Menace of Undesirables:
The Eugenics Movement During the Progressive Era

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In the United States, the first two decades of the Twentieth Century witnessed the flowering of a host of reform movements collectively called "progressivism". Unbridled capitalism and an adherence to the "Gospel of Success" during the Gilded Age of the 19th century had produced industrial misery, class polarization, and urban distress. Americans, experiencing the social inequities of the post-Civil War period and the pangs of depression during the 1890’s, enthusiastically embraced movements for reform to help alleviate the injustices and suffering.

Originally, progressive reformers sought to regulate irresponsible corporate monopoly, safeguarding consumers and labor from the excesses of the profit motive. Furthermore, they desired to correct the evils and inequities created by rapid and uncontrolled urbanization. Progressivism, basically a conservative response, asserted that the social order could and must be improved while maintaining what progressives considered "the American way of life." Some historians, like Richard Hofstadter and George Mowry, have argued that the progressive movement attempted to return America to an older, more simple, agrarian lifestyle. For a few progressives, this certainly was true. But for most, a humanitarian doctrine of social progress motivated the reforming spirit more than a conservative minority’s alleged "status anxiety".

Yet, certain conservative elements of the progressive movement did utilize American’s inclination toward social change as a means to legislate morality and promote the establishment of a racially pure America. The most obvious form of social control stemmed from the long-standing desire of Christian reformers to temper American’s drinking habits. Prohibition became a symbol of "the general system of ascetic behavior with which the Protestant middle-classes had been identified." Furthermore, prohibition became identified with nativism and racial superiority.

One crusader remarked, "The Anglo-Saxon stock is the best improved, hardestiest and fittest . . . If we are to preserve this nation and the Anglo-Saxon type we must abolish saloons." Thus, certain social and economic reforms during the Progressive Era resulted in the tendency of Christian crusaders to over-regulate, particularly in areas with moral or racial considerations.

Racist views had flowed throughout American intellectual history since the Jacksonian "age of the common man" of the 1830s. During the Gilded Age, WASP (white Anglo-Saxon Protestant) Americans took great strides toward accepting varying forms and degrees of racism. These old-stock Americans had identified themselves and their values with the Anglo-Saxon race. To them, the white Anglo-Saxon race represented the most industrious and creative people. Thus, Americans viewed any people with non-Anglo-Saxon origins with disfavor.

Americans based much of their early racial prejudices solely on color. The descendants of colonial Americans had always questioned the intellectual and moral capacity of the African, Asian, Eurasian, and Native American "Indian" races. Theodore Roosevelt, writing to Owen Wister (author of the 1929 classic The Virginian) stated, "Now as to the negroes! I entirely agree with you that as a race and in the mass they are altogether inferior to the whites." Like Roosevelt, Herbert D. Croly (the first editor of the "New Republic") took for granted the racial inferiority of Blacks. Croly noted that they "were a race possessed of moral and intellectual qualities inferior to those of the white man."

While, the early racist views had justified the institution of slavery and the slaughter of the Native American Indian, while the racism of TR and Croly fostered the Anglo-American’s sense of paternalism, imperialism, missionary zeal, and "White Man’s Burden" toward the "inferior colored" peoples of the world.

In the United States during the 1880’s and 1890’s, the belief in the inferiority of the "colored" races eventually led to the belief in the inferiority of all peoples who differed racially, culturally, or ethnically from "native-Americans", those Americans of Anglo-Saxon descent. Thus, racism evolved into a feverish nativism by the 1890’s. Americans grew alarmed with all immigrants who differed from American ideals and customs. Immigrants were seen as the cause of municipal corruption, alcoholism, poverty and crime. Furthermore, Americans abhorred the immigrants involvement in labor unrest, political radicalism, and violence. However, economic competition and employment seemed to be the largest cause of friction between Americans and the new immigrants. By the end of the nineteenth century, mushrooming nationalism and patriotism, along with an entrenched Social Darwinism, combined to create a feeling among many Americans that immigrants and other ‘biologically inferior’ people were unfit to become Americans.

In response to this increased nativism, Congress began enacting laws to exclude so-called "undesirables". In addition to Orientals and contract laborers, Congress halted the immigration of criminals, lunatics, idiots, vagrants, polygamists, and diseased persons. By 1903, Congress added epileptics, beggars, prostitutes, and anarchists to the growing exclusion list. Yet, racial purists desired further exclusion acts based on literacy and national origins quotas. The American Protective Association and the Immigration Restriction League emerged during the 1890’s to halt the "menace of the foreign-born”.

Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts, an avid supporter of the League’s goal to protect the blood of the nation from the contamination of "inferior" racial strains, warned his fellow Congressmen that Americans did not fully appreciate the threat from the fact that "immigration of people of those races which contributed to the settlement and development of the United States [was] declining in comparison with that of races far removed in thought and speech and blood from the men who . . . made this country” great. To Lodge and his conservative followers, the new immigration threatened to change "the very fabric of our race."

Numerous "old-line" Americans readily adopted this type of thinking, using biological factors and national character to agitate for immigration restriction, prohibition and "deviancy" control. In an 1893 article in the North American Review, Henry Smith Williams wrote that the objective of social reform was an environment in which
"good blood" controlled the social order. Others professed similar views. Progressive journalist E.L. Godkin in his 1897 Problems of American Democracy stated that to guarantee continued social progress the government must insure the survival of the fittest. For Godkin, society's well being depended on the progress of the elite, not the material satisfaction of the masses. Elaborating on Godkin's theme, naturalist Frank Fetter in an 1899 Forum article called for racial improvement to insure social and economic progress for Americans. Such rhetoric eventually led to more serious actions on the part of the racial purists, and the general acceptance of the eugenics movement.

Eugenics, as Charles Davenport, an American eugenics leader expressed it, is "the science of the improvement of the human race by better breeding." Sir Francis Galton, a cousin of Charles Darwin, launched the eugenics movement in 1869. The theory of natural selection had greatly stimulated the study of the new science of heredity. To Galton, the betterment of society depended largely on improvement of the "inborn qualities" of the "human breed". Galton in his book Hereditary Genius argued that men of exceptional ability tended to come from a small number of Anglo-Saxon families. Galton's studies had convinced him that there existed not only grades of men within each race, but also grades of races. For example, Galton declared, "The average intellectual standard of the negro race is some two grades below our own."

Yet, Galton's racism did not merely extend to non-white races but "inferior" white races as well. According to Galton, such events as the French Revolution and the repressive policies of the Catholic Church had sapped the qualities of the white races. In France "the guillotine made sad havoc among the progeny of her abler races." Galton attributed Europe's decline during the nineteenth century to the decrease in the number of gifted men and women in Europe. "The wonder is," Galton declared, "that enough good remained in veins of Europeans to enable their race to rise to its present, very moderate level of natural ability." Thus, Galton's eugenics gave a scientific basis for the belief that those from the best race, class, and family should rule and breed.

Like Galton in England, American eugenicists soon published their own works. Richard Dugdale added further "scientific evidence" in 1875 when he wrote The Jukes: A Study in Crime, Pauperism, Disease, and Heredity. Dugdale investigated the descendants of one Ada Jukes, an unusually large family with a high incidence of criminal behavior, alcoholism, sexual promiscuity, mental retardation and insanity. After tracing the Jukeses through five generations, Dugdale concluded that the social ills of the family members—crime, poverty and disease—were somehow transmitted from generation to generation. Dugdale maintained that environmental factors contributed more to his study of "degeneracy" than heredity, but most readers ignored this finding and jumped to the conclusion that genetic inheritance controlled disease, poverty and immorality in society. Eric Goldman wrote in his Rendezvous With Destiny (1956), "The very nature of the study seemed to imply the connection between genes and failure in society." Consequently, the question emerged: How could society best protect itself against hereditary degeneracy? The panacea for this problem: eugenics.

Historians divide the development of the American eugenics movement into three phases. The first, from 1870 to 1905, witnessed the initial sowing of hereditarian ideas in American intellectual thought. Some intellectuals during this period began to believe that social improvement did not necessitate a change in the environment but a change in the genetic makeup of individuals. Social Darwinists and eugenicists agreed that the heredity of the poor classes kept them poor.

American sociologist and economist, William Graham Sumner in What The Social Classes Owe To Each Other (1883) wrote, "It may be said that those whom humanitarians and philanthropists call the weak are the ones who may be born to acquire this right to live upon ye.

Godkin in his 1899 Forum article called for racial improvement to insure social and economic progress for Americans. This repudiation of Social Darwinism and the heyday of the eugenics movement led to the emergence of numerous racial improvement panaceas—immigration restriction, birth
control, marriage restriction, prohibition, sterilization, and permanent institutionalization of "defectives".

During this second phase, the eugenics movement took on a definite racist tone which culminated in laws designed to restrict the influx of "inferior" southern and eastern Europeans, as well as "Japs," "Chinks" and other "Mongrel" races. Sociologist Edward A. Ross wrote that "the Mediterranean peoples are morally below the races of northern Europe is as certain as any social fact."

The Spanish-American War and more importantly, World War I served only to heighten American's nationalistic fervor and their consciousness of race. Henry Fairfield Osborn, a paleontologist and director of the American Museum of Natural History, in 1917 wrote "the Anglo-Saxon branch of the Nordic race is again showing itself to be that upon which the nation must chiefly depend for leadership, for courage, for loyalty, for unity and harmony of action, for self-sacrifice and devotion to an ideal."

The progressive reformer's quest for the perfection of the American social order certainly had as an underlying motive the concept of improving the Anglo-American race. To progressives like Theodore Roosevelt, Herbert Croly, William Allen White, and E.L. Godkin, society's moral failure caused the nation's ills. To combat these evils, "good blood" must control the social order. California progressive reformer and educator David Starr Jordan declared that "poverty, dirt and crime" could be ascribed to poor human material. "It is not the strength of the strong but the weakness of the weak," Jordan added, "which engenders exploitation and tyranny." Jordan believed that the blood of a nation determined its history: "The history of a nation determines its blood... The survival of the fittest in the struggle for existence is the primal cause of race-progress and race changes."

An educator, biologist, and leader of the American peace movement, Jordan's main contribution as a major architect of American eugenics was to bridge the gap between eugenics and other reform groups. Like other progressives, Jordan subscribed to the Populist-Progressive criticism of laissez-faire capitalism. Jordan had faith in progress and in a new generation. Yet, this optimistic environmentalism of Jordan's contradicted his Darwinian-hereditary outlook of the world. Ironically, a similar ambivalence -- a "love-hate" attitude toward environmentalism -- ran through most progressive ideology.

For Jordan, the first president of Leland Stanford University, education permitted society's better members to outlive inferior peoples. Jordan believed the twentieth century had no place for the weak, the incompetent, and the uneducated. In addition, Jordan urged an end to indiscriminate and sentimental charity, a major factor he believed in the survival of the unfit. Jordan, like most progressives, viewed the urban setting as detrimental and destructive to human life. He held the general progressive belief in the social goodness of the small town or farm. The progressive's romantic attraction to the countryside can be partly explained by the alien character of the urban population. An increasing number of city dwellers belonged to the "undesirable foreign element". Yet, progressives like Jordan had reasons beyond racial ones for disliking the big city. Cities represented the centers of abject poverty and excessive wealth. Consequently, Jordan saw in rural life a more "natural" human existence.

David Starr Jordan, best known for his pacificist, anti-imperialistic views, found war morally abhorrent. To Jordan and most eugenics, war wasted "good germ plasm" and destroyed the better stocks of men. On the positive side, eugenics in the United States served the cause of peace by combating the biological arguments for war. Social Darwinism had become a justification for a belief that war was natural, inbred in man, and that out of the destruction of war came human progress through survival of those nations and races that proved themselves most fit. Eugenics leader Henry Fairfield Osborn wrote, "war is in the highest sense dysgenic rather than eugenic. It is destructive of the best strains, spiritually, morally, and physically." For Jordan and other eugenics, war created a biological law of diminished returns; the better men engaged in the most fighting and suffered the severest casualties, which left the weak to reproduce the future generation. Unfortunately, Jordan differed from most progressives on this issue.

One progressive who did not find warfare abhorrent, Theodore Roosevelt, believed, "A race must be strong and vigorous; it must be a race of good fighters and good breeders..." Unlike many eugenics, Roosevelt saw great merit in the martial struggle for national greatness. "Eugenics is an excellent thing," Roosevelt wrote, "but the individual must always be willing to risk his life for a good cause. For TR, the superior races had the duty of providing order for the world's "inferior" elements.

Most eugenics, like Margaret Sanger, supported birth control for the poor. Sanger, who desired to protect families from the economic and emotional burdens of an unwanted child, and the agony of amateur abortions, declared, "More children from the fit, less from the unfit -- that is the chief issue of birth control."

Teddy Roosevelt disagreed and campaigned against birth control. To TR, the basis for national greatness and security in a world filled with "inadequate" races depended on a high birthrate in the United States. Roosevelt wrote that "the prime duty... of the good citizen of the right type is to leave his or her blood behind him in the world; and that we have no business to permit the perpetuation of citizens of the wrong type." Unlike Sanger and other eugenics, Roosevelt believed the well-to-do, not the poor, practiced birth control, thus reducing propagation of the "better stocks of men. Roosevelt declared that all the evil in the United States the worst was "the diminishing birthrate among the old native American stock." Roosevelt expressed his disdain of persons who deliberately chose not to have children: "Such a creature merits contempt as hearty as any visited upon the soldier who runs away in battle..." In a 1913 letter to Charles Davenport and the American Breeder's Association, the former Rough Rider wrote, "As you say, it is obvious that if in the future racial qualities are to be improved, the improving must be wrought mainly by favoring the fecundity of the worthy types and frowning on the fecundity of the unworthy types. At present, we do just the reverse. There is no check to the fecundity of those who are subnormal, both intellectually and morally, while the provident and thrifty tend to develop a cold selfishness, which makes them refuse to breed at all." Throughout the 1890's and into the first two decades of the twentieth century, Roosevelt continued to speak out on the problem of "race suicide", imploring America's mothers to have more children. For TR, six was the correct number of children for Anglo-American parents.

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Questions:

1. What did many Americans see as causing the before mentioned problems?

2. Why had this problem never arisen in American history before, or had it?

3. If this problem had never arisen in American history, why was it a problem in the latter 1800’s? If it had been a problem, how was it different in the late 1800’s – early 1900’s?

4. What does the document suggest might be some possible solutions?

5. How could imperialism be a possible solution?
The Rough Rider's thundering appeals caused great alarm among many Americans. Eugenist Robert DeCourcy Ward wrote that "the most serious thing in the United States is that the fall of the birthrate is not the same in all classes. . . . The eugenically less valuable portion of the community is furnishing a disproportionately large share of the next generation. A selective birthrate has been established which is tending towards a degeneration of the stock." Harvard biologist G.H. Parker added further reason, "If society protects [the weak and inferior] against the attacks of unkind nature, it is entirely within the rights of society to see that their numbers shall not increase. Such growth may well be the very undoing of society itself." Thus, according to Ward and Parker, society protected the naturally inferior from their true destiny of extinction.

Madison Grant's The Passing of the Great Race (1916) further contributed to Roosevelt's rantings on "race suicide." Grant's work, described by Roderick Nash as "the unofficial handbook of racism," warned that race suicide would "toll the passing of this great Anglo-Teuton people" and the surrender of the nation "to the Latin and the Hun." Grant described his purpose: "to rouse his fellow Americans to the overwhelming importance of race and to the folly of the 'Melting Pot' theory." Grant extolled the virtues of the Nordic pioneers who colonized America, and believed the members of inferior races who came to America would remain inferior, thus diluting and weakening the Nordic strain by interracial breeding. To Grant, the United States must preserve racial purity and maintain Nordic supremacy in America and the world. Grant and other racial purists called for segregation and sterilization of innately inferior peoples.

Henry H. Goddard's 1912 classic The Kallikak Family: A Study in the Heredity of Feeblemindness helped convince Americans that society must protect itself from the "menace of the feebleminded" and hereditary degeneracy.

Goddard traced 480 descendants of an immigrant mentally retarded girl. His studies revealed that 214 exhibited aberrations ranging from prostitution, to alcoholism, to criminal behavior, to mental retardation. Goddard classified only 46 as "normal", while 82 died during infancy. The remaining 138 led uneventful lives, and were classified as "still undetermined." Goddard concluded, "Feeblemindedness is hereditary and transmitted as surely as any character." Thus, Americans came to equate "feeblemindedness" as largely responsible for paupers, criminals, prostitutes and alcoholics. Goddard and Grant's books contributed to the rise of eugenics as a major force in American social thought from 1910 to 1920.

The "eugenics alarm" greatly increased the American public's desire to curb the propagation of the "feebleminded" and other "undesirables," and further restrict the immigration of "inferior" peoples to the United States. Furthermore, the "eugenics scare" grossly exaggerated the threat "inferior races" posed to the American way of life. Nevertheless, eugenics gained certain respectability by moving into the colleges and universities as a legitimate field of research. Eugenics, together with the development and application of Binet intelligence tests, developed in 1905 by French psychologist Alfred Binet, imbedded in the American mind a biological theory that believed intelligence to be entirely hereditary. After utilizing the Binet tests to examine the inductees during the World War, an army report stated that the Mediterranean races "are markedly inferior in mental alertness to the native-born Americans." The report concluded, "a country which encourages, or even permits, the immigration of simple-minded, uneducated, defective, diseased, or criminalistic persons, . . . seeks trouble in the shape of public expense." The report added "whoever desires high taxes, full almshouses, a constantly increasing number of schools for defectives, of correctional institutions, penitentiaries, hospitals, and special classes in our public schools, should by all means work for unrestricted and nonselective immigration." To most Americans, immigration was lowering the standard of American intelligence. Because of language and cultural barriers, Binet's tests were effectively used to keep out "undesirable" immigrants.

The respectability of both the university and the Binet tests aided in the general acceptance of the eugenics movement by middle-class Americans during this second phase. The "menace of the degenerate" became the major topic of discussion in magazines, Sunday Schools, women's clubs, and colleges. From 1910 to 1914, just the beginning of the "eugenics alarm" and the height of progressive reform, more articles appeared in general magazines on the topic of eugenics than on the three questions of slums, tenements and living standards combined. Harper's Weekly remarked caustically that exhortation would have little effect on the native birthrate as long as unlimited European immigration continued. In response, virtually every state organized campaigns to awaken the public to the eugenics problem and, in particular, the "menace of the feebleminded."

Several organizations emerged to study the need for eugenics in the United States. In 1903, the American Breeder's Association, funded by Mrs. Edward H. Harriman, met to find solutions with the view of "purging from the blood of the race the innately defective strains." The Association set up a committee, with David Starr Jordan as chairperson, Charles Davenport, Alexander Graham Bell, Luther Burbank and others, "to investigate and report on heredity in the human race" and "to emphasize the value of superior race and the menace to society of inferior blood." In 1911, the A.B.A. presented ten possible remedies including euthanasia, restrictive marriage laws, eugenic education, scientific breeding, birth control, sterilization, institutionalization, and general environmental improvement. In its report, the Association wrote, "The greatest of all eugenic problems in reference to cutting off the lower levels of human society consists in devising means for eliminating hereditary feeblemindedness." The best solutions the A.B.A. concluded were sterilization and segregation of "defectives." In addition to the American Breeder's Association, eugenists organized the Eugenics Research Association, the American Eugenics Society, the National Conference on Race Betterment, the Galton society, and the National Committee for Mental Hygiene. These organizations lobbied by immigration restriction and sterilization of "undesirables."

Donald Pickens in Eugenics and the Progressives (1968) wrote "Sterilization is a logical and organic development of nineteenth century naturalistic, nationalistic, and nativistic thought as it contributed to the twentieth century reform known as Progressivism." Early sterilization applied to "confirmed criminals, idiots, imbeciles, and rapists", as well as alcoholics, epileptics, the diseased, blind, deaf, deformed, poor and mentally ill. Indiana gave sterilization legal sanction in 1907 by enacting the nation's first sterilization law. Washington State followed in 1909. By 1915, twelve states passed sterilization laws. Yet, most of these laws did not make a clear distinction between sterilization for
eugenic purposes or punitive purposes. Two states, Washington and Nevada, permitted a judge to impose sterilization "whenever any person shall be adjudged guilty of carnal abuse of a female person under the age of ten years, or of rape, or shall be adjudged a habitual criminal." Nevada's punitive sterilization law received its first test when a state judge sentenced a young epileptic rapist to prison and ordered him sterilized. The judge believed epileptics should not have children. A United States District Court in 1918 promptly declared this unconstitutional as cruel and unusual punishment. After several State Supreme Courts declared sterilization laws unconstitutional, the United States Supreme Court in *Carrie Buck vs. Bell* held that sterilization of the mentally retarded did indeed fall within the police power of the state. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, himself a sympathizer of eugenics, wrote, "Three generations of imbeciles are enough."

Although critics of eugenics associated the movement with sterilization, the majority of the eugenists opposed the campaign for sterilization. Many eugenists, along with progressive reformers, believed sterilization would lead to sexual promiscuity. They more openly supported permanent custodial care or segregation of "defectives" into institutions. In addition, eugenics desired marriage restriction laws to halt the propagation of "degenerates." Efforts to pass eugenic marriage laws worked hand in hand with campaigns against venereal disease. Eugenist leaders, usually skeptical of their enforcement, left the promotion of such laws to local women's clubs, churches, physicians, and charity groups. Racial purists also advocated miscegenation laws which many states enacted.

Like Progressivism, the eugenics movement in the United States during this second phase consisted of a diverse body of ideologies as well as reform measures. Some eugenics favored birth control, while others desired sterilization. Some utilized eugenics to promote doctrines of racial superiority, while others desired to use eugenics for humanitarian good. Eugenics played a part in shaping the movement for peace, prohibition, sex education, and birth control. It influenced the actions of progressive reforms who labored in behalf of programs for the care of the nation's impoverished, delinquent, insane and retarded. To many reformers, both tenement house reform and sterilization provided avenues toward the improvement of American society.

The movement for eugenics reform in the United States was an excellent example of over-regulation during the Progressive Era. Eugenists accepted the progressive principle of state action toward a common end and spoke in terms of the collective destiny of the group rather than of individual success. However, eugenics in the United States evolved from and continued to evolve into a movement dedicated to the social improvement of the Anglo-Saxon race and the subjugation of "inferior" non-Anglo-Saxon peoples. Repressive intolerance Americans demonstrated toward minority groups, aliens and radicals during the 1920's represented the maturation of the eugenics movement in the United States. Grant's The Passing of the Great Race together with Lathrop Stoddard's The Rising Tide of Color Against White Supremacy won not only support from American eugenists and racial purists, but generated wide popular interest. Thus, the blatant racism and nativism of Grant and Stoddard -- the underlying motives for the eugenics movement -- summarized in exaggerated terms the general feelings of Americans from 1880 to 1930.

The final phase of the eugenics movement occurred after 1930 when the movement rapidly disintegrated. Three events hastened the demise of the eugenics movement in the United States. First, the Depression of the 1930's discredited Social Darwinism, along with the "business elite" who professed such conservative viewpoints. Americans began to realize that failure no longer hinged on individual weakness or lack of ability. Both the biologically "fit" and the "unfit" shared in the misfortunes of the Depression. Secondly, more sophisticated research during the 1930's discredited much of the scientific premises of Galtonian eugenics. Scientists, like Irving A. Folling and Herbert J. Muller, discovered metabolic causes for certain mental retardation and genetic mutations caused by radiation that refuted the hereditary degeneracy of Dugdale's Jukes and Goddard's Kallikaks. And finally, the rise of Hitler-style eugenics with its grotesque and barbaric methods for eliminating "inferiors" horrified Americans. Realization of the full implications of eugenics abruptly halted racial reforms in the United States.

Today (1978), the underlying motives for the eugenics movement during the first two decades of the twentieth century are not dead. Racist eugenics has remained on the fringes of American social thought since 1945, periodically re-emerging into the mainstream in varying degrees and forms. Americans continue to question the intellectual and moral capabilities of numerous non-white groups. Americans have consistently forced its "superior" social institutions -- democracy, capitalism and Christianity -- upon ethnic and racial groups throughout the world, and have subscribed to racial prejudices that maintain a belief in the innate inferiority of "colored peoples".

Today, birth control remains a method of controlling ~ "undesirable" African and Asian populations, along with reducing the propagation of welfare recipients at home. Americans continue to express concern of the "new immigrants" -- the Vietnamese, Filipino, Latin American and Arab -- who seem to fail in assimilating to American ideals, values and culture. Today, as in the past, certain Americans voice fears of a declining Anglo-American birthrate and a burgeoning Black population in America's cities. Today, institutionalization and sterilization of "defectives" remains the answer of a society that desires to segregate the "unfit" from mainstream America. Thus, a movement, which had its heyday from 1905 to 1930, has the makings of revitalization during the 1970's and 1980's.

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Eugenics Part I: You Can't Keep a Good Idiot Down
Few American jurists are as revered as Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. A United States Supreme Court justice for close to 30 years, Holmes wrote seminal opinions that were clear and clever and elegantly phrased. It was Holmes who defined the limits of free speech in 1919 by noting that the law did not protect someone “falsely shouting fire in a theater.” Was it an isolated misstep or something more: an indictment of Justice Holmes and the Progressive movement he appeared to embrace? America in the early 20th century was awash in reform. As giant corporations took root, so too did calls to check their power.