

Progressive Era Reforms in Education and Family

Thesis

Through family life and education reforms, progressives aimed to create a utopian society that would vastly improve the lives of the white majority; however, these reforms were contingent on social darwinism--excluding ethnic minorities and the mentally handicapped from their benefits--thus deepening the gap between social classes in American society.



WHICH WILL YOU CHOOSE ?

Visual Metaphor

The progressives believed that in order to obtain a utopian society, they needed to follow the path on the right, that leads to societal hygiene.

It also leads society to leave behind and cut out the groups who fall into the left category of poverty and misery, among other things.

Prohibition

- Moral authority
- Atlanta Race Riot
 - Blacks are drunks and should be excluded from society, same attitude towards Irish
- Women temperance movement
 - gain of power for white women, decrease for minority groups
 - ties back to race riot defending white women from being allegedly raped by drunk blacks, rescue the morally pure white female
- Populist tradition, morals of William J. Bryan, promoting white protestant values
 - Catholics outraged at ban, interferes with religious practices, mostly immigrant religion gets neglected by law



Prohibition Cont.

- Rise of crime surrounding alcohol
 - Rich whites can afford to bypass the ban and access their alcohol in secret, rampant corruption
 - Immigrants turn to organized crime in lieu of well paying jobs
 - Immigrant figures like Al Capone grow incredibly wealthy abusing the prohibition system and bribing government officials, becoming their own type of Rockefeller creating a public image of prestige through charity donations and his underdog history



Education Reform

Although there were extremely beneficial reforms to education during the progressive era, as a result of racism and segregation African Americans were excluded from these new, innovative changes to education.

- In 1916 a new Georgia law required school attendance for children between ages eight and fourteen for at least four continuous months a year.
- per pupil expenditures in Georgia rose from 89 cents in 1900 to \$3.13 in 1920
- Replacement of one-room schools with consolidated schools, more teachers, and higher grade levels



Sexual Education

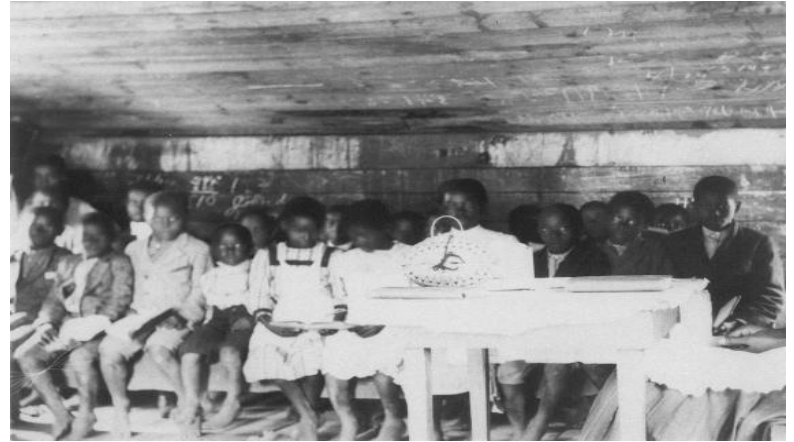
- Sexual Education was a major reform within schools
- Schools began to teach children about the dangers of sexually transmitted diseases
 - They taught their students abstinence and being responsible sexually
- In 1920 40% of all high schools had implemented some sort of sexual education

Similar to normal public school education, since blacks were not included in these schools, they were not able to receive this information and the gap was furthered between the African American community and the white community



Education Disparity

- Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) established a separate but equal precedent
- it shall be unlawful for any colored child to attend any white school, or any white child to attend a colored school.” —**Missouri, 1929**
- As a result African Americans and whites were forced to be in separate schools
- Booker T. Washington was an education reformer during the progressive era that provided education for African Americans
- Founded Tuskegee Institute that allowed blacks to be educated
- However only educated blacks to be educated within the system
- Taught agricultural skills that kept blacks from excelling, in order to attempt to gain acceptance
- Even when African Americans did reform they had no choice but to play into their own segregation because normal education would not get them a professional job like it would for whites.



Mental Hygiene Movement

People who did not fit into the ideals of social Darwinism fell behind in society, and were sent to insane asylums to weed them out of the utopian society.

- Shyness, day dreaming, withdrawn personality, and introversion were all seen as signs of psychiatric danger.
- Movement to improve conditions of mental hospitals, which were very inhumane at the time.



Mental Hygiene Cont.

- Leading psychologists of the time thought that the root of most psychological damage was childhood trauma and stress. Educators thought that trying to reduce these traumatic forces from schools, as well as offering counseling, could lead to a more mentally healthy generation.
- To combat failure, students who failed classes were given significantly less to do and learn, putting them farther behind than they would be, and subjugating them comparatively to the rest of the students.

Birth Control

Birth Control aimed to allow women of all classes to control their reproductive lives, however, like eugenics, aimed to move society towards it's utopian ideal, by reducing the amount of kids that the poor have.

In the book *The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America* by Linda Gordon, Gordon comments on how during the Progressive Era:

“The phrase “fewer but better” became common. Some advocates attacked large families, charging prolific parents with weakening the race by producing deprived children, sending them to work instead of school, and eventually filling the poorhouses.”

- Birth control advocates commented on this cycle of poor parents having too many kids that they cannot afford, and not having enough money to properly raise them. These kids would in turn continue to be poor and a hinderance to society during their lives, and potentially have their own poor kids continuing the cycle. With birth control, it was believed that this cycle could stop.

Margaret Sanger, was one of the trailblazers of the birth control movement. Having grown up poor herself, in a very large family, one of 11 children, she experienced first hand the issues of poverty caused by a family having to support many kids. Furthermore, she recognized the toll it takes on the woman giving birth. Sanger's mother died at 50, wasting away from 11 childbirths and seven miscarriages.

Sanger argued in her article *The Eugenic Value of Birth Control Propaganda*, how progressives must help guide the poor to the right staircase "towards happiness" by reducing the amount of children they have.

- "One who doesn't take into account the living conditions and desires of the submerged masses can never be of the slightest value in effecting any changes. Such systems have in the past revealed their woeful inability to prevent the sexual and racial chaos into which the world has today drifted."
- "As an advocate of Birth Control, I wish to take advantage of the present opportunity to point out that the unbalance between the birth rate of the "unfit" and the "fit", admittedly the greatest present menace to civilization, can never be rectified by the inauguration of a cradle competition between these two classes. In this matter, the example of the inferior classes, the fertility of the feeble-minded, the mentally defective, the poverty-stricken classes, should not be held up for emulation to the mentally and physically fit though less fertile parents of the educated and well-to-do classes. On the contrary, the most urgent problem today is how to limit and discourage the over-fertility of the mentally and physically defective."



BUCK VS. BELL

In the Buck vs. Bell case of 1927, the Supreme court upheld that Carrie Buck should receive forced sterilization from the State, reaffirming the eugenic ideals of furthering the State by eliminating “defectives” from the gene pool. Carrie Buck was an 18 year old woman who was observed to have the intelligence of a 9 year old.



Subsequent ruling by Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.:

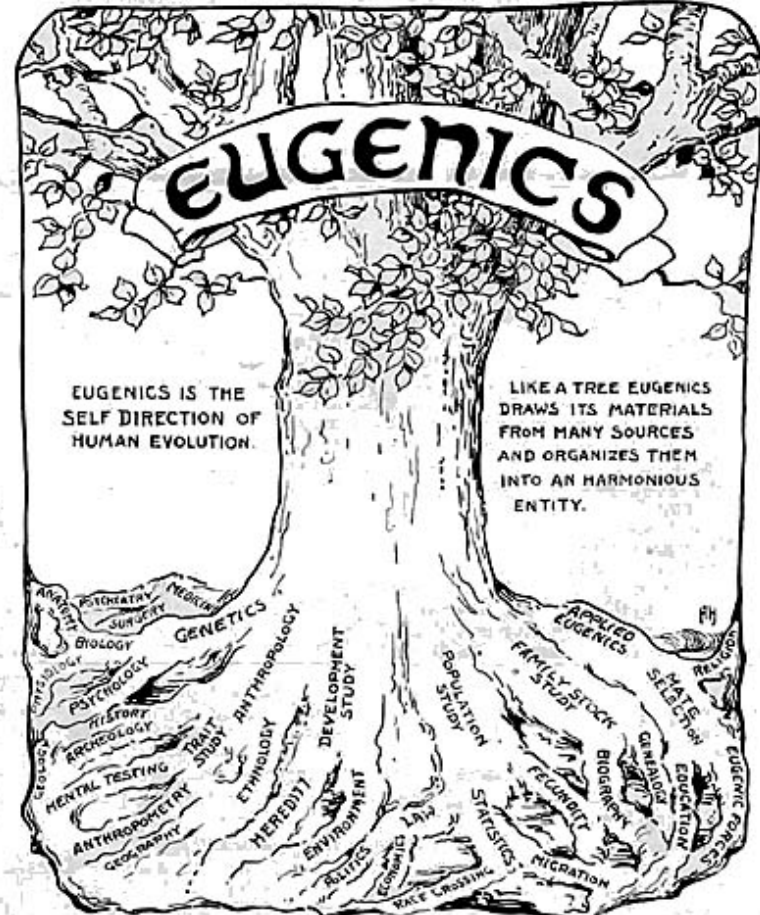
“We have seen more than once that the public welfare may call upon the best citizens for their lives. It would be strange if it could not call upon those who already sap the strength of the State for these lesser sacrifices, often not felt to be such by those concerned, to prevent our being swamped with incompetence. It is 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.”

Eugenics

- Progressive's intent to create a "white utopia" was demonstrated through eugenics: a Social Darwinism-esc science and philosophy that advocated for maintaining a genetically superior society by limiting the reproduction of the "genetically inferior"
 - Eugenists targeted the mentally and socially ill, including the impoverished, alcoholics, prostitutes and carriers of sexually transmitted disease as "genetically inferior"
 - The idea of Eugenics paralleled the progressive era's belief that the individual was responsible for their financial situation, thus the poor should not be helped
- a. Notable progressive era advocates were the Rockefeller foundation, the Carnegie Mellon Institution, W.E.B. Dubois and Margaret Sanger

Eugenics Congress Announcement

Number 1. History and Purpose of the Congress.

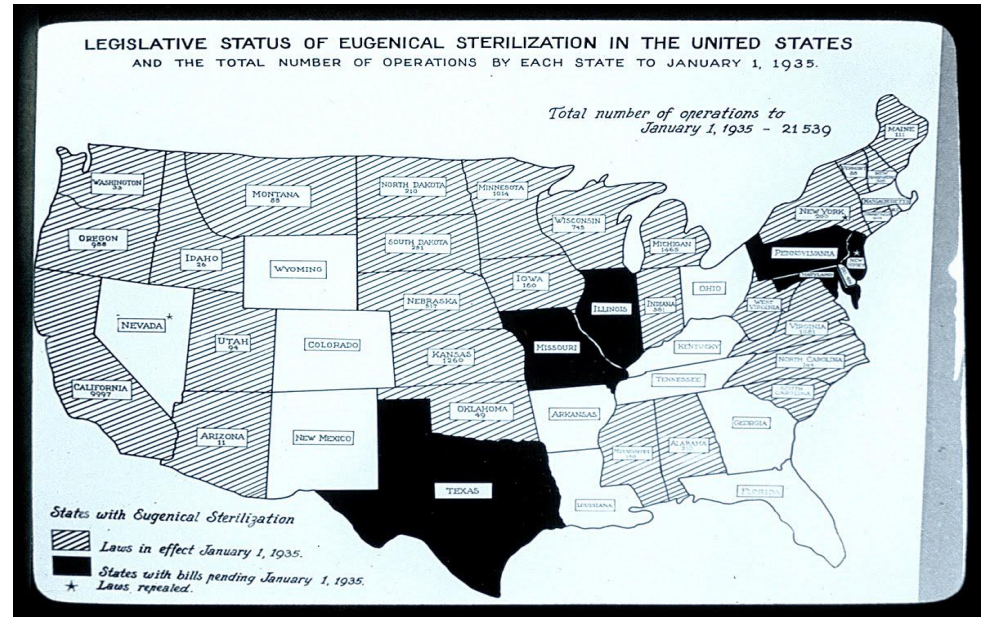


Eugenic Sterilization

- 1914 Harry Laughlin created first model Eugenics sterilization act that would authorize the sterilization of the “socially inadequate”
- 12 states created sterilization laws by the publication of this model

- The Buck vs. Bell Case also exemplifies how progressives sought a Utopia through Eugenic sterilization

- The Eugenic Sterilization Act (1932) legalized the sterilization of any “afflicted with hereditary forms of insanity that are recurrent, idiocy, imbecility, feeble-mindedness or epilepsy”



Eugenics and Anti-Immigration

- Eugenics also facilitated the Nativism movement as they applied the ideas of a genetic hierarchy to their racial one
- The Stanford-Binet (intelligence test given to Army recruits) was used to solidify a genetic inferiority of “new” immigrants and blacks as nearly 1/4 of foreign-born citizens were illiterate
- *The Passing of the Great White Race* was published by Madison Grant that covered the inevitable weakening of the white race if they persist to live/mingle with other races (primarily Mediterranean races that had influx of immigrants)--it was easy to prove the inferiority of other races b/c most immigrants lived in poverty -Applied by nativists to exclude immigrants from entering the US

"During the past forty years, our laws have made every effort to bar from this country those who would lower our mental, moral or physical standard. For the past twenty years the law has denied admission to every... imbecile, idiot, feeble-minded person, insane person, criminals and all of those likely to become public charges. Despite every effort to enforce the law, we find an extraordinary representation of these classes in our alien population."

-Congressman John C. Box

Conclusion

Reforms in Education, Mental Hygiene, Birth Control, Prohibition and Eugenics facilitated a more advanced society that was exclusive to the white majority.

Ironically, progressives responded to the class division created by the Gilded age by deepening the class disparity through reforms in education and family.

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