Evangelizing Eugenics: A Brief Historiography of Popular and Formal American Eugenics Education (1908-1948)

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Abstract

This article examines the history of the American Eugenics movement’s penetration into the formal and popular educational milieu during the first half of the 20th Century, and includes a review of some recent scholarly research on eugenic themes in education and popular culture.

Apologists have dismissed the American Eugenics movement as a shortlived, racist, reactionary, and pseudoscientific aberration that was already dying long before the collapse of the Third Reich. Many official histories of biology and various social science disciplines including education were sanitized to expunge or trivialize the involvement of a host of important prophets, disciples, and evangelists in the eugenics movement. It was also common to divorce the research and statistical methods developed in the service of eugenics from their inspiration and original application to Galton’s secular religion of human betterment.

In the last few decades, however, a new generation of scholars began to re-examine and illuminate the breadth and depth of the eugenics movement: its devotees and devotees’ actions and influence on their professions or academic disciplines and on society. These scholars also looked into how eugenics penetrated educational thought, curriculum, courses, and texts; thereby, revealing a panoply of overlapping interests, academic programs, organizations, and influential individuals that fatefully intersected and synergistically recombined into a powerful social movement throughout the first half of the 1900s.

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Michael Kohlman is a doctoral student at the University of Alberta, in the Department of Secondary Education. He has always been interested in political science (and ideologically-loaded technology) as a topic for study, but detests Political Science as a discipline.
The history of eugenics is the study of development and advocacy of ideas related to eugenics around the world. Early eugenic ideas were discussed in Ancient Greece and Rome. The height of the modern eugenics movement came in the late 19th and early 20th century. Today eugenics continues to be a topic of political and social debate. The philosophy was most famously expounded by Plato, who believed human reproduction should be monitored and controlled by the state. However, Plato understood this form Eugenics, the selection of desired heritable characteristics to improve future generations, typically in reference to humans. The term eugenics was coined in 1883 by British scientist Francis Galton. By World War I many scientists and political leaders supported eugenics, though it ultimately failed as a science. In his paper titled “Evangelizing Eugenics: A Brief Historiography of Popular and Formal American Eugenics Education (1908-1948),”28 Michael Kohlman explains that exhibitions by eugenicists became. 26 While Eddie’s father is unmarried in this show, the show itself revolves around Eddie trying to get his dad married. 27 hooks 95. 28 Kohlman, Michael J. 2012. Evangelizing eugenics: A Brief Historiography of Popular and Formal American Eugenics Education (1908-1948). Alberta Journal of Educational Research 58 (4): 657. Snider, Ashton R., 2016, UMSL, p.15. common for a short period and were even influential to American law.