

MA Thesis American Studies Program, Utrecht University

# **The Influence of Gender Constructs on The Development of the American Eugenics Movement Between 1880 and 1940 Nationally and on Montana State Level:**

The Traditional American Family VS  
Modernizing Gender Roles

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## **Summary**

Between 1880 and 1940, eugenics in America transformed into a national movement, with a distinction between positive and negative eugenics. At first, the American eugenics movement was based on racial issues and the fear of hybridization, but the concerns shifted towards degeneration and mongrelization of the American people through hereditary diseases and genetic deficiency. The construct of American gender roles had a very influential role in the development of the American eugenics movement. Gender structures changed between 1880 and 1940 on a national scale due to modernizing influences such as urbanization, industrialization, and immigration. Before, the American family had been the nucleus of society, but this notion was now threatened by people who attached importance to other values in life besides the family. Women were believed to be more virtuous than men; therefore it was their duty to raise their children but also to look after their husbands and their moral inclinations. Eugenacists were alarmed because if the traditional American family was no longer the cornerstone of society, then the progress of the American race was in danger. The eugenics movement was also present in Montana society. Here, gender constructs were not subject to as much change between 1880 and 1940 because urbanization and industrialization had considerably less impact in this rural state than in many other states in America. Because gender constructs remained traditional, eugenacists did not experience such a large threat with regards to the degeneration of Montana society. Within the negative eugenics movement, eugenics in rural areas such as Montana was generated from fears generated in the more urban areas, however positive eugenics flourished largely in rural areas because of the traditional gender roles of especially women.

## **Key words and Phrases**

The American Eugenics Movement

Gender

Victorianism

Modernization

Industrialization

Urbanization

Rural

Montana

The American Family

Positive Eugenics

Negative Eugenics

Sterilization

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## Introduction

“The improvement of our stock seems to me one of the highest objectives that we can reasonably attempt” (Galton). This is what Francis Galton argued when he appeared before the Sociological Society at a meeting at the School of Economics at London University on May 16, 1904. Francis Galton, who is a cousin of Charles Darwin, coined the term ‘eugenics’ in his 1883 book *Inquiries into Human Faculties and Developments*. He described eugenics to be the science of race betterment and explains that it “deals with all influences that improve the inborn qualities of a race; also with those that develop them to the utmost advantage” (Galton). The word ‘eugenics’ originates from Greek, meaning “good in birth” (Gillham 1). This subject generated a great deal of attention and tension in the American political spectrum and its society between 1880 and 1940.

The American eugenics movement started out to be intentionally and intensively race influenced; it was supposed to protect white women. The concerns over interracial threats and relations started to decline and by 1900, mongrelization and degeneracy of the American people had become the main concern (Rydell). There are various important themes that played a large role in eugenics, a movement that became completely ingrained in American society. At first religion was very important because it formed a basis for white supremacy; this convinced many people that other races were inferior (Rydell). Another important theme was conservation and environment; eugenicists wanted to control the environment and conserve the old America by conserving the ‘best breed’ of people (Rydell). A third theme was the concept of the American family: after eugenicist concerns had shifted from hybridization to degeneracy of the American race, their goal became to preserve the American family as they were seen as conservers of the race because they consisted

of a white men and women producing white American children. In this thesis, researched is how gender constructs on national level and on Montana State level influenced the development of the American eugenics movement between 1880 and 1940, and how the development of the movement differed nationally and in Montana due to these gender constructs.

A renewed interest in the eugenics movement presented itself in the last decades of the twentieth century. In 1963, an academic interest arose on the topic of American eugenics with Mark Haller's *Eugenics: Hereditarian Attitudes in American Thought*. This was the first work that academically evaluated eugenics in the United States (Cullen 164). In 1968, Donald Pickens connected eugenics to American progressiveness and researched corporate as well as human behaviour in *Eugenics and the Progressives*. Until then, there was not much of an academic discussion surrounding this topic yet: it was more of a first consideration of how the American public dealt with eugenics. Some years later, during the 1970s, academics have studied eugenics in America "through biographical, institutional, and comparative histories" in order to acquire a clearer sense of what was at play during this movement (Cullen 167). An example of this is Daniel Kevles' work *In The Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity*, published in 1985. Kevles focused on the interconnectedness of the disciplines of eugenics and genetics. Another important and ground breaking theme that Kevles emphasized was the distinctness between 'positive' and 'negative eugenics' (Kevles 85). Two other important works, written and published in the 1990s, are two articles by Diane Paul, which are "Controlling Human Heredity: 1865 to the Present" and "The Politics of Heredity: Essays on Eugenics, Biomedicine and the Nature-Nurture Debate". Significant issues in her work are "industrialization, urbanization, and immigration". She explains that certain

higher classes in society were afraid of social disorder and by wanting to retain their power, the eugenics movement was easy to get on board with (Cullen 167-8). The main topic that these academics addressed contains to heredity and genetics; scholars explored the nature versus nurture debate in their work and described how this was applied to eugenics. The academic question revolved around why this movement became so substantial between 1880 and 1940, which was mostly because of the threats of a changing and modernizing society.

Around the turn of the last century, several biographical books about eugenics have been published, as for example William Tucker's *The Funding of Scientific Racism: Wickliffe Draper and the Pioneer Fund* in 2002, Leila Zenderland's *Measuring Minds: Henry Herbert Goddard and the Origins of American Intelligence Testing* in 1998, and Jonathan Spiro's *Defending the Master Race: Conservation, Eugenics, and the Legacy of Madison Grant* in 2009. Another scholar publishing about eugenics in the first decade of the twenty first century was E.A. Carlson with his work *The Unfit: A History of a Bad Idea* in 2001, which revolves mainly around the sterilizations that took place during the eugenics movement. At the turn of the century, eugenics was believed to be a movement of the past and therefore academics wrote about the topic with fascination and sometimes condemnation. The academic discussion focused on individuals in the movement and on their individual ideas. At this point in time, the idea to denote entire groups of people as unfit to many seemed unthinkable and therefore individual stories of eugenicists made for intriguing study.

Surprisingly, there are only few scholars that have studied the notion of gender in the American eugenics movement, while there were great differences in the roles that men and women had and the way the movement affected them. For example, predominantly women were sterilized as a result of the eugenics movement in

America and predominantly men performed these procedures (Cullen 172). One scholar who has researched this phenomenon is Wendy Kline, who published *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Twentieth Century to the Baby Boom*, in 2002. Kline focuses on the notion of negative and positive eugenics, which will be explained in detail in upcoming chapters of this thesis. Another extensive part of her argument is that “the movement for ‘better breeding’ did not disappear in the late 1930s. Her research, which includes analysis of women’s magazines, popular novels, beauty pageants, and the controversial Cooper-Hewitt trial of 1936, convinced her that eugenic concerns fuelled on going debates past 1940” (Cullen 172-3). A second work that approaches gender roles within the eugenics movement is Alexandra Minna Stern’s *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (2005), which revolves around the family as the cornerstone of society. Just as Kline, Stern argues that the eugenics movement did not end after the 1940s, but states that it remained present in American society as far as the 1970s (Stern 197). The focus of the scholars who have studied notions of gender within the American eugenics movement, are mostly on the role that men and women performed in the movement. In this thesis, the role of men and women on national level and in rural Montana are studied, but besides merely examining their role, this thesis will show whether and how gender constructions nationally and on Montana state level have influenced the American eugenics movement, and how their influences are different in a rural state such as Montana and on a national scale.

Even though the notion of race is usually much more emphasized within the American eugenics movement, gender is an extremely important concept in order to fully understand the movement. Before but also during the American eugenics

movement, the American family was considered as cornerstone of society. Because of the increasing importance of urbanization, industrialization and immigration, even more emphasis was placed on the significance of the family. Certain people moved to cities and more women started working, which many traditional people saw as a threat to the American race. There was a fear towards the decline of marriage, the decrease in children being born, and an increase in immigrants, who most Americans saw as inferior.

During the eugenics movement, there were two ways in which eugenicists took measures to save the American race. First of all, positive eugenics was used to encourage healthy young Americans to engage in marriage and have large families; this was a non-coercive measure. However, the popularity of negative eugenics intensified in the United States and soon so-called 'patients' were being sterilized for national protection because they were seen as unfit to procreate. In the movement, a larger number of women were sterilized than men. Women who moved to urban areas and took on jobs were seen as dangerous to the future of the American race; their duty was to have healthy American children. At first these women were just seen as rebellious and astray, but later eugenicists believed that they were inherently deficient for not engaging in 'normal' American family life.

In order to answer the research question of how gender constructs influenced the development of the American eugenics movement, and how this was different on a national level and on Montana state level, an answer is first given to the question of how gender structures were constructed between 1880 and 1940, and how they evolved nationally and in Montana. Secondly, in order to fully grasp the concept of the eugenics movement, the question of how the movement evolved on a national scale is answered. This question is followed by an explanation of how positive and

negative eugenics played out. In the following chapter, these two same questions are answered for Montana state level in order to create an overview of the comparisons and differences on these two levels. Then, the first three chapters are combined to answer the question of how gender influenced the development of the movement on a national level and Montana state level. Finally, chapter five manifests how the eugenics movement came to an end and which constructs of gender were present in America at that time. This chapter gives another dimension to the question of how gender constructs can influence large movements like the eugenics movement, since gender roles modernize even further on a national level after 1940. Lastly, chapter five provides an answer to the question of whether eugenics is still present in today's society and to what extent.

The development of the eugenics movement in Montana has been researched only in the slightest, and very little has been published about it. In this thesis, insight is provided into how this movement developed in a rural state in the American West, where notions such as urbanization and industrialization were somewhat less threatening than in other parts of the country. An answer to the research question and the sub questions is obtained through the study of many primary sources such as newspaper articles, reports from the Department of Health, legal documents and pamphlets of the eugenics institutions. Furthermore, secondary literature in the form of books, magazine and journal articles, and reviews are used to interpret the primary sources.

Modernizing gender roles in an America on the verge of the rejection of Victorian morals, largely threatened eugenicists and therefore bolstered the eugenics movement, which spread towards more rural states like Montana, where women were

either victimized or benefited by the eugenic measures that spread from national eugenic ideas.

## **Chapter 1: Gender Constructs Between 1880 and 1940**

During the time of the American eugenics movement gender roles changed in large parts of the United States due to the decline of the Victorian era and the rise of urbanization and industrialization in the United States. This chapter answers the question of how gender constructs evolved on national level and on Montana state level between 1880 and 1940.

### §1.1: Gender Structures on National Level Between 1880 and 1940

The Victorian era was named after the British queen Victoria, who reigned between 1837 and 1901 (Howe 507). Victorianism became prevalent in the United States because of the large amount of Brits that immigrated to America, and because of the economic reliance between the two countries (Howe 508). When the eugenics movement commenced in 1880, Victorian standards were completely immersed in American society. Typical Victorian values were the improvement of the self, a sober life, modesty, a conscientious life, refrain from indulgence, and sexual repression (Howe 521). With regard to gender roles, traditional family life was extremely important in the Victorian era. The home was the core of every person's life. In this setting women were hugely important because of the responsibility that they carried within the family (Howe 530). The status of motherhood was very prominent because of women's responsibility of protector of the family's morals and religious values (Howe 530). The duties of women were seen as very significant during the Victorian age because they were in charge of passing virtues and honor on to her children and their husband (Howe 530).

This domestic female figure was often referred to as 'the mother of tomorrow' (Kline 3). Womanhood at the turn of the twentieth century could be perceived as a

double edged sword: on the one hand the symbol of human virtue, the mother of tomorrow, and on the other hand the symbol for moral destruction, the wayward woman (Kline 3). In her book *Building a Better Race*, historian Wendy Kline states that women were “responsible not only for racial progress but also for racial destruction” (3). The wayward woman, also referred to as the ‘moron’, or the woman adrift was an indirect result of great changes within American society, which were industrialization, immigration, urbanization, and population growth (Howe 507). These were all new concepts that brought significant changes in to the societal make up of America. Because of this, more men and women moved to cities and the importance of the family as nucleus of society decreased. Women who acquired jobs and lived on their own especially threatened Victorian standards because they were the ones that were supposed to keep this traditional way of life instituted (Kline 10). The term ‘moron’ was generated out of fear of liberated female sexuality and subsequently, the threats that these women imposed onto traditional thinking Americans, were also referred to as the ‘girl problem’ (Kline 10). Urban, working women were seen as unfeminine while the masculinity of working men in cities was also challenged by the influx of immigrants who were willing to work harder and perform harsher jobs for their wages (Kline 10). The amount of working women increased in the 1930s and the 1940s. In the 1930s this was the case due to the economic pressure, and in the 1940s because of the war in which a lot of jobs became available because many men had to leave for war. The number of women attending universities also expanded significantly: the number tripled between 1890 and 1910 and by 1920, about half of the people attending universities were women (Kline 10). Kline describes one historian in the time stating that “the new woman is the enemy of marriage, the home, and therefore civilization” (11).

Between 1880 and 1940, the traditional roles of men and women in society started to change. The Victorian concept of the family being the foundation of America decreased in importance because of the coming of industrialization, urbanization, immigration, and a growing population. Towards the end of the nineteenth century established gender roles became endangered, which alarmed many traditional Americans greatly.

### §1.2 Gender Structures on Montana State Level Between 1880 and 1940

Gender roles in Montana did not undergo the changes that gender roles did in the more modernizing parts of the United States: the family remained pivotal and white women were extremely important as guardians of morals. Conservation of rural culture was an important aspect of American Victorianism because the traditional countryside balanced out the American expanding cities (Howe 511). Urbanization, immigration, and industrialization played a less significant role in Montana but there were other issues at hand that challenged the traditional roles of men and women.

White families saw themselves as the dominant population of Montana but Native American tribes actually accounted for a much larger part of the population. A consensus in 1880 estimates that only 2448 whites inhabited Choteau County in Montana, while about 7,000 Blackfoot Indians inhabited Choteau reservations alone (Mcmanus 72). Native Americans were seen as a childlike and savage race that did not adopt American values at all. White women took on tasks to improve assimilation of Native Americans, which was the first time that white women actually had a foot in the door in real politics. Women started to establish reform groups and established the ‘maternalist movement’ (Jacobs 88). In her book *White Mother to a Dark Race*, Margaret Jacobs defines maternalism as “a movement that swept across North America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century” (88). It can be considered

as a sort of feminism, even though the term feminism was not used before (Jacobs 89). This movement mobilized women to address the disadvantages of other women and gain greater political authority (Jacobs 89). Characteristics of maternalism were “to elevate motherhood as a woman’s sacred occupation”, “justifying woman’s presence in public reform as a natural extension of their experience as mothers”, “acting in a motherly way to other women they deemed in need of rescue”, and “upholding a maternal and domestic role as most fitting for other women not for themselves” (Jacobs 89). Important women reformers in the American West were women such as Amelia Stone Quinton, Alice Fletcher, and Estelle Reel (Jacobs 97). They were especially active in removing Indian children from their families in order to have the children ‘assimilate’ into the American culture. Within their efforts, these women had significant power, which was the first branch of politics that women in the West had power in. In this instance of activism, white womanhood was used to gain the trust of the native families; they won their trust and acted when the Indian families lost their suspicion (Jacobs 193). Jacobs explains that: “Unlike more masculine terrains of colonialism, removal and institutionalization of indigenous children was largely a feminine domain, defined primarily around mothering, particularly targeted at indigenous women” (Jacobs 456). Native American parents were most often seen as ‘unfit’ parents because they lacked the morals that the white American race had instilled in them.

Anthropologist Ann Stoler has noted that “white women in the Western colonies experienced the cleavages of racial dominance and internal social distinctions very differently than men precisely because of their ambiguous positions, as both subordinates in colonial hierarchies and as active agents of imperial culture in their own right” (Mcmanus 73). Traditional, family oriented white men and women

were the dominant inhabitants of Montana, and the white woman had obtained the role of political activist besides and in addition to her role as the mother of tomorrow. Nevertheless, the white male was still the most authoritative figure in rural western states as Montana.

### Conclusion Chapter 1

In short, between 1880 and 1940, traditional male and female roles slowly started to change. For many people, a traditionally Victorian and family oriented lifestyle were still preferred, but for some men and women marriage decreased in importance and other values such as individuality and a career became more valuable. Gender roles in Montana remained traditional, yet the authority of the white woman increased on certain levels due to her role as 'the mother of tomorrow', which many women used for political reform and power. On a national level the mother of tomorrow was also an important symbol of womanhood, but it was not the only image of women. Nationally, the notion of womanhood became double edged: the mother of tomorrow was a traditional family oriented figure, and then there was the woman adrift: a woman neglecting a traditional lifestyle who would come to influence the outcome of the eugenics movement greatly.

## **Chapter 2: The History of The Eugenics Movement on National Level**

Eugenics in America was an extremely comprehensive movement. In order to fully understand the proportions and the impact of the movement, this chapter will give an answer to the question of how the eugenics movement played out on a national level. Furthermore, the difference between positive and negative eugenics on a national scale will be explained.

### §2.1 The History of American Eugenics

Eugenics has played a vital role in American history between 1880 and 1940 and there have been several historical events, which have made the American eugenics movement an even more widespread campaign. First of all in 1863, the Democrats coined the word ‘miscegenation’ to condemn President Lincoln’s practices and intentions to emancipate slaves (Rydell). Miscegenation was the mixing of races in marriage, sexual relations, or living together, which was firmly disapproved of in this time in the United States. Twenty years later, in 1883, a new state law in Alabama was instituted because of the court case *Pace vs. the State of Alabama*. This law prohibited a white person and a person of color to marry or to have any other kind of relations. Section 4189 of the Code of Alabama proclaims that:

If any white person and any negro, or the descendant of any negro to the third generation, inclusive, though one ancestor of each generation was a white person, intermarry or live in adultery or fornication with each other, each of them must, on conviction, be imprisoned in the penitentiary or sentenced to hard labor for the county for not less than two nor more than seven years (U.S.).

The fear of degeneration of the American race progressed and in 1907 in Indiana, the first eugenic sterilization law was passed (Cullen 163). A year later in Louisiana on a

State Fair, the first 'Better Babies Contest' was held (Lovett 70). Better Babies Contests were a method of positive eugenics; trying to convince the public of the importance of eugenics in an entertaining and playful manner. More and more states followed both through practices of positive and negative eugenics. Somewhat later in 1924, another important act was instated, namely the National Origins Act. This act imposes racially based quotas on immigrants to the United States, which was on going until the mid 1960s (Rydell). People feared the idea of communism and therefore Eastern Europeans were not welcomed with open arms. Southern Europeans were also unwelcome because Americans were afraid that they would not be able to assimilate into society (Rydell).

In Virginia in 1924, another sterilization law was passed. In 1927, Carrie Buck was the first person to be sterilized under this law (Tartakovsky). The case of Carrie Buck versus the State of Virginia became a very controversial and important case within the eugenics movement. Carrie's mother was believed to be feebleminded, and therefore Carrie was afraid that she suffered from the same condition. After giving birth to an illegitimate child, Carrie was institutionalized and in a court case was decided that she would have to be sterilized (Tartakovsky). In this court case, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes spoke the now famous words:

It's better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime or to let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind... Three generations of imbeciles are enough (Tartakovsky).

Years later, the truth was revealed that a relative of her foster parents raped Carrie Buck. Buck and her illegitimate child Vivian both made the honor roll in their education and thus the claim of 'three generations of imbeciles' was not even correct

(Tartakovsky). In America, over 60,000 court ordered eugenic sterilizations were performed and in some areas, people were even sterilized beyond the 1970s (Gillham 2). It was not until about 1981 that legislation for involuntary sterilization was completely overturned (Rydell).

The roots of American eugenics lie in race related issues but progressed onto fears of degeneration of the American society as a whole and therefore the concerns shifted from miscegenation and immigration to perceived hereditary problems among Americans such as imbecility, feeblemindedness, schizophrenia, and alcoholism.

## §2.2 Important National Eugenicists and their Goals

This paragraph highlights several important eugenicists in order to understand the extensive eugenics movement. Which intentions and goals do these men and women have and what does this say about the development of the eugenics movement?

Significant eugenicists on a national scale were Harry Laughlin, Charles Davenport, Lothrop Stoddard, Madison Grant, Margaret Sanger and John Harvey Kellogg. They had various goals in proposing eugenic measures. Charles Davenport was director of the Station for Experimental Evolution at Cold Spring Harbor in New York. He was very interested in conservation and was an instructor at Harvard from 1891 until 1899, teaching various levels of zoology (Charles). Davenport was President of the Society of Zoologists in two different years: in 1907 and 1929 (Charles). In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, he travelled to Europe with his wife to meet among others the British Francis Galton to discuss eugenics. Harry Laughlin, another well-known American eugenicist, became a superintendent at the Station for Experimental Evolution in Cold Spring Harbor, and was in charge of the eugenic record office (Harry). He became director in 1921 and was in service of the office

until 1940 (Harry). Laughlin's model for eugenic sterilization laws was applied by more than thirty American states, which was also one of the things he was most known for (Harry). Another aspect that he was famous for was his advocacy for immigration restriction; he regarded Southern and Eastern Europeans as being "socially inadequate" and inassimilable (Harry).

Eugenicist Madison Grant was most known for his book *The Passing of the Great Race*, in which he expressed the same concerns about Southern and Eastern Europeans as Harry Laughlin has expressed. Grant saw them as inferior and believed the Nordic race to be the strongest and best of the human species (Spiro 2). Grant and many other eugenicists did not limit their views of inferiority and inadequacy to Southern and Eastern Europeans. Their beliefs also applied to Jews, Asians, and people of color. Besides his support for immigration restriction, Grant was also very occupied with conservation (Alexander 74). He was an enthusiast for wildlife and natural conservation, was director of the New York Zoological Society, and helped in founding the Bronx Zoo (Alexander 74). The desire to preserve America's finest wildlife and nature ties in to the desire to preserve America's finest people, or 'stock'. Grant shared his interest in zoology and preservation with Charles Davenport, teacher in Zoology and active in the Society of Zoologists. These three eugenicists voiced the main fears that fuelled the eugenics movement: immigration and hybridization and degeneracy of the American race.

A few women have been important in the American eugenics movement between 1880 and 1940. One example of this is Planned Parenthood founder Margaret Sanger, she was an advocate of motherhood by choice, which according to her would produce healthier American Children. One of her known catch phrases was: "Every child should be a wanted child" (Sanger 211). In this time it seemed natural to bring

motherhood, children's health and science together to explore the best possible outcome for the American family (Sanger 212). However, Sanger did not believe that it was necessary to intervene with science because she believed that women were natural eugenicists; they all try to create the best outcome for their children (Sanger 212). A second important female figure in the American eugenics movement was Mary Harriman. Harriman married into money and had philanthropic interests; earlier she donated to several charities such as the Red Cross (Averell). Charles Davenport approached Harriman about donations for the Eugenics Record Office in Cold Spring Harbor, New York. Mary Harriman agreed to donate and contributed a large sum of money to this eugenic institution (Averell). It is not entirely clear what Harriman's goals in donating were. In his book *In the Name of Eugenics*, Daniel Kevles asserts that eugenics "struck Harriman as a means of social improvement" (54). It is well possible that she did not fully understand the severity of eugenic developments. Her contributions to the eugenics movement were large financially but her intentions relatively innocent. The initiatives by John Harvey Kellogg were relatively harmless as well. Kellogg, the inventor of cornflakes, was not occupied with sterilization but founded the Race Betterment Foundation in his hometown of Battle Creek Michigan (Michigan). Through his foundation he urged citizens with desirable characteristics to create large families (Michigan). In this way Kellogg wanted to counter the American concern of degeneracy and mongrelization.

From these various objectives became clear that eugenicist's intentions differed greatly. Although there was always the desire to preserve American society and save it from degeneracy, the means to accomplish this deviated. The examples drawn in this paragraph show that male eugenicists often worked from a negative viewpoint: fears of degeneracy and hybridization, while women more often worked

from a positive stance: the protection of the American family. The various intentions of these eugenicists show how entrenched eugenic ideas were in everyday society. In the American Eugenics movement, there is a very clear distinction between positive and negative eugenics, which will be explained in the coming two paragraphs.

### §2.3 Positive Eugenics on National Level

American eugenics can be subdivided into two different factions, positive and negative eugenics. Positive eugenics is a method that is non-violent and non-coercive, but that works towards conservation of the American archetypal race by encouraging healthy American families to reproduce, so that the in their eyes ideal race would expand. Important themes within the positive eugenics movement were maternalism, pronatalism, and urbanization (Fronc 630). Measures that were taken to stimulate large families were for example: “the elimination of city slums, raising economic standards on farms, encouraging endowment and dowry systems, and supporting marriage and childbearing among college students” (Fronc 634). The movement gained momentum throughout the 1920s and 1930s and white families with desirable characteristics, living in the suburbs, were the epitome of the movement.

Various approaches were employed in order to stimulate the procreation of perceived fit, white families. Examples of this are populist promotions, use of popular culture and advertisement on state fairs. Regarding popular culture, film was an important medium to spread the eugenic message. The motion picture *The Black Stork*, which came out in 1917, considered the question of whether to let ‘defected’ new born children live or to euthanize them (Shaddock). The film was based on a controversial 1915 case around which a public debate occurred, discussing whether to treat or to euthanize a child that was deemed unfit (Shaddock). In 1927, the film *Are*

*You Fit to Marry* was released which was a follow up on *The Black Stork*. In this film, a father tries to make his daughter, who plans to get married, aware of eugenic fitness by explaining the risks that marrying out of wedlock can bring, in the form of stories (Are). One of these stories was based on the script of *The Black Stork*, warning the child of the problems that arise with having a eugenically defective child (Are). Eugenicist propaganda fuelled both sides of the spectrum; pro-eugenics films were released, for example the film *Heredity* (1915), as well as anti-eugenic films such as *The Regeneration of Margaret*, published in 1916 (Kirby). In his book *The Black Stork: Eugenics and the Death of "Defective" Babies in American Medicine and Motion Pictures Since 1915*, Martin Pernick explains that for the topic of eugenics "mass culture was a battleground on which many conflicting visions competed" (127). After the 1920s, eugenics slowly disappeared from the big screen because it became widely perceived as a displeasing topic, and became mostly used in science fiction films (Kirby).

A second, very influential method that was used to spread the positive eugenic agenda was advertising through state fairs. An example of this was the 'Million Dollar Parade', an event at the Iowa State Fair in 1911 that displayed "prize livestock and other agricultural products" (Lovett 69). After this display, a car with schoolchildren was driven past the people, and these children were announced as being 'Iowa's Best Crop' (Lovett 69). During the American eugenics movement it was often the case that people were referred to as one would refer to cattle or agricultural products; stock and crop were not uncommon denominators. After the Iowa State Fair it appeared that the schoolchildren were actually examined in the same fashion as live stock was, because there were no established procedures of determining a human's 'fitness' (Lovett 69).

On state fairs, the typical way to bring eugenics to the attention of the public was through ‘Fitter Family Contests’, designed by doctor Florence Sherbon (Lovett 70). The contests were held in order to test family pedigrees in a playful manner and to urge people of perceived fitness to create large families. In her article ‘Fitter Families for Future Firesides: Florence Sherbon and Popular Eugenics’, author Laura Lovett explains that “the fitter family contests merged eugenics with expansive and intrusive public health campaigns and practices. The result was a much more expansive type of eugenic reform encompassing heredity and environment within an ideal of the family and the home” (70). Sherbon chose to organize most of the Fitter Family Contests in rural areas because she believed this would be most effective because of the nostalgic thoughts about the American family that were especially alive in the rural areas of America (Lovett 70).

Positive eugenics was not only urged directly on to the American public. Eugenic perceptions also took shape in daily objects and design. This especially occurred during the 1930s when the subject of “biological efficiency” started to influence industrial designers (Cogdell 218). ‘Streamlining’ became the trend among the designers of the time; light designs without edges and corners that flowed were favored. In her article “Smooth Flow: Biological Efficiency and Streamline Design”, Christina Cogdell studied the fear of constipation in the American society at the time with regards to the upcoming streamlining movement in design. Constipation was seen as a direct threat to society because people believed that obstruction of the colon was dangerous and could cause symptoms such as: “lethargy, sexual disinterest, or outright mental degeneracy” (Cogdell 217). The general thought was that blockage in the colon could create toxins from the human faeces to be released into the bloodstream (Cogdell 217). Cogdell proclaims streamlining to be the design of the

Thirties, and that designers attempted to create shapes that were as smooth as possible to always capture progress and a forward thrust (218). Intestinal efficiency is also the way in which Harvey Kellogg, the inventor of cornflakes, found his way into positive eugenics. He attempted to notify the American people about bodily efficiency by explaining the importance of consumption of his cornflakes and regularity (Cogdell 219). ‘National efficiency’ became another term used to refer to positive eugenic ideas (Cogdell 219).

In 1930, important eugenicist Paul Popenoe advocated for the fact that more needed to be done to raise awareness about eugenics in the education system. He believed that more initiative had to be taken especially in universities. Popenoe found that “all educational institutions should place marriage and parenthood second to no other objectives because of their importance personally, socially and racially” (Kline 131). In universities, few men and women got married or had children, which alarmed eugenicists. The people in universities were often seen as ‘ideal stock’ because they were often mentally and physically fit. Popenoe saw that college students did not see the importance and centrality of the American family as nucleus of society and saw eugenics in education as one way to better the race (Kline 131). He believed that “the college curriculum should be structured around marriage and family and should include courses on human heredity, which were necessary for proper selection of a mate” (Kline 131).

Even though these various efforts were made towards the goal of positive eugenics, significant impact of this movement cannot be perceived when looking at birth rates of the 1920s and 1930s (Kline 92). In her book *Building a Better Race*, Wendy Kline asserts that the attempts that were made “never took hold among the population at large” (92). However, the positive eugenics movement was a way for

women with traditional values to get involved in politics, so the positive eugenics movement definitely influenced society, but perhaps not in the way intended.

#### §2.4 Negative Eugenics on National Level

There were several different methods used in the negative eugenics movement: “voluntary and involuntary sterilization, segregation of the supposedly “unfit,” immigration and marriage restriction, and euthanasia” (Lovett 9). The most common practice in negative eugenics was sterilization. Sterilization laws in the United States initiated with the passing of a law in Indiana in 1907, and many other states soon followed (Regulating 1580). Most of these laws existed until about 1955, and American states sterilized a total of more than 60,000 people from the beginning of the movement until well into the Seventies (Regulating 1580). All of these people were considered “unfit” and were sterilized voluntarily or involuntarily. In May 1930, the article “Eugenic Sterilization in the United States: Its Present Status”, by Frederick W. Brown was published. Brown explains what the term eugenics according to him refers to: “sterilization for the purpose of preventing procreation when it is reasonably certain that the offspring would inherit the diseases or defects, among which, in certain cases, are included moral degeneracy, sexual perversion, and general tendencies toward criminality” (22).

The following states all had sterilization laws: Arizona, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin (Brown 23). Every state law had to specify the year of enactment of the original law; the year in which the last amendment, if any, was passed; the types of operation

specified; and the classes of persons subject to the law (Brown 23). Sterilization as a sentence in prison was allowed in the following three states: California, Nebraska, and Washington (Brown 22).

Trough the case of *Buck v. Bell*, it became clear that the Supreme Court approved of the ideas of the eugenicists, and because of the Immigration Act in 1924; it also became apparent that Congress supported eugenic notions (Regulating 1581). Asians could no longer immigrate to the United States because they were not Western and did not have the desirable traits in the eyes of eugenicists and were therefore a threat towards the advancement of the American race (Regulating 1581). Restrictions were also put on the number of Southern and Eastern Europeans because they were perceived as inferior and possessive of ‘illnesses’ such as alcoholism.

A final example of negative eugenics is eugenics in the form in Indian removal. In their article “The Public and Private History of Eugenics”, Chloe Burke and Christopher Castaneda describe that eugenicists used “documentary erasure” in the Twenties and listed members of Native American tribes as ‘negro’, and thus eliminated large groups of people from records (9).

Eugenicists often did not act individually, large private organizations were established such as the aforementioned Cold Spring Harbor in New York, and the Human Betterment League in North Carolina (Burke 9). The measures taken by leaders in the negative eugenics movement were invasive and violent. Chapter four will describe how gender constructs between 1880 and 1940 influenced the evolution of the movement.

### Conclusion Chapter 2

To summarize, the roots of American eugenics lie mostly in racial issues but soon shifted to concerns about hereditary problems amongst Americans. This also becomes

clear from the intentions of early eugenicists versus eugenicists who were practicing later in the movement. Early eugenicists were mostly occupied with racial issues while eugenicists later worried more about degeneration of the ideal American stock. Positive eugenics was a more peaceful movement that was associated with propagandist film and advertising, state fairs, and political reform. This chapter's paragraph about positive eugenics on national level shows how entrenched eugenics was in very different parts of society. Negative eugenics largely existed out of forced sterilizations of people who were seen as unfit by eugenicists.

### **Chapter 3: The History of The Eugenics Movement on Montana State Level**

After consideration of the development of the eugenics movement on a national scale, in this chapter the question of how the eugenics movement played out in the state of Montana is answered. Along with this question, an answer is also given to the question of how positive versus negative eugenics played out in Montana.

#### §3.1 Important Montanan Eugenicians and their Goals

In the state of Montana, there were several very influential eugenicians. Not much is published about them, but in old newspaper articles, the same names keep appearing. Perhaps the most known, powerful, and hostile eugenicist in Montana was Dr. Hathaway, the superintendent of the Montana State Asylum in Warm Springs (Montana). Within the eugenics movement, he was mostly active in sterilizations. He has been the subject of a trial because it came to light that Hathaway has performed many sterilizations without the patient's, the family's, or the Board of Eugenics' consent (Montana). Before Hathaway was in charge of the institution, Dr. R. J. Scanland was the head of the asylum (Patients). The Governor of the time, Dixon, demanded Scanland to resign his post for the sole reason of him not liking Dr. Scanland's friends (Patients). Why Scanland had to leave so immediately with a motive that was extremely vague is still not clear. It was, however, a fact that Scanland was a very good superintendent and he went on to be the head of the California State Hospital for the Insane at Napa, where he looked after twice as many patients as in Montana (Patients). In the mean time, Governor Dixon had sent Hathaway on a trip around the country, to see the work of other asylums (Patients). After Hathaway came back, Scanland had resigned and he was immediately instituted

as superintendent at Warm Springs (Patients). Within a month after Hathaway's appointment, the patients were diagnosed with a lack of nourishment and a while thereafter, the scandals began to appear (Patients). On April 23, 1924, Dr Cogswell, the secretary of the state board of health and the chairman of the state board of eugenics intervened (Patients). Cogswell urged Hathaway to be put on trial for the way he treated his patient, and so it occurred (Patients).

Dr. Philip Pallister is another influential person, only he served the cause of eugenics a while later. After the peak of the eugenics movement Pallister ran a mental institution in Boulder, Montana (Sargent Wood). At first, Pallister was also involved in eugenic sterilizations but subsequently brought a change in the way that the institution for the feeble-minded was operated and to the rest of the town. He brought:

Clean water and basic sanitation to town, and contributed to the emerging field of genetics and disability rights, by discovering and naming genetic disorders, publishing articles in medical journals, speaking at national and international conferences, transforming public perceptions of people with disabilities, overturning state policies and laws, and working with genetic specialists and associations for the disabled (Sargent Wood).

In Montana, as well as in eugenics on a national level, the negative eugenics movement was led by white, male figures. Because they were the heads of institutions, they were well known, which was not the case for positive eugenics in Montana. This was a movement that occurred mostly under the radar.

### §3.2 Positive Eugenics in Montana

In the state of Montana, negative eugenics seems to be more prevalent than positive eugenics. Despite the fact that there were no big organized events, the positive eugenics movement in Montana took shape through independent instances

such as promotional stories published in newspapers, the publishing and advertising of propaganda films, and the possibility of a state marriage test.

An example of a fictional article in the newspaper popularizing eugenics is the April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1931 edition of 'Sunday Morning Breakfast'. Sunday Morning Breakfast was a weekly editorial in the Sunday *Helena Daily Independent*. On this date, a piece was published that commenced with the sentence: "I have deemed to marry a tall blonde man, announced the young daughter of the house at the Sunday morning breakfast table" (Fulkerson). In this article, a girl explains to her father that she has learned about eugenics at a party and that she wants to marry a fit man to create strong children (Fulkerson). Her father does not seem to understand and explains that in his day, women prayed for a man and had to accept what was given to them; whether this was a good and honest man or a drunkard (Fulkerson). In the article, the father is made out to be old fashioned and the girl comes off to be well educated and responsible. The article advocated for young women to inform themselves well when it came to finding a proper spouse. It teaches girls that future happiness depended on finding a fit mate, who has not inherited 'diseases' such as alcoholism, schizophrenia, or insanity.

Many forms of advertising for positive eugenics were published in the newspaper, such as promotions for the film *The Law of Eugenics* in the *Anaconda Standard* in July 1904. *The Law of Eugenics* urged Montanan parents to be involved with the person that their children would come to marry:

Who is the man your daughter is going to marry? Do you judge him by his money, his earning capacity, or his character and fitness to be your daughter's husband? When we have a fatherhood, physically, mentally and morally qualified to produce an improved race, then the tendency to weakness and immorality will pass into oblivion (The).

This advertisement urges men to take charge as to whom their children marry and procreate with. Women were prohibited to go to the screening of the show in the evenings, so in this case men were perceived as the ones to take initiative.

The *Anaconda Standard* published another article on November 6<sup>th</sup>, 1930 that favored positive eugenics. The article was called “State Marriage Test Favored by Stockmen” and the stated that the American Stock Breeders’ association wanted to have state inspection tests passed to assess young couples who wanted to get married on their eugenic fitness (State). The goal of the test, as stated in the article is as following: “to spread information in regard to the ill effects of the marriage of defective persons”, including “imbeciles, idiots and feeble-minded, insane persons, confirmed drunkards and moral degenerates are to be restrained in colonics and kept from marrying” (State). This idea was taken further in 1935, when a eugenic marriage law was passed (Cady 779). However, physicians and other medical practitioners never accepted the law because the requirements were too idealistic, too violent, and too comprehensive (Cady 779). Lee D. Cady, writer of “Antenuptial Examination Laws”, published in *The American Journal of Nursing*, described that physicians “refused to examine applicants for marriage licenses because most certifications contained enough potential trouble to take away the physician’s right to practice medicine, or put him into jail” (779). After the responses of the medical physicians, the law was swiftly revoked (Cady 779). Although eugenics was entrenched in many parts of society, once in a while the eugenics movement would push the boundaries and their objectives would be too idealistic to take hold among the public.

An example of positive eugenics subtly settled into Montana’s society is in the previous school motto of Montana State University, the largest university of the state. In 1905, James M. Hamilton became the president of the school and the designed the

motto “Education for Efficiency”, which the University remained to use until the 1990s (Early). The term efficiency was used to denote a systematic, well-planned method to organize the most ideal society. This flowed into the education system in order to use the ideals of eugenics also in education. It was only in 1990 that the university changed its motto into ‘Mountains and Minds’ because of the aftermath that eugenics brought.

The positive eugenics movement in Montana is largely unnoticed because there were no large organized events. However, due to the traditional society in Montana, the values of positive eugenics were established in society, and men and women took on roles to reinforce these in the form of advertisement or political reform.

### §3.3 Negative Eugenics in Montana

In Montana, sterilization was by far the most used measure in the negative eugenics movement. The eugenic sterilization law was only passed in 1923 and was not repealed until the movement had been long over in 1981 (Montana). However, in 1969, the eugenic sterilization law became more lenient and sterilization practices are illegal if consent of the patient is not acquired (Montana). Nevertheless, sixty-six people were sterilized between 1969 and 1972 because they were deemed unfit to care for children or because they possessed unwanted features (Montana). There were two institutions in Montana that primarily carried out sterilizations: the Montana State Training School and the Montana State Mental Hospital (Montana). The Eugenic Sterilization Law of 1923 was described as following: “An Act to Prevent the Procreation of Hereditary Idiots, Feebleminded, Insane, and Epileptics Who Are Inmates of State Custodial Institutions, by Authorizing and Providing for Eugenic

Sterilization for Said Inmates” (Chapter 534). The law defined eugenical sterilization as: “a vasectomy, or salpingectomy, or such adequate medical treatment which will surely and permanently nullify the power to procreate offspring, to achieve permanent sexual sterility and the highest therapeutic benefits to the patient” (Chapter 535). The persons in charge to regulate eugenic sterilizations were the State Board of Eugenics:

The State Board of Eugenics is hereby created and established for the State of Montana. It shall consist of: The chief physician of each custodial institution, the president of the State Medical Association, a female member named by the State Medical Association, and the Secretary of the State Board of Health, the last named to be Chairman of the Board (Chapter 535).

A very important aspect of the eugenic sterilization law was consent. Without any form of consent, physicians would be free to sterilize any person that they thought should not procreate. In the Eugenical Sterilization Law, consent is considered in section 6 of chapter 164. It states that:

It shall be the duty of the physician to secure the consent of the legal guardian of said inmate and in case such inmate has no legal guardian, then the consent of his or her nearest known kin within the State of Montana and if such inmate has no known kin within the State of Montana then the consent of the custodial guardian of such inmate. In all cases when this consent is refused, it should be noted on the certificate by the chief physician and it then becomes his duty to notify the inmate and his guardian, or nearest known kin within the State of Montana, and in case such inmate has no known kin within the State of Montana, then the custodial guardian of such inmate, of the proposed sterilization, setting a date for him or them to appear before the State Board of Eugenics and to show cause why the sterilization should not take place. It shall then be the duty of the State Board of Eugenics to withhold the approval of the sterilization of said inmate until the said Board has heard and passed upon the merits of the objection. At the hearing it shall be the duty of the State Board of Eugenics either to approve or disapprove the sterilization (Chapter 536).

Between 1923 and 1954, the years of the official Montanan eugenic program, 256 people were sterilized (Montana). Over eighty percent of the people sterilized were found “mentally deficient”, and the remainder was found “mentally ill”

(Montana). The larger percentage of sterilized people was female, 184 women versus 72 males (Montana). Montana's sterilization law was changed in 1969; by this time the consent of the patient had to be obtained instead of only the consent of the guardian, family member living in the State of Montana, or the members in the Board of Eugenics (Montana). The Montanan eugenical sterilization law was not repealed until 1981 (Montana). The first three persons sterilized under the law were women who had a child without being married: out of wedlock. All three of these women were released out of the institutions once the sterilization was completed and once they could financially support themselves, but these women could never again have children (Montana).

The eugenics movement caused major scandals in Montana because of the misuse of the eugenical law by Dr. Hathaway. While being the superintendent at Warm Springs, Hathaway disregarded the legal section about consent and illegally performed eleven sterilizations (Butchery). When Governor Dixon appointed Hathaway as superintendent at Warm Springs, he appeared to have little knowledge of the medical practice (Dixon). Besides the horrible crime of sterilizing patients without consent, Hathaway also asked family members of his patients more money than they legally owed him. Keeping patients in a state institutions cost one dollar a day, while Hathaway charged patients and family members three dollars a day (Patients). According to an article in *The Anaconda Standard*, Governor Dixon was aware of the fact that Hathaway charged extra and kept the remainder of the money (Robbing). Hathaway was able to do this by creating a fake organization named "The State Clinic". Family members of patients believed they were paying the state of Montana but in fact the earnings went to "Hathaway, a doctor friend of his and a pretty nurse" (Robbing). Hathaway was eventually punished for his crimes in the following way:

“The penalty for each unauthorized and illegal operation is a fine of not more than \$1,000, or imprisonment in the state penitentiary for not more than five years, or both” (Butchery). Montana’s eugenics movement progressed in about the same fashion as in the rest of the states, with the exception of the scandals caused by Hathaway.

### Conclusion Chapter 3

In Montana, the movement did not begin to revolve around fears toward other races and hybridization. This was the case because modernization did not reach Montana on a large scale. The popularity of eugenics in society took hold somewhat later than on a national scale. As well as on a national scale, in Montana sterilization was also the most used measure within negative eugenics. When it came to positive eugenics, advertisements and films were also published as in the national eugenics movement, but chapter one and four show that white women for the first time took on significant roles to fight degeneracy. On average, women played a larger role within the positive eugenics movement, while men were the leaders of the negative eugenics movement. This is both true for the national eugenics movement as well as the movement within the state of Montana.

## **Chapter 4: The Influences of Gender Constructs on the Development of The American Eugenics Movement**

In this chapter, the main question is how the different gender constructs nationally and in Montana contributed to the development of the Eugenics movement in both these areas? By answering this question, the differences between the movement in these two areas and their relation to each other will become clear.

### §4.1: The Influence of Gender Constructs on the Development of the Eugenics Movement on National Level

Gender constructions between 1880 and 1940 were extremely influential in the development of the American eugenics movement: specifically the dual role of women was significant. Between 1880 and 1940, American society changed drastically: from a rural, family oriented society to a more modern urbanized and industrialized society. The role of men during 1880 and 1940 changed minimally; the influx of immigrant workers at times challenged notions of masculinity among American men, but overall white American men were the dominant group in society and the breadwinners in their families. The role of women evolved in a certain duality. Urbanization and industrialization caused for marriage and family life to not be the most important aspect for every woman anymore. Women who aspired to marry and to have children were seen as the future and the saviour of the American race, while women who moved to cities and took on jobs were seen as the destructors of American society.

While in the negative eugenics movement men were the principle campaigners towards creating the ideal race, when it came to positive eugenics these efforts were strengthened by female progressive reformers (Kline 19). Female reformers were advocates of family life and they embodied the complete opposite of the urban

woman. An example of an instance in which women reformers were very active was in the establishment of another school for the feeble-minded in Massachusetts in 1916. The state of Massachusetts actively campaigned for the feeble-minded to be institutionalized immediately for they brought danger to society (Kline 28). The 'feeble-minded' in this case mostly implied women with loose morals such as the aforementioned female 'moron' or the woman adrift. In this scenario, the one symbol of womanhood directly maligns the other representation of femininity. The League of Preventive Work, who were in charge of the campaign stated in a promotional pamphlet in 1916 that of the thirty 'morons' they had already instituted, "twenty-eight were women whose uncontrollable sexuality led them to danger and destruction: some showed a mania for the company of men, others were inviting indecent attentions, and some were living promiscuously, a terrible menace to the men and boys of the town" (Kline 28). Eugenicists thought they could limit sexual sinfulness by preventing feeble-minded women from procreation (Kline 20).

The state of California accounted for a very large percentage of the eugenic sterilizations in the United States. Physicians at the Sonoma State Hospital in California have executed many eugenic sterilizations and there have remained a great deal of records of the institution. Therefore, the occurrences at Sonoma are a good reflection of what happened in state institutions in the rest of the United States. Well-known eugenicist Paul Popenoe, who was a specialist in heredity and eugenics, oversaw a survey about sterilization for the Human Betterment Foundation. He conducted this survey at Sonoma State Hospital in California in 1926 and he made very clear distinctions in the ways that was referred to male and female patients who were being sterilized. In female cases, of 149 patients, forty-five percent was denoted as 'sexually delinquent', of which the crime was often just the reality of having sexual

impulses (Kline 54). Within this 'crime', patients were described as 'passionate' nineteen times, as 'immoral' seventeen times, as 'promiscuous' ten times, as 'masturbator' eight times (Kline 54). Only three of the 149 cases were charged with a 'real crime', which were "adultery, prostitution, and homosexuality" (Kline 54). At Sonoma, of male patients, a hundred cases have been studied between 1922 and 1925. It is remarkable that not once a man is accused of 'sex delinquency', while this was the case for forty-five percent of women studied (Kline 55). When looking at male patients, thirty-seven percent of cases mention problems with sexual tendencies, but they seem to be of a different nature than in the female cases. Sexual aggression was seen as a normal trait for a man, so there are only very few instances where men were condemned for this (Kline 55). Of the thirty-seven male cases, most were charged as being 'masturbators', which was the case on sixteen occasions, the second most used charge was 'passive sodomist', which occurred ten times, and then there were some cases about 'exposers' or 'immoral tendencies' (Kline 55). Another difference that Dr. Popenoe indicated is that "twenty-five percent of the girls who have been sterilized were sent up there solely, or primarily, for that purpose. They are kept only a few months – long enough to operate and instil a little discipline in them; and then returned home" (Kline 54). In Sonoma, it became clear that many women were sent there because of their perceived "sexual delinquency" and were sterilized for the same reason, while men were commonly sterilized for therapeutic reasons. An important distinction is that men were sterilized for their own benefit, while women were sterilized for "the protection of society" (Kline 53). In her book Kline concludes out of the Sonoma State Hospital records that "although both men and women were sterilized, the real concern was the reproductive behaviour of women" (56).

The binary view on women between 1880 and 1940 was the complete opposite of one another. The gender roles that were put upon women were either hard to live up to or absurdly unreasonable. Both of these symbols of womanhood were greatly influential in the development of the eugenics movement on national level. On the one hand the symbol of the mother of tomorrow is portrayed as the saviour of the American race. Some of these women were genuinely afraid of degeneracy and therefore fuelled the positive eugenics movement by being active in political reform. Leading female figures immersed from this activism in political reform such as Florence Sherbon, the designer of the Fitter Family Contests. On the other hand the representation of the urban, workingwoman who was seen as astray and unruly was an untruthful depiction that came forth out of pure fear of the total collapse of the American family. Because of the fear that these women would be the demolishers of the race, the leaders of the negative eugenics movement, who were predominantly men, saw these women as unfit to procreate. Eugenicists described feeble-mindedness, idiocy, imbecility, alcoholism, and schizophrenia as reasons for sterilization. Most sterilization had feeble-mindedness, idiocy, and imbecility as reason, which mostly signified women that did not favor a traditional lifestyle, or women that were found sexually deviant. Without these two symbols of womanhood, the American eugenic movement would have developed entirely differently.

Thus, gender constructions between 1880 and 1940 were extremely influential in the development of the American eugenics movement on a national level: specifically the dual role of women was significant.

#### §4.2: The Influence of Gender Constructs on the Development of the Eugenics Movement on Montana State Level

The comparison between the influence of gender on the development of the eugenics movement nationally and on Montana State level is of importance because of the difference between an area that remained rural, Montana, and a country that overall is quickly modernizing. Gender constructions in Montana persisted in being traditional and family oriented but the influence of these constructions was still very significant in the eugenics movement in Montana. In this state, white men were dominant in society but the importance of white women was also crucial. Because the American family remained the nucleus of rural society, women in families continued to serve the role of moral guardian of the family. The idea of the white woman as the symbol for the future of the race endured. The threat of the urban, wayward woman was virtually non-existent in Montana because of the rural character of the area. Immigration, urbanization and industrialization were practically absent in this state.

In Montana, there were different ways in which people worked towards the preservation of the American race. First of all, preservation of the American race between 1880 and 1940 largely meant taking Indian children from their families and sending them to boarding schools for proper assimilation into the American society. The role of women was very prevalent in these actions because for the first time, white women were more politically significant through their actions in the assimilation of Native American children. This movement of maternalism is a part of the eugenics movement because the removal of Indian children, in the eyes of white men and women in Montana prevented possible degeneration of the American race due to the inassimilability of Native Americans.

Another attempt for preservation of the American race was through negative eugenic measures, which mostly meant sterilizations. Of the people sterilized in

Montana, a large part was female: seventy-two percent were women and twenty-eight percent were men (Montana). In total, 184 women were sterilized and seventy-two men (Montana). This proves that in Montana, as well as in most other states in America, women were the subject of sterilization more often than men. Because the white woman was seen as the mother of tomorrow, every female character trait that slightly deviated from this was seen as a danger to the race. The negative eugenics movement in Montana did not take on extreme proportions because the threats of degeneration were not rooted in this rural state. For example, in Montana 256 people were sterilized during the eugenics movement while in a state as California, a state that many people immigrated to, over twenty thousand people were sterilized (Kline 31).

In Montana, the positive eugenics movement was given an impulse because of the increasingly influential role of women. The victimization of women in the negative eugenics movement in Montana, however, was largely generated by ideas that were spread from more urbanized and industrialized parts of the United States.

#### Conclusion Chapter 4

Gender constructs nationally influenced the eugenics movement through the dual image of womanhood, as described in paragraph one of this chapter. In Montana in itself, the female role of the mother of tomorrow also influenced the eugenics movement in this state, but the modernized woman was not an issue here. The ‘girl problem’ originated from national fears that spread to a state such as Montana.

## **Chapter 5: The Decline of the Eugenics Movement**

This chapter gives an answer as to what caused for the decline of the American eugenics movement. This chapter also explores gender roles nationally and in Montana after 1940 and shows what influence further modernizing gender constructs had on the decline of the eugenics movement. Lastly, the role of eugenics today is explored. How entrenched are eugenic ideas still in today's society?

### §5.1: The End of the American Eugenics Movement

Towards the 1930s, Nazi Germany had developed great interest in eugenics and started to reach out to American eugenicists, which eventually caused for the beginning of the end of the American eugenics movement (Rydell 364). In January 1934, Germany's compulsory sterilization law went into effect and American officials were extremely interested in the details and legislation behind the law (Rydell 366). In 1935, Lynn Bancks McMullen, the President of the Eastern Montana Normal College in Billings declared the following: "I abominate Hitler's general policies, but if I am correctly informed in regard to his campaign for sterilization of the unfit, I prophesy that Germany will do more for the uplift of her society in the next fifty years through sterilizations, than we have done in eighty five years through public education" (Rydell 360). Her quote shows that in the Thirties, when the American eugenics movement was still in full swing, the eugenics movement in Nazi Germany was highly respected by American eugenicists. Nazi eugenic items were studied and displayed in the United States with great curiosity and interest. At this time in the United States, expositions were a powerful means to communicate with the people and show the ideas about German hygienic and eugenic ideas that were displayed in several exhibits and museums. For example, the German government sent a eugenic

exhibition to America, which toured around the country before occupying the Buffalo Museum of Science in New York permanently (Rydell 364). In the article “The Nazi Eugenics Exhibit in the United States, 1934-43”, historian Robert Rydell explains that this “show’s tour and especially the legislation its contents supported attest to the power of the exhibit medium and illustrate the overlay of Nazi and American eugenics in the United States in the 1930s” (364). This appeal eventually started to decrease around the 1940s when the Americans got seriously involved in World War II, and fought the Germans. The Nazi eugenic artefacts that before were so interesting to the American eugenicists were now called “German propaganda charts” and “perfectly useless material” (Rydell 379). After this, eugenics decreased in popularity because of its negative connection with Nazi Germany who was seen as the enemy.

Although the national eugenics movement decreased in popularity, eugenics in Montana remained popular between the 1940s and 1970s. In 1981, Doctor Pallister, who had been director of the Boulder River School from the late 1940s into the 1970, gave a speech about the development of clinical genetics in Montana. Pallister described the moment that he went to the Boulder River School and Hospital for the first time in 1947. He described a horrible setting: institutionalized girls that no attention was paid to, girls freezing in the cold, epidemics going around, and many deaths among the patients (Pallister 1). Pallister was also a eugenicist who executed sterilizations but had a change of mind about the subject and attempted to change Montana law and tried to improve the environment for the institutionalized as well as for the town of Boulder (Sargent Wood). In August 1967, a paper named “Should Montana Have a Public Policy on Sterilization of Those Involved in Mental Retardation and if so, What Should It Be?” was published by The Montana State Developmental Disabilities Planning and Advisory Council. It stated the following:

The issue of whether or not to press for sterilization legislation is complex. On one side stand those strong proponents of the view that a constitutional right such as procreation should never be abridged for someone else. On the other side stand those who believe that having no legislation denies the right of choice to be sterilized to those who cannot directly consent. Based on the experience of those states with a sterilization law providing stringent safeguards, it is clear that such a law offers the choice of sterilization to those lacking the capacity to give informed consent. In the absence of legislation, no clear choice exists (Paper).

Two years after publication of this paper: in 1969, Montana repealed the Eugenic Sterilization Law that was passed in 1923, and passed another law that provided protection against ill-considered, compulsory sterilization (Paper). The paper “Sterilization for Those Involved in Mental Retardation: History, Issues and Options for Montana”, published in 1986, stated that after the passing of the law in 1969, no sterilization could be executed legally without consent of the patient. However, the Montana Board of Eugenics found ways to work around the 1969 law. The board continued to conduct hearings in which board members or the state could consent to a patient’s sterilization if they believed it was truly better for the patient (Sterilization). The Montana Board of Eugenics could also claim that a sterilization was executed purely for medical reason and sterilize patients who did not give consent anyway (Sterilization).

The last sterilization in Montana took place in 1972; in these last years after the 1969 law, sixty-six more sterilizations were performed (Sterilization). This paper also showed that when the law of 1923 was still valid, the intention of sterilizing was for the good of the state, after the passage of the 1969 law, the state had to act out of the good of the patient, which in reality was not always the case (Sterilization).

To summarize, when the American eugenics movement declined on national level due to negative connotations with Nazi Germany: the enemy in the war, Montana eugenics continued and was still a large part of Montana society.

#### §5.2: Gender Constructs on National Level and Montana State Level After 1940

The popularity of eugenics was not the only aspect that changed after the 1940s. Gender constructions in American society also changed by becoming further modernized. In this paragraph, gender roles in the more traditional Montana after 1940 are also evaluated, and research is going to show whether Montana gender roles remained traditional or also shifted towards a more modern construction.

According to the article “Household Headship and Its Changes in the United States” by Francis Kobrin, the amount of family households increased with sixty-nine percent between 1940 and 1970 while the entire population grew fifty-four percent (794). Kobrin explains that the amount of males that did not live in a family household formation was nearly halved between 1940 and 1970, and that the amount of women living outside of marriage or a family household decreased even more extremely (794). Family life became increasingly important in American society again, however the roles that men and women took on within their marriage were less traditional. After 1940, the number of working women increased greatly. Sociologist Linda Waite describes in her article “Working Wives” that in 1940 fourteen percent of married women in America were working and that this had more than doubled in 1960: now thirty-one percent of married women were working (65). This number grew up to forty-one percent working married women in 1970 (Waite 65). After 1940 there were many employment opportunities due to the outbreak of World War II. Waite states that employment was needed in professions that were well suited for

female workers such as labor in the “clerical occupation and service industry” (66). The increase in marriage and family life combined with the post war baby boom caused the shift in hiring women of older age versus women in their late twenties (Waite 66). Still, as a result of the baby boom, female participation on the labor market kept increasing until the 1970s. Tolerance for working women grew and motherhood and employment could co-exist from now on instead of women having to choose between motherhood and employment. This was a very extreme difference from the situation in the 1920s, when the eugenics movement was in full swing and married women would certainly not work and the women who did work were not approved of.

Gender roles in Montana and the rest of the American West again changed considerably less than they did on national level. In the rural areas, family life was extremely important and remained this significant. In Susan Lee Johnson’s essay “‘A Memory Sweet to Soldiers’: The Significance of Gender in the History of the ‘American West’”, she explains that extremely little has been written about women in the American West (101). First of all, the emphasis had always been on white males and the second most stressed topic in this area was race and ethnicity. Johnson states that more work on Western gender roles only started to appear throughout the 1970s (101). During but also after the peak of the American eugenics movement Montana society was and remained a patriarchal society. Although less had changed, Johnson does describe various notions influencing the society of American western states:

“The new hegemonic masculinity has been contested, and in some cases transformed by a number of twentieth-century social practices: women’s labor force participation during World War II; the growth of lesbian and gay communities in the urban West; and the continuing evolution of competing styles of gender relations among western American Indians, Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, and African Americans. But the discursive apparatus of white masculinity has not been dismantled and the American West still exists as a sort of happy hunting ground for Anglo virility” (92).

In short, marriage and family life again became increasingly important after the 1940s. However, a more modernized version of this concept was now in place. Being a wife, a mother, and an employee could now co-exist; it was accepted of both women and men to work. The acceptance of working women was reinforced because of World War II, when extra employees were needed. Gender constructs in Montana did not change much again after the 1940s and the traditional American family was still the epitome of civilized society. This caused for Montanans to continue to be receptive to eugenicist ideas because the traditional constructs of society were still endangered.

### §5.3 The Presence of Eugenics Today

Between 1880 and 1940, eugenics had such deep roots in the American society. How present are eugenic ideas today, almost seventy-five years after the American eugenics movement can be considered to have ended?

In 2002, Virginia was the first American state to apologize for their eugenic policies and specifically for their compulsory sterilization procedures (Virginia). In the apology, a special tribute was made to Carry Buck, the first person sterilized under the Virginia eugenics policy, who had a child out of wedlock (Virginia). A man and a woman, actually sterilized under the policy helped unveil the memorial for the victims (Virginia).

In his article “Is a New Eugenics Afoot”, historian and biologist Garland Allen states that the same mind set that was present in society during the eugenics movement, is still in existence now. He believes that radical ideas such as sterilizations would not occur now “but the requirement of antifertilization medication

for continued welfare benefits in the U.S., and bitter anti-immigration sentiment in south western U.S. and Europe are haunting reminders that we are not immune to the prejudices of our predecessors” (61).

In 1988, the Human Genome Project was started, which aimed at attempting to construct a genetic model of humanity (Cullen 164). James Watson received a Nobel Prize in 1962 as “one of the co-decoders of the DNA’s double helix” and argued that the Human Genome Project would show whether nature or nurture was more influential with regards to human behaviour (Cullen 164). Watson came to the conclusion that “we used to think our fate was in the stars, now we know in large measure, our fate is in our genes” (Cullen 164). In 1994, the book *The Bell Curve* was published in which psychologists and scientists found that human intelligence is greatly determined by hereditary and environmental influences (Allen 61). This study was very controversial and caused for new eugenic thoughts to run through societies mind. In 1998, Life magazine published a cover article titled: “Were You Born That Way? Personality, Temperament, Even Life Choices: New Studies Show it’s Mostly in Your Genes” (Allen 59). Life Magazine was not the only medium writing about heredity; Allen explains that there were many more media publishing in this line of thought, such as “The Atlantic Monthly, New Republic, Time Magazine and Newsweek” (59).

Because scientific possibilities are developing rapidly, more prospects also arise in pregnancy and childbirth. In recent years, the concept of the designer baby has brought curiosity and interest with regards to genetically engineering babies. The idea is that certain characteristics can be chosen for someone’s baby, that range between lowered risk of diseases towards the selection of gender (Ly). Before, this was a concept of the far future but the idea is becoming more real as technology

advances. This topic has become an important debate topic in bioethical debates, and in 2004 the expression has even been submitted in to the Oxford English Dictionary (Ly).

As the eugenic movement has long been over, the question is now: what do we still see as eugenics? The development in human genetic research, publicity of studies such as the Human Genome Project and other articles show that the discussion about human heredity and human behaviour is still deeply entrenched in our daily lives. The degree to which eugenics is present in American society is questionable, but it is certain that eugenicist ideas are still present in research as well as in society.

#### Conclusion Chapter 5

To sum up, just before the American eugenics movement declined in popularity, there was an overlay between Nazi eugenics and American eugenics. Both parties were very interested in each other's methods. This soon changed after World War II commenced; the United States did not want to be affiliated with Nazi ideas and quickly distanced themselves from eugenic ideas on a large scale. There was another reason that the American eugenics movement came to an end. In the 1940s, an increase of marriage and family households appeared, thus the American family remained a pivotal part of society. Nevertheless, gender constructs within these family households did modernize. More women entered the workforce, which was first mainly because of a shortage of laborers during World War II, but afterwards became socially acceptable. The number of women working kept growing during the next few decades. Although the eugenics movement has officially been over for a very long time, eugenic ideas have always remained a part of society. New scientific breakthroughs or new threats in societies instigate eugenic thoughts. However, a

pervasive movement that influences an entire country does not seem likely to occur any time soon.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, gender constructs between 1880 and 1940 influenced the development of the eugenics movement greatly.

The eugenics movement began being mostly race influenced with concerns about hybridization and immigration. The development of the movement changed because of threats that a modernizing society brought along. Because of urbanization and industrialization, gender constructs in the American society changed from a traditional family lifestyle into a more urbanized and modern society. This caused for a threat towards traditional gender roles. Women who started working were specifically threatening because in traditional view they were supposed to act as moral guardians, something of which men by themselves were thought to be less capable of. In America in general, two views of womanhood were important: on the one hand the symbol of the mother of tomorrow was present, and on the other hand the woman astray with less focus on family values. Both these symbols of womanhood significantly influenced the eugenics movement. Women that did not proceed in the tradition of morally guiding a family and bearing children were seen as destructors of the American race, while on the other hand the role of the mother of tomorrow was seen as a saviour of American society. The most noteworthy fear besides not putting family values first, was that the wayward woman would act sexually deviant: examples hereof are intercourse before marriage, acting seductive towards men, or having any other kind of sexuality besides being heterosexual. This threat frightened especially eugenicists who were fighting for preservation of the American race by supporting large and healthy families.

In rural Montana, gender constructs did not undergo the same change as in many other American states. Family life remained most important because

urbanization and industrialization did not play a large role in a rural state as Montana. White families saw themselves as the dominant group in this state while actually; more Native Americans were present than whites. White men were especially powerful, but during the time of the eugenics movement, women also gained power in the form of political reform. This started with the movement of Maternalism, which was especially significant in states in the American West. It was a movement that perfectly fit the symbol of the mother of tomorrow. White women took on roles to make sure Native Americans were able to assimilate into societies, which they did not believe was happening. Therefore, by using their femininity they were able to infiltrate into Native American families to institutionalize Native American children into boarding schools. This served as a way of attempting to save the American race. The power of white women increased because of their role as symbols of motherhood and morality.

Political reform was mostly seen as part of the positive eugenics movement but separation and segregation, which was done to the Native American children in the West, was seen as part of the negative eugenics movement. The intentions of the various eugenicists in the positive and negative movement varied. On average, male eugenicists were part of the negative eugenics movement and enforced more coercive measures and women were more inclined to take on roles in the positive eugenics movement in order to enforce these values onto American society in a nonviolent way. Overall the intention to save the American race from degeneracy was the main goal of all eugenicists.

As aforementioned, the eugenics movement came to revolve about human deficiency and hereditary diseases instead of the fear of hybridization. Especially women fell victim to this in changing times from Victorianism into a modernized

society. Women before were moral guardians; men did not have this moral compass so they were not to blame for their actions if they acted slightly deviant socially and sexually. Eugenicists saw women who lived their lives according to the values of a more modernized society as genetically deficient. For eugenicist this was a good reason for sterilization because women who did not act as saviours of the American race were immediately classified as destructors of the American race. Another important influence that constructs of the female gender had on the positive eugenics movement was their sudden political influence. Because traditional female figures were seen as moral guardians, they could exert certain political power in the form of saving of the American race on a bigger scale than merely in their own families. White American women were a very large force in the positive eugenics movement, of which an important example is Florence Sherbon, the inventor of the Fitter Families Contests, which was often implemented on state fairs in rural areas.

The 'wayward woman' was not a threat in rural Montana, but the symbol of the mother of tomorrow was even more present in Montana society than in society on national level. If women in Montana were not able to live up to the standards of this female figure or were found sexually deviant in any possible way, a reason for sterilization could quickly be found. The number of women sterilized in Montana was much higher than the number of men sterilized, as was the case on a national level.

Towards the 1940s, the American eugenics movement slowly came to an ending because of an increasingly bad reputation of eugenics due to the incorporation by the Nazis of these practices. When America became a direct enemy of Germany in the war, to practice these same ideas was unacceptable. Another reason for the decreasing importance of eugenics in society is because modernization of society kept expanding. The Victorian morals that had been important before were completely out

of date after the 1940s and due to instances such as the depression and the war; women were more needed on the work floor, which also made it more acceptable.

The question remains of how present eugenics still is in today's society. Nowadays, it still plays a role because heredity and nature versus nurture are still important topics within science. Moreover concepts such as designer babies are subject to today's moral debates about to which extent we should try to control creating more 'perfect' humans.

In conclusion, traditional gender constructs influenced the National and Montana eugenics movement because of women's increasing political authority. Modernizing gender constructs influenced the movement by threatening proponents of a traditional family lifestyle and eugenicists. The fears of the wayward woman on a national level spread to rural states such as Montana even though the 'girl problem' did not play a role in this rural society. Modernizing gender constructs bolstered fears of degeneration in rural areas as well as on National level and victimized especially women, while on the other hand the traditional woman benefited from these reinforced values.

Some people find in the word "eugenics" only a subject for humor. But if you are yourself a eugenically superior person, you realize that the ideal of sound minds and sound bodies, which is the core of the eugenics movement, is not only admirable but necessary. If the human race, beset by the growing complexities of civilization, is to endure and be able to enjoy life in the future, it must free itself from the physical and mental handicaps which now beset it. -- Paul Popenoe and Roswell Johnson (Kline).

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