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Chapter 16:

EUGENICS, IMMIGRATION RESTRICTION AND THE BIRTH CONTROL MOVEMENTS

Ruth Clifford Engs

ABSTRACT: Agitation for eugenics, immigration restriction, and birth control were intertwined during the first decades of the twentieth century along with numerous other health issues. Campaigns for these causes led to public policies in an effort to improve the physical, mental and social health of the nation. However, these issues were not considered of historical interest until the post-World War II era. Eugenics and the leaders of the eugenics movement were often discredited by late twentieth-century historians as elitists or racists, while early immigration restriction laws and nativism gained renewed interest, and birth control and its early leaders such as Margaret Sanger were both eulogized and demonized. Contested interpretations of all three of these reform movements and their leaders have been found since the 1950s.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The importance of the “rights of society” versus “the rights of the individual” goes in and out of fashion. Louis Menand, in the *The Metaphysical Club* (2001, 441), argues that the “good of society” was more important than the “rights of the individual” in the early twentieth-century compared to contemporary times. Reformers were convinced that controlling reproduction and immigration would reduce disease and welfare costs. Ruth Engs (1991) suggests that these crusades were aspects of the Clean Living Movement of the Progressive Era (1890-1920) and were entwined with various public health campaigns to “clean up America” including Prohibition and the eradication of tuberculosis (Engs 2003, ix-x).

Eugenic efforts and immigration restrictions peaked in the 1920s. However, legal birth control devices and information were not widely available until after 1936 although widespread campaigns for their acceptance were found in the Harding-Coolidge years. Sociologist Henry Pratt Fairchild (1926) brings the themes of this chapter together in his *Melting Pot Mistake* where he advocates eugenics, birth control, and immigration restriction to improve the human race. Some terminology

and information related to the eugenics, immigration restriction, and birth control movements will likely appear to current attitudes as racist, offensive, unbelievable, or just quaint. Advocates of these reforms were using the correct scientific terms of the time, such as “imbeciles” “unfit,” “degenerate,” “insane,” “defective,” “feeble minded,” etc. The reader is cautioned, however, to be careful in judging past social and health reformers and their beliefs and activities through the lens of the early twenty-first century, lest we be judged in the future for some of our current attitudes and policies.

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Eugenics, defined by its founder British Naturalist Francis Galton in 1883, and revised in 1904, is “the science which deals with all influences that improve the inborn qualities of the [human] race.” (Galton 1904, 1) Its aims were to encourage the “fit” (the intelligent, healthy and productive) to marry and have many children (*positive eugenics*) and to discourage or prevent the “unfit,” including persons judged “insane,” “feeble minded,” and criminal, for example, from reproducing (*negative eugenics*) (Saleeby 1914, 19-20). Immigration restriction policies were enacted to prevent "degenerative" Asians and eastern-and southern-European immigrants from degrading the health, heredity, intelligence and traditional values of the Anglo-American culture. Legal birth control would allow women to control their reproduction and sterilization would prevent the unfit from reproducing (Robinson 1922; Laughlin 1922).



Francis Galton was the father of eugenics. [From *Conclusions to Memories of My Life* (1908). Wells Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana. Image courtesy of the Digital Library Program]

The historiography of all these movements, and particularly the eugenics movement, began to proliferate in the 1990s. Due to the numerous monographs and essays on these subjects, and space limitation of this chapter, it is only possible to explore a select number of academics from different fields who have explored and re-interpreted these movements which peaked in the Harding-Coolidge administrations.

This essay will first discuss the origins of the eugenics (also termed *race regeneration* or *race betterment*), immigration restriction, and birth control movements drawing largely upon writings of prominent leaders of these campaigns. This will provide insight into accepted beliefs based on the science of the time.

Lamarck, Darwin, and Mendel: The Origins of Eugenics

Eugenics developed out of the intertwining of Darwinism and Lamarckian theory of the inheritance of acquired characteristics. British naturalist Charles Darwin—Galton’s cousin—proposed that changes over time in species are the result of natural selection. French naturalist Jean-Baptist Lamarck claimed that characteristics developed from environmental influences were inherited (Darwin 1859; Jordanova 1984). Lamarck’s proposal was the accepted theory of inheritance, until the second decade of the twentieth-century, and was the foundation of “degeneracy theory” in which acquired negative characteristics were thought to be passed to offspring. Individuals for centuries had recognized that traits and behaviors – both good and bad – ran in families. It was believed that *racial poisons*, such as tobacco, alcohol, and diseases such as tuberculosis and syphilis, could damage the “germ cells”—ovum and sperm. This damage then could be inherited leading to *race degeneracy* (physical and mental weakening of the human race). (Saleeby 1909, 205).

Gregor Mendel, in 1866, discovered the basic laws of genetics and heredity. But these principles were not rediscovered until 1900 and did not become widely accepted until over a decade later when professionals began to ascribe both positive and negative human traits, such as intelligence or criminality, to Mendelian inheritance exclusively, rather than environmental factors. Lamarckian inheritance theory, however, remained an undercurrent in some public health and social campaigns to eliminate racial poisons. (Engs 2005, 135; Davenport 1911; Laughlin 1922)

The scientific study of genetics/eugenics began with the formation of the American Breeders Association in 1906. Genetics and eugenics were one and the same until they separated into two disciplines in 1910 and every founding member of the editorial board of the journal, *Genetics*, was an advocate of eugenics (Ludmerer 1972a, 25). Eugenacists reasoned that if you could breed superior livestock, it should be possible to breed superior humans. However, the early geneticists/eugenacists oversimplified the problem of human genetics (Haller 1963, 3).

The eugenics movement was led by prominent academics and health and social welfare professionals who had deep concerns about the deterioration of the nation. For example, Paul Popenoe, editor of the genetic/eugenic research periodical *The Journal of Heredity*, and Roswell Johnson, a biology and geology professor at the University of Pittsburgh, discussed in their work *Applied Eugenics* the “practical means by which society may encourage the reproduction of the superior and discourage that of inferiors.” (Popenoe and Johnson, 1922, v). William J. Robinson, M.D. (1922, 111-112) in *Eugenics, Marriage and Birth Control*, proclaimed that “society cannot prevent the birth of all the unfit and degenerates, but it certainly has the right to prevent the birth of as many as it can.” Stanford University President David Starr Jordan wrote the eugenic booklet *The Heredity of Richard Roe* (1913). Noted science writer Albert Wiggam helped popularize eugenics through many articles and books. In *The Fruit of the Family Tree* (1924, 170) he argues that “we should apply science to the problem of marriage” and gave practical eugenic advice to prevent the human race from “slipping backwards.”

One of the few women who promoted eugenics was physician Lydia DeVilbiss. In her *Birth Control: What is it?* (1923) she advocated the sterilization of the unfit. However, she also strongly advocated positive eugenics and asked “when will America be willing to spend as much money in helping to rear the children of the most fit, as they now waste or worse than waste on

the offspring of the least fit?" (p. 55)

The most important institution of the eugenics movement was the Eugenic Record Office of Cold Spring Harbor, NY, established in 1910 as "a repository and clearing house for eugenic records of families." Geneticist and the pivotal leader of the eugenics movement, Charles Davenport, was its director and Harry Laughlin, assistant director. This office helped facilitate and coordinate all aspects of the movement in the United States. It also researched the pedigrees of so called "degenerate" families. *The Kallikak Family* (1912) written by Henry Goddard, director of the Research Laboratory of the Vineland Training school for "feeble-minded boys and girls," was the most noted of the "family history studies" that supposedly showed that criminality, poverty, and mental disabilities were inherited. These studies were used as justification for negative eugenics.

The eugenics movement reached its peak activity and influence in the mid-1920s during the Harding-Coolidge administrations. "Fitter Families" contests at state fairs, derived from the pre-WWI "better babies" contests, began in 1920 to ascertain the health of children and families. The Second International Congress of Eugenics was held at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City in 1921. The American Eugenics Society (AES) was founded in 1923 with numerous prominent academics, physicians, clergy, and health reformers on its board and advisory council (Huntington 1935, p. iv; Haller 1963, 72, 151-152). "To be against eugenics in the 1920s was to be ...against modernity, progress, and science." (Marks 1993, 651)

Hierarchy-of-Races and Nativism: Barring "Degenerate" Immigrants

An accepted scientific belief in the early twentieth century was the "hierarchy of races." Sociologist Elazar Barkan (1992, 2-3) notes that "the inferiority of certain races was no more to be contested than the law of gravity to be regarded as immoral." In 1856, Count Arthur de Gobineau in *The Inequality of Human Races* (1856) had proposed that "Mankind is divided into unlike and unequal parts...arranged, one above the other, according to differences of intellect." (de Gobineau, 196, 181) He divided the human population into three races and placed them on a ladder ranging from the backward, diseased, and unintelligent to highly civilized, healthy and intelligent. People from the African continent were on the bottom, those from Asia were in the middle, and those from Europe were at the top of the ladder.

Later sub-groups of European "races" were classified from desirable to undesirable by naturalist Madison Grant (1916, 122-123 insert), a eugenics, nativist and immigration restriction promoter. Grant defines Northern-European "Nordics" on the top, Eastern-European "Alpines" in the middle, and southern Europeans "Mediterraneans" on the bottom.

De Gobineau claimed that mixing of different races led to degeneration and the decay of a civilization. He argued that a degenerate "people has no longer the same intrinsic value as it had before, because it has no longer the same blood in its veins ...in other words, though the nation bears the name given by its founders, the name no longer connotes the same race." (p. 25).

Because this was an accepted belief, many feared that "racially inferior" immigrants intermarrying with "racially fit" "old-stock" Americans would lead to race degeneracy. This concern was an underpinning of *nativism*—a "pro-American conviction" that the United States

should be preserved primarily for white Anglo-Saxon Protestants (Grant 1916, 81-82; Stoddard 1920, 261-262). An important aspect of nativism was Anti-Catholicism which had roots in the conflicts of the Reformation and the American colonists' traditional rural values. After reaching a peak in the formation of The Know Nothing Party of the 1850s and its antipathy toward Irish-Catholic immigrants, nativism went underground during the Civil War (Higham 1955, 5-9; Reimers 1998, 10-12).

In the 1880s, when numerous poor Catholic and Jewish immigrants from southern and eastern-Europe crowded into eastern cities, hostility towards immigrants was revitalized. A flood of Chinese laborers into the west who did not readily assimilate resulted in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1892. The National Quarantine Act of 1893, a public health law, attempted to prevent impoverished and diseased southern and eastern-European immigrants from entering the country (Hall 1906, 84-85; Kraut 1994; Reimers 1998, 11-15). In 1894 the Immigration Restriction League was founded to advocate for stricter regulations of "undesirable" immigrants (Hall 1906, 315-316). Based upon investigations of the federal Dillingham Commission in 1907, sweeping legislation was passed in 1910 that excluded the "feeble minded," "insane," and those with physical and moral defects (Ludmerer 1972a, 25;-Martin 2011,137). Nativism fostered the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan in 1916 which embraced eugenics and pushed for immigration restriction, prohibition and public health measures (Evans 1923). (The KKK is discussed further in Chapters 8 and 15).

Nativist sentiments were implicit in the term *race suicide* – the declining birth rate and decreasing population of "more valuable" middle-class Anglo-Americans. The term, coined by the father of sociology Edward A. Ross (1901, 88) in 1901 was popularized by President Theodore Roosevelt (1905). The fear of racial suicide peaked in the early 1920s and several authors discussed the topic including nativist and anti-immigration leader Lothrop Stoddard who wrote *The Rising Tide of Color against White World-Supremacy* (1920).

Preventing diseased and unfit immigrants from entering the United States was a major public health concern. Popenoe and Johnson (1922, 303) argued that despite screening for disease, "mental defects are not of an obvious nature and manage to slip through." They expressed concerns that "immigration of recent years appears to be diminishing the eugenic strength of the nation more than it increases it." (p. 317).



A major public health concern was preventing diseased immigrants of "racially inferior stock" from entering the country. [From *Journal of Heredity* (1917) Wells Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana. Image courtesy of the Digital Library Program.]

The anti-immigration crusade interwoven with eugenics reached its zenith immediately before and after World War I when “middle-class Americans feared a Bolshevik-style political takeover from Russian Jewish immigrants or a Papal takeover from Irish, Italian, and Polish Catholics.” (Engs, 2005, 115-117). Madison Grant’s *Passing of The Great Race* (1916) greatly influenced anti-immigration supporters along with the powerful revitalized Ku Klux Klan. Noted Yale economics professor, Irving Fisher (1921, 226) stated that “the core of the problem of immigration is one of race and eugenics.” Henry F. Osborn (1923, 9), director of the American Museum of Natural History, suggested, “For America eugenics rests both on birth selection and upon immigrant selection.” These opinions were similar to many other nativist and eugenic supporters.

Nativism linked with eugenics peaked with the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924. In 1920, the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization published *Biological Aspects of Immigration* which largely consisted of Harry Laughlin’s “expert testimony” to the committee. Eugenics supporters, along with the Immigration Restriction League, campaigned for more comprehensive laws. This led to a temporary National Origins Act in 1921 followed by the 1924 act. The bill mandated a quota of foreign born to 2% of the ethnic groups who resided in the country in 1890, which were mostly northern Europeans, and guaranteed that the proportion of new immigrants from southern and eastern-Europe would be small. This national origins exclusion mandate was not revised until the 1965 Celler Act. (Mehler 1988, 2; Ludmerer 1976b, 61)

The Birth Control and Eugenic Sterilization Movements: Preventing Conception

The birth control movement was an aspect of the “woman” or feminist movement of the early twentieth century (DeVilbiss, 1923, 49). Most leaders of the birth control movement were women. The term *birth control* was coined by Margaret Sanger (1931, 191) in 1914 the founder of the campaign to “cast off the bondage of involuntary parenthood” (Dennett, 1926, 172). Another early leader was sex education and woman suffrage advocate Mary Ware Dennett. However, Sanger, after clashes with Dennett, in the early 1920s emerged as leader of the movement (Chesler 1992, 233). Many health and social reformers were against the birth control movement including eugenics supporters, such as Popenoe (1926, 145, 148) who thought the crusade was run by “sob sisters” and proposed that the “Birth Control cult should be repudiated by all responsible people.”



Lydia de Vilbiss, a birth control researcher and educator, promoted both positive and negative eugenics. [From *Physical Culture* (1915). Image courtesy Lilly library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.]

In the early twentieth-century, educated and well-to-do women were able to obtain contraception. However, in order to make birth control available for poor women, it would be necessary to repeal the 1873 Comstock Law, which prohibited materials on sexuality from being sent through the mail. Contraception information was considered pornography. DeVilbiss remarks that many physicians "under the cloak of professional secrecy" prescribe "therapeutic contraceptives for their patients. But few... have the opportunity or the courage to prescribe for the poor, miserable wretches they so often meet in the free dispensaries and in the wards of charity hospitals." Indeed, to do so would cause them to lose their hospital privileges or risk arrest. (1923, 165-166).

De Vilbiss summarizes the beginnings of the birth control movement. "On October 16, 1916 Margaret Sanger, a trained nurse... opened a clinic in a crowded section of Brooklyn. The story of this clinic, the arrest of Mrs. Sanger and her sister, Ethel Byrne, also a trained nurse, their days in prison, their trials and finally their release will always remain one of the most thrilling chapters in the history of the long struggle for human freedom." (DeVilbiss 1923, 169). Sanger had previously been indicted for discussing birth control in her newsletter *Women Rebel* in 1914 and also for a birth control pamphlet *Family Limitations*. These charges were later dropped.

The birth control movement was ignored by most health and social reformers in the pre-WWI years as Sanger was considered a radical and physicians were sometimes ignorant about the subject. William Robinson was one of the few physicians who openly championed birth control. During the 1920s, agitation for birth control was in full swing and Sanger changed tactics. She forged relationships with the medical profession, courted the middle class and embraced eugenics (Chesler 1992, 216, 277-281; Spiro 2009, 193).

In 1921, Sanger organized the American Birth Control League, an educational and lobbying organization, and the first American Birth Control Conferences in New York City. De Vilbiss, the chair of the conference, instructed physicians on various contraceptive devices. At the last session of the conference, the Catholic diocese, which considered birth control murder, arranged to have the police shut down Sanger's presentation and arrest her. The news media publicized the arrest and over 1500 participants attended the rescheduled presentation (Kennedy 1970, 94-99).

Sanger, in 1923, established the Birth Control Clinical Research Bureau, a contraceptive and research clinic which was run as a private practice; the first director was soon let go. Hanna Stone, MD, was hired and carried out detailed research. In 1920, Robert Dickinson, MD, who had decried Sanger's campaigns, was elected president of the American Gynecological Society and began to organize professional interest in birth control. He attempted to run his own birth control clinic but it failed. He created the Maternity Research Council and joined in an uneasy alliance with Sanger to oversee operations of her clinic and collect research data (Chesler 1992, 273-277).

Sanger organized the Sixth International Neo-Malthusian and Birth Control Conference in New York in 1925 and Stone gave preliminary results of birth control methods. At the conference, Johnson proposed a resolution urging larger families by "persons whose progeny gives promise

of being a decided value to the community.” Sanger, however, retorted that the birth control movement was “urging smaller families ...[and] offers an instrument of liberation to overburdened humanity” (Sanger quoted in Popenoe 1926, 149)

Mary Ware Dennett established the National Birth Control League to repeal the Comstock law in 1915. She advocated a “clean repeal” of the law rather than a "doctors only" bill advocated by Sanger that would give exclusive rights to physicians to disseminate birth control. (Dennett, 1926, 94-96,219-220) The hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church was opposed to any attempts to change the laws and put pressure on politicians to maintain the law, even for physicians. When Dennett’s initial efforts for repeal failed, she stepped down as a birth control leader. After her sex education pamphlet, *The Sex Side of Life*, was banned Dennett continued to campaign for repeal of the repressive statutes. In 1930, the courts finally overthrew the ban on mailing sex education material due to her efforts (Chesler 1992, 143-145; Chen 1996).

By the late-1920s, birth control became more acceptable to physicians. In 1925, psychiatrist Adolf Meyer published a book based upon the 1923 birth control conference organized by Sanger. It was a "symposium dealing with the subject from a number of angles." His contributors included notable academics and university presidents who supported both birth control and eugenics.

By the mid-1930s birth control leagues had emerged in many states and in 1942 they united to become the Planned Parenthood Federation of America. In 1936, after the Comstock laws were overturned, birth control devices could also be sent through the mail. However, many states continued to outlaw birth control clinics until the late 1960s (Chesler 1992, 372-373).

Although few statistics are available as to the effect of the birth control movement during the early twentieth century, a dramatic decrease in crude birth rate from 1910 to 1940 occurred resulting in smaller families. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) and Department of Public Health, Education and Welfare (DHEW) imply this was due to many factors including increased use of contraception, decreased infant mortality rate, urbanization, increase in age of marriage, increased education, and the economic Depression. Other contributing factors included the beginning of the manufacturing of diaphragms in 1925, endorsement of birth control in 1927 by the AMA, and family planning included as a part of public health in the late 1930s (CDC 1999; DHEW 1977). In 1940, a study of 3,500 women and their contraceptive use, focusing on upper middle-class women, was published; subjects were interviewed in 1933. The study showed that 83% used some type of fertility control, including 77% of Catholic women. The authors, however, remarked that the “[declining] birth rate and the effectiveness of ... particular contraceptive practices is not clear.” (Riley and White 1940, p. 890).

Birth control and eugenics were linked. By the early 1920s, Sanger, like most health and social welfare professionals of the time, accepted eugenics. Sanger contended “an American race, containing the best of all racial elements could give to the world a vision and a leadership beyond our present imagination” (1921, 46). However, this would not happen until immigrants were no longer “herded into slums to become diseased, to become social burdens... We have huddled them together like rabbits to multiply their numbers and their misery”.... Out of these

conditions come “the feeble minded and other defectives.” (1921, 37, 40)



Margaret Sanger was the leader of the birth control movement. From *Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division* (LC-USZ62-29808). http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/list/235_pos.html

Some eugenic advocates promoted birth control as a eugenic measure including Edward A. Ross and Harvard geneticist Edward M. East. Robinson (1922, 16) suggested "there is no other single measure that would so positively, so immediately contribute towards the happiness and progress of the human race" than “knowledge of the proper measures for prevention of conception.” Wiggam asserted that "when birth control is not universal it acts to decrease intelligence and character and increase incompetents and poverty" (Inman 1930, 17).

Other eugenic advocates were ambivalent about birth control. Economist Irving Fisher feared “race suicide of scientific and educated men and of well-to-do classes ...But it is plain that the extension of birth-control to all classes will tend to rectify this situation” (1921, 224-225). DeVilbiss (1923, 175) cautions “there is one great danger in the too wide acceptance of the practice of Birth Control...it might result in a sudden lowering of the birth rate... principally among the socially fit.” Popenoe and Johnson (1918, 269) noted, however, that native born old-stock “women no longer bear as many children, because they don’t want to.”

A few religious groups were against birth control. The Catholic Church was against both birth control and eugenic sterilization. Charles P. Bruehl (1928), writing from a Catholic perspective, in *Birth Control and Eugenics* details the objections to these practices on moral and religious grounds. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (“Mormons”) was also opposed to birth control on religious grounds but considered it acceptable for certain medical or “inherited” conditions (Bush 1976, 20-22; Bush 1992, 168).

Although birth control was unacceptable to some eugenic and nativist enthusiasts, eugenic sterilization was championed by most. Physician Harry Sharp, who worked in an Indiana State Reformatory, began eugenic sterilizations surgery in 1899. He convinced the Indiana state legislature that sterilization of criminals, feeble minded, and others thought unfit would be a tax-saving measure. The first eugenic sterilization law was passed in Indiana in 1907. Between 1907 and 1931, 36 states enacted these laws (Laughlin, 1922, 1-4; Engs, 2005, 55). Laughlin developed a model sterilization law in 1922.

The eugenic sterilization aspect of the eugenics movement peaked with the United States

Supreme Court decision, *Buck v. Bell* (1927), which upheld a states right to legally sterilize individuals considered “mentally defective.” Many of these individuals were immigrants. Gosney and Popenoe (1929, ix) in *Sterilization for Human Betterment* discussed the results of 60,000 sterilizations in California, the highest of any state. They lauded the *Buck v. Bell* decision. Although some states repealed these laws, it was not until the 1970s that eugenic sterilizations went out of favor. In May 2002, the governor of Virginia apologized to all those who had been forcibly sterilized in his state as did Vermont, Oregon, North and South Carolina, and California between 2002-2003 and Indiana in 2006 (Klein 2002, Stern 2005). Information on voluntary sterilization to control fertility by the middle-class in the 1920s and 30s is not available.

Changes in the interpretation of the eugenics, immigration restriction, and birth control movements appear to come in about two decade intervals. The rest of the chapter will examine the evolving historiographies beginning in the 1950s when academics first began to research these issues.

THE 1950s-1960s: **EARLY HISTORIOGRAPHY**

Eugenics

In the immediate post-World War II years, eugenics was vilified due to its association with Nazi Germany. Scholars ignored the topic until historian Mark H. Haller published *Eugenics: Hereditarian Attitudes in American Thought* (1963). This classic work is a broad based interpretation of the mid-19th century hereditarian and early 20th-century eugenics movements. Haller suggests that the origins of the movement arose from mid-nineteenth century scientific observations of both positive and negative characteristics thought to be due to heredity. Unlike some later historiographies of the eugenics movement and its leaders, Haller writes in an objective manner and does not scoff at, or label leaders, as “racist,” or “bigots.” He notes “a history of eugenics is a history of science and its social implications” (p. v).

Haller divides the eugenics movement into three segments and argues that from 1905-1930 the organized movement was at its peak and declined after 1930. However, some recent scholars suggest that eugenics continued into the 1970s as part of the birth control movement and is currently an underpinning of genetic engineering (Stern 2005). Haller shows how leaders of the day accepted the inheritability of various health and social problems and were thus led to solve these problems through eugenic reforms. Haller also discusses the influence of eugenics on immigration restriction and the ambivalence male eugenics supporters felt regarding birth control and its leaders, in particular Sanger.

Donald K. Pickens soon followed Haller with *Eugenics and the Progressives* (1968). Pickens linked the eugenic movement with other Progressive Era reforms to regulate human behavior

considered detrimental to the health and economy of the nation. He argued that the eugenic movement was based upon Darwinian naturalism and was a conservative progressive reform. Pickens (1968, 5), like Haller, suggests that “the Great Depression of 1929 and the rise of genetics marked the decline of eugenics as an organized movement.” He contends that Margaret Sanger and the birth control movement sought to restore and strengthen the basic family unit. Pickens (p. 84-85) argues that Sanger felt the problems of an increasing urban society could be solved by birth control and eugenic sterilization. He, however, barely mentions immigration restriction.

Immigration restriction

David M. Reimers (1990, 10) argues that "the emergence of the new social history in the 1960s... served to turn the attention of historians toward immigration." Although there had been popular works about immigrants earlier, John Higham (1955), in *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925*, was the first historian to examine nativism and its influence on public policy. He explores the intertwining of nativism with eugenics, fear of "race suicide," belief in the genetic superiority of the Anglo-Saxon "race" and supposed "inferiority" of the "dysgenic" eastern and southern-Europeans resulting in the 1924 National Origins Act. "From eugenicists' point of view, the immigration question was at heart a biological one, and to them admitting 'degenerate breeding stock' seemed one of the worst sins the nation could commit against itself" (p. 151). Higham implies that both the eugenics and the immigration restriction movements were racist.

The following year Barbara Miller Solomon's (1956) *Ancestors and Immigrants* discussed the Immigration Restriction League and its Harvard graduate founders including Prescott F. Hall. She traced the increased hostile attitudes of upper-class Bostonians toward new immigrants of other "races" – southern and eastern-European—and the fear of the degeneration of the "superior Yankee stock." The League accepted eugenic methods and birth control as a way to improve society but restriction of immigration was the first step toward accomplishing this (p.151). She also discussed the influence of David Starr Jordan, other eugenic proponents, and family history studies on immigration restriction.

David M. Chalmers (1965) in *Hooded Americanism* proposed that the re-emergence of the KKK in 1916 was the result of rampant nativism. The Klan in the 1920s was mostly anti-Catholic and anti-Jewish and supported immigration restriction laws. The Klan relied on both Stoddard's and Grant's writings to support their actions for "purifying the race." Stoddard may have been a member of the organization (Chalmers 1965, 33, 270-271).

Birth control

Clover F. Gross' (2006, 1), Master's thesis on Margaret Sanger suggests that "each new generation reinterprets historical events to suit the prevailing *zeitgeist*. The accepted facts surrounding the work do not generally vary, but the political and social implications can and do change with the intention of the researcher and author. Depending on the political, social and religious attitudes of individual historians, Margaret Sanger is variously characterized as a courageous feminist heroine, a brazen public nuisance, or calculating social engineer." Thus

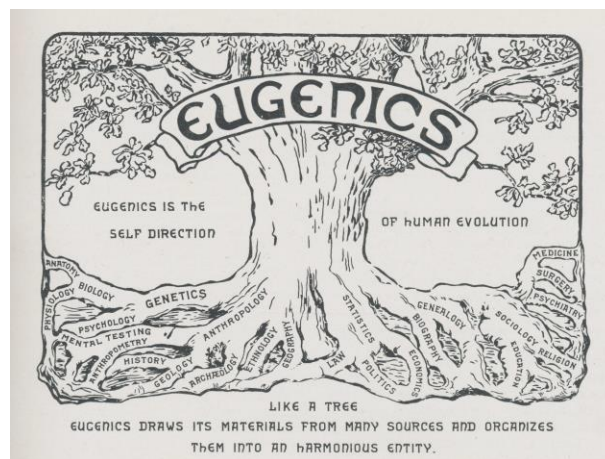
contested and conflicting interpretations of the early birth control movement and Sanger are found over the past 50 years. She has been both demonized and sainted.

No scholarly works were published about Sanger and the birth control movement in the 1950-1960 period other than Peter Fryer's (1956) *The Birth Controllers*. Sanger had published two autobiographies in the 1930s and a few popular press biographies were published in the 1960s, two as young-adult literature that regard Sanger as a heroine. Fryer focuses upon the UK, but presents a short biography of Sanger and her part as the movement's major leader in the United States although he does not discuss Sanger's support for eugenics.

1970s – 1980s: INCREASED INTEREST AND CONTESTED INTERPRETATIONS

Eugenics

Beginning in the 1970s two trends emerged concerning the eugenics movement that characterized historiography over the next two decades. Barry Mehler (1988, 7) in his dissertation notes that although little had been written on eugenics from 1940-1970 since then "there has been a virtual explosion of interest in eugenics in the United States and Europe." He attributes this to sperm banks, genetic testing and other new technologies or what some later called the "new eugenics." Secondly, some historians began to condemn eugenics supporters and the eugenic movement as racist or focused only on negative eugenics.



Eugenics had support from many disciplines. From: *Journal of Heredity* (1922) Wells Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana. Image courtesy of the Digital Library Program.

Kenneth Ludmerer (1972a, 2-3) in *Genetics and American Society* defines several "historical" views of eugenics: a science to improve the genetics of the human race; a program to promote these improvements; a social movement; and a "pseudo-science sanctuary for bigots and racists." He considered it a social movement advancing both positive and negative eugenics. Ludmerer

(1972a, 5) uses the term *scientific racism* for those who believed scientific evidence supported Nordic superiority and argues that only these individuals can be defined as racists. He does caution that eugenic supporters “must be judged by the standards of their own period rather than by those of the present.”

Carl J. Bajema (1976, 5-6), biologist and former secretary of the AES, soon followed with an edited series of essays in *Eugenics Then and Now*. In his editor’s comments, he suggests that attribution of racism to eugenics was because "confusion has and still exists as to the precise meaning of ‘eugenics.’” He also argues that reformers such as Margaret Sanger, like other neo-Malthusians, were concerned with instituting social programs designed to regulate the size of human populations by bringing about a more widespread use of birth control (p. 52).

The following two monographs interpret eugenics as a pseudoscience and focus on negative eugenics. Daniel Kevles’ (1985) *In the Name of Eugenics* is a comparative study of British and American eugenics. He discusses Charles Davenport's concern about the unfit passing on defective traits. He details the American sterilization laws, influence of eugenics on immigration, and the ambivalent reactions to birth control by eugenicists and argues “by the mid-thirties, mainline eugenics had generally been recognized...as a flawed science” (p. 164). David Smith’s (1985) *Minds Made Feeble* examines Goddard's research of the Kallikak family and discusses the faulty research methods used in that study. Smith also contends that the eugenics movement was based upon pseudoscience.

Some historians refuted the interpretations that the eugenics movement was primarily a racist or a negative movement. Barbara Ross (1985) in an essay claims it is historically incorrect to use "today’s enlightened view" to label an earlier generation of eugenic leaders racists. Nicole Hahn Rafter (1988) reviews the studies of “dysgenic” families in *White Trash: The Eugenic Family Studies, 1877-1919*. She notes that these studies focused on lower-class white families and not minorities. James Crow in a 1988 book review essay "Eugenics: Must it be a Dirty Word?" criticizes Kevles, Haller, and Ludmerer for misinterpreting eugenics, focusing on the “bad side of eugenics” and minimizing its “more lofty aims” including healthy children wanted by parents (p.12). David Smith and Ray Nelson (1989) in *The Sterilization of Carrie Buck* give a detailed account of the 1927 *Buck v Bell* case which gave states the legal authority to sterilize individuals against their wishes.

Several authors examined the history of eugenic organizations. Frederick Osborn (1974), the nephew of Henry Osborn, in “The History of American Eugenic Society” discusses the workings of the society and its change over time. Later Garland Allen (1986) published “The Eugenic Record Office at Cold Spring Harbor, 1910-1940.” This essay is a detailed and comprehensive history of the organization.

Barry Mehler’s (1988, 1-2) dissertation, *A History of the American Eugenics Society, 1921-1940*, is an in-depth study of the development, the rise, and transformation of American eugenics and the movement’s leadership. He argues that "the eugenics movement had a significant impact on American society. Eugenics was an integral part of the Progressive movement, and the study of

eugenics is inseparable from the study of genetics, public health, criminal justice, and the welfare state in general"(p. 1-2) .

Immigration

Ludmerer's (1972b) essay "Genetics, Eugenics, and the Immigration Restriction Act of 1924," explores the interrelationship of eugenic and anti-immigrant sentiments based upon the supposition that north-western Europeans were more "genetically fit" than southern and eastern-Europeans. He notes that "Prominent eugenicists did not invent the view of Nordic superiority, but they elaborated and popularized it" (p. 60). He concludes that eugenic experts gave the defining information that led to the Immigration Restriction Act of 1924. This essay along with his book (1972a) provided the first in-depth look at intertwining of eugenics, genetics and immigration restriction during the Harding-Coolidge era. Edward Hutchinson's (1981) *Legislative History of American Immigration Policy, 1790-1965* presents legislation action passed by Congress. It details the step-by-step procedures of various bills and discusses legislative bias against various racial groups and health conditions.

Birth control

In the 1970s, several historians published works on Margaret Sanger and the birth control movement; most showed its links with eugenics. David M. Kennedy (1970) wrote a critical interpretation of Sanger in *Birth Control in America: The Career of Margaret Sanger*. He claims "her contrary disposition sometimes hobbled more than it helped her movement...and the praise Margaret Sanger received often seemed out of proportion to her achievement" (p. 275). He minimizes her importance to the birth control movement and suggests she was responsible for slowing down the dispersal of contraceptive information (p. 211). Kennedy discusses her integration of eugenics with birth control and its link with immigration. He notes that when Sanger used the term "unfit" she was not referring to "races or religions."

Linda Gordon (1974) in *The Moral Property of Women* contends that birth control politics and the movement was a fundamental part of the feminist movement for emancipation and that birth control was primarily an issue of politics, not of technology. Gordon focuses on class and gender issues. Like Kennedy, Gordon is critical of Sanger's aggressive tactics and suggests she became a pawn of the conservative elite. She discusses Sanger's support of eugenics which was a constant theme at her 1920s birth control conferences.

James Reed's (1978) *From Private Vice to Public Virtue* traces the birth control movements through its leaders. He is positive toward Sanger and contends she felt "that birth control was the essential first step in any rational plan for freeing women or breeding a better race" and took help wherever she could get it including middle-class eugenics supporters (p. 131). One of these, Physician Robert Dickinson, worked to get the medical profession to accept sex and contraception research. Reed touches on nativist influences of the era, concerns of "differential fertility" and eugenics as it related to birth control. Madeline Gray's (1979) *Margaret Sanger*, based upon her papers, looks at Sanger's private life more than the birth control movement. Gray is silent on Sanger's interweaving of eugenics with birth control.

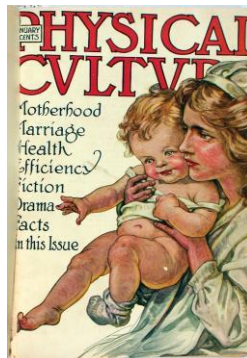
1990s: AN UPSURGE OF RESEARCH

The 1990s through the next decade saw the exploration of these movements in terms of more specific themes and a focus on negative eugenics.

Eugenics

Carl Degler's (1991) *In Search of Human Nature: the Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought* examines social Darwinism and its effect upon Progressive era leaders and their motivations which led to social changes in the 1920s. Eugenics was seen as a way to produce a better and healthier society. Philip R. Reilly (1991) in *The Surgical Solution* traces the implementation of the eugenic sterilizations laws as the best method for preventing the birth of the physically and mentally unfit. He covers the rise and fall of this public policy in the United States.

Jonathan Marks' (1993, 651) in his essay “Historiography of Eugenics,” contends that changes in opinion about eugenics over the past 50 years have resulted in revisionist history which has come in three forms: 1. Pretend the movement never happened, 2. Push eugenics to the margins led by pseudo-scientists, 3. Downplay the movement among American geneticists. He argues that the eugenics movement was multifaceted and the achievements of society, past or future, are tied to genetics. Eugenacists feared that if the unfit were allowed to reproduce, they would soon outbreed the hard working upper classes. He contends that the eugenic movement, among mainstream biologists, was a science. It was not until the Coolidge years when geneticists in writing first opposed the underpinnings of eugenics. However, anthropologist Franz Boas had earlier opposed the concept in 1916.



Positive eugenics was a way to promote healthier mothers, babies and society. [From *Physical Culture* (1916). Image courtesy Lilly library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana]

Religion, race, and geographic areas and eugenic practices were investigated as well in the 1990s. Lester Bush, Jr. (1992, 167-169) discusses positive eugenic practices among early twentieth century Mormons (Latter-day Saints) such as allowing only “righteous” men—those who were responsible and employed—to marry. It was the duty of worthy Mormons to allow as many possible “pre-moral” spirit children to be born, thus large families were encouraged. Eugenic sterilization was allowed for those with “a taint in the blood” or who were “mentally

incompetent.”

David Smith (1993) in *The Eugenic Assault on America* discusses the leaders who supported eugenic segregation and sterilization of poor whites, blacks, mixed races, and Native American Indians in Virginia. He argues that eugenics, based upon prejudice, was raised to a science and that “the eugenics movement in America was an attempt at genocide on several fronts” (p.111).

In *Sex, Race, and Science: Eugenics in the Deep South*, Edward Larson (1995, 2) contends that professionals were “worried more about the deterioration of the Caucasian race than about any threat from the African race.” He describes the political process of how middle-class and professional southerners used the new science of eugenics to justify public policies of marriage restriction, involuntary sterilization, and segregation of the “white trash” and the “unfit” along with limits on immigration.

Nancy Gallagher’s (1997) *Breeding Better Vermonters* details the activities of Professor Henry Perkins who completed family studies of indigent Vermonters. Perkins pushed eugenic sterilization as a public health measure for those who were perceived feeble minded, in particular Abenaki Indians.

Diane Paul’s (1995) *Controlling Human Heredity* examines the eugenic movement in the context of massive changes due to urbanization, industrialization and immigration which created fear and a demand for social order. Eugenics entwined with immigration restriction offered stability to keep undesirables out of the country. Martin S. Pernick (1996) examines a 1916 film supporting negative eugenics and euthanasia, *The Black Stork*. He details the controversy surrounding the withholding of treatment from a severely physically and mentally deformed newborn, with parental consent, upon which the film was based.

In 1997, Ian Robert Dowbiggin in *Keeping America Sane* explores the relationship of psychiatry with eugenics. Psychiatrists were often called upon to testify in sterilization and segregation cases. Steven Selden (1999) in *Inheriting Shame* describes the links between eugenics and education and argues that the movement was racist and mostly led by racists.

Gina M. Rachmaninoff’s (1998) master’s thesis, *Eugenics Movement: The Immigration Law of 1924*, contends that eugenics was the major factor for passage of the National Origins Act. She discusses nativist and racial theories, leaders, and organizations that pushed through this law.

Few historians have examined positive eugenics. Annette K. Vance Dorey’s (1999) *Better Baby Contests* investigates the role of women in the eugenics movement. She describes competitive baby contests where babies were judged “scientifically.” The contests encouraged mothers to improve the health of their children so their babies would be prizewinners at local and state agricultural fairs.

Immigration restriction

George E. Pozzetta assembled a collection of essays from the 1970s on the major themes and issues surrounding immigration including nativism, racism, anti-Semitism and anti-Catholicism, and eugenics. Contested interpretations are found in these essays.

Alan N. Kraut (1994) *Silent Travelers* explores the efforts of public health authorities, sometimes with nativist attitudes, to prevent immigrants with potentially fatal infectious diseases from entering the country. Eugenic concerns also underlay restriction of “unfit” immigrants who were diseased or mentally or physically weak. Kraut demonstrates the influence of the Eugenics Record Office on immigration restriction policies of the 1920s and details the cultural clash between the new eastern and southern-European immigrant health customs and America’s attempt to educate them in personal hygiene and health care in order to prevent disease.

In *Unwelcome Strangers* David M. Reimers (1998) traces the development of nativism with each wave of immigrants from the 1850s through current times including “unfit” southern and eastern European “races” in the 1910s and 1920s. However, he barely touches the eugenic influences that promoted immigration restriction. Reimers relates nativism to the prevailing conception of national identity, citizenship, and Americanization of each time period.

Birth Control

Birth control advocates associated with eugenics were demonized or considered racists in the popular press during the decades of the 1970s-1980s. This was particularly true of Margaret Sanger. Several works by historians, however, refuted these accusations in the 1990s; most were written by women. Ellen Chesler’s (1992) *Woman of Valor* is a classic and comprehensive biography of Margaret Sanger and the birth control movement based upon a wide variety of archival material. Chesler lauds Sanger as a feminist and leader and argues that Sanger’s “primary interest was to redress economic and gender inequality and to promote healthier, healthier, happier families”(p. 216). Like other health and social welfare professionals of the day, Chesler notes that Sanger embraced eugenics.

In *Birth Control Policies in the United States, 1916-1945*, Carole McCann (1994) views Sanger as a product of her age who sought to blend the science of eugenics with birth control. McCann discusses black community leaders’ acceptance of birth control who, in coalition with Sanger worked to establish a birth control clinic in Harlem. McCann also notes that the term *Sangerism* "meant the use of contraceptives by women to control their fertility. Among opponents the same word referred to the “villainous practice of contraception which they derided" (p. 5).

Constance M. Chen's (1996) *The Sex Side of Life* is the first full-length biography of birth control crusader Mary Ware Dennett. Chen traces Dennett's personal and political struggles, involvement in feminist causes, and her conflict with Sanger for control of the birth control movement. Chen eulogizes Dennett and paints a negative picture of Sanger.

2000-2012: SPECIFIC THEMES AND CONTINUED CONTESTED INTERPRETATIONS

Some historians focused on negative eugenics or continued to condemn eugenics and immigration restriction as racist movements, while others gave more objective interpretations. More publications explored specific topics related to these issues.

Eugenics

Several works focused on negative eugenics, in particular eugenic sterilization. E.A. Carlson (2001) *The Unfit: A History of a Bad Idea* gives an overview of the history of eugenic sterilization. Wendy Kline (2002), *Building a Better Race* discusses both positive and negative eugenics and aspects of the movement that involved the role of women in society. She argues that negative eugenics continued into the 1970s. Alexandra Minna Stern (2005) in *Eugenic Nation* focuses on the eugenic sterilization laws in California. Paul Lombardo (2008) in *Three Generations, No Imbeciles* details the 1927 Supreme Court case *Buck v. Bell*, which allowed states to perform involuntary eugenic sterilization surgery to prevent "feebleminded and socially inadequate" people from bearing children.

In the last decade, historians began to discuss new details concerning the eugenics movement. In 2002, Brian Regal wrote *Henry Fairfield Osborn*, the first full biography of this early twentieth-century conservationist and researcher. Regal provides an objective look at the very complex nature of Osborn and describes his positive and negative characteristics. Under his leadership Osborn turned the American Museum of Natural History into one of the most prestigious museums in the world. As an academic he produced over 900 publications, though he gave little credit to his staff in these works. Regal discusses Osborn's search for human origins and his interaction with other nativist and eugenic supporters. He points out the intertwining of eugenics, nativism and immigration restriction and the part Osborn played in these movements. Osborn was a leading pioneer of both the eugenics and immigration restriction movements. He was greatly concerned about interbreeding of Nordic with more "degenerate races" and championed immigration restriction legislation.

Christine Rosen's *Preaching Eugenics* (2004), is a study of the American clergy's involvement in the eugenics movement in 1926. A number of liberal Protestants and Catholics and Reformed Jewish clergy began to preach about eugenics. In 1928, the AES journal *Eugenics* had a special preacher's issue. Like other leaders, noted clergy were concerned about impoverished and unskilled immigrants moving into the urban areas and the resulting social problems. Therefore, they adopted eugenics as a method of social reform inspired by the Progressive Movement. For many religious leaders, eugenic ideals were based on "compassion, empathy and social responsibility" (p. 23).

Ruth Clifford Engs (2005) published the first encyclopedia on the eugenics movement. This award winning reference, *The Eugenics Movement*, includes information about organizations, conferences, personalities, theories, and publications involved with the movement, primarily in the United States, and secondarily, in Great Britain and Germany.

Thomas Leonard (2005, 207) wrote an essay which "documents the influence of eugenic ideas upon American economic reform, especially in the areas of immigration and labor reform." David Cullen's 2007 comprehensive bibliographical essay, "Back to the Future: Eugenics," reviews the literature of scholars and others over the past 50 years who have researched the eugenics movement. The essay explores the influence of Darwinian thought upon eugenics, institutional support of its growth, and how it was a precursor of 21st-century genetic

engineering which has led to a renewed interest in the subject.

Nathaniel Deutsch (2009), in *Inventing America's Worst Family: Eugenics, Islam, and the Fall and Rise of the Tribe of Ishmael* traces the historiography of "The Tribe of Ishmael" from 1870s to the present. This "cacogenic" family was used as an example of the need for eugenic sterilization in the 1920s. In the 1960s, a popular work claimed the family was descended from escaped slaves who established the first Muslim community in the United States. Detailed research by Deutsch shows they were descended from hard-working southern up-landers attempting to survive during an era of rapid industrialization and urbanization. Deutsch notes that every generation of American scholars has projected its own ideological and psychological needs on its interpretations of the past.

Jonathan Peter Spiro (2009) published *Defending the Master Race*, the first major biography of Madison Grant. Spiro describes Grant as the leading racist of his day. He points out the evolution of scientific racism and the fear of the decline of the northern European "race" which led Grant and others to push for immigration restriction laws. Spiro also discusses the conservation movement which arose simultaneously with the eugenics and other Progressive era movements. Spiro argues that for Grant saving endangered American fauna and flora was akin to "saving his own endangered race" (p. xiii). The book describes the many noted eugenic supporters who also endorsed birth control and how the two movements drew closer in the 1920s. He contends that "Margaret Sanger was increasingly willing to endorse coercion to forestall the 'peril' of the feebleminded" (p.193).

Paul A. Lombardo, in 2011, edited *A Century of Eugenics in America*. This work emerged out of the 100 year commemoration of the first eugenic sterilization law in Indiana. Several chapters focus on eugenic sterilization issues in the early 20th century.

John Glad's (2011) *Jewish Eugenics* details Jewish eugenics supporters. He notes that "given the massive assault on the eugenics movement as a supposedly 'anti-Semitic ideology of genocide... historical veracity requires that the distorted image produced over the last four decades be rectified" (p.9). Glad documents the many Jews including physicians, Reform rabbis, and other professionals who took leadership roles and supported the movement in the United States and abroad.

Immigration

Based upon primary and secondary sources, Desmond King's *Making Americans* (2000) discusses the influence of nativism and eugenics on the 1924 National Origins Act and argues that immigration restriction policies were based upon racism. He reviews the shifting patterns of migration from northern to southern and eastern-Europe in the early 20th century.

Douglas C. Baynton (2005) in his essay, "Defectives in the Land," points out the increased exclusion of disabled immigrants for health and social welfare reasons during the first two decades of the 20th century. Disabled immigrants were seen as a threat to the nation as it was feared they would become public charges or pass their physical and mental degeneracy to their children. Ali Behdad (2005) in *A Forgetful Nation* argues that the cultural identity of Americans,

which is rooted in nativism, historically excludes immigrants. He argues that eugenics, "germ theory," and heredity became the basis for objection to immigrants in early 20th century.

Susan F. Martin (2011) in *A Nation of Immigrants* discusses four waves of immigration from colonial times to the present and the ambivalence of the American population towards immigrants. Martin briefly mentions eugenics and its influence on restriction of mentally and physically "defective people" beginning in 1907. Russell O. Wright (2008) follows key events in immigration from the 18th century in *Chronology of Immigration in the United States*. In an appendix he examines the "effect of the then-popular pseudo-science of eugenics on the development of the very restrictive Immigration Act of 1924." (p. 185)

Birth control

Historiographies of Margaret Sanger and the birth control movement, as in the 1990s, were primarily written by women who continued to offer conflicting interpretations. Although usually based upon the same archival material, the authors often derived dramatically different conclusions.

Melissa Doak and Rachel Brugger (2000) in *How Did the Debate between Margaret Sanger and Mary Ware Dennett Shape the Movement to Legalize Birth Control, 1915-1924?* examine Dennett and Sanger and their differing approaches to birth control. Based upon numerous primary sources, the authors point out the intense rivalry that developed between the women.

Kathleen A. Tobin (2001) in *American Religious Debate over Birth Control, 1907-1937* details the official response of religious leaders to birth control. She argues that Sanger played on religious prejudices of the day by singling out the Catholic Church although conservative Protestant groups were also opposed to birth control (p.211). She briefly discusses the interlinking of nativism and immigration restriction with eugenics and birth control.

In 2001, Vern L. Bullough's edited *Encyclopedia of Birth Control* examines the struggle for control over reproduction and controversies surrounding these issues from a historical, biological, and social perspective. The encyclopedia champions women's rights and lauds birth control leaders including Margaret Sanger and makes no pretense of being neutral.

In contrast, Angela Franks (2005) in *Margaret Sanger's Eugenic Legacy* presents a hostile view of Sanger and Planned Parenthood, which emerged out of Sanger's birth control organization. She also criticizes previous historiographies concerning Sanger, eugenics, and the birth control movement. Franks contends that Sanger was a lifetime eugenicist who wanted to restrict the "unfit" from having children, but not a racist, because she did not consider members of other races "unfit" on account of their race.

Johanna Schoen's (2006), *Choice and Coercion*, focuses on the struggles women have experienced over the decades to obtain control over their own fertility. She mentions both Sanger and DeVilbiss and their roles in the birth control movements. Schoen focuses on eugenic sterilization and other reproductive issues in North Carolina and how they fit into public health and welfare.

Patricia Walsh Coates' (2008) *Margaret Sanger and the Origin of the Birth Control Movement, 1910-1930*, focuses on the feminist aspect of the movement pertaining to sexual autonomy and reproductive freedom for women. She points out that Sanger did not consider women free until they had control over their reproduction. Coates contends that Sanger's position on eugenics is complex—Sanger agreed that the biologically “unfit” should not procreate although she was against forced sterilization and disagreed with eugenicists who promoted fertility among the “fit” (pp. 112-113, 236). Coates traces the European influences which shaped Sanger on birth control as a way to achieve both sexual equality and satisfaction.

Jean H. Baker's (2011) *Margaret Sanger: A Life of Passion* is a sympathetic biography that refutes charges that Sanger was an elitist, racist or Nazi supporter. Baker discusses the contested portraits of Sanger by various historians and others over the last fifty years. She points out Sanger's significant work as a sex educator through her writings and lectures and her involvement with eugenics as a “female cause.” She argues that Sanger deserves to be reinstated to her important place in feminist history and as a leader for women's reproductive rights.

In summary, shifting and conflicting interpretations characterize the historiography of eugenics, immigration restriction and the birth control movements . Revisionist history has been common; some researchers have interpreted their subject through current attitudes and opinions rather than by attempting to understand the mindset of the early twentieth-century. Moreover, these issues have again cycled into the public view under different guises. Eugenics is now practiced as reproductive technology such as selecting the best embryo or desired gender for implantation in *in vitro* fertilization. Tighter immigration restriction laws and efforts to halt federal lawsuits against states that have tough immigration laws are advocated. Once again, the right of women to control their own reproduction is contentious. Conservative religious and political groups, for example, are putting pressure on state legislators and Congress to implement public policies to curtail the access to birth control or ban all abortions. This is reflected in the 2012 Republican platform that proposes not funding or subsidizing “health care that includes abortion coverage.” To fully understand the influence of eugenics, immigration restriction and women's reproductive rights on American culture over the past century, more research is needed.

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FURTHER READING

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Image archive on the American eugenics movement, [HTTP://www.eugenicsarchive.org/eugenics/](http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/eugenics/). This website contains a variety of information including a multitude of primary sources and family history studies and other information about the eugenics movement and the activities of Cold Springs Harbor, New York.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Professor Emerita, Ruth Clifford Engs, Applied Health Science, School of Public Health, Indiana University, Bloomington researches Progressive Era health crusades and crusaders. Her recent works include: *Unseen Upton Sinclair: Nine Unpublished Stories*, etc. (2009) *The Eugenics Movement: An Encyclopedia* (2005), *The Progressive Era Health Reform Movement* (2003) and *Clean Living Movements: American Cycles of Health Reform* (2001)