity centred on entertainment and exhibition. His events were not of eugenic interest.

Whether community or commercial events, baby shows also encouraged consumerism, and sometimes jokes about consumption. As early as the 1860s, there were quips about the winners of baby contests being the well-fed offspring of milkmen.⁷¹ By the 1870s Wellington's milkmen were said to be experiencing 'great demand ... for extra milk, owing to the numbers of mothers who are trying to fatten up their offspring' ahead of a baby show.⁷² The humour may have been an attempt to cover unease about the contests, but if so that disquiet soon dissipated. Advertisements began to appear, indicating that winners of baby shows were brought up 'by hand' thanks to various commercial products.⁷³ Eileen Pomeroy, who won first prize in the under 12 months category at the baby show held in association with the 1906–1907 New Zealand International Exhibition, appeared in advertisements for Highlander Condensed Milk. The adverts quoted her father, extolling the virtues of Highlander; his 'firm, healthy, and wonderfully good-tempered' daughter had benefitted from the germ-free product.⁷⁴

Turning to the the milkman or grocer rather than relying on mother's milk to feed a baby went against Plunket's advocacy of breast-feeding. It also disrupted the notion of the home as a place of production. New Zealand women were famed for their productive skills and were recognized for their important contribution to the household economy at the local equivalent of county fairs, where they won prizes for their skills in the dairy, kitchen and household garden. However, it would be a mistake to ignore their role as consumers. Baby shows provided mothers with a reason to spend money, especially if there was a prize to be had for the best-dressed child. The prizes that could be won also brought consumerism into the home. Silver tea services were all very well, but cash soon became more common and gave mothers the opportunity to buy things she wanted as well as things her family needed. Children were also brought into this world of consumption when toys were offered as prizes.⁷⁵

The consumerism associated with baby contests reinforced wider changes in women's social and economic role in the household. Arguably this was more revolutionary than dubbing such shows 'of eugenic interest'. In addition, the contests encouraged the public display of private life. Babies and mothers were placed on show and were judged not in terms of their character, but on how they looked.

Whether babies were likened to livestock or not, placing them on show, to be judged by strangers, and for that judgement to be based on such superficial measures as prettiness and how curly the child's hair was, challenged many people's notions of what mattered. Rewarding weight, as a proxy for health, might allay some concerns, but as noted above contests often had multiple prize categories, most of which had nothing to do with health and welfare. The contests also brought Pākehā and Māori parents and children together; the display of babies and mothers was not restricted to the European world.

In the US the exhibition of 'colored' babies in nineteenth century contests was often problematic and linked to discussions about slavery.⁷⁶ Things were a little different in New Zealand. As Angela Wanhalla discusses in 'Debating Clause 21: "Eugenic Marriage" in New Zealand' in this volume, there was a long history of intermarriage between Māori and Pākehā, and an educated Māori elite held many positions of prominence in New Zealand. Some became medical doctors, and while none of them seem to have judged a baby contest, Māori mothers entered their children in baby shows and Māori men were sometimes called upon to help with the judging.

There is no discernible pattern to Māori involvement in baby shows before the Great War, beyond the fact that they rarely triumphed over a European baby. There were sometimes separate categories or even contests for Māori babies, and some Pākehā assumed that unless there was a special category, no Māori babies would or could participate in a contest. 'Zamiel', who wrote a regular column in the *Auckland Star*, was guilty of such an assumption in 1889. He wondered why 'our noble aboriginal population' was 'debarred' from entering their 'dusky *tamariki*' in the Exhibition Baby Show.⁷⁷ The absence of separate categories for Māori babies had led him to assume that Māori babies had no place in the show. His assumption was not always shared by Māori mothers.

The lack of separate categories did not prevent Māori parents from entering their infants in baby shows. In 1886, for example, John Jones and Annie Paki were the only two entrants in a New Plymouth contest.

Jones, a European baby, was said to be superior but Pāki's parents were awarded 'a special prize of 10s. for commendable merit', the same amount of prize money as Jones' parents received.⁷⁸ In the Plunket era, too, Māori mothers entered their babies in contests regardless of whether there was a separate category for Māori children. Two of the 'proud mother exhibitors' at a King Country show in 1908 were Māori women, and the winner of the Wainoni pleasure ground's baby show in 1914 was 'a pretty little Maori boy'.⁷⁹

Often though, throughout the period, there were separate categories or separate competitions for Māori babies.⁸⁰ In the early years of the twentieth century these separate shows seem to have been an entrepreneurial attempt to increase the box office take, rather than a eugenic exercise. Vaudeville companies that incorporated baby contests into their offerings often held separate competitions for Māori babies, on a different night from the 'standard' show. Māori, who might otherwise not have felt welcome at the venue, had a reason to buy a ticket when a Māori baby show was on the bill; Europeans who had voted in the initial baby show could compare babies over the two nights and decide whether the infants really were that different.⁸¹

Māori participation in baby shows might lead to a comment in the press—and it must be remembered that we do not know how often Māori babies competed without generating any explicit comment—but rarely was that commentary negative. As other contributors to this collection have noted, Māori were not a target for New Zealand eugenicists. The reaction to Māori in baby shows could be seen as further evidence of that; it could also be that for Māori and Pākehā baby shows were simply a harmless way to pass an afternoon at a fair or an evening at the theatre.

At most baby shows, mothers—Pākehā and Māori—brought their offspring onto the stage or to the front of the venue, and stood or sat with their baby while the judges went to work. Mother and baby were on display for an hour or two, and then they merged into the crowd. But some nineteenth-century events were held over a series of days, and in those cases mothers decorated their baby's special enclosure, which usually included a cot, and then sat for days under the watchful eyes of the passing crowd. Mothers were thus on show in a way that was unusual at the time. Initially, this led some to pass negative comments on the women's dress and sense of decorum, while young men in the crowd were said to have spent more time admiring the mothers than the babies.⁸² Overall,

though, reportage of the shows is remarkable for the lack of concern about the public exhibition of sexually active women. Pro-natalism rather than prudery seems to have been to the fore.⁸³

CONCLUSION

Baby shows continued to be successful community and commercial events in the years immediately preceding the outbreak of war. In-person vaudeville contests were less popular once going to the pictures became a regular pastime, but those running movie houses did not abandon baby shows. Photographic displays now became part of the nightly entertainment. Each evening, specially taken photographs of babies appeared on the silver screen, with a number in the corner. Patrons at the movies would then vote for their favourite. So popular were these contests that they were usually run in heats, with a new series of photos each week. Like the in-person contests they replaced, there were cash prizes for the champion baby.⁸⁴ By 1911 moving pictures of the children were taken for the audience's amusement. Such contests were very popular with parents: the organizers of a Wellington 'kinematograph baby competition' had to close entries, and divide the competitors into two heats, with each film running for a fortnight. The film of 'Wellington's Chubby Little Babies' was very popular with the crowds at Fuller's Pictures, who determined which of the 'chubby darlings' were rewarded with cash prizes.⁸⁵ As with the photographic contests run by movie theatres, these babies were neither weighed nor measured.

Plunket baby shows, run along scientific lines, did not replace prettiest or most popular contests in New Zealand. There was room for both in a country where eugenics was 'everywhere, nowhere, and eventually somewhere'.⁸⁶ The somewhere in this case—baby shows—might seem trivial given the subject of other essays in this volume. But as the editors point out in the introduction to this volume, '[Eugenics as a Transnational Subject: The British Dominions](#)', sterilization laws should not be the yardstick of eugenic 'success'.

For some, baby shows were 'of eugenic interest' and were successful. They drew attention to infant welfare and encouraged mothers to pay more attention to their babies' weight and other measurements. Contemporaries referred to Plunket as 'practical eugenics' for a reason.⁸⁷ In the 'Better Britain' of the South, the language of better baby contests was not required, but in many other respects, local shows, especially

those under the watchful eye of the Plunket Society, mimicked the contests held in Kansas and Vancouver.

However, to only view baby contests through a eugenic lens does not just miss all the fun of the fair, it also misses the point. Baby shows were also 'of interest'. For parents, especially mothers, they were a chance to show off their infants and bask in the reflected glory, as judges and the crowds admired and rewarded the exhibits. The prizes that came with a win, and the opportunity to buy new outfits and enjoy an afternoon or evening at a fair or theatre, were added bonuses. For most of the organizers, too, there seems little of eugenic interest in such events, yet much to be gained. Baby shows helped raise funds for school swimming pools and team uniforms, and attracted crowds to picnics and sports days. They were pivotal to the success of many pre-war community events and they made a lot of money for commercial ventures, too. The Mr. Donnollys of the entertainment world were motivated by their bottom line, not improving the welfare of young New Zealanders. The audiences who attended the shows, be they at a picnic, one of Donnolly's shows, or at a movie theatre, also seem less concerned with the state of the coming generation than eugenists might have wished. Baby shows were a popular form of entertainment that helped blur the boundaries between public life and domesticity, that normalized exhibiting children and their mothers in public, that celebrated consumerism. They were part of the modernization of New Zealanders' social and cultural lives.

Baby shows did not cease with the outbreak of war. Long seen by some as ways to exhibit 'splendid specimens of soldiers in prospective',⁸⁸ the contests were now a way to raise funds for the war effort. A new category was introduced: best baby born since the outbreak of war,⁸⁹ and winners often had a military link. Edith Sawkins' success in an Otaki show in 1915 may well have been due to the fact that her father was one of the first men to leave New Zealand to fight for the empire.⁹⁰ Interest in the shows had taken a new turn. Eugenics was still somewhere, but when it came to baby shows it was rarely a prize-winner.

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Sir Robert Stout as Freethinker and Eugenics Enthusiast

Emma M. Gattey

An intelligent and seemingly indefatigable émigré from the Shetland Islands, Sir Robert Stout distinguished himself in his adoptive homeland as a lawyer, parliamentarian, Attorney-General, Premier, Chief Justice and longstanding chancellor of the University of New Zealand. Drawing upon private papers and public lectures, this chapter examines the connections between Stout's freethought and eugenic convictions. Far from occupying separate compartments in his outlook, I argue that Stout saw freethinking and eugenics as integral to the creation of a progressive, modern, liberal and scientifically oriented nation. In many ways Stout's eugenics was emblematic of his time. He largely subscribed to the same prejudices against the racially, physically and mentally 'unfit' as his contemporaries, and advocated the same means for resolution of these national 'problems'. However, Stout's biological determinism was tempered by a deeply personal, long-hidden reality: the committal

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of his daughter to Seacliff Asylum for epilepsy—one of the hallmarks of a ‘social defective’ at the time. In this, his experience, theories and endorsement of eugenics were unique.

Stout was born in 1844, in the Shetland Islands, off the northeast coast of Scotland. Educated at Lerwick Grammar School and then at the local parish school, Stout participated in weekly, wide-ranging discussions with his Presbyterian father and uncles, which he later extolled as ‘the most important part’ of his education.¹ As a result of these discussions, he came to mistrust dogmatism and unquestioned obedience to church authority. He qualified as a teacher, specializing in mathematics and science, and as a surveyor, before emigrating to New Zealand in 1864, lured by the gold rush in the Otago province. After arriving in Dunedin, instead of goldfield surveying, Stout taught school and co-founded the Otago Schoolmasters’ Association. From 1867, he trained as a lawyer, articulated to the Dunedin firm of William Downie Stewart, and was called to the Bar in 1871. One of the first students to study at the University of Otago, Stout obtained first-class degrees in Mental and Moral Philosophy and in Political Economy, under the supervision of Duncan MacGregor. This formidable Scotsman, described in John Stenhouse’s chapter ‘[Undesirable Bill’s Undesirables Bill: William Pember Reeves and Eugenics in Late-Victorian New Zealand](#)’, this volume, profoundly influenced Stout (among many others) and soon became a firm friend. Stout established an excellent reputation as a lawyer and became the University’s first lecturer in law while continuing his studies.

In Dunedin, founded in 1848 by Scottish Free Church Presbyterians, Stout became known as a freethinker who kept his distance from the churches. He edited the freethought paper, *The Echo*, and became president of the Dunedin Freethought Association, established in 1876. Stout was elected to the Otago Provincial Council in 1872, to the House of Representatives in 1875, and was appointed Attorney-General and Minister for Lands and Immigration in Sir George Grey’s administration in 1878. He had married Anna Paterson Logan in 1876, with whom he had four sons and two daughters. Anna became a renowned feminist, suffragist and temperance activist with the New Zealand Women’s Christian Temperance Union. In 1879, as at several subsequent points in his career, Stout’s precarious finances forced him to withdraw from politics and re-focus on his law practice to support his family. This resignation coincided with that of Stout’s close friend and fellow freethinker,

John Ballance. Both ministers had clashed with Grey, an Anglican, through their interest in and promotion of the New Zealand Agricultural Company. Grey saw this as an unprincipled attempt by Stout and Ballance to use their ministerial positions to support a company in which they had invested, thus betraying the Liberal cause. He never ceased to distrust Ballance and Stout.²

From 1884 to 1887, Stout was premier of New Zealand, with Julius Vogel as his treasurer. This surprising alliance (Stout had been adamantly anti-Vogel during the 1870s) was based on their mutual interest in saving the New Zealand Agricultural Company, in which both had interests, from ruin through legislation, thus shifting the financial burden to the taxpayer. In 1893, Ballance died in office as Liberal premier before Stout, his preferred successor, could obtain a seat in Parliament. Contrary to Ballance's wishes, Richard Seddon bested Stout in the succession struggle, and the two rivals clashed repeatedly until Seddon's death. Stout served as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court from 1899 until his retirement from the bench in 1926, and as chancellor of the University of New Zealand from 1903 to 1923. He was appointed a KCMG in 1886, made a privy counselor in 1921, and appointed to the Legislative Council in 1926.

Whether addressing special interest associations, graduation ceremonies, congregations or parliamentary bodies, Stout regularly expressed his freethinking and eugenic convictions. He set out to build a secular, racially superior, scientifically minded nation led by progressive liberal thinkers such as himself. With the right philosophy and policies, he believed New Zealand could surpass what the colonists had left behind in the United Kingdom. Like MacGregor, Stout believed that the state must prevent human failures, the 'unfit', and the 'lower' races from contaminating the new nation.

FREETHINKING

Historians have traditionally attributed the genesis of Stout's freethought to his upbringing in the Shetland Islands.³ Exposed in his formative years to theological debate between 'dogmatically religious', argumentative Scots, Stout became repulsed by 'the pettiness of such controversy', he claimed.⁴ Understanding religion as an integral and instinctive aspect of humanity, Stout believed that sectarian and dogmatic religion had perverted this natural human spirituality, 'substituting hatred and division

for what ought to unite all mankind'.⁵ He was not so much antireligious as hostile to established churches (such as the Church of Scotland). In Stout's view, individuals must be free to think for themselves, not shackled mindlessly to the ossified dogma of decaying churches. He considered religious sectarianism 'a major Old World evil', which intelligent modern liberals such as himself must leave behind.⁶ Thus, in an extrajudicial address to the Unitarian Free Church in 1917, Stout discouraged 'watertight compartments in our social life' between those who do 'not see eye to eye in the mysteries of life'. In order to bring about 'sectarian peace' as well as 'peace in our social life', Stout defined freethought not as 'a church, a sect, or a chapel', but as 'open to all ... open to faith and disbelief'.⁷

Stout's freethinking was significantly shaped by the influence of his father, Thomas, and his uncle William, both Presbyterian. From the age of ten, his schooling was 'potently supplemented' by engagement in their Sunday afternoon discussions on scientific, philosophical, theological and political themes.⁸ Stout respected both men immensely, and to hear them praise Robert Chambers and the novel evolutionary views of Charles Darwin was pivotal in the formation of his own theological views.⁹ In particular, William Stout's edict on evolution resonated in his nephew's lively, truth-seeking mind: 'It is not for us to discuss the effect of Evolution on religion; the question is: "Is it true?" If it is true we must say so, whatever may be the effect on our views of the universe.'¹⁰

Devouring the works of Darwin, Chambers, Charles Lyell, T.H. Huxley and Herbert Spencer, evolution became a powerful part of Stout's liberal creed.¹¹ It became so important to Stout that, as chancellor of the University of New Zealand, he declared in 1917 that he 'would not consider any person entitled to a degree in a University who knows nothing about the doctrine of evolution, and who knows nothing about the world in which we live'.¹² Everybody, he argued, should read Darwin's *Origin of Species* and *Descent of Man*.¹³ Social scientific texts such as Spencer's *Study of Sociology* were also imperative reading, in order to 'keep abreast of what is happening in the world'.¹⁴

Waldo Dunn and Ivor Richardson, Stout's first and only biographers, identified Stout as an 'advanced theological liberal', but Stout's religious affiliations (or lack thereof) are contested to this day.¹⁵ Sometimes criticized by Otago Presbyterians as an 'apostle of Atheism', and the 'Antipodean Alter Ego' of the notorious British atheist, Charles Bradlaugh, Stout's religious inclinations were more complex than simple

apostasy.¹⁶ In numerous ways, Stout established common ground with a predominantly Protestant audience. Upholding conventional moral beliefs and values was a powerful means of doing so. Upon marrying fellow freethinker Anna Logan in 1876, for example, Otago's most renowned freethinker had a *religious* wedding ceremony, presided over by the Reverend D.M. Stuart, the popular and widely-respected minister of Knox Presbyterian Church. Stout presented himself as a paragon of moral respectability, advocating prohibition of alcohol, and co-operating with progressive Protestant clergy such as the Reverend Rutherford Waddell in Dunedin.¹⁷ Stout succeeded politically and professionally in a mainly Protestant culture in part because he did not break radically with the language, beliefs and values of that culture.

Another way in which Stout found common ground with Protestants in general and Presbyterians in particular was through the rhetorical use of Scripture. Although he denounced the Bible as the 'Baal of Authority',¹⁸ Stout quoted and paraphrased it incessantly and was often didactic about Scripture. In an address on the progress of religion, for example, he queried the necessity of Christian belief for morality. In response to those claiming that Christianity *was* necessary to teach morality, Stout argued that such people 'have not read, or at all events not carefully considered, the teachings of morality in the Bible'.¹⁹ He then discussed Exodus, identifying 21 of its 32 ordinances as restatements of the Hammurabi Code, which preceded it by 500 years.²⁰ In his inaugural address as president of the Dunedin Freethought Association, on 11 February 1880, Stout predicted that freethinkers would, 'no doubt, be told that in freely criticising the Bible we do not appreciate its beauties nor understand its grandeur'. However, he asserted that 'it is we alone, who do not admit its infallibility, that can appreciate its beauties, can admit its sublimity', for '[it] does not dominate us'.²¹ Stout used Christian Scripture and rhetoric to encourage Dunedin citizens to think critically, to question received knowledge and to strive for righteousness independently of the church. Using language and thought patterns familiar to many Scottish Presbyterians, Stout attempted to secure cultural authority for himself and like-minded colleagues such as MacGregor, Ballance and William Pember Reeves.

Stout's biographers called him an 'advanced theological liberal'.²² This label is more adequate than 'supposed agnostic', although he never professed to belong to any conventional creed.²³ His speeches, pamphlets and personal letters reveal an idiosyncratic conception of faith,

which cannot be reduced to any single ‘ism’. Stout did not identify freethought with atheism, materialism, or even agnosticism. To be a free-thinker, in his view, demanded personal reflection on the great questions of life, seeking ‘the truth and the truth alone’.²⁴

Although careful to make the most of the common ground he shared with the Protestant majority, Stout wanted to lead New Zealand culture in new directions. This entailed certain discontinuities with his Presbyterian upbringing. To free New Zealand from the sectarianism and authoritarianism of Old World religion and diminish the cultural influence of the churches, Stout aimed to locate morality beyond the Bible and to show that science had ‘disproved’ Special Creation theory. Lacking the Goliath of State religion that English freethinkers reacted against, colonial New Zealand proved a rather intemperate climate for freethought.²⁵ While Stout would have loved to have been an ‘episcopophage’ (‘bishop-eater’) in the style of T.H. Huxley, he lacked the same repressive institutions to supplant.²⁶ Still, he loaded his slingshot with a mixture of science and ideology, strategically portraying Darwinian evolution and its ‘offshoot’ as an ‘alternative moral value system’—a system both incompatible with, and superior to, Creationism.²⁷

Stout was deeply concerned with righteousness, which in his view elevated both individuals and nations. He saw righteousness as located not exclusively in organized religion, but also within evolutionary science and the progressive development of the human race. In 1880, he told the Dunedin Freethought Association that:

The Bible has not suddenly been closed. It is still being written. The race is being formed, and each unit of society can help to make the future grander than the past. And when we find, as Evolution teaches us, that as we sow so shall we reap, that as the fathers are so shall be the children, there is a commanding force leading us to the right action, grander and greater than the commandments Moses promulgated.²⁸

In this revealing quote, Stout juxtaposed ‘Evolution’ with Scripture to show that the revelations of evolution are compatible and continuous with the Bible, but transcend it, leading to something better. Stout portrayed those obeying the ‘commanding force’ of righteousness as ‘living epistles’, leading a morally conscientious life of ‘good deeds’ apart from ‘old creeds’.²⁹ Each individual could add to the living text of the Bible, taking morality in new and improved directions. By making deliberate,

informed reproductive decisions, enlightened citizens could contribute to the sacred mission of improving the human race through evolutionary science.

As well as using biblical language to legitimize freethinking, Stout used science in general, and evolution in particular, as a weapon to reduce the cultural authority of the churches and to enhance the authority of their critics. Speaking to the Christchurch Freethought Association in 1881, Stout contrasted ‘Special Creation Theory’ with ‘the Evolution Hypothesis’, positing ‘unanswerable’ arguments for evolution.³⁰ These included Ernst Haeckel’s recapitulation theory, as well as ‘the argument from degeneration’, which saw proof of biological progress not only in ‘a change of outward condition’ but in the possibility of ‘degeneration’ or reversion to primitive habits. For Stout, instances of atavistic regression proved moral, mental and physical progress. With ‘lunatics’, for example, Stout observed a frequent ‘reversion to the habits and ideas of their ancestors, perhaps thousands of years back’. The ability to trace the origins of such ‘primitive’ customs or habits disproved the Christian notion that ‘mankind has fallen’ and ‘can only be raised again by supernatural intervention’.³¹ Christianity, ‘built on man’s degeneracy, not progress’, could not account for the reality that humankind was continually advancing, without the need for any *deus ex machina*. Whereas Christian doctrine assumed that paradise lay ‘in the past’, Stout interpreted evolutionary science as assuring that ‘the paradise ... of the scientific man is yet in the future’. In light of these ‘revealings’, Stout concluded that if ‘honest men ... yield to science’s teachings they must give up the popular theology’ and the notion of a personal Deity.³² Stout could not accept the biblical revelation of the Fall of mankind from perfection, which seemed too gloomy and pessimistic, particularly for a progressive young colony such as New Zealand.

Historians and rationalist apologists alike have often extolled Stout as a luminary of antipodean rationalism.³³ Stout’s freethought is often adduced alongside his illustrious political and legal careers in order to show ‘[just] how little Christian belief mattered in New Zealand’s public domain’.³⁴ Yet few of Stout’s admirers have paid much attention to connections between eugenics, racism and freethought. In his 1960 Masters thesis, by contrast, David Hamer branded Stout a ‘proto-fascist’, adducing Stout’s eugenic desire to breed the ‘best’ people, his ‘anti-democratic’ thinking, and his goal of a society free from class conflict, with labour and capital guided by the interests of the ‘national

community'.³⁵ Several decades later, however, Hamer's 1985 entry on Stout in the *Encyclopedia of Unbelief* avoided any mention of eugenics or race, emphasizing instead Stout's almost unparalleled 'eminence in the political, legal, and educational spheres'.³⁶ This redaction suggests a desire to keep New Zealand rationalism free of any troubling taint.

EUGENICS

Stout's bookshelves were laden with eugenic treatises and pamphlets, including Sir Francis Galton's *Probability: The Foundation of Eugenics* and *Hereditary Genius* and Karl Pearson's *The Scope and Importance to the State of the Science of National Eugenics*.³⁷ A Victorian polymath (and Darwin's half-cousin), Galton was a prolific author and pioneer in fields including anthropology, sociology, statistics, psychology and meteorology. His book *Hereditary Genius*, published in 1869, applied statistical methods to the study of human differences, aiming to prove the inheritance of intelligence and greatness through studies of 'a large body of fairly eminent men'.³⁸ Among those studied, Galton discussed the Darwin and Bach families at length, outlining family trees which proved the descent of scientific and musical genius through generations.³⁹ Galton introduced the term 'eugenic' in his 1883 book *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development*, defining it as:

[T]he science of improving stock ... which, especially in the case of man, takes cognisance of all influences that tend in however remote a degree to give to the more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing speedily over the less suitable.⁴⁰

Galton popularized the notion amongst his scientific and intellectual contemporaries, including his protégé, Pearson. An influential English mathematician and biostatistician, Pearson was Galton's student, biographer, and first holder of the Galton Chair of Eugenics at University College London (now the Galton Chair of Genetics). Like Stout, he was a prominent freethinker, and applied his eugenic beliefs on a national level, perceiving 'war with inferior races' as a logical corollary of his research on human measurement. He described his 'scientific view of a nation' as:

[T]hat of an organized whole, kept up to a high pitch of internal efficiency by insuring that its numbers are substantially recruited from the better stocks, and kept up to a high pitch of external efficiency by contest, chiefly by way of war with inferior races.⁴¹

In a lecture delivered at the Leys Institute, Auckland, Stout lauded eugenics as ‘the science of noble birth, or that which relates to the development and improvement of the human race’. He informed the audience that they were ‘indebted to’ Galton for this doctrine, as ‘it is to the late Francis Galton that belongs the glory and honour of the foundation of the science’.⁴² Stout summarized the ‘many social movements and social experiments’ New Zealand had undertaken to remedy ‘the degeneration of our race’, seeing ‘the wheels of progress’ moving slowly but surely in the public education system, hospitals, charitable aid and old-age pensions, and in successful medical research encouraged by ‘the best races of the world’. Stout described this commitment to racial improvement as ‘the faith of the social reformer’, whose ideal is ‘continued progress’. In furtherance of this reforming ideal, in 1886 Stout appointed his friend and teacher, MacGregor, as inspector of lunatic asylums, hospitals and charitable institutions.⁴³ To Stout, eugenics was a crucial ‘phase of this struggle for social reform’. Objectively legitimized by its ‘solid scientific foundation’, Stout saw eugenics as an ‘offshoot of the doctrine of evolution’ that would secure racial and national progress.⁴⁴

A prime mover in New Zealand’s eugenics movement from its inception, Stout was elected to the committee of the Wellington Eugenic Education Society (EES) at its inaugural meeting on 11 May 1913.⁴⁵ (His absence from the council of the society’s Dunedin counterpart was simply a question of timing. When the Dunedin Society was established in 1910, Stout had already relocated to Wellington to serve as Chief Justice.) He was an active and voluble member, giving numerous lectures on eugenics to the EES, other societies, and public assemblies.⁴⁶ His speeches described the composition and aims of the movement, gave statistical examples of ‘hereditary degeneracy’, including criminality, susceptibility to tuberculosis, and the apparent decline in birth-rate of the ‘ablest’.⁴⁷ In 1911, Stout concluded his lecture to the Leys Institute with the hope that he had shown that eugenics was ‘really the important science on which all advancement in human life depends’, and that this realization would spur the foundation of a Eugenics Society in Auckland.⁴⁸ As these orations were usually reiterated in local and

national newspapers, many primary sources show Stout's strong support of eugenic policies to improve New Zealand's racial stock.

Throughout his career, Stout remained committed to Darwinian evolution, and to the contemporary jargon of competition and 'the struggle for life' in social Darwinism. Echoing Pearson's 'war with inferior races', Stout warned an Auckland audience in 1911 that 'we must, if our race is to subsist and not be overthrown by other races, attend to two things— (1) to our breeding from the best, and (2) to a proper environment for our people'.⁴⁹ These priorities were vital, Stout urged, because 'the birth rate of the best of our people is falling', while the least able, 'physically, mentally and morally', were breeding fast. He cited international statistics to show the same alarming demographic trends in England and Germany, a tendency which 'merits our most careful consideration'. Concluding his lecture, Stout cautioned that 'we dare not neglect any of these things—if our race is to be preserved'.⁵⁰

Embracing the Huxleian metaphor of the international 'war of ideas,' with the ultimate victor being the nation with the most intelligent and best-educated populace, Stout believed that without intellectual mastery of science, New Zealand would become a 'one-eyed', scientifically sub-literate nation.⁵¹ Worse still, unless the state implemented eugenic science, New Zealand would become a racially inferior nation.

Eugenics also informed and coloured Stout's thoughts on education, industry, and social reform. He believed that New Zealand could prevent racial degeneration, and ensure racial advancement by enhancing science teaching, encouraging healthy lifestyles, improving external environments and legislating for the sterilization and segregation of the lower strata of society. Advocating a mix of environmental and hereditarian eugenic solutions, Stout adhered in some cases to what Angela Wanhalla has identified as New Zealand's 'environmental strain of eugenics', which optimistically focused on environmental solutions, not simple heredity arguments.⁵² However, as explained in the section below, 'The Personal Dimension', Stout embraced a highly hereditarian and determinist strain of eugenics with regard to 'lower' races and 'defective' classes of people. He was much more environmentally focused in relation to 'normal' Anglo-Saxons.

Stout saw "degenerates" as a threat to the ideal society he had devoted his life to building'.⁵³ His testimony before the 1924 Committee of Inquiry into Mental Defectives and Sexual Offenders

reveals his conviction that the state must intervene to halt racial decline and prevent further foreign dilution of New Zealand's racial stock.

One relatively simple way of identifying the 'unfit', and separating them from New Zealand society, was through amendment of the criminal justice system and a segregationist sentencing policy. As a prominent Dunedin lawyer, appellate Judge, member of the Prisons Board and ultimately as Chief Justice, Stout dealt frequently with recidivist criminals at all levels of the justice system. The recurring motif of criminality in his statements on eugenics should therefore elicit no surprise. Indeed, at the foundation of the Wellington EES, Professor Kirk, foundation professor of biology at Victoria University of Wellington, praised Stout's 'most distinguished public service in his advocacy of the indeterminate sentence and in its becoming law' as 'aimed at Eugenic ideals'.⁵⁴ Giving evidence before the 1924 Committee of Inquiry, Stout estimated that a quarter of the sexual offenders who came before the courts could be classified as 'feeble-minded'. Some were reformed by time spent in borstal institutions (youth detention centres) or open-air prison farms, but some were helpless recidivists. He advised the 1924 Committee that, 'after a series of offences,' such recidivists 'should be also set apart in a home where they would not be allowed freedom from control'. With regard to female recidivist offenders, Stout made a tripartite recommendation:

[f]irst ... we have to recognise the inequality of mankind; second, that heredity plays a most important part in the life of our offenders; and third, that the State has a right to prevent them from breeding. This could be done by confining them not in an ordinary prison but in homes.⁵⁵

But Stout's eugenics was not confined to hardened criminals; he called for the segregation (and effective sterilization) of a far wider class of locally born 'mental defectives'. He informed the Committee that such individuals 'should be kept at some State institution and not allowed to breed'. Permanent incarceration would 'prevent them from harming themselves and the productive members of society'. To Stout, it was also imperative that the state rigorously police immigration to prevent foreign 'defectives' from contaminating the race; 'no person' should be 'allowed to land in New Zealand who is mentally defective'.⁵⁶

As John Stenhouse's chapter '[Undesirable Bill's Undesirables Bill: William Pember Reeves and Eugenics in Late-Victorian New Zealand](#)', this volume, shows, Stout's recommendations to the Committee were

remarkably similar to those of MacGregor and Reeves, like-minded progressive reformers who wished to use the power of the state to cordon off New Zealand's borders to keep undesirables out, and to stanch the breeding of undesirables within. But racial 'improvement' was not Stout's only aim. He sometimes used the language of evolution and eugenics to wrest moral and cultural authority from the churches.

In an address to the Wellington EES on 5 August 1912, Stout posed a question: 'If the race were not to improve, what was the value of politics, religion, and social life?' Without practical efforts 'to get the best possible people', these things were worthless. It was 'the duty of the people', Stout argued, 'to see that the race should not degenerate'. Eugenics, 'the faith of the social reformer', had two core 'beliefs': 'belief in the need of the improvement of the human race and belief in the possibility of such improvement'.⁵⁷ Properly understood, this faith entailed scientific 'duties' for the conscientious citizen. Eugenics therefore provided Stout with a platform of cultural authority, a pulpit from which to preach social morality to the nation.

Hamer's 1960 thesis identified 'Fascist tendencies' in Stout's eugenic convictions, even drawing an analogy between Stout's ideas and Hitler's notion of the classless state as expressed in *Mein Kampf*.⁵⁸ This 'proto-fascist' argument has proven tenacious.⁵⁹ Given these persistent allegations of antipodean fascism, it is not surprising that there has been no comprehensive reassessment of Stout's political and personal life since Dunn and Richardson's biography in 1961.

RACE

Dunn and Richardson's almost hagiographical account of Stout accords nicely with the traditional Reevesian nationalist view of New Zealand as a tolerant, progressive society. However, perhaps as a corollary of Stout's public stature, Dunn and Richardson ignored Stout's support for the eugenics movement and his expressions of racial prejudice. Noting Stout's commitment to the writings of the British evolutionist Herbert Spencer, Dunn and Richardson euphemistically summarized Stout's political goals as being 'founded ... on principles which make for the betterment of the human race'.⁶⁰ Apart from these opaque references, however, they remained silent on the eugenic and racial aspects of his outlook.

For New Zealand, Stout desired racial homogeneity. He was determined to exclude 'inferior' and 'backward' races from his progressive nation. His ideal was a unified body-politic, populated by morally upstanding, physically healthy, productive Anglo-Saxons and strong, skilled, educated Māori. He hoped that Māori would 'not die out' but thrive as 'an active and intelligent race.'⁶¹ In 1909, Stout praised 'the Natives' for showing 'great industry and enterprise' in sheep-farming. He also acknowledged the positive influence of the Young Māori Party, under the leadership of men such as Apirana Ngata, with whom he had served on the 1907–1908 Native Land Commission.⁶² Believing that New Zealand would benefit from an 'active and industrious' Māori population, Stout 'wanted to see the Māori race live'. Stout predicted that the Māori had 'a great future before them if the young Maoris did their duty' by paying attention to their own health, and honing their 'intellectual ability' and skills. As this indigenous success would mean 'a greater future for the European race', Stout 'hoped the Europeans would help to raise the Māori to a higher plane'.⁶³

The imagined benefits of such a society were, to Stout, self-evident. With racial uniformity would come political stability and solidarity, fewer societal tensions, and negligible financial burdens on the state. A constant concern for Stout was the question: 'Is New Zealand to be a white man's country?'⁶⁴ For him, Chinese immigrants posed the foremost threat to this unity. Instructing the Wellington EES on the nation's 'duty' to improve its racial stock, Stout told the audience that 'The idea [is] to get the best possible people. For this reason the Chinese [are] excluded as tending to lower our civilisation.'⁶⁵

Stout was a prominent member of the White Race and Anti-Chinese Leagues, even serving as president of the latter (elected on 28 August 1895).⁶⁶ Members of the Anti-Chinese League advocated a £100 poll-tax on Chinese immigrants, believed that they should be denied naturalization, and hoped that their fellow members would only support candidates in the general election who favoured Reeves' Undesirable Immigrants Bill.⁶⁷ In 1896, responding to a question from the audience following an address in Wanganui, Stout confirmed that he was not in favour of introducing any more Chinese to New Zealand, and that he 'had always been opposed to Chinese immigration'.⁶⁸ In 1905, Stout published an article in the *New Zealand Herald*, syndicated in newspapers nationwide, urging readers to 'keep our eye fixed for ever on our goal' or else 'we will not be able to keep Australasia as the home of a

white race'. He believed it would be 'a great loss to the world if the white races are over-run by the yellow race', and sympathized with the platform of the Australian Labour party 'in demanding that Australia should be for the whites.'⁶⁹

Stout used eugenic language, and particularly the notion of a 'struggle for survival,' to exhort white New Zealanders to improve their own health in the greater interest of racial advancement. On 20 November 1910, Stout addressed the Men's Brotherhood of the Central Mission on 'the destiny of the white race' as opposed to (and as threatened by) 'the Asiatic races'. Stout warned his audience that 'if white men wished to retain the ascendancy, they must fight for it'. Citizens must be intellectually strong, 'physically alert and morally pure'. Further, they must abstain from the vices of alcohol, drug use and tobacco, which were too often 'allowed to lower the vitality of the race'.⁷⁰ In an address on the 'Brotherhood of Man' in 1911, Stout said that unless the white race had a 'plan' and 'fought the battle of life' by ensuring it was 'morally alive and socially fit,' it would 'pass away'. 'True brotherhood', Stout maintained, lay 'in looking to the future in order that the race to come might lead a better life'.⁷¹ In 1913, addressing the nature and ideals of brotherhood, he described the white race as 'the greatest that had ever developed'.⁷²

As Stenhouse notes, Stout was not exclusively opposed to Chinese immigrants. He not only supported Reeves' Asiatic and Other Immigration Restriction Bill of 1895 but sought to strengthen it through more extensive immigration restrictions. Before Parliament in 1896, Stout demanded 'a law against negroes and Kaffirs' as well as Chinese.⁷³

Stout's racial views were linked with his freethinking and eugenic convictions. Physically, mentally or racially 'unfit' and undesirable elements needed to be excised from the population for the general good. Much like Reeves, Stout saw significant religious and racial differences as potential sources of division and disharmony. These differences were more likely to disrupt than enable national progress. Although his rhetoric often sounded tolerant, liberal and cosmopolitan, Stout, like Reeves, was deeply ambivalent about difference. There was a powerfully homogenizing nationalism.

THE PERSONAL DIMENSION

Freethought was not the only influence on Stout's eugenic beliefs. Beyond questions of race, utopianism and New Liberalism, Stout's engagement with eugenics had a personal dimension. His daughter, Margaret Annie Stout, was an epileptic ward at Seacliff Asylum from 1891 to 1900, under the aegis of Dr. Frederic Truby King.⁷⁴ Margaret was born in 1878, and began having epileptic seizures when she was seven years old. Her parents cared for her at home for the next five years, but had her committed to Seacliff on 6 January 1891. As one of the examining medical practitioners noted, Margaret was suicidal and experiencing 'frequent attacks of un-controllable violence of temper' which made her 'dangerous to herself and others'. She was consequently certified as a 'lunatic and a proper person to be taken charge of and detained under care and treatment', pursuant to the Lunatics Act 1882. It may seem counterintuitive, then, that Stout was busily preaching eugenics to the masses and endorsing William Chapple's *The Fertility of the Unfit*, which listed epileptics amongst the various 'social defectives' the state must eliminate from society.⁷⁵

However, this little-known fact helps to contextualize Stout's dual eugenic focus on heredity, in some contexts, and environment, in others.⁷⁶ Stout's emphasis on the environment perhaps reflected a hope that a proper, institutional environment would alleviate Margaret's seizures. In a moving letter from Margaret to her father, shortly after her admission to Seacliff, Margaret hoped that Stout was optimistic about her recovery. Updating her 'dear Papa' on her much improved 'health mental and physical', Margaret proudly wrote of having 'entertained myself with crochet and lace + intervals of air + exercise'. In her postscript, she begged him to write regularly, and to reaffirm her belief that 'I know you do not want to put me away from you, but to fit me again for home life.'⁷⁷

Margaret's condition was a well-kept family secret. No other primary or published secondary sources refer to her epilepsy, or her incarceration at Seacliff.⁷⁸ This secrecy may indicate that the Stouts were ashamed of their daughter's condition and committal, or their desire to protect her from public attention. There is, however, insufficient evidence to reach any clear conclusions about their attitudes. Tucked into her medical case notes is a thick bundle of letters, telegrams and notes between Sir Robert and Lady Anna Stout, Margaret and Truby King. The Stouts'

correspondence with ‘dear Dr. King’ continued well after Margaret’s discharge from Seacliff. On 3 June 1902, Stout jotted off a note from his Judge’s chambers to inform Truby King that Margaret ‘still has the fits frequently’, and to seek his opinion on the merit and reception of ‘the latest statement on Epilepsy’ in the most recent *Review of Reviews*. Stout also asked whether Truby King thought it would be worthwhile writing to the unnamed French doctor about his discovery.⁷⁹ As Diane Paul notes in her chapter, ‘Truby King, Infant Welfare and the Boundaries of Eugenics’, in this volume, Truby King was a committed environmentalist. The Stouts would have discussed Margaret’s case with him in depth, seeking explanations and solutions. This ongoing conversation—perhaps conducted in person during visits to Seacliff, certainly captured in correspondence—may have helped Stout to cope with this family secret. At this time, there was a certain shame and stigma surrounding epilepsy and committal to an asylum.⁸⁰ While this stigma may have contributed to the Stouts’ silence about their daughter’s suffering, the ‘scientific’ discourse of eugenics possibly allowed Stout a different way of thinking about it, focusing on the benefits to Margaret of a healthy lifestyle and an improved environment.

These case notes and this correspondence comprise part of an archival treasure trove of information on Stout, which should be drawn upon to write a new biography. All the threads of primary evidence need to be drawn together. Whether bemoaning the longevity of the lowly ‘residuum’ of society in the interests of ‘a higher and a nobler race’, testifying to the 1924 Inquiry into Mental Defectives and Sexual Offenders, or writing to Truby King about European studies on epilepsy, and treatments he had read about in the *Lancet* and *British Medical Journal*, Stout’s eugenic opinions and personal experiences warrant inclusion in the annals of New Zealand history.⁸¹ Stout himself warned that by shrouding an historical figure with ‘a halo of mystery ... you detract from the man’.⁸² By addressing and contextualizing the full range of Stout’s views, a full-orbed biography will do him justice.

CONCLUSION

A figure who commanded respect in many domains of public life, Stout was one of the most influential and controversial leaders in New Zealand’s legal, political and social history. He has received excellent, albeit fragmented, treatment in publications on freethought,⁸³

evolutionism and eugenics,⁸⁴ science versus religion,⁸⁵ legal history,⁸⁶ the Scottish influence on New Zealand culture,⁸⁷ the 1893 Seddon–Stout succession struggle,⁸⁸ and racial prejudice.⁸⁹ Yet these various aspects of his life have rarely been integrated into a coherent whole. Stout has fallen out of New Zealand’s collective memory.

Stout’s freethinking and eugenics were intended to advance and strengthen New Zealand, a nation free from the retrograde influences of the churches, and from the disruptions and financial burdens of the ‘unfit’. His political philosophy had little room for failures, an outlook shared by other progressive reformers such as MacGregor and Reeves. Yet historians since Reeves have often portrayed New Zealand as the ‘social laboratory of the world’—an unusually progressive social democracy relatively untroubled by eugenics or racism.⁹⁰ Although common enough among Stout’s contemporaries, eugenics and racial prejudice are less palatable for modern readers.⁹¹ Consequently, no biographer has adequately tackled this awkward, politically loaded subject. Long overdue for reassessment, Sir Robert Stout is a revealing human lens through which to view the interaction of eugenics, freethought, race and family in colonial New Zealand.

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12. Supplement to the New Zealand Journal of Education, April 1917, quoted in D.H. Bray (1953) 'The Place of Sir Robert Stout in New Zealand Social History' (MA thesis, University of Auckland, NZ), p. 51.
13. Sir Robert Stout (1916) *The Evolution of Mind: An Address delivered by the Chief Justice before the Hawkes' Bay Philosophical Institute* (Napier, NZ: Dinwiddie, Walker & Co.), p. 32.
14. Sir Robert Stout (1908) *How and What to Read* (Auckland, NZ: The Book Exchange), pp. 6–8.
15. Dunn and Richardson, *Sir Robert Stout*, pp. 18–19. The rationalist Bill Cooke has denounced Dunn and Richardson's 'very disappointing biography', in which the authors feel compelled to discharge a 'heinous charge' of atheism: B. Cooke (1998) *Heathen in Godzone: Seventy Years of Rationalism in New Zealand* (Auckland, NZ: New Zealand Association of Rationalists & Humanists), p. 30. Similarly, J.C. Dakin has criticized the biography for '[fudging] the issue' of Stout's fundamental beliefs, especially in his later years: Dakin, 'Sir Robert Stout and Freethought', 5.
16. 'Sir Robert Stout: "Evolutioning",' *North Otago Times*, 21 June 1886, 4.
17. 'The Sweating System', *Otago Daily Times*, 8 June 1889, 2.
18. 'Eugenics: Problem of the Race, Lecture by Sir Robert Stout', *Evening Post*, 6 August 1912, 4.
19. Sir Robert Stout (1925) *The Progress of Religion: A Lecture by Sir Robert Stout, K.C.M.G., L.L.D. Chief Justice of New Zealand; Together with correspondence between Sir Robert Stout and the Rev. Creed Meredith, M.A.* (Melbourne: Rationalist Association of Australia Ltd.), p. 8.
20. Stout, *The Progress of Religion*, p. 9.
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- G.A. Wood (eds.) *Christianity, Modernity and Culture: New Perspectives on New Zealand History* (Adelaide: ATF Press), p. 124.
24. Stout, *Inspiration*, p. 1.
 25. Stenhouse, 'Darwinism in New Zealand', p. 80.
 26. J. Stenhouse (1984) "'The Wretched Gorilla Damnification of Humanity": The "Battle" between Science and Religion over Evolution in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand', *New Zealand Journal of History* 18:2, 144. This neologism, meaning 'bishop-eater', was coined by Huxley himself.
 27. Tim Hyland (2010) 'Towards "a nobler type of mankind": Eugenics and Religion in New Zealand, 1900–1940' (Honours thesis, University of Otago, NZ), p. 86.
 28. Stout, *Inspiration*, p. 7.
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 30. Robert Stout (1881) *A Lecture on Evolution and Theism* (Christchurch, NZ: Telegraph and Standard Steam Works). This lecture was delivered to the Christchurch Freethought Association in the Oddfellows' Hall on 1 December 1881.
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 34. Stenhouse, 'Darwinism in New Zealand', pp. 80–81.
 35. D.A. Hamer (1960) 'The Law and the Prophet: A Political Biography of Sir Robert Stout (1844–1930)' (MA thesis, University of Auckland, NZ), pp. 507–508.
 36. Hamer, *Encyclopedia of Unbelief*, p. 655.
 37. K.A. Coleridge (ed.) (1987) *The Pamphlet Collection of Sir Robert Stout: A Catalogue with Indexes* (Wellington, NZ: Victoria University of Wellington Library).
 38. Sir Francis Galton (1869) *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into its Laws and Consequences* (London: Macmillan & Co.).
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- family tree, which proved that ability descends through generations, culminating in the musical genius of Sebastian Bach: Sir Robert Stout, 'Something about Eugenics: Part I', *Auckland Star*, 7 June 1911, 8.
40. Sir Francis Galton (1883) *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development* (London: Macmillan & Co.), pp. 24–25.
 41. Sir Karl Pearson (1901) *National Life from the Standpoint of Science* (London: Adam & Charles Black), pp. 43–44.
 42. Stout, 'Something about Eugenics: Part I', 8.
 43. Margaret Tennant, 'MacGregor, Duncan', in *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Te Ara—The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/2m7/macgregor-duncan>, date accessed 5 January 2017.
 44. Stout, 'Something about Eugenics: Part I', 8.
 45. 'Virile Humanity: The Aims of Eugenics', *The Dominion*, 12 May 1913, 6.
 46. See, for example, the wide reporting of Stout's 'Something about Eugenics' lecture, and 'Eugenics: Problem of the Race', *Evening Post*, 6 August 1912, 4.
 47. See, for example, Stout, 'Something about Eugenics: Part I', 8.
 48. Sir Robert Stout, 'Something about Eugenics: Part III', *Auckland Star*, 14 June 1911, 8.
 49. Sir Robert Stout, 'Something about Eugenics: Part II', *Auckland Star*, 9 June 1911, 7.
 50. Stout, 'Something about Eugenics: Part III', 8.
 51. Bray, 'Stout in New Zealand Social History', p. 57. This social Darwinist rhetoric was a recurring motif in his 1887 election campaign: see, for example, 'Election Speech 1887', *Hawkes Bay Herald*, 1 August 1887.
 52. Angela Wanhalla (2001) 'Gender, Race, and Colonial Identity: Women and Eugenics in New Zealand, 1918–1939' (MA thesis, University of Canterbury), p. 33.
 53. Brian Moloughney and John Stenhouse (1999) "'Drug-besotten, sin-begotten fiends of filth": New Zealanders and the Oriental Other, 1850–1920', *New Zealand Journal of History* 33:1, 50
 54. 'Mind and Body: Efforts to Improve the Race', *Evening Post*, 12 May 1911, 3. Now known as preventive detention (and aimed at community protection rather than punitive or eugenic segregation), indeterminate sentencing incarcerated offenders indefinitely, until such time as they no longer posed a threat to society and were deemed fit for release.
 55. Transcript of Evidence to Committee of Inquiry into Mental Defectives and Sexual Offenders (1925), Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives (AJHR), H3/13, 1. For a summary of Stout's recommendations, see 'The Feeble-minded', *Evening Post*, 30 May 1924, 7.

56. Transcript of Evidence to Committee of Inquiry into Mental Defectives and Sexual Offenders (1925), AJHR, H3/13, 1.
57. 'Eugenics: Problem of the Race', *Evening Post*, 6 August 1912, 4.
58. Hamer, 'The Law and the Prophet', pp. 505, 507–508.
59. In 1989 John Stenhouse described Stout's 'scientized' promotion of 'proto-fascist bourgeois paganism' against Christianity: J. Stenhouse (1989) 'Science Versus Religion in Nineteenth Century New Zealand: Robert Stout and Social Darwinism', *Pacifica: Australian Theological Studies* 2:1, 61–86. More recently, Tim Hyland's Honours dissertation examines the etymology of 'fasces' and warily asserts that Hamer's argument 'does seem to have merit': Hyland, 'Towards "a nobler type of mankind"', pp. 90–91 (footnotes). Jim McAloon describes Stout's 'authoritarian social engineering' as 'a secular version of evangelical Presbyterianism's godly commonwealth': Brad Patterson, Tom Brooking and Jim McAloon (2013) *Unpacking the Kists: The Scots in New Zealand* (Dunedin, NZ: Otago University Press), p. 142.
60. Dunn and Richardson challenged Stout's 'ready, indeed too ready, acceptance of views in keeping with his natural character' and assert that 'throughout his life he retained perhaps too high an opinion of Spencer's writings': Dunn and Richardson, *Sir Robert Stout*, pp. 28, 216.
61. 'The Maoris' Future', *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 19 August 1908, 2.
62. 'The Dominion and the Maori', *Manawatu Standard*, 24 March 1909, 3.
63. 'The Hope of the Maori', *Waikato Argus*, 13 January 1908, 2.
64. Stout, 'Something about Eugenics: Part III', 8.
65. 'Eugenics: Problem of the Race', *Evening Post*, 6 August 1912, 4.
66. 'The Chinese Question', *Evening Post*, 5 August 1895, 4; 'The Chinese Question', *Evening Star*, 29 August 1895, 2.
67. 'The Chinese Question', *Star*, 19 May 1896, 2.
68. 'Sir Robert Stout and the Chinese', *Star*, 2 June 1896, 2.
69. Sir Robert Stout, 'The Yellow Races', *New Zealand Herald*, 1 July 1905, Supplement. See also 'The Yellow Races: Their Outlook and Our Danger', *Evening Star*, 11 July 1905, 3; 'The Brown and Yellow Peril', *Nelson Evening Mail*, 18 July 1905, 2.
70. 'Race Building', *Evening Post*, 21 November 1910, 2.
71. 'The Brotherhood', *Dominion*, 9 October 1911, 5.
72. 'Brotherhood of Man', *New Zealand Herald*, 23 April 1913, 9.
73. *NZPD*, 93, 1896, p. 255.
74. Patient Number 2414, Margaret Annie Stout, Seacliff Hospital Medical Casebook, 14 March 1890–1821 May 1891, DAHI D264 19956 Box 42, Archives New Zealand, Dunedin.
75. Stout, R. (1903) introductory remark to *The Fertility of the Unfit*, by William A. Chapple (Melbourne: Whitcombe and Tombs). Note, in

- particular, Chapple's reference in Chap. 10 to the American eugenicist, Dr. W.D. McKim, and his recommendation of a lethal chamber for a broad range of 'defectives'. Dr. McKim wrote, 'The painless extinction of these lives would present no practical difficulty—in carbonic acid gas we have an agent which would instantaneously fulfil the need': W.D. McKim (1901) *Heredity and Human Progress* (New York: Putnam & Sons), p. 193.
76. Stout, 'Something about Eugenics: Part III', 8.
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 87. Patterson, Brooking and McAloon, *Unpacking the Kists*.
 88. Tom Brooking (2014) *Richard Seddon: King of God's Own* (Auckland, NZ: Penguin); D.A. Hamer (1988) *The New Zealand Liberals: The*

- Years of Power, 1891–1912* (Auckland, NZ: Auckland University Press), pp. 106–115.
89. Moloughney and Stenhouse, ‘New Zealanders and the Oriental Other’, 43–64.
 90. Philips, J. (1998) ‘Exhibiting Ourselves: The Exhibition and National Identity’, in John M. Thomson (ed.) *Farewell Colonialism: The New Zealand International Exhibition, Christchurch, 1906–1907* (Palmerston North, NZ: Dunmore Press), p. 18.
 91. For example, Brooking shows that sinophobia, albeit ‘chilling’ to modern readers, was popular mainstream Australasian opinion: Brooking, *Richard Seddon*, p. 164.

Revisiting Three Eugenic Moments: 1903, 1928, 1937: The Disappointments and Hopes of Antipodean Progressives

Charlotte Macdonald

In 1932 C.P. Blacker, general secretary of the Eugenics Society (London), bemoaned the fact that many members of the public confused ‘eugenics’ with ‘eurythmics’.¹ If the 1930s public did not understand, perhaps it is not surprising that historians continue to struggle with the meaning and significance of a phenomenon that was—for a time—‘everywhere’ and ‘nowhere’.² In early twentieth-century New Zealand eugenics commanded a popular, and at the same time, almost always controversial, position in the arenas of public debate, medical and scientific expert opinion and parliamentary politics. This chapter revisits three moments in that history: the 1903 publication of Dr. W.A. Chapple’s *The Fertility of the Unfit*, the 1928 high tide of legislative attempts to apply eugenics to public health practice; and the 1937 Physical Welfare and Recreation campaign to improve adult fitness. It does so within the

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changing global historiographical context in which each of these histories came to the attention of historians of New Zealand. In broad terms this sequence can be understood as a shift from a 1970s social history and social control-focused perspective conducted within an endeavour to build a national historiography, to an early twenty-first century concern with discursive constructions of power, cultural meanings of the body, and connected histories of eugenic advocacy and critique operating across networks spanning British, imperial and wider worlds. Fresh analysis of the character and historical meaning of eugenics in New Zealand is provoked by the unresolved state of interpretation: early twentieth-century efforts to control the quality and quantity of population continue to trouble scholars and citizens. The legacy of an era as a ‘white dominion’ continues to be part of the post-colonial present. Moreover, a study of the vigorous yet largely unsuccessful movement in this part of the world offers insight into a globally diffuse movement, an insight from the ‘global south’; the edge from which the centre can come into sharper focus.

In this revisiting I have been struck by the challenge to early twentieth-century proponents of eugenics in New Zealand by a range of sceptics and opponents: the push back, the ‘nowhere’ of Garton’s characterization concerning where eugenics ‘lands’ in Australia and New Zealand.³ In this sense, the New Zealand experience reinforces Bashford and Levine’s point underlining the co-existence of advocacy and critique across the history of eugenics as a tension-laden tandem rather than a temporal sequence in which advocacy was followed by critique. That observation has prompted further consideration of how eugenics was entangled in the centrality and complexity of the history and nature of what is understood as the ‘active state’ in New Zealand: whether that was the Liberal state of the 1890s and very early years of the twentieth century (the ‘social laboratory’, William Pember Reeves’ ‘state experiments’, and historians’ various notions of its progressive or punitive, inclusive or exclusive nature⁴—issues also taken up in Emma Gattey’s chapter ‘Sir Robert Stout as Freethinker and Eugenics Enthusiast’, this volume, and John Stenhouse’s chapter ‘Undesirable Bill’s Undesirables Bill: William Pember Reeves and Eugenics in Late-Victorian New Zealand’, this volume); the ‘expert state’ of the 1920s (when social policy was as often, indeed, *more* often, advanced by public servants exercising authority by professional qualifications and status as well as via administrative office, rather than politicians)⁵; or the ‘workers’

entitlement' state of the late 1930s, manifest in the first Labour government with its strongly social-democratic reformist manifesto enacted under the leadership of Michael Savage, Peter Fraser and Walter Nash. That government's actions are generally acknowledged as constituting New Zealand's modern 'welfare state', notable for its pre-World War Two establishment.⁶

Advocates of eugenics urged the state to be more vigorously interventionist: to extend into new realms of reproductive and bodily regimes, encouraging the 'fit' to reproduce more and the 'unfit' to reproduce less if at all. Such urgings provoked questions about the scope of state action and responsibility. They thrived in an era in which public health was making substantial claims on political attention and the public purse. Yet, the eugenic advocates had limited success in aligning their reform programme to the major strands in New Zealand's political culture. In particular, defence of the autonomous individual and the assertion of a common humanity served as principles of resistance to more intrusive and cohesive state action. Both the understandings of autonomy and humanity deployed by contemporaries were constructed within prevailing notions of a gendered and raced individual where white masculinity was the measure.

In the historiographical span in which this discussion is located, the world in which historians have been thinking about eugenics since the late 1970s has also been one in which ideas about the nature and size of the state in relation to the society as a whole, or the life of the individual, have undergone radical change.

The encounter with these three moments in New Zealand's history come from disparate points in my research career. Chapple's 1903 work was part of an early postgraduate research project in the late 1970s. Gray's 1928 Mental Defectives Amendment Bill was the subject of an Honours essay by Lisa Sacksen completed under my supervision in 2005. The Physical Welfare and Recreation campaign of the 1930s–1940s formed part of a wider study of national fitness across the British world published in 2011.⁷

1903: W.A. CHAPPLE TESTING THE LIMITS OF THE LIBERAL STATE

W.A. Chapple (1864–1936), a New Zealand-born surgeon and later politician, produced his manifesto, *The Fertility of the Unfit*, in 1903. At 127 pages rather more than a pamphlet, rather less than a treatise, it was published by Whitcombe & Tombs.⁸ The publisher's addresses tell us something of the span within which the eugenic debate at the turn of the century was positioned: Melbourne, Christchurch, Wellington, Dunedin and London. The work carried a preface by Reverend Rutherford Waddell, the reformist cleric, and letters of commendation from Dr. J.G. Findlay, a prominent lawyer and future Liberal Minister of Justice but at this point yet to win a seat in parliament; Malcolm Ross, a leading journalist and mountaineer, and Sir Robert Stout, the Chief Justice and highly respected former Liberal statesman.⁹ Dunedin, and Otago University in particular, served as a link between Chapple (medical graduate), Findlay and Stout (law graduates), and Waddell. All four endorsements invited readers to attend to Chapple's work while reserving their position on whether they agreed with his solution. Their presence in the book encouraged readers to think Dr. Chapple had identified a 'problem' that deserved discussion.

Chapple's manifesto set out the 'problem of population' and a remedy. The 'problem' was first and foremost a decline in the birth rate, which Chapple plotted carefully using statistical tables. He went on to explore various possible drivers, identifying which *might be* and which *were* active in the New Zealand setting. Eliminating poverty, Chapple also rejected labour conditions (poor economic activity, unemployment) as a significant 'cause'. The decline was not spread evenly across the whole population. In the crucial chapter titled 'Who Prevent', Chapple set out his evidence, concluding: 'The best limit, the worst do not'. The 'best' he identified as that section of the population who appeared to be the healthiest, best educated and most law abiding. Chapple then drew attention to the striking relationship between birth rate and individual self-discipline: 'Birth-rates vary inversely with prudence and self-control.'¹⁰

It is important to note that in 1903 when Chapple set down his manifesto as an early expression of eugenic ideas addressed specifically to the local audience from a New Zealand medical practitioner, the 'unfit' he

described were largely defined by their criminal character. It was the burden of prisons, the criminal justice system, juvenile offenders—inmates of industrial schools, reformatories, prisons—and the expanding scale of police and penal institutions that was uppermost in his mind. The linked blights of crime, insanity, drunkenness and destitution led some people to asylums, others to prison or the street. And it was this apparently increasing and intractable incidence of ‘deficiency’ that suggested a deep seated pathology that required more concerted analysis and redress.

In chapters seven and eight of *The Fertility of the Unfit*, Chapple then went on to explore in detail the implications of the patterns of declining and differential fertility that he had described. Looking at the multiplication of the fit in relation to the state, and the multiplication of the unfit in relation to the state, Chapple suggested that while the practice of population restraint or lack of it might be a personal choice, the cost (by which he primarily meant financial cost) was borne unevenly. The state was forced to pick up the cost of ‘unfit’ progeny, using taxes contributed by the ‘fit’. By supporting the ‘unfit’ population, the state lessened any restraint or burden on individual men or families, and thus encouraged further breeding by this section of the population. The circle of increasing undesirability and unfitness and cost thus steadily escalated. Voluntary measures such as education for self-restraint were ‘of little avail’ he surmised, leaving surgical solutions as the only effective option. Chapple set out the case for sterilization, particularly advocating the sterilization of women to prevent reproduction of the unfit. Criminal men and the insane would thus be prevented from passing on their pathology, and ‘burden’, to subsequent generations.

Chapple’s argument was quickly, and energetically, repudiated by J.L.A. Kayll’s 189-page *A Plea for the Criminal*, published in 1905, which carried the lengthy and informative subtitle: ‘*being a reply to Dr. Chapple’s work: “The Fertility of the Unfit” and An Attempt to Explain the Leading Principles of Criminological & Reformatory Science*’.¹¹ James Kayll (1873–1944) was the chaplain at Invercargill prison; he had recently returned from seven years working in Turin and Washington on prison reform. Chapple’s medical authority was countered by Kayll’s status as clergyman, prison chaplain and member of the Howard League for Penal Reform; religion and social science contested modern medical science.

Kayll argued that Chapple was wrong in his analysis of the evidence and morally unsupportable in his remedy. Criminals were neither increasing in number nor breeding disproportionately. Heredity alone did not account for criminality or for other forms of ‘weakness’. Kayll rejected Chapple’s case that ‘unfit’ people were reproducing disproportionately; instead he depicted crime as a product of social conditions more than heredity. He thus rejected sterilization as the remedy, regarding it as immoral. In its place he commended the new penology, emphasizing reform of the criminal over vengeance, advocating the indeterminate sentence (to allow for individual cases) and writing admiringly, and fulsomely, of the example of the Elmira Reformatory in New York State. Founded in 1876, Elmira’s influential inaugural superintendent, Zebulon Reed Brockway, departed from the entrenched orthodoxy by replacing retribution with reform and physical punishment with psychological inducement. Early reports from the Reformatory claimed a success rate of 82% non-recidivism among its initial 12,000 felons admitted.¹² Kayll’s case against Chapple underlined the environmental more than the hereditarian shaping of human behaviour, and insisted on the capacity for reform of even the most ‘damaged’ individuals. Kayll also disputed Chapple’s claim that the criminal class was contributing disproportionately to proliferation of the ‘unfit’, noting that few criminal men were, in fact, parents of children.

For Kayll, Dr. Chapple had set himself ‘the useless task of threshing straw’.¹³ Moreover, Chapple’s depiction of the ‘unfit’ (including criminals) was morally objectionable: ‘it regards the weak as if they were nothing less than an intolerable incubus on society, a grit in its bearings’.¹⁴ Society was more than the sum of its parts, because people were bound together in an interacting whole. Kayll concluded with a call to renew confidence in human capacity, and in New Zealand’s ‘young and plastic’ institutions.¹⁵

An important context for this early eugenic exchange was the contemporary debate amongst progressives on prison reform. A.C. Hoggins’ *Essay on Prison Reform* appeared in 1901. The National Council of Women, an important contributor to the debate on social reform in the 1890s, and in its reconstituted form post-1919, passed resolutions concerning prison reform at its first meeting in 1896 and continued to debate the subject at its annual meetings in following years.¹⁶

When I first encountered Chapple in the late 1970s in a project on crime and gender in New Zealand across the Liberal period

(1880s–1910s), the prevailing interpretive frame in social history was social control. Plotting the contours of ‘prescription and reality’, ‘prescribers and rebels’,¹⁷ ‘deviance and normality’ were common. The significance of institutions and policies was being pushed aside in favour of a focus on those who were residents or inmates at the receiving end of archive-generating politicians and gaolers: history from below. In addition, scholars raised new questions about gender. How far did these regimes—institutional and ideological—create social, political, economic and cultural structures which circumscribed the lives of women in asymmetries which were longstanding in time and wide-reaching in scope?¹⁸

The nature of the Liberal period became a central question in New Zealand history, and the nature of the Liberal state a preoccupation. The traditional Reevesian understanding of the period as one of generous state expansion and progressive innovation was cooled by Oliver and Tennant’s enquiries into social control elements within the Liberal agenda. Punitive and mean provision was actually the more enduring aspect of this form of state expansion (charitable aid, Old Age Pensions). Seddon’s ‘active state’ of charitable aid and Old Age Pensions excluded, rationed, judged and apportioned on mean and punitive lines. This scholarship was being undertaken when control of reproduction was a major issue in liberation feminism and the focus of considerable political contest.¹⁹ All these factors form part of the context for historical understandings of New Zealand’s eugenic mesh.

1928: DR. GRAY AND THE DEFEAT OF THE MENTAL DEFECTIVES BILL EUGENIC CLAUSES: THE LIMITS OF THE ‘EXPERT STATE’?

By the mid-1920s eugenic ideas had shifted even further from the realm of abstract debate to become the basis for policy and practice in public health. The concern was not so much the proliferation of a criminal class as the expanding demands on the nation’s mental hospitals. When Lisa Sacksen came to examine Dr. Theodore Gray’s advocacy of amendments to the Mental Defectives Act in 1928 that would have, if successful, brought in sterilization, registration of marriages, and other specific eugenic measures, her interest focused on the phenomenon of what might be termed ‘the expert state’. As head of the Department of Mental Health from 1927–1947 Dr. Gray was the leading clinical-medical and administrative figure, in a position to exercise massive influence in New

Zealand. Prior to his appointment as head of department, Gray had occupied senior clinical and advisory roles, even further extending the temporal reach of his power.

It is the role of the expert, the public servant and scientific authority that is at the centre of this episode in New Zealand's eugenic history. Saksen tackled this history as the subject of her BA (Hons) research project in 2005; she was working part time in the Ministry of Social Development while completing her degree.²⁰ Garton notes the permissive space in the interstices of institutions and professional practice within which eugenic practice might thrive beyond the realm of legislative direction.²¹ It is this dimension that is to the fore in considering Dr. Gray's part in the events, expectations and disappointments, intentions and outcomes of 1928.

Saksen's starting point was *inside* the state: in the administration of the Mental Health Department where Dr. Theodore Gray held the critical position as the senior officer responsible for day-to-day management of mental hospitals up and down the country, and principal adviser to the government of the day.²² She was also interested in the account Gray later made of his career in his memoir *The Very Error of the Moon* written and published in his retirement. Given the prominence of eugenic debate through much of Gray's early career and his leading role as advocate of eugenic reform, what place did the 1928 event occupy in his autobiographical account? The shifting historiographical landscape within which Saksen was working by 2005 had brought cultural meaning and discursive construction to the fore, and the radical reconstruction of ideologies of the state's role in social policy in the later twentieth century (the post-1984 'revolution' in the New Zealand experience) brought renewed historical attention to the nature of the state in its various political, administrative and experiential dimensions.²³

As a senior figure in the Department of Mental Health, Gray had given evidence to the Committee of Inquiry into Mental Defectives and Sexual Offenders convened by Sir Māui Pōmare as Minister of Health in 1924 (and comprised largely of those regarded as experts in fields of 'mental defectives and sexual offenders'). Pōmare was another figure in the state apparatus in a political position. The Committee's recommendations had been published and widely discussed in public and political circles. In 1927, under Gordon Coates as Prime Minister and Alexander Young as Minister of Health, Dr. Gray was sent on a world study tour in order to examine what provision was being made for treatment and

management of ‘mental defectives’ elsewhere. He visited 13 countries including the United States, Canada, Britain, Germany and Belgium. This was a considerable investment in state expertise. Gray’s report was widely disseminated, with 500 copies being printed for distribution.²⁴

The 1928 Bill which went before Parliament was very much Gray’s work, and was acknowledged as such by contemporaries. The Bill included provisions for the registration of ‘retards’, a marriage register (see Angela Wanhalla’s chapter ‘[Debating Clause 21: “Eugenic Marriage” in New Zealand](#)’, this volume, for discussion of the Bill’s marriage provisions), sterilization, and an expansion to the categories of people subject to the legislation to include those designated as ‘social defectives’. The category extended the reach of the original 1911 Act. It was also a variation and expansion of the similarly diffuse category of ‘moral imbecile’ included in the British legislation. A Eugenics Board which would exercise oversight over the application of the new provisions was also provided for under the Bill. Gray’s role as author and chief advocate of the measure, and principal scientific adviser to the government of the day can be set in the context of other significant figures of the time. John Beck in Child Welfare, and Truby King in the reshaped Department of Health exercised major influence within the administration *and* beyond, arguably more powerful than the ministers they served.²⁵ We are reminded then that the ‘state’ might not be a big, abstract or diffuse thing, but could also be small, and malleable in the hands of a few powerful individuals. This is especially the case in the highly centralized political and bureaucratic structure of the New Zealand state with nothing equivalent to federal or local government to obstruct or delay an initiative.

Bringing the Mental Defectives Amendment Bill to parliament in July 1928 the Minister of Health, Alexander Young, was responding to concerns about population quality and quantity that had been running with particular prominence and persistence through the 1920s. To the longer-term anxieties about the decline in the numbers of Pākehā children being born were growing worries as to the numbers (and proportion) of the current population identified as inhabiting the margins of social capacity and labour efficiency. That such people seemed to be New Zealand-born rather than originating elsewhere added grist to the reformist mill. The series of public enquiries held through the 1920s from which the 1928 Bill emerged was part of a larger context of heightened political and public debate over physical and social health, and where responsibility for its remedy might lie.

When the Bill reached parliament, it drew strong support and vigorous opposition. Introducing the first reading, Alexander Young referred to the portion of the population to which it was directed as the ‘flotsam and jetsam of humanity’.²⁶ Rejecting this designation and the perspective which saw those who might come under the legislation as a problem to be removed from sight rather than drawn into the remedial realm, the leading opponent of the Bill, the Labour MP Peter Fraser, emphasized a common humanity. Fraser underlined the necessity of ‘essential facts’ when dealing with ‘human beings’, those who comprised ‘the very web and woof of human life’.²⁷ Describing himself as ‘an enlightened sceptic’ of the eugenic thinking behind the legislation, Fraser comprehensively attacked the key provisions of the Bill.

According to Fraser, the ‘essential facts’ supporting the Bill’s provisions were lacking; the new category of ‘social defective’ was too vague, and was even dangerous. Who, he asked, would decide what constituted ‘anti-social conduct’ and protection ‘in the public interest’ as the basis for classification? What had happened to the category of ‘moral imbecile’ recommended by the 1924 Committee and in use in Britain? Who would comprise the Eugenics Board, and how would it operate? Would there be any members on it independent of the Department? If so, how would they be selected? To these questions, Fraser expressed a wariness of a nomination system open to any interested party thereby potentially opening the door to ‘people who fall ready victims to social quackery or eugenic charlatanism’, where what was needed is people with ‘special and deep knowledge’.²⁸ Fraser rejected the proposal that ‘retarded children’ be put on a register when they were designated to be 2 years ‘behind’ (‘behind’ who or what?); he was utterly unconvinced by clause 25s provision for sterilization noting his ‘repulsion’ for the practice in California and the lack of medical consensus anyway on its efficacy. ‘All we know is—here is a world that we have come into and we ought to endeavour to make the environment as good as we can for every one in it and enable every one to live as decent lives as possible.’²⁹

Fraser praised the work of Plunket and Dr. King, seeing it as proof of the efficacy of environmental measures. (See Diane Paul’s chapter ‘[Truby King, Infant Welfare, and the Boundaries of Eugenics](#)’, this volume, for discussion of this point.) He urged that ‘before we go in for any of this experimentation we should endeavour to see that every child has a chance to grow up to be a strong, healthy, intellectual man or woman; and when all the economic and social disadvantageous factors have been

eliminated we can start to legislate for the germ plasm. Then will be time enough.³⁰ These words concluded his speech.

Fraser and other opponents (which included Forbes and Lysnar on the conservative side of the House) strongly argued against the state exercising powers ('expert power') on the basis of a defined category of 'social defective' that they regarded as far too loose and lacking medical veracity. In the version of the Bill first put to the House the clause specifying this new category read: 'persons in whose case there exists mental deficiency associated with or manifested by anti-social conduct and who require state supervision and control for their own protection or for the protection of others'.³¹ As Garton has noted, it was this category of 'feeble-minded' that presented most difficulty to policy makers; those who could be described with social rather than medical pathology.³² The debate in parliament does not reveal so much utilitarian versus individual rights (or other ideological) division but rather, suspicion or reticence about how far state powers should be extended, and in what circumstances. Labour's position, expressed most fully by Peter Fraser, articulated a deep reserve as to how such powers might be exercised in use against the powerless. But it was not only the position of the minority Labour members. Others in the Reform and Liberal camps were also unconvinced about extending these powers, and about the 'science' on which they were based (they wanted that certainty that Stephen Garton spoke about).³³ In the end, the legislation that was passed was significantly amended from what had been proposed. Gray's manifesto of eugenic reform had largely been defeated. (See Hamish Spencer's chapter '[Eugenic Sterilization in New Zealand: The Story of the Mental Defectives Amendment Act of 1928](#)', this volume, for a more detailed account.)

When Gray came to write his memoir in his retirement, published as *The Very Error of the Moon* (the title taken from a line in *Othello*) in 1959, his preface deflected the book's focus away from himself. His intention, he declared, was not 'autobiography', but rather, to promote 'appreciation' of the work done by those employed in mental hospitals. As author he was identified as 'Formerly Director-General of Mental Hospitals in New Zealand'.³⁴ The book is highly selective of the work done by the Department in which he was head for twenty years and worked for much longer. Gray says very little about the 1928 legislation or surrounding controversy. He briefly mentions the 1927 study tour but provides little, if any, clue as to the context in which it took place. In his

biographical essay on Gray in the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, Warwick Brunton observes this later reticence, noting that ‘Gray subsequently stayed silent about his views on eugenics and sterilization of the mentally unfit, and on his chairmanship of the short-lived Eugenics Board.’³⁵

If one purpose of this collection is to chart the ‘when’ of eugenics in New Zealand and across the British colonial world, then Gray’s memoir is a useful marker. *The Very Error of Moon* can be taken as a sign of its decline. Gray was a product of New Zealand. Like his key opponent, Peter Fraser, he was born and educated in the north east of Scotland, but spent most of his adult life and career in New Zealand.³⁶ It was as a medical officer practising and administering in New Zealand that Gray came to advocate and then to lose the argument over the use of eugenic measures in the New Zealand public health system. By 1959 it was not something to mention, even in a reflective memoir.

1937: NATIONAL FITNESS, PHYSICAL WELFARE AND THE WORKERS’ WELFARE STATE

The third episode under consideration comes in the mid to late 1930s, with schemes of ‘national fitness’ in Britain, New Zealand, Australia and Canada. These were instigated through legislation enabling government funding to support public promotion encouraging adults, men and women, to take up physical activity—sport, games, recreation, exercise. In Britain they ran under what was known as the ‘National Fitness Council’ established by the Physical Training and Recreation Act passed in July 1937; in New Zealand it was an initiative of the Labour administration, enacted in November 1937 as the Physical Welfare and Recreation Act. In New South Wales, and then Victoria and finally across the Commonwealth of Australia as a whole, it comprised a series of state and federal provisions for ‘national fitness’ (operating nationwide by 1941), and in Canada—first in British Columbia under the innovative ‘Pro-Rec’ (Provincial Recreation) scheme and then more widely—it was a national fitness programme which was running under a national structure and legislation by 1943.³⁷ The schemes ran a variety of activities: distributing funds to sports and recreation clubs; subsidizing construction of swimming pools, gymnasias and playing fields, mounting public

education campaigns with posters, parades, Fitness Weeks, public displays, radio exercise sessions and the like.

All the schemes shared a primary goal of seeking to increase physical activity by men and women beyond their school years: to overcome the big drop-off in activity that coincided with going into the workforce. To promote greater fitness the newly established government schemes ran public education campaigns setting out the benefits and pleasures of greater physical fitness, the desirability of *playing* as well as *watching* sport and games, and the health benefits for individuals in doing things such as hiking, playing badminton, performing morning exercises and the like. The starting point then, in this episode, in programmes inaugurated across the 'British world' 1937–1943, was the healthy or 'normal' adult rather than the criminal or 'mental defective'.

In New Zealand, the schemes were part of a wider Labour programme of centre-left reform for working people. The healthy body was a citizen entitlement which was to be secured through full employment, adequate housing and social security which included health. And part of an explicit reworking of the world for workers, which included paid holidays, the 40-hour week, opportunities for leisure that went beyond residual 'time off' (giving full expression to Labour's ambition for all people to enjoy 8 hours recreation, 8 hours sleep, 8 hours work—a model based on the wage earner in the paid workforce rather than those such as domestic servants or housewives whose work was not defined by clock or remunerated in pay). New Zealand's 1937 Physical Welfare and Recreation programme was about the positive use of leisure, of time, and pleasure in active bodies through sport, games, exercise, tramping and similar activities. Bill Parry, the minister responsible, and his senior public servant, the horse racing fan and poetry-reading Joe Heenan, were both keen exponents of such endeavours. In New Zealand the legislation and resulting branch of government was known as 'Physical Welfare'. A Physical Welfare Branch with a growing staff was located within the Department of Internal Affairs. New Zealand's scheme highlights the variable political settings within which such schemes of state-initiated adult fitness regimes could be initiated. Not only was government-supported adult physical fitness an initiative taken up by governments of left (New Zealand) and right (Britain) in the late 1930s but the existence of the schemes across the British Empire illustrates the pervasive enthusiasm for orchestrated bodily fitness. Such priorities were far from being the preserve of totalitarian regimes.

National fitness initiatives promoted by Britain and other dominion governments in the 1930s–1940s were based on the principle that had come to represent medical orthodoxy by the end of World War One, that a healthy body was an active body. They were both shaped by, and shaping of, the powerful popular movement that made active, sporting bodies fashionable and desirable across much of the world by the 1930s.³⁸ As Christopher Wilk has noted, ‘healthy body culture’ was a pervasive element of the interwar culture and aesthetics of modernism.³⁹ The healthy body was alive in popular culture, in commerce, in the material world in such things as Aertex shirts and Slazenger rackets; in Lane’s Emulsion, Pears Soap and in comedian George Formby’s character in the 1937 feature film *Keep Fit*, in popular movements such as Prunella Stack’s Women’s League for Health and Beauty, and much beyond. Active, beautiful, fit bodies were not only—or principally—the preserve of the state. Rather, the state-funded national fitness schemes drew on and sought to capitalize on, the contemporary popularity—‘fads’ in some eyes—for the healthy body; the fashion of fitness and the allure of vitality.

The labels under which these campaigns were known to contemporaries, as ‘national fitness’, however, flagged eugenics to a later perspective, marking a historical moment when such language came to be indelibly and infamously associated with the extremities of eugenics practised under the Nazi regime.

In the research I conducted on these campaigns across Britain and the ‘white dominions’, I was surprised to find so little explicit eugenic imprint. In *Strong, Beautiful and Modern*, therefore, I argued that while the language was common the content was not eugenic: ‘If the terms ‘national fitness’ and ‘Fitter Britain’ shared a common vocabulary with eugenics, there was nothing in the policies that leaned in that direction.’⁴⁰ Even in 1930s Britain, the understanding and language of eugenics was vague and diffuse: this is the context for C.P. Blacker’s complaint that eugenics was being confused with eurhythmics.⁴¹ Indeed, the prevailing assumption was more that all adults were unfit (or less fit than they might be) and could respond to urgings to do more exercise. A state of unfitness was taken as the normal state of most adults, rather than the pathological state of a minority who required to be classified. In the limited goals for the campaigns we see an abandonment of eugenic principles linked to breeding and any absolute state of fitness. The ‘evaluative logic’ (Bashford and Levine’s phrase) that some ‘human life was of more value ... than other human life’ was not present.⁴²

WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO EUGENICS BY THE 1930s?

In terms of national fitness schemes, I argued in *Strong, Beautiful and Modern* that eugenics was not present; the time scale for what was effective action was something that was proposed as able to be achieved by an individual person in 10 minutes each day. The very notion of adult fitness (as something that could be easily acquired) represented an abandonment of the evaluative principle at the heart of eugenics. And of its temporal scale (time being the pinnacle of modernity's rationality in its precise, measurable and quantifiable form). Now, fitness was something to be acquired in 10 minutes each day; eugenics of whatever strand was to be achieved over a lifetime, or several lifetimes. Yes, it was hoped—and urged—that many people would take up exercise, sport and games, active recreation. But it was also acknowledged that not everyone would. Inertia was a big obstacle. Being a spectator was vastly more popular than being a player. And as Lord Astor commented in the House of Commons, for all that one might agree with the idea of more exercise it was always easier to sit in one's bath in the morning and think about others actually doing it.⁴³

There were also no punitive consequences for non-participation in the campaigns that were set up—they were persuasive and suggestive. Most acknowledged that compulsion was impossible and undesirable. The goal was to make physical activity itself a reward for the satisfactions and pleasures of activity as an end and the benefits of better health and overall good feeling derived from regular exertion. Ultimately, the argument of *Strong, Beautiful and Modern* was that while the national fitness and physical welfare campaigns encouraged greater physical activity and levels of fitness among the existing adult population, their focus and ambition, was limited. Nowhere is there any indication of an attempt to distinguish 'fit' from 'unfit' portions of the populations. Promoters of national fitness through physical exercise believed it was possible to improve physique, but there is no sign they sought to 'improve' national populations through the eugenic science of selective breeding.⁴⁴ *Strong, Beautiful and Modern's* interpretation is based, to some degree, on the *absence* of evidence. And that prompts the question if there is an absence of something in the archival record is it the silence that speaks?

Even if national fitness campaigns were not eugenic in character the *perception* that they were eugenic became a factor in their post-1945 demise. The language came to carry undesirable associations, ones that

needed to be distanced. The *perception* of the schemes as possibly tainted by eugenics helps explain why they did not endure (except in Australia). Wrapped up in their demise was the reassertion of a particular notion of Britishness—of the centrality of ‘play’, the culture of games and the principle of voluntarism. Britishness in the use of the body through games-playing was a powerful cultural form and symbol; it points to a Britishness that is not confined to rule of law, or common colonial histories, but is also about an intangible but very real sense of common ground, something that binds together very disparate territories and circumstances.

Instead, what we see in the post-1945 years across Britain and other ‘British’ countries is a powerful reiteration of sport, exercise and games as voluntary activities, pursuits undertaken as ends in themselves and in spheres defined by non-state action. William Beveridge makes this point in his 1947 *Voluntary Action*, a much less well remembered work than his earlier, famous ‘Report’ of 1943.⁴⁵ But it was this reiteration of the games-playing nature of British life, of democracy and freedom, and of non-state action that took on particular significance in the post-1945, Cold War, and welfare state era. A cultural bond of ‘Britishness’, evident in the 1930s fitness schemes and the expansion of sporting links through the newly-instituted Empire Games (1930), BBC Empire service, and escalation in international fixtures, came to have even greater force in the post-1945 era of Britain’s global declension.

The central thematic frameworks for *Strong, Beautiful and Modern* were notions of modernity and the nature of empire—specifically, Britain and white dominions in 1920s–1940s. What happens to the empire and imperial links with the dominions during the post-1918 decades? How does this period sit with the ‘problem’ of the end of empire in these places, where, as Stuart Ward and James Curran and others have discussed, there was no formal independence or breaking away?⁴⁶ *Strong, Beautiful and Modern* makes the case for reinforcement of cultural bonds of empire through these years—games-playing, sport, ‘body culture’, radio are also part of the parcel that sits alongside the 1926 Balfour declaration, the Empire Settlement scheme of the 1920s, and the Empire Marketing Board 1926–1933 (whose poster frames the National Fitness Council took over).

CONCLUSION

Revisiting 1903, 1928 and 1937 within the historical context of early twentieth-century progressive advocacy for eugenics, and a late twentieth–early twenty-first century shifting historiography produces new questions along with the perspectives to be gained by distance. To advocates such as Chapple and Gray, eugenic principles and practices offered an explanation for contemporary pathologies (increasing crime, more recidivist criminals, sexual offending, social manifestations of ‘deficiency’) and a means for their remedy. Acting effectively and promptly was, in their view, an urgent matter to be undertaken in a society seeking to maintain the quality, vigour and efficiency that made New Zealand a leading dominion within the globally dominant British Empire. Eugenic provisions, in Alexander Young’s 1928 words, offered the parliament the ‘unrivalled opportunity to lead in the march of social progress’.⁴⁷ Their critics, as quick to enter the public domain, shared the eugenists’ temporal and developmental view of New Zealand as a young and malleable society, one whose reputation and vitality was to be protected. In Kayll’s 1905 words, it was New Zealand’s ‘young and plastic’ institutions that offered hope to those who entered into the criminal and health arms of the state.⁴⁸ For Peter Fraser also, in 1928, it was the environment—political, economic and social—that needed alteration to meet the needs of people rather than an irredeemable ‘unfit’ group who needed permanent amendment. Rejecting the eugenic analysis of an inherently ‘defective’ section of the population, the argument for progressive reform from the eugenic *opponents* looked to a shift in circumstances rather than to an alteration in the persons of those living in the historical circumstances of early twentieth-century New Zealand.

The physical welfare/national fitness moment of 1937, manifest in New Zealand and across Britain, Australia and Canada, operated under the linguistic mantle of eugenics but the schemes had abandoned any eugenic imperative. All adults, the campaigns urged, could improve their fitness. Such fitness was a level of enhanced health, physique and well-being: the maintenance of the body through regular exercise was likened to the maintenance of a motor car by the regular input of oil and petrol. The body was a mechanism to be kept in good shape, the means by which a modern person inhabited the world of work, of intimacy, the container for the ‘self’ (a distinct entity from mind or soul),⁴⁹ and the expression of their status as a citizen of nation and empire. Good health

and fitness was a source of individual benefit and pleasure as well as civic responsibility.

For historians of the 1970s and 1980s the eugenic propensities of the early twentieth century provided perplexing but stark evidence of a pervasive intent to mould a population in a way that was overbearing, distasteful and repugnant. The analysis of 'deficiency' and the recommended means of controlling reproduction presented unambiguous testimony of a desire for state and social control that mapped directly onto the prevailing interpretive frameworks of an anti-authoritarian social history.⁵⁰ For historians of women and gender, eugenic movements reinforced the role of professional (and especially medical) ideologies and practices and the state as producers of asymmetry. At the same time it underlined the central historical place of reproduction as a site of social and political contest, but in a form that sat in contrast with the reproductive politics of 1970s–1980s contraception, abortion and sexual freedom. Women as objects of eugenic attention preceded investigation of women as agents in eugenic argument, but both occupied ground in a burgeoning historical landscape.

In the prevailing national framework of history-writing in New Zealand from the 1960s, eugenics has added an uneasy element to several central figures—Reeves, Tregear, Seddon, Pōmare, Ngata amongst others. In a few instances, notably in Taylor's discussion of philosophy professor Tommy Hunter's role in the defeat of Gray's proposals in 1928, eugenics offers a moment of triumphant exceptionalism. Noting the opposition offered by Hunter and other professors of philosophy and some of their political allies, Taylor concludes that 'New Zealand was alone in the economically developing world in rejecting a formal proposition for the sterilization if not castration of people designated socially as "unfit".'⁵¹ But such nationalist frames have been more in the side lanes than the principal historical highways in the early twenty-first century. Linkages, common languages, exchange, cultural connections, empire and networks have been more to the fore. Eugenics in New Zealand, from these vantage points, shows itself to have much in common with discussion and enactment elsewhere. Its advocacy, and its opposition, were part of a global movement. The machinery of the state in New Zealand was particular, and the argument about the limits to state action ultimately shaped the extent to which progressive advocates and progressive opponents worked out how far eugenic remedies could be applied. The greater part of these were, as has been acknowledged, through

immigration restriction rather than through segregation, sterilization or marriage registration.

In the longer term, the responses to and attempts to account for eugenics as part of a progressive national history, or networked imperial and global histories, present the historical investigation as a subject of interest in itself. For all the value of these changing approaches, the relationship between the state and reproduction, between political power and individual action continue to be unpredictable. The modernist promise of shaping a population ideal in size and character (which the revolution in family size appeared to have demonstrated was possible), combined with an activist welfare state, offered progressives in New Zealand, as elsewhere, a highly attractive tool for fundamental social ‘advance’. Its enactment and its fundamental premise that bodies rather than political-social forms were defective, proved both dangerous and unconvincing. Eugenics has been relegated to history. Yet the promise of managed reproduction remains alive in the modernist and post-modernist era, an inspiration to imaginary futures conjured up in the ever-proliferating genres of science and future fiction—utopian and dystopian.

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Truby King, Infant Welfare and the Boundaries of Eugenics

Diane B. Paul

Sir Frederic Truby King (1858–1938) is a New Zealand national icon.¹ Celebrated for his contributions to infant, child and maternal health, especially through the activities of the Plunket Society, an organization that he founded, King was knighted in 1925 and would become the country's first private citizen to be given a state funeral and to be pictured on a postage stamp (Fig. 1). King's family was also granted special permission to bury him in his own garden in Melrose, Wellington, where he and wife Lady Isabella (Bella) moved in 1921.² Streets in the cities of New Plymouth, where he was born, in Dunedin, where he lived most of his working life, and in Waikouaiti, the town that includes the seaside settlement of Karitane, where the Kings had their summer home, are named in his honour. During a 1934 visit to New Zealand, George Bernard Shaw asserted that: 'Truby King was the greatest man in New Zealand, and should have the most imposing monument New Zealand can build to commemorate him.'³

Although King continues to be held in high esteem by the New Zealand public, he has also acquired many academic detractors. Today,

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Fig. 1 Commemorative stamp issued in 1957 on the 50th anniversary of the Plunket Society. Courtesy of StampsNZ

a common charge is that he was an ardent eugenicist. In his day (and for several decades thereafter) that claim would have seemed preposterous, at least taken as an accusation. King and the Plunket Society were associated with the belief that virtually all babies could and should be saved, a goal that was to be accomplished through the provision of proper nutrition and maternal and infant care. In King's view, eugenicists greatly over-emphasized the power of heredity in explaining human differences, thus providing a false impression that insanity, criminality and other undesirable traits were typically fixed at birth. One of his favourite expressions, repeated in a multitude of books, pamphlets, articles, interviews and speeches, was that 'environment could knock heredity into a cocked hat'.⁴ A more unlikely adage for a eugenicist is hard to imagine.

This essay explores the following questions: How and why did Truby King come to be labeled a eugenicist, and why did the label come to stick? How should we assess this characterization? And finally, what can we learn from this case about the ever shifting and contested boundaries of eugenics—the purposes served by drawing the line between what's in and what's out in one place rather than another? But before tackling these questions, a little more background about King and the society he founded is in order.

TRUBY KING AND THE PLUNKET SOCIETY

King developed both a theory about the feeding and care of infants, known as ‘Mothercraft’, and a system for implementing the theory that is often credited with sharply reducing infant deaths in New Zealand. (By the end of World War I, New Zealand had achieved the lowest [white] infant mortality rate in the world, a position it held until the second half of the twentieth century.)⁵ The Plunket programme for infant and child health had several components including advocacy of breast-feeding, a practice that King passionately promoted. ‘It may be laid down as an axiom that every mother can nourish her offspring in the natural way’, he wrote, and it was her duty to do so⁶ (Fig. 2). When truly impossible (as in the case of his own wife), the best alternative was ‘humanised’ milk that matched the composition of breast milk as far as possible.

King stressed the importance of regularity in everything related to infant and child care including feeding, sleeping, exercise and excretion, of babies sleeping through the night, and of their getting plenty of fresh air and sunlight. In 1907, he founded the New Zealand Society for the Promotion of the Health of Women and Children, later prefaced by ‘The Royal’. The organization eventually became known as the Plunket Society after its first patron, Lady Victoria Alexandrina Plunket, mother of eight and wife of the Governor-General. Its slogan was: ‘Help the mothers and save the babies’. The Plunket system, apart from promoting King’s philosophy of child-rearing, consisted of a series of Karitane hospitals and nurses (a development that began with the Kings taking ailing children into their holiday home at Karitane) and also Plunket nurses, who were trained at the Karitane–Harris Hospital in Dunedin. Services were open to all and provided free of charge.⁷

The history of Plunket relations with Māori is complex. Although the first baby taken into King’s care (in 1906, prior to the founding of the Plunket Society) was a Māori boy, Plunket’s clientele for more than its first half century was almost exclusively Pākehā (New Zealanders of European origin). Initially, the state Health Department, which began operating a Native Health Nurse Service in 1911, resisted Plunket encroachment on what it viewed as its domain. An early agreement divided responsibility for infant health between the Department, which would serve Māori, and Plunket, which would serve Pākehā. Although in theory, Māori women could visit Plunket clinics, few did, and Plunket nurses were instructed not to visit Māori homes. This administrative

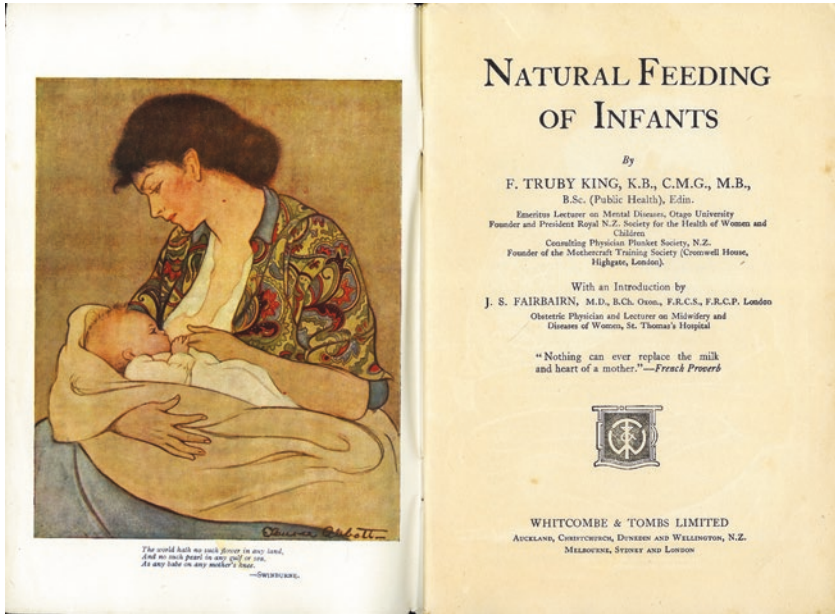


Fig. 2 Frontispiece from Truby King's 'Natural Feeding of Infants'. First published in New Zealand in 1917, in Britain in 1918, and republished in 1930. Courtesy of the Truby King Collection, Special Collections, University of Otago, Dunedin, NZ

arrangement was reinforced by local resistance to combined services on the part of Pākehā women, especially in predominantly Māori areas.⁸

But uptake of the Plunket system by women of European origin was rapid. By 1908, the society had a branch in each of the four main population centres; in 1912, following a lecture tour by King, it expanded to 60 branches, each with a Plunket nurse, who saw babies at Plunket 'rooms' (clinics) or in their own homes. By 1946, 85% of all Pākehā babies were seen by one of nearly 200 nurses who made 220,000 home visits.⁹ Bella King (who died in 1927) promoted Plunket principles in her popular column, 'Our babies', which by 1914 appeared in 50 New Zealand newspapers.¹⁰ Her husband, who oversaw the column, was also a prolific writer and apparently charismatic speaker, and his pamphlet, *The Expectant Mother and Baby's First Months* (1916), was provided free

to every applicant for a marriage license.¹¹ But King's influence extended far beyond New Zealand, especially to the UK, Canada and Australia.

SEACLIFF AND NUTRITION

King was also known for the humane treatment of the insane. In 1889, he was appointed medical superintendent of Seacliff Lunatic Asylum, where he developed both successful farming and fishing operations, introduced a much better diet, and created smaller and more attractively-decorated wards, with hallways and adjacent rooms painted in different colours. An avid gardener, who introduced many new varieties to New Zealand, he planted trees, shrubs and flowers, created extensive gardens with paths, opened up views of the sea (replacing the iron perimeter fences that blocked them), and allowed patients access to fresh air and grounds.¹² He also instituted staff training and prohibited abuse of patients.

It was at Seacliff that King developed his views on milk and nutrition. Seacliff was a farm asylum with many cows, but the calves were fed cheap substitutes for their economically valuable milk. The result was a 20% death rate of calves due to 'scouring', the equivalent of infant diarrhea in babies. King devised an artificial feeding regime that produced superior results.¹³ Then in 1904, the Kings adopted a baby girl (Esther, whom they renamed Mary), the second daughter of an attendant at the hospital who had been left in straightened financial circumstances. Bella King became dissatisfied with Mary's progress, blamed the formula (a mix of cow's milk and cane sugar) and urged her husband to invent a better infant food, as he had done for his farm animals. At about the same time, the Kings began a four-month visit to Japan. They found much to admire in this rapidly modernizing country, including its government, health system, scientific approach to agriculture, and the aesthetics expressed in garden design and decorative and fine arts. Truby King was especially impressed by the health of Japanese infants, a condition he attributed to the fact that Japanese mothers traditionally breastfed for far longer than European women.¹⁴

Both the connection King made between animal and human nutrition and his view that properly educated women would always choose natural over artificial nutrition, is reflected in his 1905 *Feeding of Plants and Animals*. 'Nutrition given by the mother is always best', he wrote,

and the wisest breeders will always continue to let Nature have her way. ... When the farmer resorts to hand rearing he does so simply because there is a profit in removing butterfat valued at a shilling a pound and replacing it with vegetable starches and fats which cost him about a penny. But this is not the attitude or feeling of the mother who rears her child by means of a bottle. For the most part she is densely ignorant of the duties of maternity, and does not realise the injustice she is doing to herself and her offspring.¹⁵

King's views on the centrality of food to human health and behavior profoundly influenced his attitude towards the insane, whom he considered victims of improper nourishment, as well as his views on heredity and on eugenics.

KING AND THE CULT OF DOMESTICITY

King was an influential exponent of the 'separate spheres' doctrine—that women's place was in the home—associated with the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century cult of domesticity. In King's view, women should aspire to be wives, mothers and in some cases nurses. Higher education and most careers were inconsistent with women's maternal role, their highest calling, and one ordained by nature. 'The destiny of the race is in the hands of its mothers' was an oft-repeated slogan; like many of his most characteristic maxims, it originated with Caleb Saleeby, English physician, journalist and member of the Fabian Society, who was also a founder of the Eugenics Education Society (from which he later parted).¹⁶

Saleeby and King shared many preoccupations: the need for improved infant and maternal care, the damage done by alcohol and other 'racial poisons', the value of heliotherapy (Saleeby founded the Sunlight League in 1924), and the principle that, in Saleeby's words, motherhood was 'the supreme duty and supreme privilege of womanhood'.¹⁷ But whereas Saleeby supported higher education for women, King thought it led to a disinclination to marry and have children and to inept nurturing; in his view, intellectually cultivated women often did not know how to feed and care for babies. Moreover, he considered the effort women poured into academic education ruinously misdirected since energy spent on such pursuits would be unavailable for reproduction and maternity (a common view in this period, when it was often said that education

diverted vital energy from the development of the reproductive organs to the brain). Although King railed against the ‘evils of cram’—the force-feeding of academic information—for both sexes, he considered mental over-exertion particularly harmful for females. Boys and girls required different kinds of education; schooling for the latter should focus on preparation for wifehood and motherhood. (His critiques of the ‘irrational education’ of girls often referenced Herbert Spencer, whose *Essays on Education*, published in book form in 1861, argued that British children are fed too little food and too many irrelevant facts, with particular injury to females.)¹⁸

The same concern for misspent energy applied to athletic activity. King acknowledged that college-educated women were often proficient at tennis, golf, hockey and other competitive sports, but stressed that these accomplishments came at high cost. As he explained in a 1914 lecture: ‘Obviously, if an undue proportion of the energies and the blood-supply go to the brain and the voluntary muscles, there will not be enough for the rest of the system.’¹⁹ Although gentle exercise was beneficial for women, it should aim at the development of the external abdominal muscles and ‘involuntary muscles of the internal organs’ and not ‘Sandow fitness’.²⁰ Women also needed many opportunities to rest, and should avoid restrictive and unnatural clothing such as corsets and high-heeled shoes.

Of course, there were dissenting voices, especially on the issue of women’s capacities and appropriate roles. Female doctors in particular chafed at King’s pronouncements on the nature of suitable vocations for women and sometimes at his strictures on maternal and infant care. In her autobiography, the well-known obstetrician Doris Gordon noted that she received a letter from King suggesting that she resign the presidency of her local Plunket branch because she favoured the use of anaesthetics in labour.²¹ Wellington physician Agnes Bennett, a particularly energetic and persistent critic, once described King and Dunedin gynaecologist Ferdinand Batchelor (who claimed that Nature did not intend women to become physicians and that they could at best be mediocre ones), as ‘The greatest obstacle to women’s progress and emancipation that New Zealand has known.’²² But in King’s lifetime, even those female professionals who took him to task for his extreme paternalism usually lauded his contributions to infant health.

REASSESSING KING AND PLUNKET

In the years since his death, King's reputation has waxed and waned, sometimes simultaneously, reflecting trends both in scholarship and the larger society. Thus, his views on what would come to be known as 'green care' for the institutionalized now seem prescient. But his attitudes towards women have become increasingly distasteful, and feminist scholars writing on sexuality, reproduction and the family have often treated both King and the Plunket Society with derision. Although Linda Bryder, in her history of Plunket, has emphasized that the society was 'run by women for women', since the 1970s it has more often been viewed as establishing a regime for their surveillance.²³ Moreover, the rigid Plunket system, with its stress on feeding by the clock and regularity in all activities, went out of fashion as child rearing became more permissive. Relatedly, in the context of rise of the new social history, and especially women's history, the history of the family and post-colonial history—all emphasizing the ubiquity of oppression and power—the aim of the Plunket system of child-rearing came to be viewed as turning out disciplined, obedient capitalist workers, citizens and soldiers. In the words of Erik Olssen, the first important revisionist scholar, the goal was 'breeding for empire'.²⁴ Plunket's role in the infant mortality decline has also been questioned (even by some who view the society favourably), with scholars noting both that the decline began before its establishment and the existence of other important factors, including a reduction in family size. And some who do credit Plunket with a substantial contribution to the decline have argued that the specifics of the system were less important than the attention to infant and child care.²⁵

By the 1980s, eugenics had also become a focus of scholarly attention by historians of science and medicine, with the subject soon capturing the interest of academics in such fields as women's history, colonial and post-colonial studies and especially disability studies. In the context of the growth of these mostly new fields and certainly new perspectives, and as control of reproduction also became an emotionally charged political issue, King came increasingly to be labeled a eugenicist. Today, it is common to find King characterized as a 'typical' or even 'fervent' eugenicist, and thus to be grouped with William A. Chapple (1864–1936), New Zealand-born author of *The Fertility of the Unfit*, who proposed a breathtakingly broad programme of sterilization of all 'defective' women (including criminals, paupers, the feeble-minded, alcoholic, insane

and diseased) and also the wives of all ‘defective men’,²⁶ or zoologist William Benham (1860–1950), a founding member and President of the Eugenics Education Society. King’s ideological distance from the latter is illustrated by his complaint that:

The policy of the Eugenics Education Society has been to concern itself mainly—almost wholly—with the question of the effects of heredity. The result of this upon the public mind has been to convey the idea that anything done to help matters after the individual has come into the world would be of very little importance indeed – that it might be of some importance with regard to the individual, but that it would be of almost no importance with regard to the race.²⁷

A few illustrative examples of post-1985 commentaries on King:

‘Truby King was ... a typical eugenisist of his day.’²⁸ ‘Truby was ... a proponent of the Eugenic theories which were very much in vogue.’²⁹ ‘Frederic Truby King [was] an extremely vocal eugenicist who was an advocate of racial improvement through selective breeding.’³⁰ ‘Dr Truby King was an outspoken eugenicist, committed to the ideal of improving the race by means of selective breeding.’³¹ ‘The fervent eugenicist, Sir Frederick Truby King’ ...³²; ‘the much-revered founder of the Plunket Society, Sir Frederick Truby King, “a fervent eugenisist”’.³³

King has even been portrayed as the *leader* of the eugenics movement in New Zealand.³⁴ Often, the eugenisist label is taken as so obviously correct that authors feel no need to defend it. It is notable that the same phrases recur frequently in the literature on King, reflecting the fact that authors tend to cite only a few secondary sources and apparently rarely consult original texts.

Several scholars mention that King belonged to the Eugenics Education Society (EES) though none provides any evidence for that claim.³⁵ Thus, Hilary Stace writes: ‘The Eugenics Education society [*sic*] was founded in Dunedin in 1910 with an influential membership, one of whom was Truby King, the Medical Superintendent of Otago’s Seacliff Asylum’,³⁶ and Robyn Longhurst that ‘The Eugenics Education Society of New Zealand was founded in 1910. Amongst its members were some influential and well-resourced people including politicians, academics, and F. Truby King who was Medical Superintendent of Seacliff Mental Hospital.’³⁷ Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Plunket Society also came to

be characterized as a eugenic organization: thus the Wikipedia entry on King (citing an earlier publication by Stace) notes that he was best known for the establishment of Plunket, an organization ‘set up to apply scientific principles to nutrition of babies, and strongly rooted in eugenics and patriotism’.³⁸ Longhurst even assumes that the EES *became* the Plunket Society: ‘The Eugenics Education Society of New Zealand was founded in 1910. ... In 1915 his Majesty the King conferred on the Society the honour of being titled “The Royal New Zealand Society for the Health of Women and Children”. From around 1925 the Royal New Zealand Society for the Health of Women and Children (Inc.) became more commonly known as the Plunket Society.’³⁹ Only the belief that King was a founding member of the EES and Plunket a eugenics organization could make such a claim seem remotely plausible.

KING ON HEREDITY AND ENVIRONMENT

King consistently downplayed the role of heredity in explaining mental and moral differences. He thought that in more than 95% of cases, good nutrition and care would transform babies born with apparent defects into healthy adults, and he heaped scorn on those who said that it would have been better had some children not been born (what he called, after Saleeby, the ‘better dead’). Like the classic eugenicists, King consistently analogized human to plant and animal breeding. But whereas Galton and his followers emphasized the choice of sires, King’s focus was on nurture: the care and feeding of offspring.

In a 1926 pamphlet on the purpose of the Plunket Society, King characteristically wrote that men and women would exhibit radiant health and perfect physiques ‘if man took as much trouble about the rearing and care of his own species, as he does about the rearing of cattle and horses’.⁴⁰ The claim is strikingly similar to Galton’s: ‘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!’⁴¹ But for Galton, the means to that end was breeding, not rearing.

It might seem that King must have been neo-Lamarckian in his view of heredity, and that his apparent ‘environmentalism’ reflected the assumption that physical, mental and moral traits acquired through positive effort would be transmitted to progeny. However, that was not King’s view. A follower of August Weismann, King’s was not a ‘soft’

view of heredity. But perhaps unsurprisingly, he emphasized that the germ cells do not exist in a vacuum, and that they can be damaged by bad maternal nutrition and in general by ‘the habits and health of the mother’ and by racial poisons. Like Saleeby, a passionate Mendelian and critic of neo-Lamarckism, he believed that ‘the nurture of the future parent may affect the nature of the offspring’.⁴² But that is not because heredity can be *directly* shaped by personal or social effort. Parental cultivation of mental, moral or physical traits does not improve heredity, and so the next generation will not inherit any resulting improvements. King was thus an environmentalist in the modern sense; he thought genes largely irrelevant to most human mental and moral differences.

For King, environment and not genetics explained insanity. His life-long views are well-summarized in a speech at the 1932 conference of the Mothercraft Society:

I have always realised that there is no way of dealing with insanity except by commencing with the baby. Not more than one person in three who enters an asylum ever dies outside an asylum. You must prevent insanity by bringing up the people in a healthy state. Some people say insanity is hereditary. I say it is not hereditary. It is ill-health. Bring up a child healthy and normal, make him vigorous, give him a good body, and the probability is that he will never enter an asylum. I have known cases where both parents were insane and yet their progeny were perfectly healthy, because care was taken in early infancy.

And he goes on to cite ‘the great Ignatius Loyola [who] is reputed to have said, “Give me the child until it is six years of age and you are welcome to it afterwards”’.⁴³

In King’s view, eugenic instruction had led to an ‘unhealthy fatalism’. That environment could knock heredity into a cocked hat was a very good thing ‘because we cannot alter the inherited nature of the individual—that which has come down from tens of thousands of years back—but we have every control over the environment. We ought to make the environment for all human beings such as will conduce to the stability, progressiveness, and permanence of the race.’⁴⁴ King took every occasion to reiterate the view that ill-health or unfitness is rarely inevitable and that nearly all the ill and weak ‘could have grown up excellent specimens of humanity had they been properly and sensibly reared’.⁴⁵ For example:

If women ... were rendered more fit for maternity, if instrumental deliveries were obviated as far as possible, if infants were nourished by their mothers, and boys and girls were given a rational education, the main supplies of population for our asylums, hospitals, benevolent institutions, gaols and slums would be cut off at their sources.⁴⁶

King expressed a similar attitude toward criminality in his comments as a member of the 1924 Committee of Inquiry into Mental Defectives and Sexual Offenders. (For the history of this committee and its report, see Hamish Spencer's chapter '[Eugenic Sterilization in New Zealand: The Story of the Mental Defectives Amendment Act of 1928](#)' in this volume). At the time, mental defect was considered the root cause of many other social problems, including criminality. King, by then Director of the Division of Child Welfare, commented:

If we adopt the right measure with the individual at the right time and treat him in the right way there is no reason why he should become anti-social. ... Our present system of education and the present attitude of society makes him so, but if we can treat him in such a way as will enable him to find out for himself that he is not inferior and in some cases he may be superior it will have a very good effect on the individual concerned. If we can show that in some respects he is normal and probably superior then there is no reason why he should become anti-social or have criminal motives. That is the whole point. It is a question of education or, in other words, it is a question of the treatment meted out to him.

And he added: 'As a schoolmaster I am for environment every time and I believe that environment will do infinitely more than the average biologist will admit.'⁴⁷

A comparison with William Benham (1860–1950), a distinguished zoologist at the University of Otago and founding member and President of the EES, is instructive. Benham had been asked to address the 1911 meeting of the Plunket Society in Dunedin, where both he and King resided. He said:

We must constantly bear in mind that, according to all our biological knowledge, heredity is of more importance than environment, and it is feared that the children of the less valuable class will hand down their deficiencies to their offspring. Hence the race is tending to deterioration. ... The object of the Eugenics Education Society ... is, amongst others, the

education of the people (1) as to the importance of heredity, as opposed to environment ...⁴⁸

And in a 1914 lecture on 'The Problem of the Unfit', Benham admonished the members of a university women's club that: 'We must bear in mind that to-day is the day of brains; of efficiency. Environment, however greatly improved cannot raise the inefficient into a state of efficiency, for efficiency is on the average a matter of inherent quality.'⁴⁹ The contrast with King is stark. In the same year, speaking at the Australasian Medical Congress, King charged that: 'The Eugenics Education Society had decided to confine its activities almost entirely to the study of and recognition of heredity as the main factor, and one unfortunate result had been to lead people to suppose that Nature was everything and that nurture scarcely mattered as regards the race. That was all wrong.'⁵⁰

Thus, it might seem that that the characterization of King as eugenist is absurd. But it possible to construct plausible cases both for viewing King as a eugenist and as an anti-eugenist. After all, King served on the 1924 Committee of Inquiry and was an author of its 1925 report, which claimed that the fecundity of mental defectives was a menace that needed urgently to be curbed. He was not opposed to sterilization in the (relatively rare) cases of heritable mental defect. Notwithstanding his critique of the 'better dead' school of thought, he believed that infants born mentally defective should be left to die, as it was no kindness to them, their siblings or their parents to keep them alive in a 'hopelessly defective state', and for that reason, 'laid it down as an absolute rule that no baby was ever to be admitted to a Karitane hospital if mentally defective or abnormal'.⁵¹ Running throughout King's published works and speeches are expressions of concern both about the differential birth-rate, often expressed as fear of 'racial suicide', and the quality of immigration, classic eugenic concerns that he would have shared with Benham and Chapple. Citing a study of the low fecundity of Harvard and Yale graduates, he claimed that the situation would be even worse 'with more capable and well-to-do women'.⁵² A report on a 1914 speech notes that, after 'turning to the subject of eugenics, Dr. King said investigation had shown that the birth-rate was numerically unsatisfactory, but particularly unsatisfactory in the best classes of the community, and by the best classes he meant the most capable, physically, mentally, and morally'.⁵³

Like many of his compatriots, King feared that Asians would one day overrun New Zealand. (Japan's achievements if anything made it more

of a military threat.) Erik Olssen was surely correct in claiming that the Plunket system was meant to produce a populace fit enough to defend against foreign invasion.⁵⁴ As a Plunket nursing pioneer Joyce Powell wrote: ‘It was not only the high infant death rate that made his [King’s] doctrines accepted by influential people. He also addressed the concerns of the Caucasian world of his time. The European birthrate was falling and there was fear that “Asian hordes”, particularly from China, would overwhelm the white races.’⁵⁵ The following quotes exemplify these several preoccupations:

were the prospects of the human harvest ever worse among the Patricians of old Rome than they are among the finest human stocks of today ... The most urgent and pressing need of our vast Empire is ample British-born population ... In all civilized countries a smaller and smaller percentage of new population is being derived from the best sources.⁵⁶

One of the worst aftermaths of war will be in the increased crop of inefficients twenty years hence, due to the wholesale abandonment of babies to artificial feeding who in normal times would have been nursed by mothers. ... In all civilized countries a smaller and smaller percentage of new population is being derived from the best sources, and from quarters where there would be ample to provide for larger families if they were desired.⁵⁷

Within a quarter of a century we shall both be slaves of Mongols, or on the other hand, we shall save the British Empire for people of our own race, language and ideas ... ‘The Caucasian is not played out’ (to use the language of Bret Harte’s ‘Heathen Chineese’). But we must go back to family life, abandon ‘race-suicide’, people our countries with our own race, and not abandon them to Asiatics.⁵⁸

Where does that leave us? Was Truby King a eugenicist? Although he sometimes heaped scorn on eugenicists and especially the EES, he sometimes also talked of his efforts as a kind of eugenics, as in this passage, where he attributes the plunge in infant mortality in New Zealand and Dunedin to the work of the Society for the Health of Women and Children:

Its object was the care of the infant before birth and during the period of infancy; in other words, practical eugenics. It was really an attempt to rear a strong and healthy race by constructive, and not by restrictive means.

The object was not primarily to eliminate the unfit, but to prevent their production by aiding in the full development of the healthy, 'for the sake of women and children, for the advancement of the Dominion, and for the honour of the Empire'.⁵⁹

But in his day, King's 'save the babies' campaign was typically counterpoised with eugenics. Saleeby, a eugenicist who was also involved in efforts to improve infant health, explained the distinction: 'Eugenics stands for the principle of heredity—the principle that the right children shall be born. The campaign against infant mortality stands for a good environment—so that children, when born, may survive and thrive.'⁶⁰ For Saleeby and for King, eugenics and Plunket-type initiatives were usually viewed as conceptually distinct, though they could work in concert.

In any case, given a broad enough definition of eugenics, such as any of the three proposed by Francis Galton, Plunket principles and practice could certainly fit. Thus, in 1904, Galton defined eugenics as 'the science which deals with all influences that improve the inborn qualities of a race; also with those that develop them to the utmost advantage'; and in 1909 as 'the study of agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations either physically or mentally'.⁶¹

Such a broadly defined term allowed for multiple interpretations. In 1946, English biochemist and geneticist Lionel Penrose remarked of Galton's 1909 definition: 'This formula allows many different interpretations.' Indeed, he noted that it encompasses all of medicine, psychology and social science.⁶² And as eugenics developed into a social movement, advocates of disparate policies claimed the label or, as it fell into disrepute, had it attached to them. Eventually it was emptied of content. It seems clear that in the case of Truby King, the eugenics label was an effect rather than a cause of his declining reputation.

The argument is not that the eugenics label is wrong, but rather that a label broad enough to encompass W.A. Chapple and Truby King is simply not meaningful. It does not do any work; or more accurately, it does not do any analytical work; the work that it does—and that explains its appeal—is emotive.

There is certainly a sense in which Truby King was a eugenicist. (Indeed, there is a sense in which the label could apply to virtually everyone who lived in his time.) What we need to know is what *kind* of eugenicist. And that is a complicated task. People do not necessarily sort

neatly into the categories ‘eugenicist’ and ‘non-eugenicist’, and they do not even fit along some kind of continuum.⁶³ That is because the eugenics movement was associated with diverse policies and perspectives. Some eugenists favoured compulsory sterilization while others opposed it, and the same is true for birth control, restrictive immigration and indeed every eugenic policy. Practices that counted as eugenics for some, such as masking strategies (where carriers of genes for recessive disorders are discouraged from mating with each other), were considered dysgenic by others. A markedly heterogeneous lot, eugenists counted among their number militarists and pacifists, feminists and misogynists, racists and critics of racism, socialists and those who hated the working class. The history of such a broad and multifaceted movement is obviously capable of very diverse interpretations depending on which individuals, events, policies and practices are judged to be key, judgements that have also changed—without our much noticing—over time.⁶⁴

It is possible to claim without contradiction that a figure was both a eugenicist and a critic of eugenics both because the meaning of the term has always been slippery, such that one could say that someone was a eugenicist in *this* respect but not another, and because the term’s connotations have shifted, such that one era’s critics could be seen as another’s proponents. In the first half of the twentieth century, even such critics of the US sterilization laws as Franz Boas, H.S. Jennings, and Abraham Meyerson took for granted that the *truly* ‘feeble-minded’ should not be allowed to breed, and through at least the 1960s, that was true of many self-declared critics of eugenics in respect to serious hereditary diseases. Penrose himself could today be termed a eugenicist since he would have sought to prevent carriers of the same deleterious recessive gene from marrying each other, and today any interference with reproduction is often labeled eugenics. In Penrose’s time, no one would have thought to call his proposed masking strategy ‘eugenics’, and no one would now attach that label to Penrose—or to Boas—because these figures are widely admired. In contrast, King’s reputation in the academy has plummeted with changing attitudes towards child care, women’s roles and the virtues of empire.

It is notable that in his critique of the proposed sterilization amendment to the 1928 mental deficiency bill, Peter Fraser argued that the hereditary influence on mental deficiency could not be determined until every child is given a ‘proper opportunity’, first by ensuring that its

mother was well-nourished during pregnancy, and that the child would be:

born into a good home and has a proper opportunity to develop physically and mentally. It should have a good home and plenty of sunlight and fresh air. In so far as New Zealand has done that, in so far as the work of Sir Truby King and the Plunket Society has helped to do that, I believe it has been one of the most valuable contributions to sociology the world has ever known. The work of Sir Truby King and the Plunket Society stands high in the opinion of the world, and deservedly so. I believe that the direction I have indicated is the right direction to follow – that before we go in for any of this experimentation we should endeavour to see that every child has a chance to grow up to be a strong, healthy, intellectual man or woman; and when all the economic and social disadvantageous factors have been eliminated we can start to legislate for the germ plasm. Then will be time enough.⁶⁵

We have travelled a long way from Fraser to the assumptions that inform much of today's scholarly literature on King, not to mention his Wikipedia entry. The shifting judgements are illuminating—a lens through which we can view the changing meanings of eugenics and derive insights into the social purposes the label serves for different communities at different points in time. The interesting question is not whether Truby King was a eugenicist, a question to which there could be no consensus answer, but why at a particular point, a label that would have seemed misplaced to his contemporaries came to seem appropriate—even self-evidently so—to many commentators. It also draws our attention to the often overlooked fact that it is not only eugenics but the concept of eugenics that has a history, and that we simply cannot make sense of a figure like Truby King unless we understand what eugenics meant to him.

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‘Aristocrats of Knowledge’: Māori Anthropologists and the Survival of the ‘Race’

Barbara Brookes

When touring Māori communities in the South Island of New Zealand in June 1929, the Ngāti Porou leader and first indigenous Minister of Native Affairs, Āpirana Ngata, carried with him Lucien Lévy-Bruhl’s *How Natives Think*.¹ Lévy-Bruhl, professor in the history of modern philosophy at the Sorbonne, and one of the founders, in 1925, of the Sorbonne’s Institute of Ethnology, argued for ‘the incommensurability of thought systems in different cultures’.² At the time Ngata was reading *How Natives Think*, he was engaged at one level on a local political mission of assessing the needs of local communities. At another level, Ngata was deeply engaged with the currents of contemporary international thought in anthropology. We can do more than imagine how Ngata, a proud ‘Native’, read the analysis of his ways of thinking by a French philosopher because he recorded his response. In a letter to his great friend Peter Buck at the Bishop Museum, Hawai’i, Ngata wrote that Lévy-Bruhl’s book was:

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a fine example of how the pakeha scientist can go wrong by a wrong conception of the premises on which to theorise. He creates his own type of what a native may be & then deduces what the limits to his range of ideas might be.³

Ngata and Buck, at once ‘natives’ and ‘anthropologists’, men who both counted Pākehā amongst their ancestors, occupied a distinctive position from which to engage in debates over culture. As historian George Stocking wrote of indigenous people in a later period, they ‘commanded the role of actors in their own history’ rather than subjects to be analysed by others.⁴ Buck concurred with Ngata’s assessment of Lévy-Bruhl and wrote to him:

What is a native anyway? You cannot apply the same mental standards to Melanesians, Polynesians, Tierra del Fuegians, Australian aboriginals and others and mix them up and take an average. Such a study-constructed native doesn’t exist. ... The psychologists know their methods but not the particular native race.⁵

Ngata and Buck were unusually situated in the early twentieth century as indigenous intellectuals working to shape the terms of debate about their own culture. Debates about the future of the Māori coincided with rising international interest in the possibilities of improving populations through the study of eugenics. As men conscious of the importance of rank in the Māori world, an interest in the literal meaning of ‘eugenics’—‘good birth’—was part of their world-view.⁶

Both men rose to positions where they enjoyed state-sanctioned authority to set an agenda for the internal organization of the nation and for New Zealand’s Pacific ‘empire’. In an address on ‘Anthropology and the Government of Native Races in the Pacific’, Ngata held that the function of government was to ascertain the elements of traditional culture, and to judge whether or not they were inimical to progress or worth preserving in order to create success.⁷ In his view, and in his career, anthropology and government were closely intertwined.

My aim is to explore the positions of Ngata and Buck, the intellectuals at the ‘cultural interface’ between Māori and Pākehā worlds and the particular tensions that resulted at a time when the future of the Māori was by no means secure. I intend to explore the links between one type of academic anthropological knowledge manifest in the Polynesian Society created in the early 1890s and a more politically orientated

group with similar ethnographic interests named Te Ākarana Māori Association created in the 1920s. For both groups, ideas about how to improve the population in order to secure a vital future had great appeal.

The phrase 'Aristocrats of Knowledge' is drawn from Māori scholar Maharaia Winiata, who used it to describe men of mixed Māori-Pākehā descent, with access to a European education, who became leaders in New Zealand society. The tensions experienced by these men have been elegantly observed by others—Keith Sorrenson and Steven Webster in particular—but here I want to pay attention to an issue generally passed over: miscegenation and its meanings for Māori.⁸ From the beginning of European settlement, Māori iwi (tribes) had worked to incorporate the newcomers into their own society and intermarriage was a key means of doing so. By the 1920s, however, men who were themselves products of Māori/Pākehā marriages became increasingly concerned about the implications for 'the race' represented by Māori/Chinese liaisons. What had once been an open attitude of engagement with newcomers constricted as the racial identity of Māori became of national concern. The particular national identity of New Zealand relied on an idea of two peoples, distinct yet harmonious. Māori /Chinese relationships threatened that ideal.

STUDYING CULTURE

A circular sent around New Zealand in 1891 proposed the formation of a 'Polynesian Society' dedicated to the study of Polynesian culture. In his history of that Society, Keith Sorrenson outlines how Percy Smith, the Surveyor General of New Zealand, wanted to create a society similar to the Royal Asiatic Society, but one that embraced 'Australia, New Zealand, the Chatham Islands, Polynesia proper, Melanesia, Micronesia, Malaysia, and Papua and their native races'.⁹ It was an ambitious plan stirred to life by fears that those who knew the traditions of the Māori—the people themselves—were in danger of dying out. The knowledge of their migrations, traditions and life ways might be lost forever.¹⁰

By the time of the founding of the Polynesian Society in 1892, eighteen year old Āpirana Ngata, of Ngāti Porou on the East Coast of the North Island, was enrolled as a law student at Canterbury College in Christchurch. During those student days he took note of the dangers of race mixing. 'Race intermixture' he wrote with regard to the Roman and British Empires, 'and utter neglect of race distinctions led to [the]

disappearance of the sharp outlines of race morality'.¹¹ In the 1890s Ngata warned his contemporaries, 'Must we languish and die by the hearth of our *pakeha* lovers and husbands, that the mongrel race of the future may boast a long descent from the Gods of the Pacific, that there may be added to the all conquering, all devouring Anglo-Saxon, a fresh strain of blood ...?' Ngata's vision was of 'a Maori race ... of a distinct and separate existence, but nonetheless subject to law and government, loyal to the flag that protects it ...'.¹²

The young Ngata was particularly concerned about sexual immorality and the mixing of Māori with dissolute Pākehā. In 1893 he observed:

The closer the Maori is brought to the pakeha the more rampant grows the evil [of immorality]; for your low, vulgar, uneducated, degenerate pakeha is a hero in the eyes of his dusky brother. It is the ambition of the Maori lad to ape the manners and habits of this lamp-post adorning class. It is the ambition of the Maori maiden to please and fascinate the lad. ... Illicit intercourse, vice and immorality have already destroyed the purity of the race, have stunted a race once famous for its physique, have rooted out whatever industrial tendencies survived other pernicious influences, and degraded the characteristics it once possessed of hospitality, liberality, bravery and manliness. You view instead a pigmy race of men and women, a degenerate cross between the pakeha and the Maori, inheriting the worst qualities of both, elevated by no sense of rank ...¹³

Ngata's marriage, in contrast to the individualized contracts he was criticizing, was undertaken in traditional fashion of those of rank; the 'chiefly practice of selecting spouses for their children'.¹⁴ Māori leaders exerted the kind of control over marriage alliances that aristocratic European families once had, though the ability to maintain such traditions was breaking down as the urban context offered young people new freedoms. The high-ranking Ngata was betrothed to Te Rina Tāmāti who died before the marriage could take place. 'According to custom' the elders offered Te Rina's younger sister Arihia, aged sixteen. She married twenty-one year old Āpirana in 1895.¹⁵ Arihia's father, Tuta Tāmāti, shared Ngata's intellectual engagement with anthropology: he was a foundation member of the Polynesian Society in 1892.

In that year, fifteen year old Peter Buck, also known as Te Rangihīroa, was working alongside his Pākehā father on a sheep station. Four years later Buck enrolled at Te Aute College, where Ngata had received his secondary education. Te Aute school for Māori boys, under the able

leadership of John Thornton, fulfilled the headmaster’s aim of providing leaders for Māori society. The young men attending the school were coming of age at a time when the future of their people was uncertain. Te Aute College Students’ Association annual conferences created a forum for discussion of the conditions in Māori communities. These conferences, Buck remarked, revealed ‘The decline of our race, and the sad, sad state of our people’ to young men who ‘before hardly gave the matter a thought’.¹⁶

At a conference of the Te Aute College Students’ Association in 1898, Ngata, who had now completed degrees in both Law and Political Science, made a plea for the unity of the Māori people. By overcoming their loyalty to iwi, Māori could unite ‘for the maintenance of the best characteristics of the race, for its protection against a well-meaning but cruel-fated civilisation’. He hoped for:

a healthy, vigorous community of men of our colour, blood, and tongue, full of manly independence and the pride of race ... able to contribute of its best towards the life and government of the Britain of the Southern seas.

Ngata went on to comment on ‘the dark details of a process vaguely recognized as persistent and inevitable’—the dramatic decline in the Māori population. Between 1858 and 1896 ‘nearly 16,200 souls’, had been lost; in 1895 the recorded population numbered 39,854. Ngata searched for reasons for this decline: lack of care of infants; parents ‘debilitated by past debauchery’; Māori tohungas (medicine men); female sterility due to immorality before marriage; only partial adoption of European habits and clothing; and ‘to a certain extent the continual intertribal and consanguineous marriages, resulting in diminished fruitfulness and enfeebled constitutions’. Observers, he noted, suggested that ‘unions between Māori women and Europeans are prolific enough, but unions with males of their own race are rarely so’. He claimed, to the contrary, that Māori women given to youthful promiscuity were not noticeably more fertile when married to Europeans.

Ngata argued against fatalism, calling on his fellow members of the Te Aute College Association to work against consanguineous marriages, against the neglect of infant life and the sick, and against the prostitution of young girls. He saw the greater mobility of young Māori men as widening the marriage pool and hence adding a ‘drop—perhaps more—of life-giving blood to an effete and noble clan’.¹⁷

His immersion in Anglicanism at Te Aute made him particularly critical of sexual immorality, seeing it as a disease that required a cure. Peter Buck attended the same 1898 Conference and gave a paper entitled 'The Decline of the Maori Race: The Causes and Remedies'. Inspired by the 'intense piety' of John Thornton at Te Aute, Buck's address has been described as 'practically a sermon'.¹⁸ 'If our people are to be saved from the fate of the natives of Tasmania and Australia', he argued, 'they must be spiritually educated.'¹⁹

Teachers at Te Aute suggested the study of medicine to Buck and found a scholarship to make it possible for him. Nothing seemed more necessary than the promotion of health and hygiene for the future of Māori. The summer before going to Medical School Buck spent working amongst the Ngāti Porou on the East Cape. There he fell in love with a high-ranking Māori woman but the iwi 'did not think him ... worthy' of her.²⁰ This collision between the expectations of the newly educated Buck and the authority of tribal elders made a lasting impression on him. It was clear he still had much to learn before he could claim rank in Māori society.

Buck, the offspring of a Māori mother and Pākehā father, eventually married an Irish woman, Margaret Wilson, in 1905 after qualifying in medicine at the University of Otago in Dunedin. Buck's story indicated how, at times, marrying a Pākehā might be less fraught for individual Māori than marrying someone from hapu towards which there was traditional enmity, or where status considerations were foremost.

Ngata and Buck went on to have distinguished careers. From 1905 to 1909, Buck was employed as a Native Health Officer, working to improve sanitation and health in Māori communities. His ethnographic interests were heightened by a stint as medical officer at the International Exhibition village at Christchurch where he met the contingents from the Cook Islands, Niue and Fiji.²¹ In 1909, Buck followed Ngata into Parliament. Firm friends, and united by their interest in Māori traditions, that year they invited Augustus Hamilton, Director of the Colonial Museum, to deliver a series of lectures on ethnology in Wellington. In a lecture entitled 'How to Study the Maori', Hamilton contrasted the shoe-string operation of the Polynesian Society with the federally-funded American Bureau of Ethnology and the German commitment to spending £10,000 a year on the teaching of ethnology. The expense was an investment because, according to Hamilton, for 'the administrator a knowledge of ethnology was exceedingly useful as a guide in dealing

with such primitive peoples as the British, especially in their vast Empire, were likely to meet’.²²

In that same year, ‘The Maori Question’ and ‘The Science of Eugenics’ were coupled in a column in *The Otago Witness*, a Dunedin newspaper. A commentator welcomed Ngata’s assertion, in an address to the newly formed New Zealand Club, that the Young Māori Party ‘did not intend to preserve the Maori race as a separate and distinct race’, regarding the fusion of Māori with Europeans as inevitable.²³ This, the author hoped, would lead to greater access to Māori land and no need for separate Māori parliamentary representation, which since 1867 had existed in four reserved Māori seats. And if the future of the Māori race was of such great importance to the nation, so too was the future of the Pākehā. For ‘an explanation and elaboration’ of the science of ‘eugenics’ the author recommended C.W. Saleeby’s *Parenthood and Race Culture* seeing in the practice of eugenics ‘the business of the patriot’ in building the right kind of society.²⁴ Just what that society might look like preoccupied the leaders of New Zealand.

Both Sir Robert Stout (the subject of Emma Gattey’s chapter ‘[Sir Robert Stout as Freethinker and Eugenics Enthusiast](#)’ in this volume) and Āpirana Ngata took part in a lecture course in 1911 organized by the Auckland Leys Institute. Stout lectured on ‘What Eugenics Mean’ while Ngata addressed ‘The Present Day Maori’.²⁵ The two men served together on the 1911 Native Land Commission.²⁶ In a lecture to the Wellington Young Men’s Christian Association, Āpirana Ngata asserted that intermarriage between Māori and Pākehā was worthy of eugenic discussion since ‘a slight dash of Maori blood in a European would augment rather than depreciate his efficiency in whatever walk of life he might happen to be’.²⁷

The actual corporeal attributes of Māori became of interest to Buck and he had the opportunity to study his compatriots more closely when serving with them in the First World War. When stationed in England from May 1918, he made the acquaintance of leading British race theorists, Arthur Keith and Karl Pearson, who advised and encouraged him. Keith, a convinced Darwinian, studied human evolution through fossils and emphasized the importance of competition in evolution.²⁸ Pearson brought his considerable mathematical skills to bear on questions of heredity and from 1911 held the first Galton Professorship in eugenics at University College, London.²⁹ Keith and Pearson provided Buck with instruments to make bodily measurements, including head shape, of the

men in the Maori Pioneer Battalion on the way home to New Zealand.³⁰ Cranial measurements were, according to John Allen, the most popular way of making comparisons between populations.³¹ The study of ‘Maori somatology’ could perhaps solve deep puzzles of whakapapa or genealogy: just where did Māori originate?³²

By the 1920s, Ngata was increasingly influential as a politician, looking to the future as well as the past. In determining just what kind of society New Zealand should be, he gave his support to the 1920 Immigration Restriction Act, which entitled people of British or Irish birth or descent free entry to New Zealand while denying Chinese the right of permanent residence. The British people, Ngata argued, represented ‘the best civilisation that has so far appeared on the face of this globe’.³³ That year saw the publication of American Lothrop Stoddard’s *The Rising Tide of Color against White World Supremacy* which historian David Walker argues was emblematic of racial thinking that saw relationships between whites and Asians leading to the decline of civilization.³⁴ Stoddard’s book, a key text for American eugenicists, was widely discussed in the New Zealand press.³⁵

Ngata’s close association with Gordon Coates—who became Native Minister in 1921 and Prime Minister in 1925—empowered his political position. He drove Māori land modernization schemes while at the same time seeking to conserve tradition through support of ethnology. He worked towards the establishment of a Board of Ethnological Research in 1923 and a Maori Purposes Fund Board in 1924. Part of the aim of the latter was ‘Support of the Polynesian Society of New Zealand and any other society which has for its object the study and investigation of matters concerning the Maori and cognate races of the South Pacific Ocean.’ This support was financial; in the ensuing years the Polynesian Society received several hundred pounds per year, still a shoestring budget, but allowing the Society to embark on more ambitious publishing ventures.³⁶

Buck and Ngata met international visitors interested in anthropology. George Pitt-Rivers was one who came to New Zealand in 1923 for the Australia New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science conference in Wellington. Grandson of the general who founded the Oxford Pitt-Rivers Museum, the wealthy Pitt-Rivers was, at the time, serving as assistant to his then father-in-law Henry Foster, Governor-General of Australia. He toured Māori communities on the Wanganui River with Elsdon Best, New Zealand’s ‘foremost ethnographer of Maori

society’.³⁷ F. Landis Mckellar and B. Hart claim that it was this introduction to Māori that led Pitt-Rivers to a life-long interest in miscegenation, subsequently developed academically when he pursued the study of psychology and anthropology with Bronislaw Malinowski at Oxford.³⁸

Pitt-Rivers’ report on his Wanganui visit began with consideration of the question of ‘the phenomenon of the gradual extinction of unadapted peoples’. This question proved difficult to study because of ‘the gradual infiltration of foreign blood into a declining population, and the frequent inability to discriminate between the unadaptable and unmixed stock that is declining and the new miscegenated stock which is capable of surviving under the changed conditions’.³⁹ In that same year, Peter Buck published ‘The Passing of the Maori’ in which he criticized Pākehā who predicted Māori extinction and argued that the population was recovering. The ‘nightmare visions of the past have been thrown off like a frayed flaxen cloak’, proclaimed Buck, ‘and the unfettered Maori of to-day with self-reliance looks confidently forth to the future’.⁴⁰

Drawing on the ideas of the Oxford anthropologist Robert Marett, and echoing a long line of British observers back to the time of Cook, Buck distinguished Māori from other Polynesians, suggesting that ‘Five centuries in a temperate climate toughened his constitution, sharpened his mentality and altered his material culture. The islanders, with their open houses, scanty tapa clothing, and food without labour, were left far behind the Maori.’ According to Buck, ‘the numerous changed conditions induced by a more vigorous climate’ caused Māori ‘to shed the indolence of the tropics’. This vigour meant Māori were in a better position to survive.⁴¹

Anthropologist Helen Leach argued in a 1993 *New Zealand Journal of Archaeology* article that Buck’s view of Samoan material culture as backward arose in response to two books that compared Polynesian peoples and placed Māori lower down the scale of evolution. The first was the *Handbook of Western Samoa* published by the New Zealand administration in 1925 in which, according to Buck, Samoans were placed as ‘the highest branch of the Polynesians’. The second book was the Australian geographer Griffith Taylor’s *Environment and Race*. Ngata, writing to Buck, interpreted Taylor as suggesting that Māori and Hawai’ians were earlier strata of Polynesians, while Samoans represented ‘the later and higher’ type. Both Buck and Ngata were deeply imbued with the ‘prevailing evolutionary pre-occupation with racial thinking’.⁴² Indeed they employed such thinking in assessing various iwi.⁴³

Addressing the question of the ‘Absorption of the Race’, Buck called on the work of E.B. Tylor, first professor of Anthropology at Oxford, who argued for the unity of mankind and that all human races were capable of intermarrying. Buck emphasized that white New Zealanders ‘were the result of the blending in Britain of a number of ethnic waves’. The ancestry of Māori was still a matter for enquiry but Buck felt assured ‘the Caucasian and Mongoloid blood entered into it in far-off Asia, and that Negroid and Melanesian elements contributed very slightly during the colonization of the Pacific’. He added ‘Another intermixture should not matter much to either side, since each was long ago deprived of any pretensions to purity of race.’⁴⁴

Considering the impact of miscegenation, Buck cited leading American anthropologist, Franz Boas, who argued that Native American half-breed women had higher fertility than women of solely Indian blood. Buck himself had examined the genealogies of 814 men of the Māori battalion and found that ‘48% had’—that curious thing—‘white blood’. Marriages outside the group were, in Buck’s view, ‘changing the full Maori into another type’.⁴⁵ Buck concluded

Miscegenation has stepped in, as it has down all the ages, and will render the assimilation of culture and physical features the stepping-stone to the evolution of a future type of New-Zealander [*sic*] in which we hope the best features of the Maori race will be perpetuated forever.⁴⁶

Buck noted that New Zealand had escaped the prejudice against half-castes evident in both Western and American Samoa. Ngata, ever conscious of rank, attributed this to the fact that the mothers were ‘women of the highest families’ noting ‘they showed capacity for leadership in every effort of the race’. The products of such mixing were men of mixed race like himself (Ngata had a Scottish grandfather) and Buck. Ngata saw such men as ‘largely responsible for the cultural adjustments, which in part [they had] consciously enforced’.⁴⁷

In the first half of the 1920s, Buck undertook field studies in the Cook Islands resulting in the first volume published by the Board of Maori Ethnology: *The Material Culture of the Cook Islands*. The impressive speed of his work was possible, he wrote Ngata in September 1926, because ‘the Polynesian corpuscles carry us behind the barrier that takes a Pakeha some time to scale’.⁴⁸ In 1927, Buck took the opportunity to relinquish his medical career and devote himself full-time to

anthropology, taking up the offer from Professor Gregory of the Bishop Museum in Hawai‘i of five years full-time study of the Pacific. He wrote to Buck

I think the time is now ripe when I should devote myself entirely to [anthropology] and keep up our reputation in this branch of scientific work. I know I can more than hold my own with other workers in the Polynesian field. ... In Polynesian research, it is right and fitting that the highest branch of the Polynesian race should be in the forefront and not leave the bulk of the investigation to workers who have not got the inside angle that we have. They miss things that are significant to us.⁴⁹

As an ‘insider’ Buck believed that he could cut to the heart of Polynesian culture, yet as Helen Leach has shown, in his judgement of Samoan material culture, hierarchical racial thinking came to the fore. What might, on the surface, appear to have been undifferentiated ‘Polynesian corpuscles’ remained deeply imbued by ideas of rank.

SOCIAL ACTION

The year of Buck’s departure for Hawai‘i, ideas of rank began to make themselves felt in new ways. 1927 saw the formation of Te Ākarana Māori Association in Auckland, New Zealand’s largest city, out of a desire to form an association of ‘educated’ Māori in order to promote ‘Maori welfare regardless of creed’. The group aimed to represent the ever-growing numbers of Māori living in Auckland (estimated to be some 35,000 in the district in 1927).⁵⁰ The men who founded the Association were amateur ethnologists, in the tradition of Ngata and Buck, and a number of them were the product of mixed-race relationships. Unlike the purely intellectual endeavours of the Polynesian Society, these men sought social action. They exemplified a new type of leadership: educated, urban-based, and wrestling at close quarters with the task of upholding Māori culture and protecting it from ‘untoward’ influences. Believing political action to be urgently necessary, they invited Ngata to be their patron.⁵¹

While the Polynesian Society was founded in Wellington, the nation’s capital, Te Ākarana Association was located in the burgeoning urban centre whose hinterlands were dominated by Māori. Te Ākarana Association founders were concerned with the way urban values had the potential

to erode Māori culture. They were concerned that their own hard-won respectability might be undermined by a class of dispossessed Māori who worked for the Chinese. The emergence of the Association in the 1920s is not perhaps surprising when a deepening economic crisis saw Māori competing for scarce work as casual labourers or in the service sector in towns. Such moves away from tribal districts led to a breakdown of the authority of elders and reduced knowledge of tradition.

The leadership of Te Ākarana Association shared the concerns of Buck and Ngata but they were from northern tribes, rather than from the East Coast or Taranaki. Ngata focused his political career on rural land issues whereas Te Ākarana men were concerned with the urban economy relevant to their northern city and with the concerns of northern iwi. Calling for local standards of schooling to be raised, one member commented 'he could not call to mind one instance of a Maori from the North gaining the rank of high honour: it was behind the East Coast with its Ngata and Taranaki with its Dr. Pomare and Buck'.⁵² By 1901, the Auckland provincial district was the most populous in the country and by 1930, the greatest proportion of Māori (48,040 out of a total of 67,017) resided there. Auckland, then, was at the forefront of questions about the participation of Māori in the urban economy. These were urgent questions to those teaching the next generation of young Māori, such as Patrick Smyth.

Elected chairman and secretary of the Association, Patrick Smyth had an Irish born father and a high-born Ngā Puhī mother. Sent from an isolated settlement in the Bay of Islands to St Stephen's Native Boys' School in Auckland, Smyth excelled as a scholar and eventually returned to the school as a teacher. In 1916 he married a Pākehā woman, Marion Cooper. Although very critical of many aspects of Māori life, Smyth developed a passion for Māori language and traditions, eventually publishing a textbook on Māori pronunciation.⁵³ George Graham, a Pākehā, and frequently the spokesperson for the Association, had an accounting and legal background. As a native agent, he often gave free advice to impoverished Māori families. Married in 1899 to Takurangi Kahupeka Hapi, he had a large family. After the marriage ended in separation about 1912, George Graham went on to form successive liaisons with two more Māori women. He took great interest in Māori culture, compiling manuscripts of oral traditions and artifacts. He was an active member of the Polynesian Society and a founder of the Anthropology and Māori race section of the Auckland Institute and Museum.⁵⁴

James Rukutai, another leading member of the Association, was a rangatira of the Ngāti Hikairo and Ngāti Hourua iwi. Educated at St Stephens College, after a stint as a miner he became a Native interpreter in the Supreme Court. Rukutai was said to be an 'advisor in legal matters to a wide circle of his people'.⁵⁵ He was also an avid sportsman, having been involved in rugby league at a high level and in the Auckland Lawn Tennis Association. James's wife, Bera Rukutai, was a high ranking member of Ngati Tahinga of Tainui. Bera, or Bella as she was called, was 'an authority on Maori customs and folklore' and said to be a 'valued social worker among her people'.⁵⁶ She was one of the early members of Te Ākarana Māori Association (once members decided to welcome women) of which James became chairman.

These 'aristocrats of knowledge' spent a good deal of time looking backward—studying the traditions of Māori, collecting and preserving artifacts. But they also looked forward and, in order to measure 'the distance along the path of progress traveled by some' they had to measure the distance others lagged behind.⁵⁷ Great concern was expressed about the possibility of racial degradation through association with 'Asiatics', by which they meant Chinese and Hindu men. The formation of the White New Zealand League in 1925, discussed by historian Jacqueline Leckie, was prompted by the concern the farmers of Pukekohe felt when Indians and Chinese began leasing land and competing in the market garden business.⁵⁸ Te Ākarana Māori Association shared the concerns of the League in its campaign to highlight the issue of Māori girls consorting with Chinese and Hindu men. In March 1928 they sent a letter to Māori leaders throughout the North Island 'expressing disapproval of intermixture with Asiatics and asking [those leaders] to make known the Association's views'.⁵⁹

Māori looked for work wherever they could find it. The Auckland Hospital Board was at the forefront of those dealing with indigence in the later 1920s. 'The situation in Auckland today', Labour MP M.J. Savage told Parliament, 'simply beggared description'. People were going hungry and the Hospital Board was doing its best but a national solution was required for the problem of unemployment.⁶⁰ The chairman of the Auckland Hospital Board informed the Prime Minister, Gordon Coates, that destitution among Māori was taxing the Board and that young Māori women were working for Chinese market gardeners and for 'Hindus in fruit shops'. Coates expressed the view that this should stop.⁶¹ George Graham attributed the problem to changing

economic conditions, which forced Māori to move to the city and take up any work they could find. Work for the ‘Chinese and Hindoos’ he considered undesirable for Māori women. According to a well-known social worker, moral standards were ‘at stake’.⁶²

Te Ākarana Association members protested against ‘the growing association between men from the East and Māori women’ in February 1929.⁶³ *The Sun* reported how ‘educated Maoris [*sic*] feel the pressing need for freeing their brethren from what they consider to be harmful influences’. The Association’s members, themselves products of or engaged in Māori–Pākehā intimate relationships, claimed to be taking miscegenation seriously but it was miscegenation of a particular kind: Māori women mixing with Asian men.

George Graham argued that ‘whenever there is a mixed marriage between any two people, a decline in the hygiene of those two people always accrues’. Since Graham’s own marriage to a Māori woman had resulted in seven children, he was clearly not referring to Māori/Pākehā alliances. It was, he said, ‘a well-known fact that in the cases of the Maori girls marrying Chinese there have never been any children’. His views were widespread. The Māori Methodist Synod, for example, concurred with the view that while there was no objection to Māori marrying into the ‘British race’ they did object to ‘Asiatic marriages’.⁶⁴

The behaviour of some Māori women, ‘living and commingling with Hindus and Chinese’ made one Anglican leader, Andrew Ngawaka, ‘almost ashamed to acknowledge’ himself a Māori. He advocated setting aside a settlement in or near Auckland in order that Māori could ‘multiply in accordance with their traditions’.⁶⁵ Patrick Smyth regarded the employment of Māori girls after leaving school as ‘a very serious question’. ‘It was most essential’ he suggested, for Te Ākarana Māori Association ‘to watch jealously the welfare of our young womanhood as on them rested the glorious duty of perpetuating the Race.’⁶⁶ Te Ākarana Māori Association called for the government to take action on the employment of Māori girls in Chinese market gardens.

Āpirana Ngata’s elevation to a cabinet post in government put him in a position to do more for his people and he responded quickly to the concerns raised by Te Ākarana Māori Association and the White New Zealand League. Surveying ‘the general Maori position’ in his July 1929 speech to the House, Ngata emphasized three key points: the need for assistance ‘in districts where poverty and distress prevail’; the fact that the State provided no assistance to Māori to develop their lands;

and 'the need for an Inquiry into the problem of the employment of Maoris (especially girls) on Asiatics' market gardens'.⁶⁷ By September a Committee of Inquiry was established to investigate whether it was 'in the interests of public morality' that Māori women should be employed in market gardens as well as 'wages, health, housing and general health and sanitary conditions'.⁶⁸

How extensive was Māori women's work for the Chinese? Figures presented to the Committee of Inquiry indicated that approximately 53 Māori women in Auckland were living on the premises of Chinese market gardeners (not living *with* Chinese men as Te Ākarana Māori Association had suggested). The extent of the Inquiry, therefore, seemed out of proportion to the numbers involved. Miscegenation, it seems, was the driving concern. The Inquiry heard evidence from a Mr. Dale, an educationalist and sociologist, that if Māori women 'of a lower morality and less racial pride' mixed freely with the Chinese 'the result is not a lifting of those moral standards that as pakehas we try to give the Maori, but rather a lowering'. The offspring of relationships between Māori and Chinese would be 'a queer mixture, a mixture that from a sociological point of view is a menace to our population'. Dale continued:

It is partly sentiment, I suppose, but we are going to lose the British outlook, partly national because we are going to lose that for which we are striving – a pure Maori race.⁶⁹

He hinted that dire political ramifications might follow if Māori and Chinese intermarried since there were still sections of the Māori people who believed that one day 'the pakeha will be sent out of the country' by a 'gigantic wave' and this could blend with the Chinese nationalist point of view.⁷⁰ A further danger of miscegenation lay in land alienation. One witness to the Inquiry pointed out that children born of Chinese fathers would be able to inherit Māori land. In his view Māori blood would be tainted by any association with the Chinese.⁷¹

The Inquiry called on anthropological expertise and appended some quotations from a paper by African-American Professor Earl Finch of Wilberforce University, a pioneering African-American institution run by the African Methodist Episcopal Church from 1863. Finch, who had been trained at Wilberforce and at the University of Chicago, had presented his paper at the First Universal Races Congress in London in 1911.⁷² Entitled 'The Racial Effects of Miscegenation' Finch's paper

argued that miscegenation ‘produces a type superior in fertility, vitality, and cultural worth to one or both parent stocks’. He cited Quatrefages 1879 book *The Human Species* in support of the view that ‘the Polynesian Islanders disappear with a terrible rapidity, whilst their mixed races ... show a redoubled fertility’.⁷³ This was not, however, the part of the Finch article appended to the report. Rather he was cited in support of the view ‘that racial miscegenation often produces an inferior population’.⁷⁴ The Inquiry concluded:

The indiscriminate intermingling of the lower types of races – i.e., Maoris, Chinese, and Hindus – will ... have an effect that must eventually cause deterioration not only in the family and national life of the Maori race, but also in the national life of this country, by the introduction of the hybrid race, the successful absorption of which is problematical. There is also a very real danger that in so far as the offspring of Chinese fathers are concerned such miscegenation may eventually result in the submergency of the Maori race similar to what has occurred in Hawaii.⁷⁵

The behaviour of young women, lured away from traditional communities, concerned Māori elders, the members of Te Ākarana Māori Association, and Ngata. The concern was not just about their independence gained by earning an individual wage from the Chinese. It was also about the traditional expectations of families and male honour. Rank would become meaningless in a world where the elders could no longer exercise control over marriage arrangements. Such control was still possible in a rural context where Māori values prevailed and were understood. It was much more difficult in urban areas that presented young women and men with new options.

In seeking to promote ‘race consciousness’, Āpirana Ngata upheld a view of ‘white’ New Zealand that encompassed Māori but excluded the Chinese and the Indian. This view, that ‘whiteness’ meant primarily excluding those from the east, was expressed by Patrick Smyth who assured the Te Ākarana Association that white New Zealanders regarded Māori as equals and that ‘White Australia meant keeping out Japanese and Chinese.’⁷⁶

In arguing for Māori land schemes in 1934, Āpirana Ngata repeated the Māori proverb ‘divorce the Maori from the land and you make of him a slave’. Landholding was constitutive of Māori masculinity. He continued ‘We do not want Maori slaves wandering about New Zealand

mating with the Chinese and the Hindus—people who are alright in their own country, but, in white New Zealand and white Australia, are undesirable.⁷⁷

The cultivation of 'race pride', a goal upheld by Māori men in positions of authority, required stemming race contamination by those thought to be of a lower order. If Chinese men could not be banished from New Zealand, then control had to be asserted over Māori women. Middle-class men engaged in the preservation of Māori society, in Ann Laura Stoler's words, 'conjured up the supposed moral bankruptcy of culturally dissonant populations, distinguishing them from the interests of those who ruled'.⁷⁸

Where did Buck stand on the Māori/Chinese issue? Unfortunately the Ngata/Buck correspondence only details Ngata's view. We do know, however, from Buck's correspondence with George Graham that he appreciated the efforts of Te Ākarana Māori Association in 'keeping together the best elements of the Auckland Maoris' and giving 'them a pattern to look up to'. He continued, 'the drift into the city from the north has always been bad. Living in cheap areas brings them into association with a class they do not rightly belong to ...'.⁷⁹ Indiscriminate mixing was, in this view, likely to undermine traditional rank and values.

In a supreme irony, Buck, a long-time resident of the United States and a Professor at Yale, one of the USA's most prestigious universities, was denied American citizenship because Polynesians were 'classed as Orientals' in that country. Alice Te Punga Somerville has explored the way in which Buck 'occupied' a 'space' where 'race, Indigeneity, citizenship, nation' intersected.⁸⁰ Somerville cites Buck writing to his friend Eric Ramsden:

I could not become an American citizen under the ... law, for an applicant has to be over 50% Caucasian. The Polynesians are classed as Orientals in spite of anthropological evidence of their Caucasian origin so I can only show 50%.⁸¹

The racial hierarchies that both Buck and Ngata had long subscribed to, interpreted differently in this instance, turned Buck—who had long argued that Māori were of Caucasian origin—into an Oriental.

But back to 'Aristocracy'. Buck's dilemma was solved, as Somerville puts it, by 'a better offer': that of a knighthood (KCMG) from New Zealand in 1946. He would have been ineligible for this honour if he

had accepted American citizenship.⁸² Since his own elevation to a knighthood (Knight Bachelor) in 1927, Ngata had continually lobbied for the same honour for his friend. It took 19 years to achieve and in the end Buck's was a superior honour, perhaps to Ngata's chagrin.⁸³ Buck noted Ngata's efforts in 1930, commenting that 'Americans while professing democratic ideals without the emblems of an extinct aristocracy ... are extremely hypocritical in reality. One's value in the American world would be considerably enhanced by some such recognition and it is useless to deny the fact that it would in our own world including the field of science.'⁸⁴

Through an imperial honours system, the 'Aristocrats of Knowledge' were transmuted into aristocrats of the realm. Both men valued such an honour deeply. The inescapable lure of hierarchy, in racial and status terms, helped define their careers and shape their anthropological preoccupations.

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Eugenics and the Maintenance of White Supremacy in Modern South Africa

Susanne M. Klausen

During the twentieth century, the South African government was infamous for its unapologetic commitment to white supremacy, and apartheid, the national policy of ‘separate development’ for whites and other ‘races’ (1948–1994), became global shorthand for the profound lengths to which a state would go to entrench racist policies.¹ South Africa’s reputation as an exceptionally racist country began solidifying in the international imagination in 1960, when a handful of white police officers killed 69 unarmed black demonstrators, women and men who were protesting the passbook system that was integral to enforcing racial segregation. The massacre drew worldwide criticism and condemnation from the United Nations Security Council, which alerted the world to the increasingly inhumane, exploitative system of apartheid.² Given its ugly past, it is understandable if students of racism assume eugenics flourished in South Africa, a place where proponents surely easily succeeded in installing eugenic laws and policies. Yet that would be a major overstatement. Instead, perhaps counter-intuitively, eugenics was

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relatively uninfluential in South Africa, the British settler society in which racism was most influential in policy terms. This seemingly paradoxical state of affairs makes the nature of eugenics in South Africa distinctive relative to the other British dominions discussed in this volume, as well as other places where eugenics had a range of significant consequences, such as Europe and the United States.

Eugenic ideas about how to protect white racial purity were certainly circulating in South Africa from its earliest days as a British dominion (est. 1910) and continuously found support among white supremacists in subsequent decades.³ They simultaneously reflected the thinking of, and motivated, intellectuals and social movements throughout the twentieth century, and a number of significant laws were created that reflected eugenic thinking, such as legislation prohibiting racial mixing between whites and racial 'others', and allowing eugenic abortion (see section 'Apartheid (1948–1994)' further below). But ultimately the impact of eugenics was far less severe than its most passionate adherents intended. Even at the height of its popularity and legitimacy, during the inter-war years, eugenics had only limited success. For example, proponents' attempt to form a social movement explicitly dedicated to promoting eugenic measures largely failed: the Eugenics Education Society, formed in the 1920s, lasted only a few years because of lack of popular interest. And calls for sterilization of the 'feeble-minded' in the 1920s and 1930s were ignored.

To a significant extent, the lack of widespread and official enthusiasm for eugenic policy proposals reflects their superfluity. Put another way, by the time of Union in 1910 racialized thinking and racist policy-making did not require eugenics; a pre-existing, extremely powerful racist ideology had already permeated the white settler community.⁴ Centuries of slavery and servitude starting in the seventeenth century, when Europeans first arrived in the region, meant that by the twentieth century white supremacy had been largely naturalized, internalized and legitimized by the dominant settler population. By then a racial hierarchy of human 'races' had been constructed and buttressed by colonial laws, and whites had been firmly installed at the top because of their putative intellectual and moral superiority.⁵ But, as this essay attempts to show, the reasons for both the successes and failures of eugenic projects were also the result of the unique and complex politics of race that informed and bedevilled the development of South African society since the advent of industrial capitalism in the late nineteenth century.

In this chapter, eugenics refers to both the *belief* that ‘some human life was of more value ... than other human life’ and *efforts* to entrench laws, social policies and behaviours that reflected this ‘evaluative logic’.⁶ Where eugenics movements existed, such efforts generally reflected the anxieties and priorities of political and social elites in their specific national contexts. In South Africa, eugenists were primarily motivated by concerns about two major ‘race problems’ that characterized the new British territory from its very beginning until the demise of apartheid. The first was a quantity issue, namely white fear of ‘swamping’ by the far larger African population, and the other was a quality issue, specifically anxious settlers’ conviction that the quality of the white race was declining. In what follows I explore the nature of eugenics and how its proponents attempted to intervene in these two social problems during the country’s two main political phases: segregation and apartheid.

SEGREGATION (1902–1948)

By the late nineteenth century, when industrial mining was developing in the region that would become South Africa, the ideology of Social Darwinism was being deployed by members of the dominant English-speaking elite but theories of race were still vague and abstract. This changed in the immediate aftermath of the devastating South African War (1899–1902) when there was increased political support for those politicians and social elites engaged in building the new colony who set out to ‘define the significance of race within South Africa’s future social and political system’.⁷ While the British for the most part succeeded in forging a political alliance with the conquered Boers with the goal in mind of forming a united, white South African identity, this *rapprochement* left unanswered the question about how whites should co-exist with politically subjugated Africans. In the reconstruction era (1902–1910), the small but determined group of intellectuals and politicians wanting to segregate Africans seized upon scientific racism as a discursive resource to demarcate and reify racial difference. In other words, identifying supposedly innate differences between Africans and whites became useful to those seeking justification for segregation.

The ideal of segregation had great appeal to whites who were intensely anxious about being numerically ‘swamped’, as was the term, by the majority African population, what was commonly called *oorstroming* (‘deluge’) in Afrikaans. Whites have never made up more than

about one-fifth of the total population: in 1911, of the total population of six million, 67.3% was African, whereas whites comprised 21.4%, coloureds 8.8%, and Indians 2.5%.⁸ Therefore, when designing the new dominion's socio-economic structure, elites found themselves in a challenging situation. On the one hand, there was the need for cheap black labour to work in the diamond and gold mines established at the end of the nineteenth century and soon afterwards on capitalist, white-owned farms. But on the other hand, whites feared blacks. After all, the African kingdoms had only very recently been conquered by the British, and though subjugated, Africans never ceased seeking ways to regain political and economic rights.⁹ Keeping 'surplus' Africans, meaning those not required as labourers, away from major urban centres was perceived as the best way to protect the white minority. As ideological justification for segregation, as historian Paul Rich has shown, pro-segregationist participants at the meetings of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science (SAAAS) during the reconstruction era infused scientific racism into discussions aimed at defining racial difference, determining Africans' educability, and devising policies for supposedly helping Africans adapt to modern ways of life.¹⁰

After Union, eugenicists continued trying to prove Africans were innately different and inferior to whites, a project that had increased legitimacy as eugenics gained popularity in South Africa, as it did in other modernizing nation-states. By World War I, explicit eugenic ideas were being deployed by academics, politicians, members of the medical and psychiatric professions, and civil servants who were influenced by scientific developments elsewhere, especially in the United States and Britain. Scientists, doctors and government policy-makers debated the merits of biological and psychological theories of heredity, and believers in white racial superiority increasingly laid claim to scientific authority by drawing upon eugenics. In doing so, they made selective use of racialized scientific theories. Indeed, as Saul Dubow observes, eugenics in the interwar era was a 'scavenger science', one that fed on whatever theories were available while legitimizing and adapting itself in the process.¹¹

During the interwar era, the most notable, high-profile eugenicist was Harold Fantham, an advocate of extreme biological determinism. Fantham was a highly respected scientist with an impressive professional reputation. He was educated at Cambridge (Christ's College) and University College, London, where he had been a gold medalist in zoology. He emigrated to South Africa in 1917 in order to take up a position

as professor of zoology and comparative anatomy at the University of the Witwatersrand. There he founded the Department of Zoology and became dean of the Faculty of Science from 1923 to 1926.¹² Fantham was a zealous believer in the theory that human heredity was shaped by an ineradicable, unchangeable 'germ plasm' and that environmental influences had no effect on heritability. He produced numerous scientific papers alone and with his wife Annie Porter, a respected scientist in her own right, on the heritability of physical and racial characteristics—research that claimed to demonstrate racial mixing produced weaker human specimens—that he presented at meetings of the SAAAS and elsewhere throughout the 1920s and early 1930s.¹³

One technology used by eugenicists seeking to prove Africans were inherently inferior was intelligence testing, an activity that was popular in this period. Mental testing was first applied to Africans in the 1910s and 1920s, when scientists seeking evidence of racial difference conducted IQ testing on workers in mines. Results supposedly proved Africans' inherent mental inferiority and, therefore, their unsuitability for citizenship. For example, in 1929 the psychologist working at the Department of the Interior, M.L. Fick, published the results of a study purporting to show that Africans had lower levels of intellectual ability than whites.¹⁴ Fick's methodology was a combination of testing individuals, following the model of the Simon–Binet Tests, and groups using a test modelled on the Army Beta Test devised by R.M. Yerkes in the United States during World War I.

However, Fick and others attempting to show that Africans were intellectually inferior to whites and had a limited capacity to be educated ultimately had minimal impact on government policy. Instead, counter arguments put forward during the debate in 1932 surrounding the report of the Native Economic Commission, which stated that Africans living on reserves could adapt to the arrival of white settlers and the resulting changes to their way of life, won the day. It is important to note that in taking this position, political elites were in part reacting to the criticism of African intellectuals such as D.D.T. Jabavu of the University College of Fort Hare, who vehemently criticized Fick's findings of inherent African mental inferiority and insisted that any signs of Africans being 'behind' Europeans in intellectual ability were the results of culture. In addition to taking heed of African intellectuals' criticism, white liberal policy-makers were also hoping to make segregation more palatable to African elites.¹⁵

By the mid-1930s, hereditarian explanations for intellectual differences between the races were losing momentum. In 1934, at an influential conference titled *Educational Adaptations in a Changing Society*, the liberal philosopher R.F.A. Hoernle also attacked Fick's conclusions regarding African educability on the basis that there was no clear scientific evidence for a distinct African 'race psychology'. Hoernle, like Jabavu, argued that differences between the races were culturally induced. Thus, by the 1930s the majority of scholars and policy makers were rejecting scientific claims of racial difference, as dominant thinking tended towards an emphasis on cultural difference that was by definition relative and mutable.

As mentioned above, in addition to fearing swamping by Africans, many members of the middle class were convinced that whites' racial fitness was declining, and that this process of white racial 'degeneration' posed an equally dangerous threat to the maintenance of white supremacy. But here, too, eugenists who subscribed to a biologically deterministic world-view faced opposition, as the debate within the scientific community regarding the relative importance of heredity versus the environment that had occurred when assessing Africans' intelligence was applied to the perception of white racial decline.

One major symptom that sparked anxiety was the existence of the 'feeble-minded', also called 'mental defectives', a problem population assessed and discussed only insofar as it affected whites. Among those who believed the feeble-minded were biologically tainted, and thus a threat to the white race, were high-profile advocates of forced sterilization, including: Dr. J.T. Dunston, the first commissioner of mentally disordered persons after the passage in 1916 of the Mental Disorders Act; Dr. J.A. Mitchell, the Union Medical Officer of Health who in 1929 publicly called for sterilization of mental defectives; and Fantham. But eugenic sterilization was opposed by other, equally experienced and respected, civil servants and doctors, such as J.E. Norman, the Senior Government Probation Officer, and Dr. H. Egerton Brown of the Pietermaritzburg Hospital. They criticized eugenist arguments in favour of sterilization by insisting that science had yet to explain what, precisely, constituted feeble-mindedness and how, exactly, it was transmitted. Just as in Britain, South Africans lobbying for the passage of a law mandating eugenic sterilization of the mentally unfit failed.

Indeed, scepticism about claims of the overarching power of heredity meant there was never sufficient scientific endorsement of radical

proposals such as compulsory sterilization put forward by Fantham and other fanatical biological determinists. Extreme hereditarianism was never dominant in the scientific community because it was forcefully challenged by other notable scientists, such as James Duerden who was professor of zoology at Rhodes University and himself a eugenicist. In 1926 Duerden made a presentation at the meeting of the SAAAS in which he attacked Fantham's subscription to the idea of the germ plasm and rejection of evidence of the potential influence of the environment.¹⁶ To Duerden, there was instead a complex interaction between heredity and environment, a conclusion he reached based on his own research on the effects of nutrients on the plumage of ostriches and the wool of merino sheep.

Significantly, in addition to African and English-speaking liberal intellectuals and scientists, Afrikaner nationalist intellectuals also rejected a strictly hereditarian explanation for feeble-mindedness. This was not because they were less racist than their English-speaking counterparts—indeed some English-speakers, like Fantham, were intensely racist—but because of the unacceptable implications of hereditarian thinking for interpreting 'poor whiteism', which was second only to swamping as the most politically pressing socio-political problem of the segregation era.

Unlike in other British dominions such as New Zealand, where, as the editors of this collection point out, eugenicists believed 'that the settlers were especially fit, vigorous, and resistant to degeneration', South African eugenicists were intensely concerned about the evident inferiority of 'poor whites', as they were commonly called in popular and official discourse, relative to middle-class (mostly English-speaking) whites.¹⁷ The *arm blankes* (poor whites) were rural Afrikaans-speakers who had been pushed off the land and pulled into the cities in a steady stream starting in the late nineteenth century by a series of economic depressions and natural disasters. In the cities they constituted a highly visible underclass concentrated in mixed-race slums and by 1930 as many as 400,000 whites (in a total white population of just over two million) were living in destitution.¹⁸ In urban slums they lived cheek by jowl with Africans—too close, according to their upper-class counterparts, both literally and figuratively. By 'sinking' to the level of the 'Native', poor whites were considered an ominous sign of the fragility of the white race.¹⁹ They were also loathed for proliferating: they—like Africans—had a much higher birthrate than middle-class whites.²⁰ Eugenicists believed the fertility of poor whites, who were perceived as biologically tainted, had to be contained in order

that whites as a whole would be fit enough to ward off swamping:²¹ as one bureaucrat said to Prime Minister Jan Smuts in 1919, ‘above all we must constantly keep in mind that as Europeans we are but a handful in the face of an overwhelming mass of an inferior race’.²² In general, then, poor whites were perceived by English-speaking South Africans as a major racial threat to white supremacy. Indeed, the ‘poor white problem’, as it was officially termed, was the predominant social and political problem in South Africa until World War II.

The impression of racial inferiority of poor whites was strengthened by the results of mental testing, which was extended to whites in the early 1920s. Tests revealed that Afrikaans-speaking children performed poorly relative to English-speaking ones, a controversial finding that exacerbated already existing social and ethnic fissures in the white population—a community whose two dominant white groups were still working out how to live together in the wake of Boers’ bitter defeat in the South African War. To many, poor whites’ poverty and supposed mental deficiency confirmed the impression of racial inferiority. And this, inevitably, marked them off as a major—and rapidly growing—source of weakness within the white race. Whites were experiencing a drastic erosion in quality, hereditarian eugenicists claimed. And because poor whites were a much smaller group than Africans, they were a far easier group to target for eugenic intervention. The desire to do so led to a campaign to modify reproductive behaviour that was started and initially led by eugenicists: the birth-control movement.

The birth-control movement was formed during the Great Depression that hit South Africa hard in 1929, exacerbating the already serious poor white problem. Fantham, still the dominion’s leading eugenicist, who had failed in his efforts to find sufficient support for his Eugenics Education Society in the 1920s, thought the moment was ripe to try to form a new eugenic organization. So, along with his wife Dr. Annie Porter, he sought to limit the reproduction of ‘unfit’ poor whites.

Porter was a parasitologist who in 1917 established the Department of Parasitology at the South African Institute for Medical Research and was its head until 1933. She was also a senior lecturer in parasitology at the University of the Witwatersrand. Porter was dedicated to projects with a public-health dimension and was renowned for her dedication to her research. She, like Fantham, was also an outspoken opponent of social-welfare programmes, calling them naïve and wasteful philanthropic measures that interrupted natural selection. Such interventions merely

preserved the 'unfit' in society, both argued, and, even worse, aided social undesirables to reproduce their kind. Her pessimism was palpable in her essay 'The Woman Eugenicist':

Philanthropists fall all over themselves to help the afflicted and obviously unfit. We have cripple schools, deaf and dumb schools, special schools for the mentally disturbed, for the truant, the thief and for all sorts of unfit. In these costly special schools, every effort is made to do the often impossible and turn the inadequate into adequate citizens. The State needs all the *good* children it can get. But it does not need the under-nourished, mal-adjusted brood of the overworked and under-paid slum dweller or the feeble-minded, and so the woman eugenicist would extend to them the knowledge of birth control.²³

In 1930 Fatham and Porter formed the Race Welfare Society (RWS), whose official mission was 'the study, investigation and application of eugenics with especial reference to South African problems'. The RWS was formed with the explicit aim of curbing the fertility of putatively inferior poor whites. As Fatham wrote in the RWS's first pamphlet:

In South Africa, large families, often 10 to 12 and even 20 children, occur among the poor whites. It is the slum-dwellers, the feeble in will, the careless, the shiftless and indifferent who have the large families and, consequently, in the future, a larger proportion of the population will have the hereditary characteristics of these classes ... In South Africa there must be limitation of the 'poor white' element. Only the nobler, more intelligent, energetic and healthier citizens of the present should be the ancestors of future generations.²⁴

Birth control, he argued, was the single most important way to 'lessen the stream of recruits to the poor white class' as well as the number of feeble-minded, who were 'a scandal and menace to the community'. As Fatham bluntly explained, 'Eugenicists desire that the unfit shall not procreate and that their taint shall die with them.'²⁵ While mental defectives should be sterilized, those who were capable of being responsible should be taught to use contraceptives.

Together, Fatham and Porter conferred legitimacy on the RWS and they attracted a small group of English professionals and leading philanthropists in Johannesburg to the group's executive. In February 1932, they opened the country's first birth-control clinic, in downtown

Johannesburg. Soon birth-control advocates in urban centres around the country were also establishing private birth-control clinics, often in the face of controversy and criticism. And in 1935 all the groups formed a national birth-control organization, the South African Council for Maternal and Family Welfare.²⁶

Yet once again, extreme hereditarianism failed to maintain popular or attract official support. Ironically, Fantham, Porter and their fellow hard-line eugenicists very quickly became marginalized in the movement they had started. Although they tried within both the RWS and the emerging national birth-control movement to maintain the eugenic goal of preventing passage of the 'taint' of poor whiteism into the white race as a whole, by the mid-1930s it was dominated by the second, much larger, ideological wing comprised of maternal feminists. These middle-class, mostly English-speaking women called their birth-control clinics 'Mothers' Clinics', and, as this name implies, their dominant interest was not the welfare of the white race but the welfare of women. Maternal feminists also advocated birth control as a solution to the national crisis of white poverty, but they defined the nature of the crisis differently. They believed that a pressing problem was the tremendous suffering to which mothers were subjected during the harsh years of the Depression, as well as the rising number of maternal deaths from clandestine abortion. Providing mothers with birth control, they believed, would strengthen the role of mothers in the home and thereby buttress the family and stabilize the nation. It would also mean that mothers, made healthier by the possibility of birth spacing, would produce much better, healthier babies, which would be of great value to the nation. Very importantly, the Mothers' Clinics were liberal organizations that from the start served both poor white and black women, albeit in segregated sessions.

In 1937, the Department of Public Health awarded the council funds for the provision of birth control for poor white and mostly coloured women (Indian and African women remained difficult to reach) to be renewed annually. This was a remarkable development. In Great Britain, the Ministry of Health approved the distribution of contraceptive information through maternal welfare centres but did not fund birth control services until the 1960s. In Australia and New Zealand, governments began subsidizing birth-control clinics in 1971. In Canada it was still a federal crime to advertise contraceptives as late as 1969. The funding for Mothers' Clinics in South Africa was therefore an important achievement

for maternal feminists, not for the extreme eugenicists whose message had enjoyed substantial support among elites during the height of the Depression. Already by the end of 1933 the national financial crisis was over and the economy was once again expanding. With a growing economy, the state could offer mass employment to poor whites, who were quickly absorbed into the public sector, especially as railway workers (a policy that displaced tens of thousands of African workers). Also in 1933, Fantham and Porter left South Africa for posts at McGill University.

Moreover, when the Depression ended, the message that poor whites were biologically dangerous became unpopular and politically untenable, for two reasons. First, elites decided they *needed* poor whites to be white. Ensuring they obtained a proper sense of whiteness required their rehabilitation, which, in turn, necessitated the environmentalist argument that poor whites were salvageable. A majority of white English-speakers and moderate Afrikaners were determined to forge a united racial front in response to the threat of swamping by the far larger subject black population, so every white person was useful in the struggle to maintain white supremacy. Second, there was a political imperative to rescue the poorest members of the white Afrikaans-speaking community rather than sacrifice them on the altar of biological fatalism. English-speaking South Africans and moderate Afrikaners, both hoping to stave off emergent extreme Afrikaner nationalism, thus rallied around the vision of South Africa as a nation based on white supremacy and ethnic equality between the two dominant white groups. Maintaining the *rapprochement* between the two original settler communities meant rescuing poor whites, and all Afrikaners deeply resented any hint of belief in their inherent inferiority. In this respect, eugenics in the segregation era was predominantly a battle over whiteness. Indeed, poor whites were an example of the most common focus of eugenicist fear and loathing in many national contexts: what Ann Laura Stoler calls the ‘internal enemies’, members of a dominant group perceived as the enemy within.²⁷

However, although eugenicists who subscribed to a strict biological understanding of heredity often failed in their efforts to influence the state in the segregation era, they did achieve one significant victory in relation to another source of white racial anxiety: miscegenation. Unlike New Zealand where, as Angela Wanhalla observes in Chap. 6, this volume, eugenicists did not try to prevent intimate relationships between the indigenous Māori and Pākehā (white New Zealanders), and the state regarded intermarriage as a positive means of promoting assimilation,

in South Africa miscegenation between whites and Africans was widely detested. Although interracial relationships have a long history in the region dating back to the earliest days of settlement, after Union they rapidly became socially unacceptable. By the 1920s there was increasing alarm about the effect of racial mixing with Africans, as exemplified in the novels of Sarah Gertrude Millin and the research findings of academics like Fantham and Porter.²⁸ Settler elites voiced concern that mixed-race offspring of interracial unions (called coloureds) produced a weaker ‘hybrid’ race, in addition to undermining whites in demographic terms by increasing the already much larger size of the ‘non-European’ population relative to the white population. Thus, a strong desire to maintain white racial purity informed the passage in 1927 of the Immorality Act that criminalized sex between whites and Africans.

As Jeremy Martens argues, the law’s passage was shaped by an ‘understanding of whiteness that made membership of the white race—and thus the right to participate in civil society—contingent on the adoption of middle-class morality and a “civilised” mode of living’.²⁹ Infusing the process of constructing hegemonic whiteness was revulsion at the idea of Africans ‘infecting’ whites with their black blood: the desire to maintain ‘white purity’, often a fiction in reality, powerfully informed the passage of the 1927 law.

APARTHEID (1948–1994)

As the editors of this collection point out, one of the conventional assumptions about the history of eugenics challenged by recent scholarship is that ‘World War II was a watershed event, following which enthusiasm for eugenics evaporated’.³⁰ This insight applies to South Africa where, during the apartheid era, laws and health policies were passed that sought to interfere with biological reproduction in ways that continued to reflect the ‘evaluative logic’ that cherished white lives over black lives. Though there was a resurgence of scientific racist thinking in small intellectual circles,³¹ elites who were anxious about the survival of white supremacy mainly deployed discourses that had been adapted to changes in the international political context.

The Afrikaner National Party (NP) was elected in 1948, the same year as the adoption of the UN’s Declaration of Human Rights and just a few years after the revelations of the horrors of the Holocaust. The NP won the election with a promise to buttress white supremacy

by implementing apartheid (Afrikaans for ‘apartness’), a national policy of ‘separate development’ for the four official race categories of white, African, coloured and Indian. Ultimately, apartheid extended pre-existing segregation-era laws to enforce increased (political, economic, spatial and social) separation of the races.

However, the NP was promoting a white supremacist utopia at a historical moment when the international community felt revulsion against the extreme racism of Nazism. Adapting to this global shift in attitudes and discourse about the concept of race, the NP promoted and justified the denial of rights to the African majority by largely eschewing an explicit *racial* discourse and embracing a supposedly more palatable discourse of *ethnic* difference. In doing so, the NP was continuing a trend that had already begun in the 1930s, when there was an emerging consensus among both liberal English-speaking and Afrikaner-nationalist intellectuals on the centrality of culture in discussions about the nature of South African society. By then extreme hereditarian claims about racial difference were on the wane, a process hastened after World War II by the horrors of the Holocaust. As Paul Rich writes, in South Africa, ‘The bogus claims of national socialism in Germany made scientific racism increasingly unacceptable intellectually.’³²

Therefore, once in power and seeking to defuse the potential threat of a united African front, the NP government promoted and praised the distinctiveness of all ethnic groups, including African ones, and set out to spatially organize populations accordingly. Called Grand Apartheid, the policy meant that each African ethnic group (Zulu, Pedi, Xhosa, etc.) would be designated a so-called homeland, territory located along the borders of what would finally be ‘white’ South Africa. At first glance Grand Apartheid may have seemed equitable to some observers, but this illusion was rapidly exposed for what it was when the policy’s implementation meant that millions of ‘surplus’ Africans (meaning all except those whose labour was required on the mines, farms and in white homes) were forcibly removed from their homes and given citizenship in quasi independent, ethnically-defined nation states. During apartheid, at least 3.5 million blacks were relocated to numerous ersatz African states.³³

Furthermore, eugenic thinking persisted after 1948 in new laws that reflected the ongoing conviction that white lives were inherently more valuable than black lives and the related fear of swamping. Indeed, anxiety about swamping became more intense during apartheid as the proportion of whites relative to blacks continued to shrink: by 1950, whites

comprised only 20.9% of the total population and they had a lower birthrate; in subsequent decades it became widely believed that if demographic trends continued unchanged the future would be dark, literally and figuratively. Consequently there was intensified fear of *bloedvermenging* (blood mixing) between whites and other races.³⁴ Fear of miscegenation was so powerful that the first two major laws enacted under apartheid were sex laws aimed at stopping racial mixing: the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949) and the Immorality (Amendment) Act (1950) that expanded upon the 1927 law by prohibiting sex between whites and all other races (not just Africans as decreed originally). At least 20,000 South Africans, many of who were white men, were prosecuted for contravening the Immorality (Amendment) Act before its repeal in 1985.³⁵

Another example of adapted eugenic thinking that gained legitimacy among whites during apartheid was the new discourse of black ‘overpopulation’, essentially a continuation of the previous discourse of ‘swamping’ but now clothed in the new terminology of population control devised during the Cold War: in both cases, black fertility and population growth was perceived as a threat to white survival.³⁶ Despite the relocation of millions of Africans to the newly created ‘homelands’, whites continued losing demographic ground: by 1970 the white population had dropped to 17.3% of the total population.³⁷ Anxiety rose to ever higher, sometimes hysterical levels, as indicated by the endless reportage about the ‘cradle race’, with its alarmist headlines in newspapers like ‘There MUST Be an Urgent Approach to Population Growth.’³⁸ In the 1960s and 1970s ‘white survival’ continued to be a major issue, and black ‘overpopulation’ was the threat needing to be defanged.³⁹ As a doctor declared in a speech given in 1971, ‘the population explosion and high [African] birth rate make up the most deadly threat ever to face South Africa in her 319 years of realized history’.⁴⁰ Clearly, for many whites, the policy of Grand Apartheid was not working, or at least not fast enough.

Already by the early 1960s, whites were calling on the government to implement population control for blacks.⁴¹ The belief that the state needed to somehow curb black fertility was not new but now it was fuelled by, and attached to, the growing legitimacy of the international population-control establishment that promoted the idea that the world was undergoing a dangerous population explosion. Advocates of population control in countries around the world saw overpopulation as an

unintended consequence of enlightened colonial rule that had curbed 'tribal' warfare and introduced western medicine, whereas critics argued that increased birth rates among the poor had more to do with the expropriation of indigenous land and the destruction of pre-colonial cultural norms and relationships.⁴² In the context of the Cold War, advocates of population control worried that communists would make gains in the Third World, the new term for previously colonized territories, and they believed part of the answer to preventing the takeover of poor countries was for poor people to have fewer children because too many mouths to feed would lead to mass starvation, political chaos, and a willingness to support communism. White South Africans rapidly adopted and deployed the discourse of 'overpopulation' and calls for population control became frequent and increasingly strident. In 1969, for example, the *Natal Mercury* published an editorial declaring that if unchecked, African population growth would increase to the point of causing extreme want and misery, a 'situation [that] is the best possible incubator for Communism'.⁴³

For years, the NP was reluctant to try to manipulate African fertility-control practices for fear of provoking the anger of two groups.⁴⁴ First, there were the international critics of apartheid who, since Sharpeville, were quick to accuse the government of genocidal practices. Second, the government was wary of inciting the resentment of African men, who claimed the state had no business interfering in their sexual relationships with African women, whose sexuality they wanted under male control. However, by the early 1970s the regime accepted the argument that it was imperative to intervene directly in black fertility or else accept the inevitability of swamping as a result of 'overpopulation', and in 1974 the Department of Health established a population-control programme. Ostensibly the programme was non-racial, but in practice it was aimed at black women, who were provided contraceptives, especially the hormonal injection Depo Provera, free of charge in thousands of clinics around the country, including mobile clinics that could reach rural women.⁴⁵

Eugenic assumptions about the defective nature of certain types of white people also continued to permeate public discourse during apartheid, albeit in a radically different version than first seen during the segregationist era regarding the 'feeble-minded' and poor whites, such as during the debate surrounding the passage in 1975 of the Abortion and Sterilization Act, South Africa's first statutory law on abortion.⁴⁶ The NP was essentially forced into devising a statutory law on abortion after

the courts had called into question the long-standing common law on abortion, and, given the party's intensely patriarchal world-view, the over-riding purpose of the new law was to prevent white women from having control over their reproductive sexuality.⁴⁷ However, one of the legally permitted reasons for having an abortion was eugenic, specifically: 'Where there exists a serious risk that the child to be born will suffer from a physical or mental defect of such a nature that he will be irreparably seriously handicapped.'⁴⁸ By including a eugenic clause, South Africa was part of an international trend, for the same clause had been included in new abortion laws passed in numerous countries in the 1960s and 1970s, starting with Britain in 1967.⁴⁹

In South Africa, eugenic abortion was deemed acceptable across party lines. Repeatedly, politicians and abortion rights advocates referred to the horrors and tragedy of giving birth to severely disabled children as justification for accessing state abortion services, indeed it was one of the few reasons for procuring an abortion that found support in all political parties. The thalidomide disaster of the early 1960s, when an untested drug given to pregnant women in dozens of countries around the world resulted in the birth of thousands of severely disabled children, played a role in destigmatizing abortion in South Africa, as it did elsewhere. Numerous aspects of the thalidomide disaster, such as the efforts of American Sherri Finkbine to procure an abortion rather than give birth to a potentially disabled child, were followed closely by white South Africans reading Afrikaans and English newspapers.⁵⁰ As one member of parliament said in 1972:

We know the case of thalidomide and the result of that....Are we going to stand by and let these children come into the world...is it fair to bring such children into the world, children born deaf, blind, dumb, without arms, without legs?...I do know...that if therapeutic abortion is allowed... far fewer crippled children, deformed mentally and physically, will be brought into the world.⁵¹

While women's right to abortion was highly contested, eugenic abortion was acceptable to all but a very small minority of South Africans who, reflecting religious (mainly Catholic and Dutch Reformed Church) teaching, completely rejected eugenic thinking. By the 1970s, then, it was normative that abortion should be procured in cases where a child may be born mentally 'retarded' or physically deformed. As stated earlier, South Africa

was not unique in finding this reason socially and politically acceptable: in a global context, just as with the idea of ‘overpopulation’, there was increasing acceptance of eugenic abortion from the mid-1960s onwards.

CONCLUSION

As this chapter has shown, South African eugenicists who advocated racialized reproductive policies in the name of maintaining white supremacy achieved a number of victories in both the segregation and apartheid eras. But these successes need to be viewed in the context of repeated failures on the part of scientific racists to win arguments for biologically based social policy-making. In sum, while eugenics existed in South Africa beginning in the first decades of the twentieth century, it was also always contested, often by critics equally if not more respected than its advocates. Frequently eugenicists were ineffective at persuading authorities in government, science and medicine to heed their advice. Yet the imprint of eugenic advocacy on white South Africa was deep, as demonstrated in the 1970s by the emergence of state-funded population control for blacks and legalized eugenic abortion for whites.

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