

# Study on the definition of eugenics history essay



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The definition of eugenics is the study and practice of selective breeding applied to humans, with the aim of improving the species. Sir Francis Galton coined the term eugenics in the 19th century as he studied agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations, whether physically or mentally (<http://www.eugenics-watch.com/roots/chap02.html>). He was the cousin of scientist Charles Darwin and made many of his observations through his cousins teachings of evolution and natural selection. Eugenics was not only studied in Europe, but very well accepted in the United States as well. People all over the world were interested in understanding the effects of genes on behavior and bodies in choosing who should reproduce and who should not. These ideals affected people all over the world and helped shape how people would perceive psychology. Eugenics has affected the human race through its tie with Nazi, Germany's Holocaust, the use of birth control in America and its hunger to control positive and negative reproduction in our world.

When looking into the affects of eugenics, the root must be discovered. There was a beginning point, and how did it get started? The term eugenics is derived from the Greek words “ eu” meaning good and “ gen” meaning birth. The suggestion of selective breeding in humans is rooted as far back as Plato. It was noted that the best men have intercourse with the best women and it is true of the opposite of society, in regards to inferiority. Eugenics has strong roots in 19th Century's social Darwinism where inequalities of fitness, competition, and biological rationalizations were popular (Kevles 2001). Many social Darwinists, influenced by Darwin's “ survival of the fittest” insisted that biology was destiny. Nature over nurture

influenced the broad spectrum of socially deleterious traits, ranging from criminality and poverty to mental illness; that all of society's problems including the feeble-minded and the licentious resulted from heredity (Marks). Sir Francis Galton, wanted to perfect the human race by, getting rid of its "undesirables" while multiplying its "desirables" (Inquiries into the Human). Galton concluded that, since one could use artificial selection to exaggerate traits in other animals, one could expect similar results when applying such models to humans. However the eugenics movement began in the 20th century and struck like wildfire. The United States and Germany took the biggest interest in this idea of improving the society through encouraging or forbidding reproduction. However, these two countries favored the idea of "negative" eugenics, which was through implementing sterilization on different social groups. Galton once wrote that the point of eugenics was to "give the more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing speedily over the less suitable" (Chase, p. 13). Galton wrote in a time where the industrial revolution had brought along some new medical advancement that decreased the death rate among newborn babies. These new technologies however were only given to the upper classes at first. As a result, the upper classes had a lower birth rate, as they were more confident in keeping their children alive. These very narrow ways of thinking came from the fact that he believed that the poor received diseases, were uneducated and illiterate and it was inevitable because they were born this way. He then in turn looked at the most prominent members of society and came to the assumption that they were biologically alike. After observing all of these members of society he decided that the "more suited" people were

Caucasian. This observation caused his thoughts of other races to be skewed.

Galton's writings and ideas on eugenics were adopted and put into practice by a number of Americans in the late 1800, but the true movement didn't begin to plummet until the founding of the Station for the Experimental Evolution in 1904 and the Eugenic Record Office in 1910 were put into place (MedscapeToday). The mission of these staffs were to find people who met the requirements as being " unfit" and study them or limit them. They relied on interviews, visual examinations, and IQ tests. Those people who did not pass these tests were often surgically sterilized to prevent transmission of their " defective germ-plasm" (MedscapeToday). All the way from 1914 through the 1970's, more than 30 states legalized sterilizations and more than 60, 000 U. S. citizens were sterilized against their will. Some might not realize that these things were related back to the study of eugenics. Those are people who forget the true principle and the craving for a master race. Interracial marriage was also outlawed in a number of states. Unfortunately these discoveries caused unprecedented biased opinions and caused more problems then supposedly solving them. Just as Galton's ideas took hold in America, they were also popular in Europe. Germany earned particular admiration from U. S. eugenicists by it's virtue of accomplishment right after the way (Medscape Today). These two parts of the world exchanged ideas and often encouraged each other to keep searching for that perfect master race. Both before and after Adolf Hitler came into power in 1933 the Rockefeller Foundation Provided hundreds of thousands of dollars into funding Germans to research the biological and social conditions of the

German people. Adolf Hitler used the principles of eugenics to justify his brutal torturing of the Jewish race as well as many other “undesirables”

Eugenics must be discussed parallel with the Holocaust because the two go hand in hand. The events that led to this awful sterilization, torture and slaughter of millions of Jewish, Gypsies, Slavs and children of mixed racial background were in fact rooted in the science of genetics (Murderous Science). The Nazis came to power in Germany in 1933 and were immediately infatuated with the racial purity of German people. They became deeply ensconced in the ideas of “negative” eugenics. Racial hygiene swept like wild fire through the German areas. Eugenic ideals were everywhere throughout the German medical, biological and scientific world even before World War II. Nazi Germany first went through steps to eliminate these undesirable genes by prohibiting sexual relationships on mixed races. They also infused sterilization and killing, demonstrated through negative eugenics (In the Name of Eugenics). If children had a parent of different racial background or were discovered of having likelihood to mental illness, alcoholism or mental retardation they were killed so these genes were not passed on. These so called precautions were done to remove the threat of contamination of genetic stock and avoid any further complications their differences might cause (In the Name of Eugenics). On the other end of the spectrum, but on a much smaller scale, Nazis were encouraged to have larger numbers of children. This is connected with the Lebensborn program which in turn gave money, medals and other awards to try and encourage the “best” mothers and fathers to have bigger families in order to create the perfect race. This is an example of positive eugenics and

it was used on a much smaller scale in Nazi, Germany as apposed to negative eugenics. The Lebensborn program sponsored communities Germans could live in to encourage their reproduction. The first home was opened in 1936 in Steinhöring, which was a village a ways from Munich. The house was furnished from the nicest Jewish homes and these types of villages were sprinkled all around Europe. Although the United States never had a mass genocide, there was an immoral idea of dispersing birth control. Margaret Sanger introduced the idea of eugenics through contraception.

Doctors were not allotted to give contraception or advice to anyone for the reason that contraception's were seen as being given to men and women that were unfaithful to their spouses. These types of restrictions deeply upset Margaret Sanger, so she would in turn devote her life to spreading knowledge in respect to contraception. Margaret Sanger's ideas did not stop there, in fact her attitude toward eugenics corresponded and skewed her teachings (Margaret Sanger's Eugenic Legacy). Margaret Sanger saw how unhappy some women were with the amount of children they gave birth too. It wasn't a question of loving them, it was an issue with being able to support them. Sanger wanted to provide a safe less traumatizing way to terminate pregnancies. She was quoted saying that

" I heard over and over again of their desperate efforts at bringing themselves `around' — drinking various herb-teas, taking drops of turpentine sugar, steaming over a chamber of boiling coffee or of turpentine water, rolling down stairs, and finally inserting slippery-elm sticks, or knitting needles, or shoe hooks into the uterus."-Margaret Sanger

At first Margaret Sanger's motives were completely pure. She wanted to be able to demonstrate safety and give women the power to choose. Later on, Sanger began to believe that birth control could be used as a way the upperclassmen could eliminate social disruption. She began to voice her concern with the fact that the birthrates of "white" and native to our country's birth rates were declining. (Margaret Sanger's Eugenic Legacy). Sanger thought it her job to advocate birth control to keep the socially unfit from reproducing. This movement drew its greatest support from the people that were witnessing the daily tragic consequences of hereditary diseased workers. Margaret Sanger's solution was simple She publicly announced in 1919 that "More children from the fit, and less from the unfit-that is the chief issue of birth control" (Kennedy 115). When speaking about the "unfit", Sanger was referring to the mentally challenged and physically deformed. She certainly did not believe that any things she was advocating were unjust. She thought these were justified through ridding the world of potential problems. In 1922 Sanger's ideas were getting more acknowledgment than ever before. She suggested that families should apply in order to have children. In addition to citizens applying for babies, foreigners shouldn't be able to reproduce in this country because "the filled the slums and made the cities wretched" (Kennedy 115).