

2017

## Ethics, Eugenics, and Public Education in Georgia (1910-1965)

Aaron Gerald Guest Sr.

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ETHICS, EUGENICS, AND PUBLIC EDUCATION IN  
GEORGIA (1910-1965)

Aaron Gerald Guest Sr.



COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY

ETHICS, EUGENICS, AND PUBLIC EDUCATION IN GEORGIA (1910-1965)

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE COLLEGE OF LETTERS AND SCIENCE  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS  
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY

BY

AARON GERALD GUEST SR.

COLUMBUS, GEORGIA

2017



ETHICS, EUGENICS, AND PUBLIC EDUCATION IN GEORGIA (1910-1965)

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Columbus State University

December 2017



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## ABSTRACT

This study traces the eugenics movement in Georgia, focusing on the ideology behind the social policies that led to the forced sterilizations of over four thousand Georgians from 1939 to 1965. This thesis will address the following questions: 1) How were Georgia's public policies affected by eugenics? 2) To what extent were the racial views of Georgians affected by scientific proclamations? 3) What role did the public schools play in educating the populace about eugenics?

This research will focus primarily on the scientific racial dynamic of America during the twentieth century, arguing that American political thought and the idea of a racial hierarchy were heavily influenced by eugenic ideology, which served as an "objective" justification for white hegemonic sociopolitical control. This approach to the subject challenges previous scholarship on the history of eugenics in Georgia by illustrating how the social philosophy influenced white supremacy, thus shaping the state's socio-political policies.

INDEX WORDS: Georgia, Eugenics, Sterilization, Public Education.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## DEDICATIONS

I am grateful to all of those with whom I have had the pleasure to work during this project. I gratefully begin my graduate studies to my advisor, Dr. James H. Hight. Although that opportunity never came to fruition, I am thankful for his encouragement and confidence in my research. I would like to thank Dr. Barbara Scaglia for her support and Dr. Brad Huff for his help with the geographical component of my research. To my thesis committee, Dr. Gary Sprayberry and Dr. Sarah Burrows, I appreciate your support and thank you for guiding my research. Thank you to the entire Department of History and Geography at Columbus State University. I would also like to thank the archivists and staff at the state archives in Morrow, Georgia, for making each visit enjoyable and productive. The residents of William Henry Spencer High School, whose own labors in the world kept mine going. My parents, Isaac and Lysette Guest for showing me unconditional love. My brother, Isaac Guest III for helping me organize my thoughts.



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I am grateful to all of those with whom I have had the pleasure to work during this project. I initially began my graduate studies as an assistant to Dr. Daniel Gullo. Although that opportunity never came to fruition, I am thankful for his encouragement and confidence in my research. I would like to thank Dr. Ilaria Scaglia for her support and Dr. Brad Huff for his help with the geographical component of my research. To my thesis committee, Dr. Gary Sprayberry and Dr. Sarah Bowman, I appreciate your support and thank you for guiding my research. Thank you to the entire Department of History and Geography at Columbus State University. I would also like to thank the archivists and staff at the state archives in Morrow, Georgia, for making each visit enjoyable and productive. The students of William Henry Spencer High School, whose own labors in the world kept mine going. My parents Isaac and Lynette Guest for showing me unconditional love. My brother, Isaac Guest III for helping me organize my thoughts.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the twentieth century, the scientific understanding of human variation determined the construction of racial identities. The social order of Western society became justified through the newly founded social philosophy of eugenics. As an academic study, eugenics was an interdisciplinary approach to the aspects of human biological variation heavily influenced by the theory of evolution, which enjoyed widespread acceptance since it emerged near the end of the nineteenth century. Described by its founder, Francis Galton, an English statistician and cousin of Charles Darwin, as the “self-determination of human evolution,” eugenics attempted to connect the spectrum of academic disciplines under the common goal of improving the genetic attributes of the human population.

Eugenics found a welcome home in the nineteenth-century rise of European nationalism and became an accepted tool in the development of European national identities.<sup>1</sup> Although the eugenics movement is typically associated with the social philosophy of the National Socialist Party in Germany, many of the ideologies and practices the Nazis embraced had been developed and refined in the United States.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the United States led the way in utilizing eugenic thought to influence national policies concerning race and social status. Along with pioneering compulsory sterilization programs in the twentieth century, eugenic ideology was predominant in America's naturalization policies centuries before Francis Galton created a title and academic discipline for the idea of biological and social European racial hegemony.<sup>3</sup> The issue of slavery predetermined

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (New York: Knopf, 1985), 46.

<sup>2</sup> Stefan Kühl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 13.

<sup>3</sup> According to Paul Lombardo, “Congress passed America's first naturalization law in 1790. It limited the privilege of US citizenship to ‘free white persons.’ About a century later, immigration laws began to restrict who could enter the country. The 1882 Act to Regulate Immigration prohibited entry to “any person unable to take care of himself



European power in the United States and eugenics enabled it to flourish after the Civil War put an end to the institution. From racially motivated violence to exclusionary policies, the racial philosophy embedded in eugenics justified and promoted a white nationalistic identity.

This identity was developed throughout the United States in the early twentieth century by organizations that disseminated their knowledge in public forums and college lecture halls. The movement received extensive funding from the nation's leading corporate foundations, including the Carnegie Institution, Rockefeller Foundation, and J.H. Kellogg. The American Breeders' Association and Eugenics Records Office emerged as the leading national eugenics projects and enlisted support from renowned scholars such as biologist Charles B. Davenport, the conservationist Madison Grant, and psychologists Henry H. Goddard and Harry H. Laughlin. The primary function of these organizations at the national level was to influence immigration policy and legislation. At the state level, eugenics organizations focused on miscegenation policies, family planning, and sterilization.

Advances in medical technology helped promote eugenics as a viable tool in controlling undesirable demographics throughout the population. In 1899, Dr. Henry Sharp, an inmate physician at the Indiana Reformatory at Jeffersonville, performed the first vasectomy on an inmate in custody. Sharp, who also specialized in castration as a means to cure masturbation, gained widespread recognition for his work. By 1907 he had helped promote vanguard legislation in Indiana that became the model for state-sponsored eugenics boards overseeing involuntary

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or herself without becoming a public charge." The law was designed to exclude immigrants whose undesirable conditions might prove costly to society – including convicted criminals, the poor, and the mentally ill. In that same year, the Chinese Exclusion Act was the first measure to specifically target immigrants by race or ethnicity. Lombardo, Paul A. *Three Generations, No Imbeciles: Eugenics, the Supreme Court, and Buck v. Bell*. (Baltimore, Md.; Johns Hopkins University Press), 2010.



sterilizations on the institutionalized and “unfit.”<sup>4</sup> As the practice spread throughout the United States, eugenic ideology also became a more significant factor in national identity.

In 1909, the American Breeders’ Association and the Immigration Restriction League, a group of scholars established in 1894 dedicated to disseminating information about the dangers of increased immigration from Europe, formed a committee to influence legislation. The primary objective of the collaboration was to promote the belief that immigrants from southern and eastern Europe were racially inferior to Anglo-Saxons or Nordic Europeans. Backed by notable scholars and philanthropists, such as Harry Laughlin and Lothrop Stoddard, the committee helped influence Congress to pass the 1924 Immigration Act, which reduced immigration from undesired populations such as Italians and Jews. In addition to Europe, it also severely restricted the immigration of Africans and outright banned the immigration of Arabs and Asians.

Along with establishing the nation's immigration structure, early eugenicists used the public school system as a tool for shaping the population towards their desired identity. In 1913, Henry Goddard published *Sterilization and Segregation*, in which he outlined the role of public schools in the eugenics movement. Goddard introduced Binet-Simon tests into public schools as a means to identify and segregate “feeble-minded” students into training schools designed for the “mentally defective.” He suggested that “compulsory education laws have brought these children to our attention by bringing them into the public schools. Our attention, once turned to them, we have begun to investigate the situation, and have quickly found certain startling facts.”<sup>5</sup> By establishing varying levels of mental deficiency such as high grade “morons,” middle grade

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<sup>4</sup> Gregory Michael Dorr, *Segregation's Science: Eugenics and Society in Virginia*, Carter G. Woodson Institute Series (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 115.

<sup>5</sup> Henry H. Goddard, *Sterilization and Segregation* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1913), 3.



“imbeciles,” and low grade “idiots,” Goddard paved the way for the use of standardized testing and the identification of learning ability.

Although the Nordic European eugenic model was shaping the national identity of the United States in the early twentieth century, it did not go unchallenged. The eugenics movement was so widely accepted that even its detractors shared positions with several aspects of its core ideology. In *A Century of Eugenics*, Gregory Dorr and Angela Logan describe W.E.B. Du Bois’ response to European superiority in eugenic ideology as “assimilationist eugenics.”<sup>6</sup> Throughout the early twentieth century, Du Bois both challenged and confirmed eugenic concepts in his works. In his 1903 essay “the Talented Tenth,” Du Bois suggested that “the Negro race will be saved by its exceptional men,” and that they would “guide the mass away from the contamination and death of the worst.”<sup>7</sup>

Although he rejected the idea that biological differences were significant enough to justify any racial inequalities, he acknowledged that there was variation relating to the capabilities of all humans. In 1904, he exclaimed that “the Negroes have their degenerate types in the dwarfs and Hottentots—so have the Europeans; they have their mixed types of all degrees and kinds of mixtures—so have the Europeans. However, it is an unproved and to all appearance an unprovable thesis that the physical development of men shows any color line below which is black pelt and above the white.”<sup>8</sup> Along with his academic work, Du Bois also engaged eugenics by publishing

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<sup>6</sup> Dorr, Gregory M., and Angel Logan. ““Quality, Not Mere Quantity, Counts”: Black Eugenics and the NAACP Baby Contests.” In *A Century of Eugenics in America: From the Indiana Experiment to the Human Genome Era.*, 68-93. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011), 68.

<sup>7</sup> W.E.B Du Bois, “The Talented Tenth,” in *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative American Negroes of To-Day*, contributions by Booker T. Washington, W. E. Burghardt DuBois, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Charles W. Chesnutt, et al (New York: James Pott & Co., 1903), 58.

<sup>8</sup> Eugene F. Provenzo Jr., *Du Bois on Education* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 116. W.E.B Du Bois,



articles in *The Crisis* on “baby contests” sponsored by several branches of the NAACP. Similar to the Teutonic eugenic family promoted in such games hosted by the American Breeders’ Association, the baby contests that Du Bois supported attempted to challenge the established Anglo Saxon standard by illustrating the model or “fittest” Negro family.

As Du Bois led the defense in the debate over whether the Negro had the same intellectual possibilities as other races, practitioners of the eugenics movement continued their focus on sterilizations and social policies. In 1927, the Supreme Court set a legal precedent for forced sterilization with its decision in *Buck v. Bell*. In the case, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, writing for the majority, famously declared that “three generations of imbeciles are enough” confirming the practice of involuntary sterilizing the unfit.<sup>9</sup> With seemingly universal support, eugenic ideology reached an apex in the 1930s. Although the eventual exposure of the genocidal policies of Nazi Germany against its Semitic population under the guise of racial science damaged the public image of the philosophy, eugenic policies continued to flourish in the United States.

In 1937, Georgia became the final state to enact eugenic sterilization legislation and continued the practice until 1970. The development of eugenics in the South followed the model of its northern and western counterparts with a focus on segregating the mentally ill through state institutions. However, the South’s demographics brought racial dynamics to the forefront of eugenics policy in the region. After emancipation and the end of the Civil War, white supremacists defended their social norms through institutions and systematic policies that refused every attempt to restructure white hierarchal control over African Americans. From the Ku Klux Klan to the convict lease system and lynchings, the region that comprised the former Confederate States of

<sup>9</sup> J. L. Power, *Proceedings of the Mississippi State Convention, Held January 7th to 26th, A. D. 1861, Including the Ordinances, as finally Adopted, Important Speeches, and a List of Members Showing the Professions, Proficiency, Nativity, Politics, Age, Religious Preferences, and Social Relations of Each* (Jackson, Miss.: Power & Caldwell, Book and Job Printers, 1861), 47.

<sup>9</sup> *Buck v. Bell*, 274 U.S. 200 (1927).



America had already established a firm understanding of its “Caucasian” identity before the introduction of eugenic ideology.

Differences in human pigmentation were often understood as biological, and the South based its social structure on the idea that African Americans were naturally suited to their subservient role. Mississippi’s justification for secession illustrates the predominant views towards the biological predetermination of the South’s racial hierarchy with its declaration that,

Our position is thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery-- the greatest material interest of the world. Its labor supplies the product which constitutes by far the largest and most important portions of commerce of the earth. These products are peculiar to the climate verging on the tropical regions, and by an imperious law of nature, none but the black race can bear exposure to the tropical sun. These products have become necessities of the world, and a blow at slavery is a blow at commerce and civilization. That blow has been long aimed at the institution, and was at the point of reaching its consummation. There was no choice left us but submission to the mandates of abolition, or a dissolution of the Union, whose principles had been subverted to work out our ruin.<sup>10</sup>

Biological variation fixed the status of Africans in America to their material interest in the structure of southern civilization. Every aspect of the burgeoning study of eugenics agreed with the direction of southern racial policies during the early 1900s and would become an integral component of law and order until the late 1960s.

Every state in the region enacted eugenic sterilization laws, yet many medical practitioners lied to patients and falsified documents to control the state’s undesired population. African American women often received hysterectomies and tubal ligations after childbirth and following surgeries such as appendectomies and gallbladder removals. In *Medical Apartheid*, Harriet Washington sheds light on how southern medical practitioners performed these “outside of the

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<sup>10</sup> J. L. Power, *Proceedings of the Mississippi State Convention, Held January 7th to 26th, A. D. 1861. Including the Ordinances, as finally Adopted, Important Speeches, and a List of Members Showing the Postoffice, Profession, Nativity, Politics, Age, Religious Preference, and Social Relations of Each.* (Jackson, Miss.: Power & Cadwallader, Book and Job Printers, 1861), 47.

<sup>11</sup> Edward L. Hulse, *Sex, Race, and Science: Eugenics in the Deep South*. (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 60.



law” involuntary sterilizations on African Americans in procedures that became known throughout the region as Mississippi Appendectomies.

Across the nation, black women who trusted obstetricians to deliver their children were being surreptitiously sterilized, and this revelation poisoned relationships between them and their doctors. To accomplish the sterilizations, practitioners lied to patients, forged consent forms, or falsified medical records to reflect an “appendectomy” or “gallbladder removal,” so it is now impossible to know the exact number of African American women who were sterilized without their knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

The volume of rogue sterilizations and medical procedures performed on the African-descended population in the South makes quantitative studies of their frequency difficult. However, there is documentation from incomplete files that this thesis utilizes in order to establish an understanding of the scope of eugenics procedures in Georgia.

In 1919, Alabama became the first state in the region to pass sterilization legislation when a clause in the creation of the state home for the mentally ill allowed the superintendent of the Home for the Feeble-Minded in Tuscaloosa to sterilize its patients. In 1935, a bill proposing the creation of county public health committees that had the power to sterilize anyone in a state or local custodial institution passed through the House and the Senate. However, it was vetoed by Alabama’s governor, Bibb Graves, after consulting with the Alabama Supreme Court on the bill’s constitutionality.<sup>12</sup> The focus of Alabama’s sterilization program was on inmates held in state institutions. Overall, Alabama was not in favor of sterilization, which is evident in the comparatively low number of two hundred twenty-four sterilization victims. Similar to other states in the region, the people of Alabama were more in favor of segregation of the “unfit” than sterilization.

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<sup>11</sup> Harriet A. Washington, *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 204.

<sup>12</sup> Edward Larson, *Sex, Race, and Science: Eugenics in the Deep South*. (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 60.



In Florida, no sterilization bill ever passed the state legislature. However, a segregation law passed in 1919, which intended to slow "the propagation of future degeneracy and dependency through eugenic segregation."<sup>13</sup> This legislation led to the creation of the Florida Farm Colony, a state facility designated for the "care, treatment and training of mentally deficient children."<sup>14</sup> Although the Farm Colony only committed individuals from six to twenty-one years of age, many Floridians went to the institution on court orders ranging from juvenile delinquency to prostitution. There were several factors in Florida's decision to not develop a sterilization program. However, the state's identity as a resort and retirement destination played a significant role in the focus on segregation rather than sterilization.

Mississippi passed sterilization legislation in 1928, targeting "persons who are afflicted with hereditary forms of insanity that are recurrent, idiocy, imbecility, feeble-mindedness or epilepsy."<sup>15</sup> White women typically received the most attention of Mississippi eugenicists. In his role as "scientific advisor" to the Mississippi mental hygiene Commission, Thomas H. Haynes illustrated the underlying racial aspect of eugenics in the South.

In a country poor farm in Mississippi there is one imbecile white woman of about 40 years who has more children that she can count, both white and black. She has not the common sense of an ordinary seven-year-old girl, yet she is highly sexed. The community has entrusted her with the management of her life and really aided her, at the expense of taxpayers, and producing the children who can be nothing but parasites all their lives long.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>14</sup> Steven Noll, *Feeble-Minded in Our Midst: Institutions for the Mentally Retarded in the South, 1900-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 123.

<sup>15</sup> J.H. Landman, *Human Sterilization: The History of the Sexual Sterilization Movement* (New York: MacMillan, 1932), 91.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas H. Haynes, "Preventative Medicine as Applied to Mental Deficiency in Mississippi," *Transactions of Mississippi State Medical Association* (1919), 136. Another version of this paper was published as "Preventative Medicine as Applied to Mental Deficiency in Mississippi," *Southern Medical Journal* 12 (1919): 541-44.



The structure of the legislation followed Virginia's sterilization law. However, unlike most states, verification of mental deficiency was not required by any medical practitioner. In Mississippi, the lack of appropriations in combination with the common practice of labeling a procedure as therapeutic rather than eugenic to avoid safeguards written into the law resulted in a total of six hundred and eighty-three documented sterilizations throughout the lifespan of its sterilization program.

By the end of 1963, two hundred and seventy-seven individuals were sterilized in South Carolina. The state adopted its sterilization legislation in 1935, and similar to other states in the region it developed at a slow pace. Unlike the rest of the region, South Carolina left more evidence of a racial determinant in its sterilization procedures. Between 1949 and 1960, the years in which the state mental health hospital published its records, African-American females made up 98% of all sterilizations.<sup>17</sup> In his research on involuntary sterilization in the United States, Philip R. Reilly cited this disproportionate data as the only example in the southern states where the suspicion of racial bias could be "entertained."<sup>18</sup> Despite the overwhelming evidence in South Carolina's sterilization data, Reilly and other scholars consider it an outlier and suggest that southern programs were not racially motivated.

Although it did not pioneer any aspects of the movement, Georgia's delayed entry into the field of eugenics allows for the examination of the philosophy as a tool for controlling not only the "mentally defective," but also the undesirable Negro demographic in its segregated society. The "science" initially emerged in Georgia's medical community with concerns about degeneracy and spread throughout popular culture until the state board began authorizing involuntary

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<sup>17</sup> Larson, *Sex, Race, and Science*, 155.

<sup>18</sup> Philip R. Reilly, "Involuntary Sterilization in the United States: A Surgical Solution," *The Quarterly Review of Biology* 62, no. 2 (June 1987): 166.



sterilizations. After the passage of the sterilization law in 1937, the rate of sterilizations in Georgia ascended slowly, reaching a peak of two hundred and twenty-two per year between 1950 and 1960. The four thousand documented sterilizations in Georgia ranks fifth among all states that participated in eugenic sterilizations<sup>19</sup>

The historiography of the eugenics movement in the United States includes several monographs; however, only a few examine the science as it developed in the Deep South and none with the sole focus on the events in Georgia. Therefore this research provides insight into a historical topic that is in need of additional critical analysis. This thesis will challenge previous research on the development and structure of eugenic programs in Georgia with evidence that was not available to the public at the time of their publication. Along with analyzing the role of eugenics in education and popular culture, this research will argue that contrary to previous scholarship on the subject, Georgia's sterilization program was indeed racially motivated.

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<sup>19</sup> The data used in this thesis is compiled from the state files housed electronically in the Georgia Department of Archives and History, Morrow, GA. the files are categorized by their designation; RTB: Record to the State Board of Eugenics, COR: Correspondence between family members and the State Board of Eugenics, RPT: Sterilization report, NTC: Family notification of the sterilization procedure. Each file is numbered as such, 1234RTB, or 1234COR which designates the file of one individual and the type of documentation.

<sup>20</sup> Edward L. Larson, *Sex, Race, and Science* 138.



CHAPTER ONE: THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF EUGENICS PHILOSOPHY

The definitive political history of the eugenic sterilization movement in Georgia was Edward Larson's 1995 book *Sex, Race, and Science: Eugenics in the Deep South*. Larson's initial analysis of the flow of eugenics in the South suggested that "Georgia's belated sterilization campaign did not display a particularly racist color."<sup>20</sup> Larson's explanations for this policy stretch from the racist standards of the era were threefold. First, he suggests that there were no open calls for sterilizations of one group over the other and provides evidence of newspaper propaganda calling for the sterilizations of both the "negro and white feebleminded." Second, Larson echoes the assumption made by Stephen Noll in *Feeble-Minded in Our Midst* that because the resident populations at the Georgia Training School for Mental Defectives at Gracewood and Milledgeville State Hospital "were all white" the sterilization policy therefore only concentrated on white citizens. Third, he suggests that the proponents connected to both the failed and successful legislation attempts in 1935 and 1937 by governors Eugene Talmadge and Eurith D. Rivers ran opposite of established racial precedents.<sup>21</sup> Talmadge, the outspoken white supremacist, vetoed the sterilization bill in 1935 while Eurith D. Rivers, who was supportive of African Americans, signed the bill and made it state law.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Edward Larson, *Sex, Race, and Science: Eugenics in the Deep South*. (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 3.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Edward J. Larson, *Sex, Race, and Science*, 138.



There are problems with these arguments. First, there would be little need for any direct propaganda aimed at the African American community during Georgia's eugenic sterilization campaign. The failed process of reconstruction and the imposition of Jim Crow via segregation, disfranchisement, and lynching left African Americans in a quasi-slavery status that segregated the community and maintained it in a lower social status than European Americans. From 1877-1930, there were 589 lynchings in Georgia. The killings and racial terror reinforced the white community's racial control over African Americans, setting the tone for racial interactions throughout the state. Second, the institutions where these sterilizations occurred, Milledgeville and Gracewood, served as the surgical solution for primary physicians and many feeder institutions, such as prisons, schools, and state courts. The permanent populations at these institutions were white, but there is evidence in the state eugenics files that more sterilizations were performed on African Americans through an outpatient sterilization procedure. Third, as noted by Larson, Governor Talmadge, who opposed all programs connected to the progressive-backed "Little New Deal," vetoed every piece of legislation that crossed his desk in 1935. He would go on to boast that, "he threw every New Deal bill in the trash without reading it."<sup>23</sup> The fact that Governor Arnall "openly supported the rights of African Americans to vote in the Democratic primary at a time when that was a major political issue"<sup>24</sup> does not exempt him from the ability to support policies that were detrimental to the black population in Georgia.

Since the publication of Larson's work, over 30,000 documents and files relating to the state's eugenics board have been made available to the public at the Georgia State Archives in Morrow. News of the documents became public knowledge in 2007 with a series of articles

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<sup>23</sup> William Anderson, *The Wild Man from Sugar Creek: The Political Career of Eugene Talmadge* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), 119.

<sup>24</sup> Edward J. Larson, *Sex, Race, and Science*, 138.



published in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. By the end of that year, the state had passed a resolution expressing regret for the victims of its involuntary sterilizations and calling for the education of Georgia's citizens on the role of the state in the eugenics movement.

Since those developments, the history of eugenics in Georgia has advanced piecemeal. Paul Lombardo has published several articles on the subject and devoted a chapter of *A Century of Eugenics in America: From the Indiana Experiments to the Human Genome Era* to the history of eugenics in Georgia. Karen Keely and Betsy Nies also examine the role of biology in Georgia. However, all of these studies focus primarily on the racial ideology transmitted through popular culture, specifically the impact of Erskine Caldwell's literature on the eugenics movement. Lombardo and Keely both suggest that Caldwell's work brought the public attention to eugenics and helped influence Georgia's sterilization legislation.

Although these studies provide a much-needed analysis of the impact of eugenics on popular culture, they do not scrutinize the impact of sterilization from a racial aspect. Amy D'Unger has presented information from the state eugenics files at several symposiums. Her research is providing evidence that shows a correlation between the decline of lynching in Georgia and the rise of sterilization across the state. Along with a thorough examination of data relating to compulsory sterilizations, D'Unger suggests that the sterilizations were "used by the state to resist civil rights successes and exercise social control over the Black population."<sup>25</sup>

This thesis complements these works and introduces concrete evidence to the historiography of eugenics in Georgia. It does so by analyzing data from the state eugenics board that challenges the interpretations made by various works published before these state eugenics files became

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<sup>25</sup> Amy D'Unger and Paul Lombardo, "Ethics, Eugenics, and Public Health in Georgia." Research presented at the annual symposium of the Georgia Department of Archives and History, Morrow, Georgia. September 17, 2016.



available. The two locations where the state conducted its compulsory sterilizations, the Georgia Training School for Mental Defectives at Gracewood and Milledgeville State Hospital, were segregated. Due to the facilities being whites-only and a general lack of provisions for Negroes, scholars have often concluded that the movement was more focused on white populations rather than blacks. In *Feeble-minded in Our Midst: Institutions for the Mentally Retarded in the South, 1900-1940*, Steven Noll states that “these statutes allowed for the sterilization only of people residing in state institutions” and “since the black-feeble minded were generally excluded from institutions for the feeble-minded, they often escaped the surgeon's scalpel.”<sup>26</sup> This analysis of Georgia's sterilization files contests Larson and Noll's assumption and provides evidence that black Georgians faced the surgeon's scalpel as much, if not more than their white counterparts.

Although Georgia was one of the most racially segregated states in the Union, historians have suggested that its eugenic policies did not follow a “racial color.”<sup>27</sup> This thesis argues that the historians of eugenics in Georgia have written their studies based on assumptions rather than on material evidence. The eugenics files illustrate a vastly different story about how and why the state performed sterilization procedures on members of its populace; more importantly, they shed light on who was deemed “unfitted to rear children.”<sup>28</sup> Although the state never appropriated funds

*True Story of Race, Crime, and Corruption in the Deep South*, David Beasley acknowledges the scholarship of Edward Larson and Paul Lombardo, suggesting that Amy D'Unger's work at Georgia Tech will “benefit researchers for generations to come.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Steven Noll, *Feeble-Minded in Our Midst: Institutions for the Mentally Retarded in the South, 1900-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 102.

<sup>27</sup> See Larson, *Sex, Race, and Science* and Noll, *Feeble-Minded in Our Midst*. Both of the works suggest that African Americans were not sterilized because the state's institutions were segregated. The evidence from the states file illustrate that Black Georgians were sterilized at a higher or equivalent rate with whites throughout the lifespan of the State Eugenics Board.

<sup>28</sup> Sterilization Files, 3737RTB, 2 December 1957.



for a facility for African American “defectives,” data from the archives reveals that they were sterilized as often as their “Caucasian” counterparts.<sup>29</sup>

The inclusion of the eugenic files in the political history of Georgia will help provide a better understanding of how the movement shaped social policies throughout the state. As a field of study, eugenics encompassed several academic disciplines. Human “fitness,” central to eugenic ideology, blended with medical and political beliefs in the South, establishing a scientific justification for white supremacy and segregation. The data from the state files illustrate reactionary patterns that correlate to societal issues stemming from Georgia’s struggle to maintain a segregated society during the early twentieth century.

#### Sources

A large section of the sources that this research utilizes are recently released files from the state eugenics board located at the Georgia State Archives. The names of the victims have been redacted, and the files are stored electronically, available to the public through a laptop and an external hard drive containing photographic images of the documents. These files have the potential to rewrite the political history of eugenics in Georgia. In *Without Mercy: The Stunning True Story of Race, Crime, and Corruption in the Deep South*, David Beasley acknowledges the scholarship of Edward Larson and Paul Lombardo, suggesting that Amy D’Unger’s work at Georgia Tech will “benefit researchers for generations to come.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Although there is evidence of more non-regulated sterilizations, current analyses of the files illustrates the following; White Males: 525, White Females: 838, Black Males: 808, Black Females: 310. There is also evidence that illustrates shifts in the populations that were targeted for sterilizations that followed changing societal norms and ethics.

<sup>30</sup> David Beasley, *Without Mercy: The Stunning True Story of Race, Crime, and Corruption in the Deep South* (New York: St. Martin's Press. 2014), 264.



Indeed the sterilization files will change the way in which future generations understand the history of Georgia. This thesis attempts to shape the narrative of the first generation of research by examining previously unknown source materials. Along with these files, this research focuses on the role of eugenics in legislation, policy, and popular culture. Many of these aspects of society influenced each other and helped lay the foundation for the common understanding of biological causation for social interactions throughout the state. These sources expand the narrative surrounding the role of eugenic ideology in Georgia and present evidence that contradicts the consensus history regarding racial motivation in the state's program.

The data from this was compiled to create an interactive map of the four thousand reported cases of sterilizations across the state. This map is available on a website, THE GEORGIA EUGENICS PROJECT, which contains maps with GIS data and links to several documents, including Georgia's 2007 eugenics resolution.<sup>31</sup> The map analyzes the state by county, which also has syringes that users can hover over and click to view the race, gender, and reason for compulsory sterilization. The redaction of personal information from the files assures that the research is ethical and follows The National Institutes of Health (NIH) standards on "Protecting Human Research Participants."<sup>32</sup> This resource can contribute to the history of eugenics in Georgia as a geographic visualization or infographic and will be "open," with the ability to grow as future research into the state's eugenics programs provides additional information.

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<sup>31</sup> Map created in fulfillment of degree technology requirements using ESRI Story Map Software. <https://csu2.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=859226ff775c487ba96d1c60be4a3e67>

<sup>32</sup> In order to complete my initial research on the state eugenics files at Columbus State University, I was required to complete, through The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research, the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants."



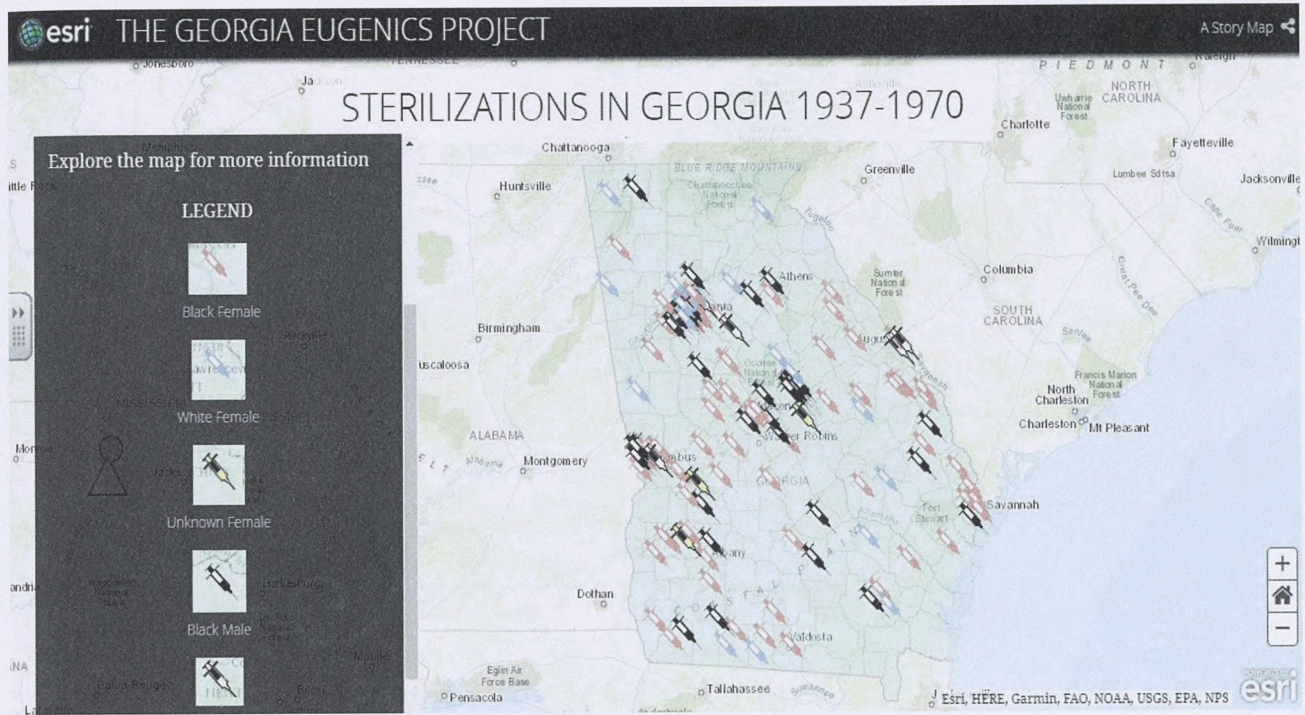


Figure 1: THE GEORGIA EUGENICS PROJECT



CHAPTER TWO: EARLY EUGENIC IDEOLOGY IN THE UNITED STATES

“These be devils that come out only by prayer and fasting.”<sup>33</sup>

The term eugenics has evolved to encompass a variety of meanings. Before the 1970s, it maintained its original definition and scope, meaning the self-direction of human evolution. However, most recently it has been used to point out an individual’s racist views or as a charge thrown at policies that embrace “Social Darwinism.” There is now a consensus that the biological science associated with eugenics was non-scientific in that its theories of the biological determinants of social issues are unproven. However, the core belief in improving the biological qualities of humans continues through advances in genetics, including the unlocking of the human genome. New technologies associated with CRISPR genetic editing allow people to “repair” genetic sequences and select qualities in their offspring, such as eye and hair color, height, and “intelligence.”<sup>34</sup> These new advances in genetic engineering raise bioethical concerns similar to those associated with eugenics during the late nineteenth century. Therefore, the history of the application of eugenic philosophy is becoming more pertinent in the early twenty-first century.

This research focuses on the racial ideology or philosophy associated with eugenics and suggests that it developed into a tool used to reinforce predetermined southern white hegemony. By the time the racial theory became popularized in the South, Georgia was in the midst of its Jim Crow policies, and this “modern” scientific philosophy blended perfectly into traditional understandings of human variation. In his analysis of its impact on popular culture, Paul Lombardo

<sup>33</sup> “No Eugenics in Schools,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 11, 1914.

<sup>34</sup> Jennifer Khan, “The Crispr Quandary: A new gene-editing tool might create an ethical morass — or it might make revising nature seem natural,” *The New York Times Magazine*, November 8, 2015.



suggests that "Eugenics lent a scientific gloss to legislation to uphold 'racial integrity' in Georgia, but its ultimate effect was merely to support existing social relations and bolster a culture of white supremacy."<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the "scientific gloss" of eugenics legitimized every aspect of society in the segregated South. In this sense, the term eugenics became synonymous with the socially accepted ideas associated with southern white racial hegemony.

During the twentieth century, the term eugenics encompassed mental and physical fitness as well as racial hegemony. In Georgia, the philosophy added a scientific authority to previously established ideologies and became a tool for classifying ethnic identities as well as engineering social policies. This thesis explores both explicit and implied forms of eugenics as well as ideas that aligned with its core beliefs without directly naming the philosophy. It argues that many of the social and public policies in Georgia were eugenic in nature even if they were not explicitly referred to by name. The political and biblical justifications for slavery predate the term eugenics. However, its pseudoscientific racial doctrine served the same ends as white supremacists that were determined to keep the African American population in a subservient position.

The view that African Americans were less civilized than Europeans was foundational in the antebellum South and, later, in debates about the ability of African Americans to govern during Reconstruction. Prior to the construction of eugenics as a social philosophy, the polygenetic belief that humans with different skin pigmentation were created separately dominated western racial ideologies. Scholars such as Josiah Nott, a prominent surgeon and founder of the University of Alabama School of Medicine, promoted polygenetic ideas that the races were created separately.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Lantzer, Jason S. "The Indiana Way of Eugenics: Sterilization Laws, 1907-74." In *A Century of Eugenics in America: From the Indiana Experiment to the Human Genome Era.*, 26-41. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011), 30.

<sup>36</sup> Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 70.



In 1844, Nott published *Two Lectures, on the Natural History of the Caucasian and Negro Races*, in which he denied the creation account in Genesis and denied that the ancient Egyptians were “Negroes.” Instead, Nott, a slaveholder who followed the racial ideologies of German anthropologist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach and French novelist J. A. Gobineau, attempted to establish a revisionist model of history, where “the Caucasian or White and the Negro races were distinct at a very remote date, and that the *Egyptians were Caucasians*.”<sup>37</sup>

During the Reconstruction era, the polygenetic ideology shifted, with scientists tending to theorize a single species origin with a subspecies hierarchy—one with “Nordic” Europeans at its apex. White supremacists argued that Africans were less evolved as a race and thus incapable of governing without paternalistic oversight from whites.<sup>38</sup> Most often referred to as “Social Darwinism” or “scientific racism,” these ideas were eugenic by nature, capturing the core belief that evolution had made European civilizations the global standard. Although the term eugenics may not have been explicitly used to describe ideas and policies in the South, they can be classified as eugenics if the core belief originated in the conviction that all non-European cultures and eugenic identifications were inferior.

The South was never at the forefront of academic research on eugenics. Nonetheless, it emerged as the vanguard of racial segregation efforts. Edward Larson argues that “southern scientists and academics did little to introduce eugenics to the region” and that “on average, [they] simply could not and did not read as much as did people in any other region of the country.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Josiah Nott, *Two Lectures, On The Natural History Of The Caucasian And Negro Races* (Mobile, AL: Dade and Thompson), 1844.

<sup>38</sup> Joseph LeConte, *The Race Problem in the South* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1892), 363.

<sup>39</sup> Larson, *Sex, Race, and Science*, 42.



Nonetheless, Georgia's racial dynamic created a unique environment that allowed eugenics to flourish in theory and practice.

During the early twentieth century, Georgia's legislature illustrated the philosophy associated with eugenics by passing a series of public health and vital statistics laws that shaped the framework for collecting data on births, deaths, and marriages. The laws, publically praised by the *Atlanta Constitution* as "rational eugenic policies" and a "tremendous asset" to the wellbeing of society, also reinforced segregation efforts by including racial classifications for many governmental agencies.<sup>40</sup> This classification system allowed whites to preserve their "racial integrity" and protect their "germ plasm" against miscegenation while maintaining a way to create exclusionary policies against Negroes.<sup>41</sup> In many of Georgia's Jim Crow laws, such as the segregation of rail cars in 1891, the white primary of 1900, and the disfranchisement amendment to the state constitution in 1908, the legislation itself did not use the term eugenics to describe its social policies, yet they were profoundly influenced by its ideologies.

In 1914, M. L. Brittain, the state's superintendent of schools, determined the role of eugenics in the state's classrooms when he declined to add eugenics to the state's curriculum. To Brittain and many Georgians, the question of "how much we should tell children" about "the laws of inheritance" was a topic that was more suited to the home environment.<sup>42</sup> Although there were public debates in the medical and educational communities, sterilization legislation only came into play in the 1930's. Paul Lombardo suggests that Georgia's late adoption of eugenic legislation

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<sup>40</sup> "The Public Health Bill," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 12, 1914, 2.

<sup>41</sup> Lantzer, Jason S. "The Indiana Way of Eugenics: Sterilization Laws, 1907-74." In *A Century of Eugenics in America: From the Indiana Experiment to the Human Genome Era*, 26-41. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011), 49.

<sup>42</sup> "No Eugenics in Schools," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 11, 1914.



developed from political hesitations rather than disagreements on the scientific or medical merits of eugenics. He also suggests that while Georgia was slow to pass eugenics legislation it was at the forefront among southern states where eugenics was a “familiar topic.”<sup>43</sup>

Before the establishment of a state eugenics board in 1937, Georgia gained national attention with the publication of *Tobacco Road*, a 1932 novel by Erskine Caldwell. His fictional description of degenerate conditions in a white rural community near Augusta increased public awareness of the proposed eugenic sterilization legislation. His father, Ira Caldwell, also wrote about eugenics and had five articles published in *Eugenics: A Journal of Race Betterment*. Caldwell’s characters from *Tobacco Road* are based on case studies that were published by his father. In addition to *Tobacco Road*, Caldwell subsequently published a four-article series for the *New York Post* that documented many of the social issues that became popularized in his novel. The image of intergenerational familial poverty helped promote the idea that eugenics was necessary to control undesirable social demographics and promote racial hegemony.<sup>44</sup>

In *A Century of Eugenics in America: From the Indiana Experiments to the Human Genome Era*, Paul Lombardo describes the relationship between Caldwell’s *Tobacco Road* and the state’s 1937 eugenic sterilization legislation as an “underexplored link” in the history of eugenics in Georgia.<sup>45</sup> As the ideology of eugenics and the squalid conditions in some areas became visible to the general public, the creation of an agency to regulate the state’s feeble-minded

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<sup>43</sup> Lombardo, Paul A. “From Better Babies to the Bunglers: Eugenics on Tobacco Road.” In *A Century of Eugenics in America: From the Indiana Experiment to the Human Genome Era*, 45-67. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011), 49.

<sup>44</sup> Ira Caldwell published several articles in *Eugenics: A Journal of Race Betterment*, the American Eugenics Society’s official journal. I. S. Caldwell, “The Bunglers: A Narrative Study in Five Parts,” *Eugenics* 3 (1930): 202-10 (part 1); 247-51 (part 2); 293-99 (part 4); and 377-83 (part 5). Erskine’s novel follows a fictional family based on the studies of his father. Erskine Caldwell, “Georgia Poverty Swept, Says Caldwell,” *New York Post*, January 18, 1935.

<sup>45</sup> Lombardo, “From Better Babies to the Bunglers,” 45.



demographic began to seem like a necessity. In 1935, the *Augusta Chronicle* called for a grand jury investigation to disprove Caldwell's "grossly overdrawn" claims. There was a sensitivity about depictions of southern rural backwardness that was longstanding in the region, in part because of enduring North-South battles. The following year, Caldwell toured the region with renowned photographer Margaret Bourke-White to illustrate the conditions portrayed in *Tobacco Road*. Their partnership resulted in *You Have Seen Their Faces*, an illustrated documentary of rural conditions in the Deep South.<sup>46</sup>

Although the book was critically acclaimed, many Georgians continued to deny the depiction of the poverty in the state, and it was banned in Atlanta. The classification of Caldwell's work as propaganda by an Atlanta municipal censorship board brought the topic of eugenics out of the medical community and into a language that the general public could understand and visualize.<sup>47</sup> Lombardo suggests that the controversy associated with Caldwell's work was "at least part of the reason for the popular acceptance of sterilization in Georgia."<sup>48</sup>

The popularity of the term eugenics decreased sharply after World War II exposed the inhumanity of the Nazi eugenics programs.<sup>49</sup> However, the Georgia State Eugenics Board thrived throughout the 1960s, despite unfavorable associations attached to the philosophy. In total, the state of Georgia was responsible for the compulsory sterilization of over 4,000 of its citizens. It established a medical definition of eugenic "fitness" in addition to its previous understandings in

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<sup>46</sup> Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White. *You Have Seen Their Faces* (New York: Modern Age Books, 1937), 10.

<sup>47</sup> "New Board Bans 'Tobacco Road,'" *Augusta Chronicle*, November 22, 1938.

<sup>48</sup> Lombardo, "From Better Babies to the Bunglers," 52.

<sup>49</sup> Daniel Kevles. *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), ix.



legislation and popular culture.<sup>50</sup> Although the files are incomplete and more analysis will lead to new results, the state of Georgia was responsible for sterilizing over two thousand black males and “Caucasian” females during the entirety of the program. Patterns in the files correlates with one of the chief concerns about miscegeny in the segregated society. The fear of the degeneration of the white race by white women who gave birth to biracial children. This was a concern before the creation of eugenics and found new justifications with the emerging sterilization program. White males were the third targeted demographic, with over five hundred sterilizations, and black females received the least attention from the State Board, with over three hundred sterilizations.

While this data is open to interpretation, this thesis suggests that the data from sterilization demographics not only illustrates the intentions of the Eugenics Board but also sheds light on the direction of the structure of white identity in the South. Since slavery, and throughout each phase of southern history, the perceived threat of sexual relationships between Negroes and “Anglo-Saxon” females shaped social and legal policies and interactions between the races. Negro females were not a priority for sterilization due to their non-threatening role in southern society.<sup>51</sup> Their demographic was classified as hypersexed in eugenic terms and only drew the attention of eugenicists in extreme cases.<sup>52</sup> The focus of the State Board on “Caucasian” females followed the eugenic attempt to clean or “purify” the white race. Although it was less critical than shaping the reproduction capabilities of white males, it was more critical than those of Negro females.

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<sup>50</sup> Eugenic sterilizations allowed the state to establish biological standards that reinforced the policies of racial segregation. Georgia’s focus on sterilizing African American men and white women was rooted in the same fear that was the catalyst for lynching/outrage throughout the South. The ideologies of race intersected with gender and lynching was a way to instill fear, a way to police the “color line” by doing so, and, because sex was and is so central to maintaining “racial” boundaries, a way to maintain racial fictions of “whiteness.”

<sup>51</sup> Larson, *Sex, Race, and Science*, 156.

<sup>52</sup> Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into Its Laws and Consequences* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1887), 338-9.



As the movement became popularized, the state's eugenics board used sterilizations as a tool to quell its undesired populations. These eugenic sterilizations began to target African Americans and increased in response to gains made during the Civil Rights Movement, illustrating the role of eugenics in the state-sponsored social control over its black population.<sup>53</sup> Although involuntary sterilizations were the most visible form of applied eugenics in public policy, this research also investigates the ideological role that eugenic ideology played throughout the state. Analyzing the various theories and applications of the eugenics movement provides a thorough examination of underexplored evidence and challenges the consensus history of the construction of eugenic identities in Georgia.

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<sup>53</sup> Data compiled from the Sterilization files at the Georgia Department of Archives and History, Morrow, Georgia. Data compiled from the Sterilization files at the Georgia Department of Archives and History, Morrow, Georgia. Amy D'Unger and Paul Lombardo. "Ethics, Eugenics, and Public Health in Georgia," Research presented at the annual symposium of the Georgia Department of Archives and History, Morrow, Georgia. September 17, 2016.



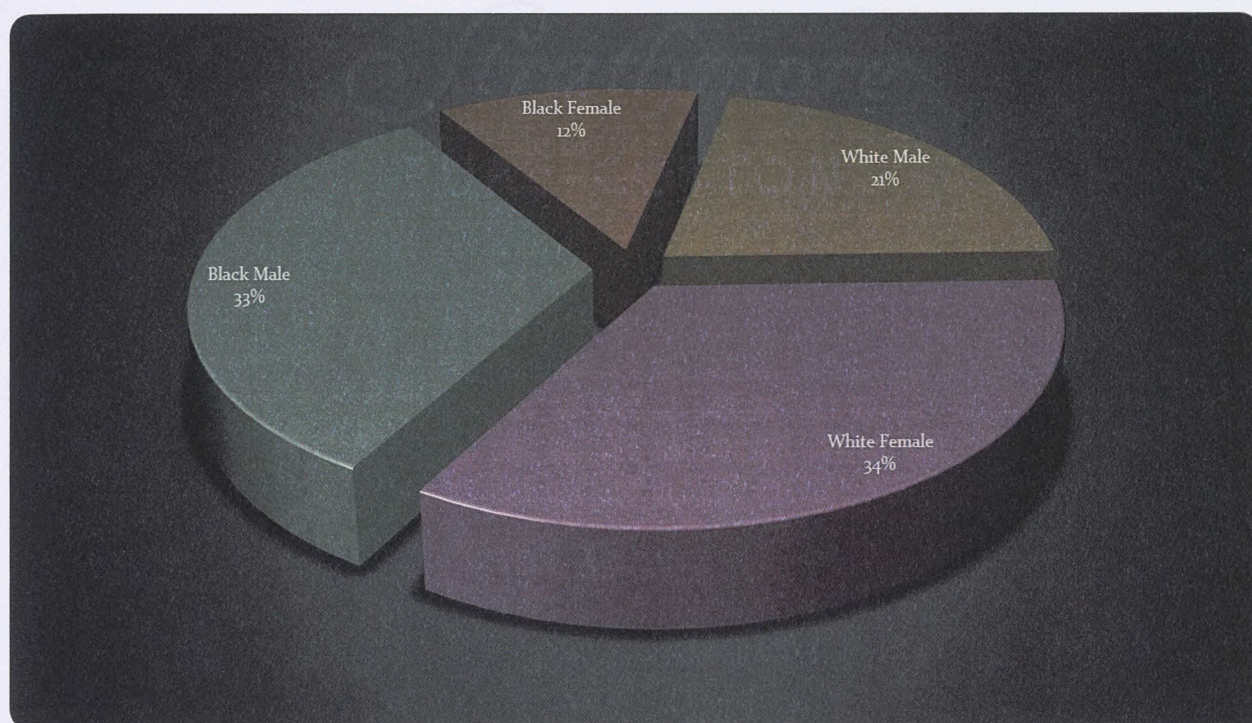


Figure 2: STERILIZATIONS IN GEORGIA BY RACE AND GENDER, 1937-1963



CHAPTER THREE: THE ORIGINS OF EUGENIC PHILOSOPHY IN GEORGIA

“The sterilization project of Hitler in Germany is a step in the right direction.”<sup>54</sup>

One of Georgia's first instances of medical support for eugenic sterilization came from Dr. W. L. Champion's 1913 presentation at an annual meeting of the Medical Association of Georgia. Insisting that there was a “rapid increase of insanity among the negro race since they were made free citizens,” Champion played to the fears already surrounding the African-American community in Georgia.<sup>55</sup> Arguing that African Americans and the mentally disabled were “burdens of future generations,” Champion laid the groundwork for medical research into eugenic sterilization. The presentation, “Sterilization of Confirmed Criminals, Idiots, Rapists, Feeble-minded and Other Defectives,” also included a model sterilization law that mirrored prior legislation in New York and Connecticut. The modern geneticist Phillip Reilly best explains Georgia's eugenic origins when he notes that “Southern whites who opposed miscegenation sought intellectual proof that the Negro was inferior.”<sup>56</sup>

Georgia's first official attempt at eugenic sterilization came in 1935 when Speaker Pro-Tem Ellis Arnall introduced a sterilization bill into the state's House of Representatives. The bill called for “one surgeon and one alienist of recognized ability” to examine those people who were incarcerated in state institutions for criminals and the feebleminded and then called on them to

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<sup>54</sup> “Report of the Committee on Public Policy and Legislation,” *Journal of the Medical Association of Georgia* 23 (1934): 304.

<sup>55</sup> W.L. Champion, “Sterilization of Confirmed Criminals, Idiots, Rapists, Feeble-minded and Other Defectives,” *Journal of the Medical Association of Georgia* 3 (1913): 112.

<sup>56</sup> Philip R. Reilly, “Involuntary Sterilization in the United States: A Surgical Solution,” *The Quarterly Review of Biology* 62, no. 2 (June 1987): 153.



sterilize those found to be unfit.<sup>57</sup> Although this bill received overwhelming support and passed the Georgia House of Representatives on 7 March 1935 by a landslide vote of 117 to 29, Governor Eugene Talmadge eventually vetoed the bill, along with all of the progressive reforms known as Little New Deal policies.<sup>58</sup> In response to the unpopular veto, the *Columbus Enquirer* wrote, "The scientific reasons for sterilization are so well established and so sound that the governor is flying in the face of accepted practice in vetoing the bill."<sup>59</sup>

The bill finally passed after Talmadge's anti-progressive term as governor. In 1937, the legislature passed laws allowing for sterilization of individuals who "if released without sterilization," would "procreate a child, or children who would have a tendency to serious physical, mental, or nervous disease or deficiency."<sup>60</sup> The new State Board of Eugenics consisted of three members: the Chairman of the State Board of Control (later the Director of Social Security), the Director of the State Board of Health, and the Superintendent of Milledgeville State Hospital. This team of three was responsible for determining whether the state could sterilize the mentally ill, prisoners, and school children. Further, the records of the Board of Eugenics would not be open to public inspection. The Board would, though, upon ruling on a sterilization procedure, notify the patient's next of kin or legal guardian, who had ten days to protest. If such a person did not exist, then the Board of Eugenics would notify the Solicitor General of the Superior Court of the county where the patient was committed.

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<sup>57</sup> Georgia House Bill 204 (1935), sec. 1-3, Georgia Dept. of Archives and History, file 37-1-5; iv-5-3 (box 164). Psychiatrists were often referred to as "Alienists."

<sup>58</sup> "Senator Speaks Almost 5 Hours in One-Man War," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 8, 1935, 1.

<sup>59</sup> "Governor is Wrong," *Columbus Enquirer*, March 28, 1935, 6.

<sup>60</sup> 1937 Georgia Laws, Chapter 5, Section 3, 414-415.



Riding the wave of support for the newly enacted sterilization legislation of 1937, W. L. Funkhouser, one of Georgia's most prominent physicians, published "Human Rubbish" in the *Journal of The Medical Association of Georgia*.<sup>61</sup> In this article, Funkhouser followed the logic of Dr. W. L. Champion, who introduced eugenics to Georgia's medical community in 1913, by drawing from fundamental eugenic ideologies:

We talk of our breed of cattle, and plan for a higher strain.  
 We double the food of the pasture,  
 We heap up the measure of grain,  
 We draw on the wits of the nation, to better the barn and the  
 pen: But what are we doing, my brothers, to better the breed of  
 men?<sup>62</sup>

This article defined the problems connected with "white trash" and "human rubbish," suggesting five measures, including sterilization, as potential fixes. Funkhouser even suggested that euthanasia might eventually be necessary for handling mental problems. He wrote: "The time may come when it will be necessary to resort to euthanasia for those who are mentally and physically beyond scientific restoration to some degree of physical and mental health and happiness."<sup>63</sup> Funkhouser boldly suggested sterilization for everyone that was incapable of producing "normal offspring." He even questioned the foundations of the Constitution of the United States, suggesting that "contrary to the Constitution of the United States all men are not born equal-physically, mentally, or economically."<sup>64</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Lucian Lamar Knight, *A Standard History of Georgia and Georgians* (New York: Lewis Publishing Company, 1917), 2067.

<sup>62</sup> W.L. Funkhouser, "Human Rubbish," *Journal of the Medical Association of Georgia* 26 (1937): 199.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*



Evidence from the State Archives illustrates that the newly founded State Board of Eugenics received support from national eugenic organizations while it struggled to develop under the scope of the laws. In a 1938 letter to State Department of Public Health Director (and later director of the Board of Eugenics) Thomas F. Abercrombie, the Assistant Secretary of the Human Betterment Foundation, F.C. Reid, wrote "We notice the Eugenics Board of Georgia is reported by the papers as ready to begin its work." Along with offering "any service they could render," the Human Betterment Foundation supplied Abercrombie with ample literature on human sterilization.<sup>65</sup> Abercrombie and the Eugenics Board were deluged with pamphlets and literature concerning sterilizations and ways to collect and share their data. The board also had to implement the process that the state would follow regarding appeals. John W. Oden, the Superintendent of Milledgeville State Hospital at the time and thus a board member, objected to this appeals process. In a letter to fellow board member T. F. Abercrombie, Oden complained, "It seems to me that any person we desired to have sterilized could carry the case through every court in the land."<sup>66</sup>

Although the state supported its new legislation, the new Eugenics Board moved slower than the public expected. In 1938, Robert Swisher, the state news editor of the *Augusta Herald*, wrote a letter to Public Health Director Abercrombie stating,

for several years this newspaper has been advocating a sterilization law for Georgia's insane and habitual criminals. This law has been passed, but it has never been put in operation. We are very much interested to learn when the sterilization board is to hold its first meeting, who are its members, how it will operate. Naturally we understand that there is some opposition to such a law from certain religious and civic organizations. Therefore, anything we write will point to the social benefits of sterilization. We know many persons in Georgia institutions are sterilized secretly during the course

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<sup>65</sup> F.C. Reid, Assistant Secretary of The Human Betterment Foundation to T.F. Abercrombie, Director, Georgia State Board of Eugenics, February 17, 1938; Eugenics Board; Director's Subject Files; Director's Office; Department of Public Health (of the Georgia Department of Human Resources), Record Group 26-02-003; Georgia Department of Archives and History, Morrow, GA.

<sup>66</sup> John W. Oden, Superintendent, Milledgeville State Hospital to T.F. Abercrombie, Director, Georgia Department of Public Health, December 16, 1938; Eugenics Board; Director's Subject Files; Director's Office; Department of Public Health (of the Georgia Department of Human Resources), Record Group 26-02-003; Georgia Department of Archives and History, Morrow, GA.



of some other operation. We have not said anything about these operations since they are morally justified. However, we believe public opinion can be moulded in favor of sterilization by properly writing news stories and we would like to see these start just as soon as possible.<sup>67</sup>

Later that year Swisher again wrote to Abercrombie. This time he was concerned with what he believed to be a lack of progress from the Eugenics Board and issued a borderline threat,

Nearly two years ago the General Assembly passed this law and so far no meetings of the board have been held. Meanwhile, some few patients have been sterilized secretly during other operations and this might result in some criticism if it becomes publicly known. The *Herald* believes it would be to the public interest if this board were organized and functioned regularly.<sup>68</sup>

Despite these critiques, the first procedure sponsored by the State Eugenics Board took place in 1938, and the program flourished, becoming one of the most active in the United States. While Georgia was the last state to implement eugenics laws, its four thousand documented sterilizations ranks fifth among all states that participated in eugenic sterilizations. The rate of sterilizations in Georgia climbed slowly until it increased significantly after the end of World War II. Between 1940 and 1950, sterilizations were performed at an approximate rate of eighty per year and about twenty-three per 100,000 residents. Between 1950 and 1960, these numbers increased to approximately 220 sterilizations per year, at a rate of about nine sterilizations per 100,000 residents per year. The rate of sterilizations decreased substantially after the year 1960, until it finally stopped around 1963.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Robert Swisher, State News Editor, *Augusta Herald*, to T.F. Abercrombie, Director, Georgia Department of Public Health, Undated; Eugenics Board; Director's Subject Files; Director's Office; Department of Public Health (of the Georgia Department of Human Resources), Record Group 26-02-003; Georgia Department of Archives.

<sup>68</sup> Robert Swisher, State News Editor, *Augusta Herald*, to T.F. Abercrombie, Director, Georgia Department of Public Health, ca. late 1938 and early 1939; Eugenics Board; Director's Subject Files; Director's Office; Department of Public Health (of the Georgia Department of Human Resources), Record Group 26-02-003; Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta, GA.

<sup>69</sup> Julius Paul, *Three Generations of Imbeciles Are Enough: State Eugenic Sterilization Laws in American Thought and Practice* (Washington, D.C.: Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, 1965), 326-327. Although, his analysis was used by Larson and Noll, the official Georgia number cited by Dr. Paul is not congruent with the current analysis of Georgia Sterilization Files from the Department of Archives and History.



Dr. T.G. Peacock, the superintendent of Milledgeville State Hospital who presided over the majority of the sterilization procedures that occurred in Georgia, published his analysis of the state program as a special article in the *Journal of the Medical Association of Georgia* in 1953. In "Georgia Program for Sterilization," Peacock provided insight into the ideology that established the state's program. Along with outlining the 1937 laws, Peacock provided comparable data to justify the actions of the state. Highlighting the benefits of the state program, he wrote:

More immediate and tangible results are found in the fact that 302 of these sterilized patients have been furloughed 483 times, for a total period outside of the institution of 258 years. Many of these furloughs would not have been possible without the assurance that the patient would not become pregnant.<sup>70</sup>

Although the state had sterilized over one thousand people by 1953, Peacock did not feel that the state was doing enough to address the problem of the feeble-minded. He included an assessment of Georgia's program in his special article, in which he stated that "we believe that we have saved the state thousands of dollars by being able to discharge patients who could not otherwise have gone home."<sup>71</sup> Acknowledging the difficulties that confronted the state eugenics program, he proclaimed, "We do not claim that our program in Georgia is complete. We feel it is almost trying to sweep back the ocean with a broom. During 1949, however, Georgia protected 4.3 psychotics from parenthood for every 100,000 population, and in this respect led the nation."<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> T.G. Peacock, "Georgia Program for Sterilization, *Journal of the Medical Association of Georgia* 42 (1953): 276.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 277.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 276.



*Sterilization recommendations and objections*

Georgia's eugenic legislation made provisions for institutional release for individuals recommended for eugenic sterilization. Often this meant that a person was held at Milledgeville State Hospital indefinitely, pending the sterilization process. The state's typical rationale for the institutionalization hinged on the procedure more than any particular disability. Assuring that "if sterilized he may leave the Institution and get along satisfactorily with proper supervision,"<sup>73</sup> the state board of eugenics often held individuals recommended for the procedure without the permission of the next of kin.

A letter from the wife and daughter of a forty-three-year-old colored man from Mitchell County recommended for the procedure due to a "schizophrenic reaction" and "addiction to alcohol" illustrates the way these institutionalizations were confusing to and unwanted by many families.<sup>74</sup>

Doctor when you think you are going to perform the operation on [name redacted] I have been waiting to hear from you. We will be glad when he can come home. We need him very badly now. Does the operation have anything to do with his mind Dr? Or do you recon he can do without the operation. We are not hurrying you Dr. because we want him to be good and well when you release him to come. The way my husband talk is his natural way of talking. He has always talked tied tounge. So you can't judge him by the way he talked. I want to come up there to see you, but I was hoping that the next time I come I could bring him back with me. That is why I am writing to you Dr. please tell me when you think he will be able to come with us. Thank you very much.<sup>75</sup>

Other families, in their letters to the board, suggested that they would do anything to get their loved ones back home regardless of their opinions of the sterilization procedure. In correspondence to Dr. Peacock, a man from Pelham granted permission for the procedure with

<sup>73</sup> Sterilization File, 1202COR, 23 June 1950.

<sup>74</sup> Sterilization File, 121RTB, 5 December 1941.

<sup>75</sup> Sterilization File, 4928RFS, 30 January 1962.

<sup>76</sup> Sterilization File, 4928CORa, b, 15 May 1962.



conditions of a furlough for his next of kin. He related to Dr. Peacock that, "I will be willing for you all to operate on her if that will do her any good. Do you suppose after that I can bring her home and keep her home."<sup>76</sup> Indeed, the motivating factor in many of the letters was the return of their loved ones. In response to Dr. Oden and the State Board, the husband of a woman diagnosed as being mentally defective "all her life," revealed that "I have talked this over with her and she is perfectly willing to undergo the operation so she can come back to me."<sup>77</sup>

The sterilization files also illustrate the natural or eugenic ideology that permeated Georgia society. A woman from Atlanta echoed the sentiments of the State Board by stating that her daughter "was not born right and caused her lots of trouble." In the letter, the woman related that she had gone as far to "advise her not to have no children."<sup>78</sup>

Although most of the next of kin in the archived correspondence agreed to the sterilization procedure, many individuals expressed concern over the patient's illness and the effectiveness of the surgery on their particular disability. A man writing in concern about his twenty-four-year-old brother from Tattnall County expressed that, "with reference to the sterilization operation of my brother, if it has anything to do with securing or operation of the complaint in his side, then we are willing for the operation, but just for the sterilization alone we are not willing for the operation."<sup>79</sup> Another correspondence took a similar approach to the procedure, but offered an opposite reaction. In objection to the institutionalization of a thirty-year-old "colored" male from Morgan County,

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<sup>76</sup> Sterilization File, 1262COR, 22 June 1950. 8

<sup>77</sup> Sterilization File, 84COR, 6 June 1940.

<sup>78</sup> Sterilization File, 1371CORa, 1950.

<sup>79</sup> Sterilization File, 2913CORa, 7 December 1950.



his next of kin stated that "children might be his next stage and children might help him. When he was born, he was normal. In some cases children will put them in good health."<sup>80</sup>

There is also correspondence in the files from individuals who obviously had no understanding of eugenics or a sterilization operation. The next of kin of a woman from Marion County diagnosed as manic depressive with "mental trouble following birth of last baby,"<sup>81</sup> expressed that she was "very proud to know that the State Board of Eugenics will meet on June the 13, 1950 and Pass of the advisability of sterilization operation on [name redacted] and I don't see any reason that I would wish to object to the operation."<sup>82</sup>

The correspondence of a thirty-two-year-old "colored" male from Columbus housed in Milledgeville State Hospital with a diagnosis of schizophrenia illustrated typical objections to the operation. His next of kin wrote,

Dr. T.G. Peacock I read your letter telling me about the board will meet on July 8, I will not be able to meet the board for I was over there on July 5 to see this boy and I ask for you I wanted to talk with you but I could not get to see you I do not want [name redacted] to take the operation for he has never try to like no girls and has never try to coat no body and always say he don't like them so that is my objection to the operation and will you please put this letter before the board and please let me no if thay will except it for I don't has the money to come also in your next letter tell me just how he is getting along and do you think he could be taking out on a trail some time this year Thank You.<sup>83</sup>

The most visible instance of a successful objection out of the approximate 4,700 files is illustrated in case 1497. In this case, the guardian of a nineteen-year-old from Fulton County brought charges against Dr. Peacock in the Superior Court of Baldwin County on constitutional questions regarding

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<sup>80</sup> Sterilization File, 3375CORa, 10 March 1957.

<sup>81</sup> Sterilization File, 1234RTB, 24 May 1950.

<sup>82</sup> Sterilization File, 1234COR, 24 May 1950.

<sup>83</sup> Sterilization File, 1739CORa, July 1952.



the sterilization procedure.<sup>84</sup> Although *Buck v. Bell* did not specifically address Fourteenth Amendment issues, Peacock “believed that the ruling of that case was sufficiently broad to cover any objection.” In his response, Peacock argued,

It is clear that the law is well settled respecting the constitutionality of sterilization statutes having reasonable application and providing for hearing and judicial review. The Georgia statute here in question meets every requirement stated by the courts...and is, therefore, valid and effective exercise of the police power of this state.<sup>85</sup>

Although Peacock appeared fully prepared to address the questions of the court, he soon filed an official letter vacating the sterilization order issued by the State Board of Eugenics.<sup>86</sup> By refusing to engage in court, Peacock was able to continue the state’s program without raising any unwanted attention from the press.

The State Board of Eugenics also faced legal challenges regarding the requests for sterilizations of individuals not housed in state institutions. Among the files in the State Archives are several responses from Dr. Peacock concerning the scope of the law regarding sterilizing individuals who were recommended to the state by members of the general public. In correspondence to Dr. W. B. Harrison, Peacock revealed, “our interpretation of the laws governing the state board of eugenics is that the board can pass on only those cases who are confined in a state institution or hospital or training school. We have asked the Attorney General for definite ruling [but] we have not received it.” However, Peacock suggested a route to sterilization for the patient in question, “perhaps Ms. Margaret Owens could get the 14-year-old mentally defective

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<sup>84</sup> Sterilization File, 1497CORf, October 1951. File 1497 directly correlates with legal documentation Georgia, Baldwin County before the board of eugenics, Dr. T. G. Peacock, as Superintendent of Milledgeville State Hospital, -VS- Richard O’Neil Jackson, incompetent, Et Al. response of Frank Fuller, as guardian of Richard O’Neil Jackson. Cassandra E. Maxwell attorney-at-law 864 Hunter St. SW., Atlanta 14, Georgia. File 37-1-5; iv-5-3 (box 164), Georgia Department of Archives and History.

<sup>85</sup> Sterilization File, 1497CORi, October 1951.

<sup>86</sup> Sterilization File, 1497CORj, October 1951.



girl committed to the Gracewood Training School for Mental Defectives prior to the time of the meeting so that the board could pass on her. She could then be returned to her home and have the operation performed by a surgeon of a parent's choice, if they so desire."<sup>87</sup>

Patterns emerging from the incomplete collection of sterilization files housed in the Georgia Archives illustrate that the record keepers at the State Board of Eugenics were not concerned with accuracy. The case of one sixteen-year-old "colored" male from Vidalia was provided with the rationale that "she is likely to become chronically insane, thus unfitted to rear children."<sup>88</sup> File 2753 illustrates the haphazard procedures that the State Eugenics Board used in its recommendations. A 44-year-old married "colored" woman from Terrell County, institutionalized with a diagnosis of "mixed type manic depression reaction" was spared the trauma of having been operated on twice, had the doctor that performed a sterilization preceding the birth of her last child not informed the state board of eugenics about her prior procedure.<sup>89</sup>

#### *Gender and Race in Georgia's Eugenic Programs*

One of the foundational ideas connected to eugenics was that controlling the reproductive capacities of women held a higher importance than controlling those of men. This was no less true in Georgia's sterilization program. Of the 711 sterilization procedures at Milledgeville State

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<sup>87</sup> T. G. Peacock, M. D. Chairman and Secretary State Board of Eugenics, to Dr. W. B. Harrison, Regional Medical Director, August 10, 1950. File 37-1-5; iv-5-3 (box 164), Georgia Department of Archives and History.

<sup>88</sup> Sterilization File, 1435RTB, 20 March 1951. 1572RTB, 1577RTB 1582 RTB, 1585 RTB, are all files on Negro Males. However, the records of the State Board lists them as "she." It appears that the state may have used templates for record keeping and no one caught the oversight.

<sup>89</sup> Sterilization File, 2353CORa, 15 August 1955.



Hospital between 1938 and 1953, only sixty-nine were performed on male patients.<sup>90</sup> Eugenicists placed great concern on a woman's sexuality and each race or group of people had his own definitions surrounding the states ideal man or woman. An example of a sterilization request for a female without racial background information read:

Fulton County. Admitted to this institution on December 18, 1947. Age 18; single. A diagnosis of psychosis with psychopathic personality has been recorded. Commitment history states patient "oversexed." One child.<sup>91</sup>

This fear of hypersexuality remained prominent even though women were more likely to suffer injury or death from a salpingectomy or removal of the Fallopian tube than a man was from a vasectomy.<sup>92</sup> The ability to control the female reproductive system was a primary goal of early eugenicists. In the U.S., these eugenic ideas were welcomed in a society where women were seen as the people whose domestic responsibilities included raising the next generation of good citizens. As racial ideas blended with eugenics in the mid to late nineteenth century, they became "mothers of the race," whose reproductive and domestic capacities bore the burden of social reproduction, and thus racial reproduction.

Along with the role of women in the eugenic belief system, orthodox eugenics also concentrated on race to establish the specific gender roles of the state. Addressing gender roles surrounding the issue of human sterilization in *The Journal of The Medical Association of Georgia*, Avary M. Dimmock referred to an example of a Denver woman who bore five children after refusing to be sterilized. He also illustrated how race affected the concerns of Georgia's eugenic

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<sup>90</sup> T.G. Peacock, "Georgia Program for Sterilization," *Journal of the Medical Association of Georgia* 42 (1953): 276.

<sup>91</sup> Sterilization File, 970RTB, 14 December 1948.

<sup>92</sup> Philip R. Reilly, "Involuntary Sterilization in the United States: A Surgical Solution," *The Quarterly Review of Biology* 62, no. 2 (June 1987): 154.



origins by emphasizing the importance of race degeneration.<sup>93</sup> Dimmock's proclamation that "the law of race-preservation is as vital to a nation as self-preservation is to an individual" provides an understanding about the how eugenic associations often blurred the definitions connected to race and gender.<sup>94</sup>

The sterilization files also exemplify gender definitions that transcend race. The eugenic ideology about womanhood in the African American community in Georgia combined with previous stereotypical ideas about African American women's hypersexuality and immorality, stereotypes first established during slavery.<sup>95</sup> With these presumptions surrounding African American womanhood, many recommendations charged that the patients' sexual abnormalities were responsible for the procedure, rather than any specific mental disability. File 681 illustrates the extent to which sterilizations were implemented out of fear of hypersexuality:

Colored female. Admitted to the above hospital on July 5, 1947. Age 24; separated from husband. Presented to staff and a diagnosis of dementia paradox was made. Pregnant at the time of admission. Commit all kinds of sex acts among her children, ages eight and 6 years. Has not been normal since the birth of first child.<sup>96</sup>

This report concluded with the recommendation that "she is likely to transmit her mental trouble to any offspring that she might have."

Several of the files followed a similar pattern, with race determining the gender rationale concerning the sterilization procedure. A twelve-year-old "colored" female from Stevens County was described as having an "I.Q. of 37" and a "History of sexual irregularities."<sup>97</sup> However, further

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<sup>93</sup> Avary M. Dimmock, "Human Sterilization," *Journal of the Medical Association of Georgia* 26 (1937): 424-425.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1985), 27-31.

<sup>96</sup> Sterilization File, 681RTB, 12 September 1947.

<sup>97</sup> Sterilization File, 1240RTB, 1948.



correspondence in this file reveals that the girl lived in a poorly maintained home with eight other children and a mother who “[ran] around with other men.” This young woman’s mother also described her husband’s family as “being queer,” illustrating the social environment as the root of her “irregularities,” rather than any mental or biological disorder.<sup>98</sup> Only occurring in the gender descriptions of African American women, these hypersexuality accusations were also illustrated in charges such as “slips off and goes with men”<sup>99</sup> and “strips naked in the street.”<sup>100</sup>

In 1954, a fourteen-year-old “colored” female from Muscogee County was presented to the State Board after being found having sexual relations with a soldier.<sup>101</sup> Following a theme of hypersexuality and attraction to soldiers, the State Board noted in its recommendation that “it is also stated that she masturbated.”<sup>102</sup> Another African American woman from Muscogee County was sterilized because she “displays exhibitionism and making sexual approaches to all males with whom she comes in contact.”<sup>103</sup> One of the most blatant examples of the stereotyping of African American women that were not present in the files of white women comes from File 672. In that case, the report stated:

Colored. Admitted to the above hospital on January 25, 1946. Age 20; single. Presented to staff and diagnosed psychosis with mental deficiency. Was sent here because she was sex problem at home. Wild over soldiers. Social Worker reports she had sex relations with 14 soldiers in one night.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Sterilization File, 1240CORc, 9 June 1950.

<sup>99</sup> Sterilization File, 1224RTB, 1 June 1950.

<sup>100</sup> Sterilization File, 1016RTB, 9 December 1948.

<sup>101</sup> Sterilization File, 672 RTB, 12 September 1947.

<sup>102</sup> Sterilization File, 2512RTB, 12 July 1954.

<sup>103</sup> Sterilization File, 4821 RTB, 11 September 1961.

<sup>104</sup> Sterilization File, 672 RTB, 12 September 1947.



Along with these stereotypical identifications of black womanhood, the gender descriptions illustrated in File 1038 show how sterilizations were also used as a form of birth control. The situation of a fourteen-year-old Cobb County female, presented to the clinic with a diagnosis of psychosis with mental deficiency, is described as “mother forced to leave patient alone at home as she goes out to work. Fear that someone might take advantage of patient and she might get pregnant.”<sup>105</sup>

The case of another fourteen-year-old young woman, this one from Richmond County, illustrates opposite concerns. Her next of kin wrote in protest, “I do not want her to go through with that process, because she is too young. And she has a chance of getting better the older she gets.”<sup>106</sup> Also illustrating the unwanted nature of the institutionalization her relative asserted that, “if she cannot stay without that process, I would like for you all to return her to me. Because I will take her and keep her out of the street at all times.”<sup>107</sup> Although Dr. Peacock acknowledged this objection, he provided the same generic response: “It is the opinion of the staff that this operation should be performed on [name redacted]. It would not effect [sic] her mental condition, the only purpose of this operation is to prevent her becoming a mother.”<sup>108</sup> The files show no other correspondence between the family and Dr. Peacock. The young woman in question was sterilized four months later.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Sterilization File, 1038RTB, 22 June 1949.

<sup>106</sup> Sterilization File, 4035CORa, 20 July 1958.

<sup>107</sup> Sterilization File, 4035CORa, 20 July 1958.

<sup>108</sup> Sterilization File, 4035CORb, 24 July 1958.

<sup>109</sup> Sterilization File, 4035RPT, 21 November 1958.



Although early eugenicists did not focus on homosexuality or its perceived biological origins, it was a reoccurring justification for both “colored” and “Caucasian” males. The State Board did not explicitly target homosexuals as a demographic. However, it was a justification in several recommendations for sterilization. In 1953, a sixteen-year-old Negro male from Muscogee County was admitted to the clinic and diagnosed with “Sexual deviation, homosexuality, psychotic reaction.”<sup>110</sup> Although his next of kin did not consent to the procedure, this man received a vasectomy. The sixteen-year-old's mother wrote a letter to Dr. Peacock, stating that “I wouldn't want him operated because I do need his help I don't have anyone much to depend on.” Following the correspondence from other Georgians who simply wanted their loved ones returned home, she concluded her letter with a plea: “I do wish it would be to the place you all could see him home soon.”<sup>111</sup>

Another example of homosexuality as a factor in the state's recommendations was the case of a thirteen-year-old committed to the institution by the Juvenile Court of DeKalb County. The board's records do not elaborate on the details of his charges, stating only, “Patient lies and steals and practices homo-sexuality.”<sup>112</sup>

Other files recommended sterilization for sexual irregularities rather than homosexuality. Many of the files are not descriptive and only list a diagnosis. Therefore, a sexual irregularity could encompass various conditions. Sexually transmitted disease, rape, and lifestyle choice were common factors that the State Board of Eugenics took into consideration and were classified as irregularities. The case of a thirteen-year-old “colored” male from Hall County illustrates how the

<sup>110</sup> Sterilization File, 2450RTB, 10 February 1954.

<sup>110</sup> Sterilization File, 2208CORa, July 1952.

<sup>111</sup> Sterilization File, 2208RTB, July 1952.

<sup>112</sup> Sterilization File, 63RTB, 17 July 1959.



Board diagnosed these conditions: "Presented to the clinic and diagnosed of schizophrenic reaction, catatonic type recorded. Sexual irregularities are noted."<sup>113</sup>

The development of Georgia's eugenic ideology followed mainstream aspects of the movement. Many social issues, such as homosexuality and alcoholism, were deemed to have biological origins and thus presented as a problem that could be prevented by eugenic sterilization. Recommendations from the state include medical and social "illnesses" that were not desirable in Georgia's society. In this application, eugenics became a tool that Georgians used to shape their ideal Anglo Saxon identity.

#### *Origins and Development in Georgia's Schools (1900-1936)*

Similar to the trajectory of sterilization legislation, the formation of the eugenics in the public school system in Georgia and the Deep South followed national trends with delayed applications and reactions.<sup>114</sup> Initial reactions to eugenics in Georgia were favorable and matched white public approval of the burgeoning system of Jim Crow. Political and educational leaders in the South had relied on the belief that people of African descent were inherently inferior to whites since slavery and continued policies based on that ideology throughout the twentieth century. Just as slaveholders had defended their institution on scientific and biblical understandings of race and "progress," educators also based their perceptions of race and human variation on the consensus of scientists and political leaders.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Sterilization File, 2450RTB, 10 February 1954.

<sup>114</sup> Georgia was the last state in the Union to enact sterilization laws. By 1938, when Georgia administered its first sterilization, the national view began to shift away from state-supported eugenic programs. Larson, *Sex, Race, and Science*, 147.

<sup>115</sup> James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 346.



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The rise of Jim Crow policies in the South corresponded with the formation of eugenics as an academic discipline. The two shared the ideological framework of perceived low African American intellectual capacity and racial inferiority. Emancipated Negroes were denied the right to hold office based on the standard anthropological beliefs that Africans and Africa-descended peoples were incapable of governing due to their so-called lack of capacity.

The Deep South was reluctant to commit to state funding for public education, and Georgia had historically opposed establishing a system to serve its citizens. However, during Reconstruction, Georgia's new constitution (demanded by the U.S. Congress and written with the participation of many elected African Americans) mandated a public school system in the state. Although this new constitution called for "a thorough system of general education, to be forever free to all children of the State," policies were adopted slowly. With the resumption of Democratic control in the Georgia Legislature in 1872, racial segregation came to the forefront of its planning and applications. In 1895, Georgia enacted legislation that barred the shared use of educational facilities for whites and African Americans, setting the foundation for Jim Crow schooling for the next seventy years in the state.<sup>116</sup>

Ravished by war and inept Reconstruction efforts, Georgia's public schools failed to gain any significant developments until the early half of the twentieth century.<sup>117</sup> In 1910, M. L. Brittain was appointed the state's superintendent of schools and was tasked with developing its structure. Brittain's primary challenge was establishing a standard for teaching traditionally underachieving

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<sup>116</sup> John L. Hopkins; Clifford Anderson; and Joseph Lamar, "1895 Code Vol. 1" (1896). *Historic Georgia Digests and Codes*. Book 27. Georgia also established segregation codes about the housing of inmates and individuals deemed to be insane. The measure to segregate public schools and the penalties associated with it was reestablished in 1926, 1933, and 1945.

<sup>117</sup> Anderson, *Education of Blacks in the South*, 167.

to Brittain



rural populations. To combat the persistence of poverty and lack of funding, Brittain called for additional funding from local districts. A 1912 article in *The Journal of Education* illustrates the challenges that the state had to confront. In "Educational Intelligence," Britton wrote, "We speak of the free school. But this fund is not and never has been large enough to keep the schools going as they should." He suggested that "the practice blinds people to its essential injustice, and gives plausibility to the cry of those who say that every man should educate his own children."<sup>118</sup>

Along with economic and organizational issues, Brittain also had to face the challenges of the directing the state's curricula. As the eugenics movement grew and became embraced by prominent scientists and political leaders, Georgia had to determine how its schools would disseminate the ideology of eugenics to its citizens. With the option to include eugenic ideology in the curriculum through topics such as sex hygiene in 1914, Brittain elected to abstain from any incorporation of eugenics in the state's programs. Georgia's educators did not object to the ideology associated with eugenics; rather, they demurred on the basis of the intricacies of the subject matter.

According to Brittain, eugenics was a subject best imparted in the home environment. *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* covered the superintendent's refusal and agreed with his assertion that the education of eugenics should be developed outside of the school environment. Describing the challenges associated with the subject, the editor wrote,

The task at once appeals to the logical mind not as one of the labors of Hercules but as all seven of them rolled into one. We have been stumbling along in blindness over the laws of inheritance, and as to "how much we should tell children," ever since civilization was entitled to that term. To think how that we can correct that oversight in a very few years, either by teaching children eugenics or prescribing scientific marriages is to fall into a pitfall that would be very funny if it were not very tragic.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> "Educational Intelligence," *The Journal of Education* 76, no. 8 (1893): 218–223.

<sup>119</sup> "No Eugenics in Schools," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, January 11, 1914.



Indeed, teaching scientific racism through the public education system was tragic, and the paper made sure to relay the message that, "the science of eugenics is, in its way and place, an excellent one." According to *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, Georgians agreed with the "science" behind eugenics, but the paper nonetheless concluded with the assertion that, "the man or woman who would put edged tools in the hands of children is playing with something that resembles dynamite."<sup>120</sup>

As the school districts began to form some semblance of a modern system, the eugenics movement continued to gain support throughout mainstream America. Georgia may have said no to eugenics in its schools, but, as the superintendent suggested, the ideology was nurtured in the home environment. As products of the communities that they served, Georgia's public schools were a reflection of society at large and taught subjects based on society's understanding of an issue. While refusing to recommend the study of eugenics in its schools, Georgia's education system continued to use history and science textbooks that either ignored race or followed a eugenic ideology. Lawton Evans' *The Student's History of Georgia*, the first Georgia history textbook adopted in the beginning of the twentieth century, overlooked the role of Negroes in its society and surmised that the primary cause of the Civil War was that President Lincoln was elected on a "platform that denied [white southerners] protection for their property in the territories."<sup>121</sup>

The chapter on Reconstruction made little mention of African Americans outside of their role in politics. In an analysis of the Reconstruction Act of 1867, the text suggested that

There were nearly as many Negroes on the register as white men, the total number registered being 192,235, of which 95,973 were colored persons. General Pope then ordered an election for delegates to a constitutional

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Lawton B. Evans, *The Student's History of Georgia* (Macon, GA: J. W. Burke & Co., 1884), 269.



convention. Many whites refused to vote in this election, and the Negroes voted for the first time. Many of the delegates chosen were men of no character and little ability. Of the 166 delegates elected, 33 were negroes.”<sup>122</sup>

By implying that the delegates had character issues and were incapable of political participation, the textbook reinforced the eugenic ideology that Africans, as a race, did not have the historical progress that was required for self-governance and political incorporation. The Deep South was not at the forefront of any significant educational developments and typically implemented strategies that originated in other school districts throughout the nation.

Georgia's history textbooks mostly avoided the subject of eugenics; however, the biology textbooks that were available at the time supported the mainstream eugenic descriptions concerning race and human variation. In the field of biology, Georgia was home to one of the most famous reconcilers of evolution and religion, Joseph LeConte. LeConte was a native Georgian who became a professor of natural science at Oglethorpe University and the University of South Carolina. After the Civil War, LeConte chose to leave the South for a teaching position at the University of California due to the increased participation by Negroes in politics, which he described as “the intolerable insolence of the negroes suddenly set free with all their passions.” He also suggested that Reconstruction was destined to fail and that “the sudden enfranchisement of the negro without qualification was the greatest political crime ever perpetrated by any people, as is now admitted by all thoughtful men.”<sup>123</sup> Even though LeConte found living with emancipated African Americans unbearable, he continued to influence ideas on race in the South. In 1888, he published *Evolution: its History, its Evidences, and its Relation to Religious Thought* with the

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 309.

<sup>123</sup> Joseph LeConte, *The Autobiography of Joseph Le Conte*, ed. William Dallam Armes (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1903), 230.



intention of breaking through the religious barriers that prevented widespread acceptance of Darwinism in the Deep South.

Southerners were typically reluctant to embrace evolutionary theories based on the ideological conflicts with religious doctrines concerning the origins of species; however, their beliefs of white supremacy fell in line with eugenics and social Darwinism. Similar to the ideology of human variation developed by German anthropologist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, many educators in the South believed that Negroes were naturally inferior to whites as suggested by scientific racism, and they understood progress as the contributing factor in Africans' assumed lack of civilized historical development. Subjects such as Civic Biology reinforced these beliefs with textbooks that connected the theories of evolution and eugenics and applied them to social issues.<sup>124</sup>

With Georgia's stance that eugenics should be learned outside of the classroom, the home environment along with popular culture became one of the major outlets for processing eugenic information. In 1919, amidst news and war maps from the First World War, the *Atlanta Constitution* published a first page brief on eugenics in Africa. The article reported the findings of J. H. Balmer, an English traveler and an authority on South Africa per the Royal Geographical Society of London. Balmer was famous for traveling the European world with his "singing boys," three kaffir youth from South Africa. He is reported to have described that "when a baby is born to Zulu parents, and it appears to be below standard, it is given a gentle wallop over the

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<sup>124</sup> Jean Dawson, *Civic Biology* (Boston, MA: Ginn, 1918), 344-45. The textbook was widely used throughout the early twentieth century. Her work directly links evolution to eugenics and boldly promotes the critical need to prevent the "feeble-minded" – 1 in 30 Americans, according to the authors – from reproducing. Information accessed via: <http://www.textbookhistory.com/database-eugenics-in-high-school-biology-textbooks/>. This database arranges high school biology textbooks based on their use of eugenic ideology.



head...After that there is a funeral.”<sup>125</sup> The lampooned representation of Africans and their baby selection policies illustrates the assumed applications of eugenics in supposedly less civilized regions of the world. It also reinforced the notion of a lack of racial progress for Africans that had grown to become the standard in the southern understanding of human variation and its connection to social structures. By highlighting a story that was familiar to whites through the social policies of ancient societies, the *Atlanta Constitution* helped fortify the traditional understanding of eugenics outside of the educational system.

Other representations of eugenics in popular culture also demonstrated how eugenics blended with mainstream science. In 1927, the *Pittsburg Courier* published an article on students that were behind in their studies. The report covered a study of four thousand pupils, administered by a “State-wide commission,” that found “the feeble-minded tend to be the first or second rather than the last child.”<sup>126</sup> As these “scientific” studies became a part of public conversations, eugenics was accepted by a more diverse audience as evident in the favorable article published in the African American newspaper.

Despite the non-recommendation of including eugenics in the curriculum of Georgia’s public school systems, its inclusion in higher education was favorable. In 1927, the *Atlanta Constitution* revisited the issue of race in schools, this time to comment on a report of the American Eugenics Society regarding the progress of eugenic studies in American colleges. In its report, the AES revealed that “three quarters of the colleges are offering instruction in human biology, which

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<sup>125</sup> “Club is the solution of Eugenics Problem Among Zulus of Africa,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 17, 1916.

<sup>126</sup> “Psychiatrists Study Backwards Students – Feeble-minded Pupils Found to Be First or Second Rather Than Last Child,” *The Pittsburg Courier*, August 6, 1927.



may be covered by the term genetics or eugenics.”<sup>127</sup> The AES report also recommended including eugenics in high school instruction. Along with suggesting that teachers of biology should be carefully selected, the *Atlanta Constitution* reported that,

These scientists suggested that attention to human physiology in high schools might be shared with eugenics. The suggestion was likewise offered of possibility of the education committee of the society cooperating advantageously with the health education. Physical education and home economics groups of the society with the idea of getting a liberal share of instruction, basic for eugenics in the courses in general science and general biology in the seventh, eighth and ninth grades of the public schools.<sup>128</sup>

Since their creation, American universities were designed to take advantage of the system of slavery. In his examination of the legacy of slavery in America’s higher education systems, Stephen Wilder illustrates how by the nineteenth-century universities also embraced the ideology of scientific racism by teaching facets of eugenics embedded throughout their curriculum. Wilder suggests that “the rise of scientific racism, like theological racism, required interventions in the academic and intellectual realms, from the passive distortions of unreliable and biased sources to the active invasions of slave traders and slave owners seeking intellectual proofs for their suspicions and assertions about the nature of color.”<sup>129</sup>

Indeed, as white southerners received increased criticisms for their constructed racial hierarchy they often turned to academic institutions to justify their ideologies. Many eugenic theories of human variation established in American universities became foundational arguments of white supremacists. In his examination of eugenics in education, Clyde Chitty argues that “popular eugenic theories actually *acquired* their popularity through the official knowledge sponsored by the state.” He also suggests that, despite its formal demise by the 1970s, “eugenic

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<sup>127</sup> “Eugenics in the Schools,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, November 27, 1927.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> Steven Wilder, *Ebony & Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2014), 190.



ideas had never, in fact, gone away; they were always there, embodied in the constant struggles over sufficient funding for the education of the poor and for school a school system that was less elitist and less classed, raced and gendered."<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Clyde Chitty, *Eugenics, Race and Intelligence in Education* (New York: Continuum International Pub. Group, 2007), 113.



## CHAPTER FOUR: EUGENICS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION (1937 - 2010)

“History accompanying patient states that patient was not able to get along with other children and interferes with other children’s social and school activities. Wanders away from home and not able to learn in school.”<sup>131</sup>

Although there was no explicit protocol for sterilization in Georgia’s schools outside of the Gracewood Training School for Mental Defectives, an inability to successfully matriculate through the school system was a key factor in the state’s decision to sterilize an individual. The typical narrative surrounding most school-age Georgians subject to sterilization was their inability to function according to socially accepted norms. Students across Georgia that could not advance or had behavioral issues could be sent to the Gracewood Training School and recommended for sterilizations.

File 4060, the case of a “colored” male, illustrates the manner in which the State Board utilized education in its determination:

Age 16 years, Mental Age 7 years, 10 months, I.Q. 57. Diagnosis: mental defect, moron. Admitted to Georgia Training School for Mental Defectives December 19, 1955, from Coffee County, Georgia.” “History accompanying patient states that patient does not learn in school. Gets into trouble on the streets and not able to control him at home. He steals and lies.<sup>132</sup>

Since the sterilization procedure was outpatient, it was possible for youths to be transferred to Gracewood for a brief period and then transitioned back to their homes. This system allowed the State Board to sterilize more individuals, as the law required that they only operate on individuals that were housed in a state institution. The State Board recommended many of the individuals that were committed to the Training School for Mental Defectives for the inability to adjust in public

<sup>131</sup> Sterilization File, 3451RTB, 5 April 1957. Atlanta, Georgia.

<sup>132</sup> Sterilization File, 4060RTB, 31 July 1958. Douglas Georgia.



schools.<sup>133</sup> In 1955, a sixteen-year-old black male from Atlanta was admitted to the Training School and sterilized because he “was not able to get along with other children and interferes with other children’s social and school activities. Wanders away from home and not able to learn in school.”<sup>134</sup>

In the case of a twenty-five-year-old black female from Lawrenceville, the board observed that the “history accompanying patient shows that mother is nervous. Patient had convulsions until 4 years of age. Went to school and six years old and reached the third grade. Did not learn in school.” Although the recommendation did not specify any mental deficiency, Dr. Oden concluded that the “patient is only twenty-five years old. She is still in the child-bearing age, and would, without a doubt transmit her mental deficiency to her offspring. She admits sexual relations before coming to the hospital.”<sup>135</sup> The inclusion of sexual promiscuity in the recommendation illustrates how Georgia’s eugenicists followed the fundamental belief that the “negro is aghast at his own wild, impulsive nature.”<sup>136</sup>

Typical of most justifications for the sterilization of “colored” females, hypersexuality or sexual irregularities accompanied the justifications for a 13-year-old “moron” from Coweta County. Admitted to Georgia Training School for Mental Defectives because she “was unable to advance in school satisfactorily,” the Board also recorded that the “Patient has been sexually promiscuous and has had gonorrhoea according to history.”<sup>137</sup> Another Negro female with an “I. Q.

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<sup>133</sup> Stephen Noll, *Feeble-Minded in Our Midst: Institutions for the Mentally Retarded in the South, 1900-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 116.

<sup>134</sup> Sterilization File, 3451RTB 5 April 1957. Atlanta, Georgia.

<sup>135</sup> Sterilization File, 775RTB, 8 September 1947. Bulloch County.

<sup>136</sup> Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, 350.

<sup>137</sup> Sterilization File, 563RTB, Newnan, Georgia. 29 December 1945.



of 33” and five siblings that were “mentally retarded” was sterilized in part because she was “unable to exercise ordinary judgment and prudence.”<sup>138</sup>

According to eugenic ideologies, criminal behavior was biologically determined and expressed itself in public arenas such as the school system. The case of a sixteen-year-old Negro male from Augusta illustrates this ideology. In 1939, he was admitted to the Training School because he “was unable to learn in school, gave a great deal of trouble stealing and roaming the streets. Deficient in memory, and one time secured and [sic] axe and started to knock a child in the head. Patient, while in the institution, has been quite a behavior problem, inclined to take things that do not belong to him.”<sup>139</sup>

The themes of intelligence and social status were constant throughout the lifespan of the State Board of Eugenics. In 1961, the state processed another sixteen-year-old “colored” male for sterilization based on his inability to adapt to social norms. Diagnosed as an “imbecile” with a “41 I.Q.,” the Board also noted that “this child has been in Milledgeville twice for stealing. He received treatment for syphilis while at Milledgeville. Our records show that this child is not capable of adequate socially accepted judgment.”<sup>140</sup> Another example of perceived intelligence and social acceptance is evident in File 4829. The State Board recommended a fourteen-year-old white male from Augusta diagnosed with a mild mental retardation and an IQ of fifty-nine, with the rationale that the “history accompanying this child states that parents are of normal intelligence and that this

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<sup>138</sup> Sterilization File, 4493RTB, Nashville, Georgia 4 February 1960.

<sup>139</sup> Sterilization File, 66RTB, 17 July 1939. Augusta

<sup>140</sup> Sterilization File, 4833RTB, Dalton, Georgia 11 September 1961.



child's retardation is due to birth injuries. The patient's constant behavioral problems indicate complete lack of judgment in social situations."<sup>141</sup>

The public school system as a reflection of the community it served influenced the state's direction on genetics. With a state board of eugenics focused on the sterilization of individuals who "if released without sterilization, to procreate a child or children who would have a tendency to serious physical, mental, or nervous disease or deficiency," the science of eugenics became a key factor in many Georgians interpretation of human intelligence and variation.<sup>142</sup> At the time of this research, there is little direct evidence of the application of eugenics in Georgia's public school systems outside of the 1914 recommendation to exclude it from the statewide curriculum. The Georgia Archives is in the process of organizing documents relating to eugenics; however, the majority of the material is more closely related to the medical field rather than to its applications in education.

Newly released sterilization files from the Georgia Department of Archives and History may provide information relevant to this study. Critical areas of future research on eugenics in Georgia revolve around how the state determined who was eugenically unfit and the role of educators in that process. Current eugenic files at the Georgia Department of Archives and History focus on the medical aspects and correspondence of the state board at Milledgeville; however, new material has the potential to shed light on unknown aspects of Georgia's eugenics programs. These questions stem from issues of clarity in this research topic and gain support from studies such as Ann Winfield's on the implications of eugenics in American memory. Winfield suggests that

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<sup>141</sup> Sterilization File, 4829RTB, 31 August 1961.

<sup>142</sup> 1937 Georgia Laws, Chapter 5, Section 3, 414-415.



“teachers and students were enlisted in the movement to eliminate the unfit, unhygienic, and deficient from schools.”<sup>143</sup>

Some of the challenges associated with understanding the role of eugenics in American schools are rooted in a false sense of the accomplishment of social scientists and the effectiveness of their utilization of “anthropological antiprejudice pedagogy as a powerful weapon in the war against fascism.”<sup>144</sup> Several studies of race in America’s educational systems echo Zoe Burkholder’s work and give the impression that tolerance in American education began to influence policy in response to Nazism and scientific racism in the late 1930s. However, although out of favor on the national level, several southern states, such as Georgia, continued sterilizations throughout the beginning of the modern era, illustrating the need for continued examination and clarity on the role of race in education.<sup>145</sup>

The Deep South embraced eugenic policies and programs much later than most states in the Union. In Georgia, the public school system rejected a role as the disseminator of the ideology; however, the state did not suppress the movement and became the last state to pass eugenic sterilization legislation. Although there is little evidence to illustrate the ways that eugenics manifested in classrooms across the South, Ann Morning’s examination of how race has been taught across educational systems in America demonstrates how “race concepts are conveyed to the public through formal education.”<sup>146</sup> Understanding the ways that the nation learned the

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<sup>143</sup> Ann Gibson Winfield, *Eugenics and Education in America: Institutionalized Racism and the Implications of History, Ideology, and Memory* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 123.

<sup>144</sup> Zoë Burkholder, *Color in the Classroom: How American Schools Taught Race, 1900-1954* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 8.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> Ann Morning, *The Nature of Race: How Scientists Think and Teach About Human Difference* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 21.



concepts of race and eugenic ideology provides a foundation for future directions for the role of race in public education.

Eugenics is contemporarily remembered as a relic of Nazi ideology. However, as Ann Morning suggests, modern “biological interpretations of race remain powerful in scientific thinking and communication to the public.”<sup>147</sup> Sabina Vaught also supports this contemporary eugenic crossover with her observation that “like the eugenics movement and the birth of innately racist IQ testing, contemporary high-stakes tests and standards rest on scientific laurels, discursively fashioned as “universal” and “fair.”<sup>148</sup> The study of eugenics in the educational systems in the South can contribute to the field of history by providing insight into the scientific justifications for white supremacy that were commonplace during the eugenics movement and continue to dominate contemporary research into human variation.

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Sabina Vaught, *Racism, Public Schooling, and the Entrenchment of White Supremacy: A Critical Race Ethnography* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 159.



## CONCLUSION: EUGENICS IN THE MODERN ERA (1965-2010)

The history of eugenics in Georgia is developing piecemeal. Before Edward Larson's examination of eugenics in the Deep South in 1997, there was no published history available on the state's sterilization program. Although *Sex, Race, and Science: Eugenics in the Deep South* was groundbreaking and is considered the most thorough history of eugenics in Georgia, Larson's work was limited by the availability of his sources. Several of the conclusions that he developed were not established with knowledge of the state files that were released in 2007, along with a state resolution expressing "regret for Georgia's participation in the eugenics movement and the injustices done under eugenics laws, including the forced sterilization of Georgia citizens."<sup>149</sup>

One month before the resolution passed, the *Atlanta Constitution* published Gayle White's article, "Involuntary Sterilization in Georgia: Why did it Happen?" The article was the first significant publication of the state's eugenic files and has fueled new interest in the state's eugenic past. Although there have been no books written on the subject since the release of the files in 2007, academic interest in the subject is increasing. In 2010, Stephen Smith, a graduate student at Georgia State University, analyzed a sample of the eugenics files for his thesis, *Eugenic Sterilization in 20th Century Georgia: From Progressive Utilitarianism to Individual Rights*. Although he had access to the state's files, his analysis did not include any racial aspects. In fact, Smith's research agrees with Larson's analysis "that proponents of sterilization in the South never

<sup>148</sup> Stephen Smith, *Eugenic Sterilization in 20th Century Georgia: From Progressive Utilitarianism to Individual Rights* master's thesis, Georgia State University, 2010, Electronic Thesis & Dissertations, 394. Electronic Thesis & Dissertations, 394. <http://digitalcommons.gsu.edu/etd/394>

<sup>149</sup> Data compiled from the Sterilization Files at the Georgia Department of Archives and History, Morrow, Georgia. Data compiled from the Sterilization Files at the Georgia Department of Archives and History, Morrow, Georgia. Research presented at the annual meeting of the American Society for Human Genetics, Atlanta, Georgia, September 17, 2010.

<sup>149</sup> S. Res. 247, 149th Gen. Assem., Reg. Sess. (Ga. 2007). March 27, 2007.



publically advocated directing sterilization toward a particular race. Instead, advocates spoke of sterilizing both whites and blacks in order to prevent poverty and degeneracy."<sup>150</sup>

While Georgia's sterilization program never explicitly targeted one race over the other, data retrieved from the sterilization files illustrate patterns that can uncover the state's rationale on its eugenic identity. Larson's analysis of eugenics in Georgia failed to take in to account the prevailing doctrine of white supremacy and the overtly racist society in the South. Examining eugenics in the scope of the segregated society provides a more thorough understanding of the motivations underlying the state's eugenic past. Current analysis of the files shows that Georgia's target racial demographics changed over the course of its sterilization program. In its early years, from 1940 to 1949, the state only performed sterilizations on women, and most were white. The focus of the state board shifted to include men, and from 1956-1957, seventy-five percent of all male sterilizations were African American. From 1940 to 1965, African Americans comprised only thirty percent of the total population. However, the demographic made up fifty-four percent of the states eugenic sterilizations. Further examination of the data confirms the racial shift towards African Americans. During the years of 1950-65, sixty-one percent of all sterilizations focused on black Georgians.<sup>151</sup>

Indeed, Georgia's eugenic sterilization program was racially motivated. Patterns in the data illustrate that the procedure was used as both a form of social control and tool to resist integration. As the Civil Rights Movement emerged in the late 1950's, the frequency of involuntary

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<sup>150</sup> Stephen Smith, *Eugenic Sterilization in 20th Century Georgia: From Progressive Utilitarianism to Individual Rights* master's thesis, Georgia State University 2010, Electronic Thesis & Dissertations.594. Electronic Theses & Dissertations. 594.<https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd/594>

<sup>151</sup> Data compiled from the Sterilization files at the Georgia Department of Archives and History, Morrow, Georgia. Data compiled from the Sterilization files at the Georgia Department of Archives and History, Morrow, Georgia. Amy D'Unger and Paul Lombardo. "Ethics, Eugenics, and Public Health in Georgia," Research presented at the annual symposium of the Georgia Department of Archives and History, Morrow, Georgia. September 17, 2016.



sterilizations on black Georgians began to increase. This correlation follows the eugenic strategy of eliminating or reducing a minority population through sterilizations. In Georgia, the fear of increasing integration efforts led to the targeting of African Americans for eugenic sterilization. Amy D'Unger suggests that, during an earlier era, the sterilization program played a role in slowing the number of lynchings across the state. She has hypothesized that the data from the state's files correlates with the sterilizations being used as a less violent substitute for the outrage.<sup>152</sup>

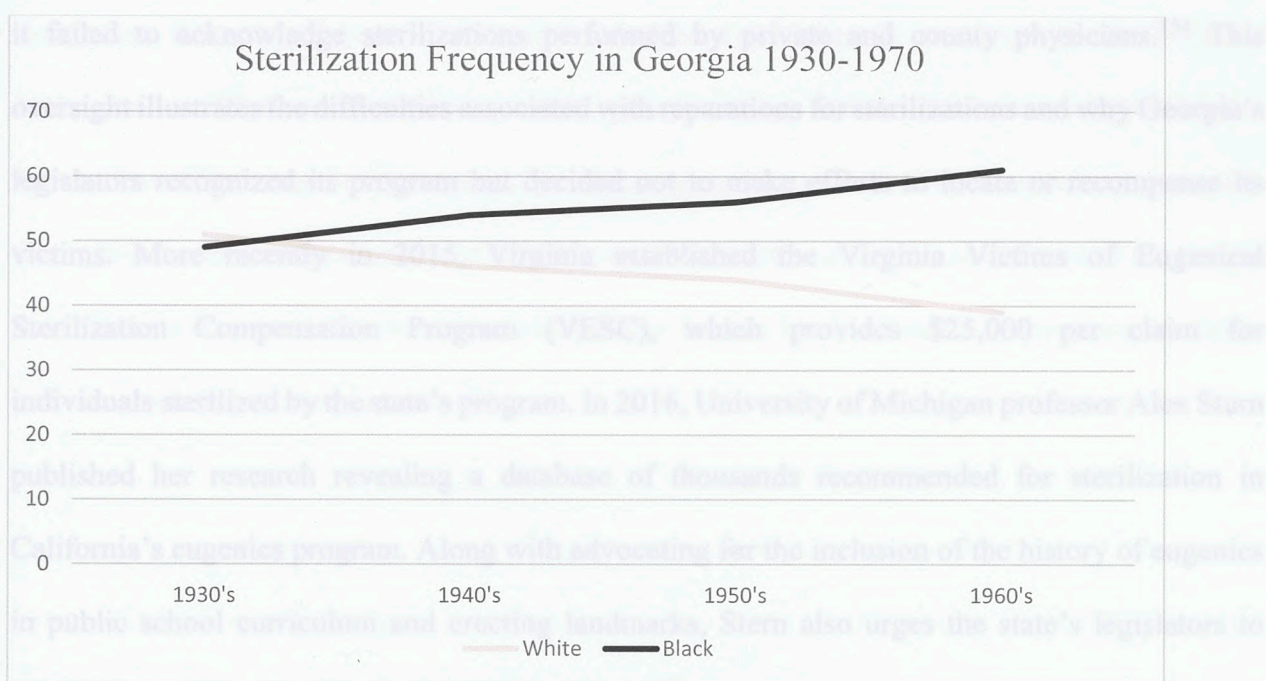


Figure 3: STERILIZATION FREQUENCY IN GEORGIA, 1930-1970

During the 1960's criticisms concerning Georgia's sterilization laws and violations of patient's rights began to grow. The 1937 law was repealed in 1970 when the procedure became available only at the request of a parent or guardian, making the state's sterilization program voluntary. Contemporarily, Georgia's legislature has issued an apology in the form of a resolution

<sup>152</sup> Amy D'Unger and Paul Lombardo. "Ethics, Eugenics, and Public Health in Georgia," Research presented at the annual symposium of the Georgia Department of Archives and History, Morrow, Georgia. September 17, 2016.



for the victims of its programs and vows to “support the full education of Georgia citizens about the eugenics movement in order to foster a respect for the fundamental dignity of human life and the God-given rights recognized by our Founding Fathers.”<sup>153</sup> Although the resolution made progress in reconciling with its eugenic past, Georgia fell short compared to the recent efforts made in other states.

In 2013, North Carolina established a fund to compensate the victims of its eugenic sterilization program. Although the payments were successful for victims of the state’s program, it failed to acknowledge sterilizations performed by private and county physicians.<sup>154</sup> This oversight illustrates the difficulties associated with reparations for sterilizations and why Georgia’s legislators recognized its program but decided not to make efforts to locate or recompense its victims. More recently in 2015, Virginia established the Virginia Victims of Eugenical Sterilization Compensation Program (VESC), which provides \$25,000 per claim for individuals sterilized by the state’s program. In 2016, University of Michigan professor Alex Stern published her research revealing a database of thousands recommended for sterilization in California’s eugenics program. Along with advocating for the inclusion of the history of eugenics in public school curriculum and erecting landmarks, Stern also urges the state’s legislators to establish compensations for its surviving victims.<sup>155</sup>

As the United States continues to struggle with its shared national identity, the issues of culture and genetics often emerge as indicators for various groups within the nation. Technological advances have increased our collective understanding of the human genome, and there is a

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<sup>153</sup> S. Res. 247, 149th Gen. Assem., Reg. Sess. (Ga. 2007). March 27, 2007.

<sup>154</sup> Campbell, Colin, and Ann Doss Helms. “More NC Eugenics Victims Could Become Eligible for Compensation.” *The News & Observer*, 9 June 2016.

<sup>155</sup> Katie Morrissey. “California victims of eugenics-based sterilization programs deserve reparations, researchers say.” *Los Angeles Times*, 26 December 2016.



consensus amongst scholars that the idea of race is a social construct lacking enough biological variation to differentiate races of man. However, the same technology is revealing biological markers for racial variations and has the ability to be used as a tool for social control through genetic manipulation.

Understanding the comprehensive history of eugenics is vital for future generations. The ability to apply eugenic ideology to social and biological issues has grown with advanced genetic research and poses ethical questions in many of its findings. Although the academic consensus downplays the role of genetics in racial variation, new research continues to challenge its interpretations.<sup>156</sup> If not applied responsibly, genetic editing has the potential to shape societies in ways that follow eugenic principles. The education and awareness of how eugenics programs in Georgia were racially motivated and how the ideology became a tool for social control can indeed help “foster a respect for the fundamental dignity of human life,” and serve as a warning for future policies regarding human genetics.<sup>157</sup>

<sup>156</sup> Ann Harmon, “In DNA Era, New Worries About Prejudice.” *The New York Times*, 11 November 2007.

<sup>157</sup> S. Res. 247, 149th Gen. Assem., Reg. Sess. (Ga. 2007). March 27, 2007.



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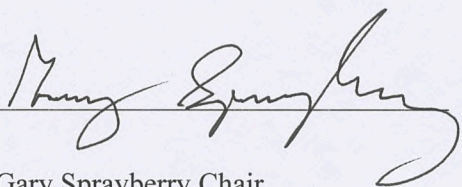
MASTER OF ARTS

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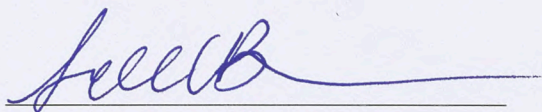
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