

# The 'Unfit': 'Race' Cleansing in the US

**HIS 345-01**

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**Spring, 2009**

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Eugenics was a branch of the life sciences that drove much of American social policy in the early twentieth century. Its goal was to promote morality and progress by cleansing the 'superior races' of contamination by 'inferior types', such as the poor, the mentally and physically disabled and tainted "races", such as Blacks, Jews, and immigrants. Invented in England, pioneered in America and perfected in Nazi Germany, the movement drew on science to structure American society from the 1880s to the 1960s. This course examines the social and scientific trends that supported the movement to categorize people as more or less fit, and breed a better humanity based on eliminating the 'unfit.' In the process, we will explore how and why we categorize people and how context affects the ways in which science shapes American society in a system that is open to diversity, but often deeply threatened by it.

**EVALUATION AND GRADING:** Your grade in the course will be based on exam scores, in-class and two assignments:

- 20% two written assignments
- 70% 3 exam grades
- 10% class participation,

There will be 3 exams, including the final; the first will be 20% of your grade, the next two will count 25% each. The final exam will be cumulative and it will occur during the scheduled period for final exams. I will evaluate your work based on your:

- written articulation of concepts, theories and historical trends gleaned from the readings
- effective explanations of the ethical issues and contemporary problems raised by biological concepts as they influence cultural diversity
- integration and synthesis of historical trends on exams, assignments and discussions

## **REQUIRED TEXTS/READINGS:**

### Texts:

Wendy Kline. Building a Better Race. Gender, Sexuality and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom. Berkeley: UC Press, 2001. (ISBN 978-0-520-24674-4)

Elof Carlson. The Unfit. History of a Bad Idea. Cold Spring Harbor, NY: Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press, 2001. (ISBN 978-087969587-3)

### Reserve readings:

Gail Bederman, "Theodore Roosevelt: Manhood, Nation, and "Civilization", Chapter 5, Manliness and Civilization, Univ. Chicago Press, 1995. pp. 170-215.

Alexandra Stern, “Instituting Eugenics in California,” Chapter 3 from Eugenic Nation. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005, pp. 82-114.

Alexandra Stern, “California’s Eugenic Landscapes,” Chapter 4 from Eugenic Nation. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005, pp. 115-149.

Website Resources for Assignments:

First Assignment:

[http://www.jacklondon.net/writings/TurtlesTasman/told\\_in\\_drooling\\_ward.html](http://www.jacklondon.net/writings/TurtlesTasman/told_in_drooling_ward.html)

“Told in the Drooling Ward” (Jack London, from The Turtles of Tasman, 1916 (also on reserve))

Second Assignment: “Against their Will: North Carolina’s Sterilization Program”

<http://againsttheirwill.journalnow.com/>

Other Web Sources:

Eugenics Record Office Records: American Philosophical Society

<http://www.amphilsoc.org/library/mole/e/ero.htm>

Cold Spring Harbor Archive of the American Eugenics Movement

<http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/eugenics/>

Dolan Learning Center: Buck vs. Bell

<http://karmak.org/archive/2004/06/buckvbell.html>

**Topics and Tentative Schedule:**

*Weeks: January 20-27:* Race in America – 1900

Carlson, Introduction, Chapters 1-3, Chapter 16;

Cultural and Religions foundations of human hierarchies; why masturbation?

Race and the authority of science; 1850-1900

*Week: January 27:* Carlson, Chapters 4-7;

Degeneracy, Degeneration and Social Darwinism

Constructing Pathology: Diversity and the Poor

*Week: February 3:* Bederman “Theodore Roosevelt: Manhood, Nation, and “Civilization”;

Darwinism, and the Progressive Era

An ‘American Race’—Madison Grant

Social Fears of Race Mixing: Roosevelt, Nationalism and Manhood

*Week: February 10:* Carlson, Chapters 8-9;

Weismann, Mendel, and the new genetics

Feeblemindedness and criminality

*Week: February 17:* Carlson, Chapters 10-11, Stern, “Instituting Eugenics in California,”;

Degenerate families and “parasites”  
Institutionalizing Eugenics—David Starr Jordan, Charles Davenport

*Week: February 24:* Carlson, Chapters 12-13;  
World War I and the rise of “negative” Eugenics  
Legalizing Eugenics: Immigration restriction, masturbation and forced sterilization  
Buck versus Bell, 1927

**First Exam: March 3**

*Film March 5: The Lynchburg Story*

*Week: March 17,* Kline, Intro and Chapters 1-2;  
Changing views of women: Threats from the ‘New Woman’  
Prostitution, insanity and ‘feble-mindedness’: Progressive California  
Measuring the mind: The IQ test and the new “moron”

***Spring Break, March 7-15***

**First Assignment due: March 19**

*Week: March 24:* “California’s Eugenic Landscapes” and Kline, Chapter 3;  
Progressive environmentalism, immigration, and progressive medicine  
Sterilization, promiscuity and birth control

*Week: March 31/Apr 2:* Kline, Chapter 4  
“Reproductive Morality”: Motherhood and Female Sexuality  
Changing Definitions of Eugenics: 1930-1960  
Saving the family: The Cooper Hewitt Trial

*Weeks: April 7:* Kline, Chapters 5 and Epilogue  
Motherhood and Pronatalism  
Paul Popenoe, marriage counseling

**Second Exam: April 14**

*Weeks: April 21:* Carlson, Chapters 17-19  
America’s connection to Nazi Germany  
The Holocaust and changes in American eugenics

**Second assignment due: April 28**

*Week: April 28,* Carlson, Chapter 20  
“Newgenics” and “backdoor eugenics”: health care and biotechnology  
The Genome project, genetic testing and typologies  
Genetics and epigenetics

**Reading Day, May 6;**

**Final Exam: Thursday, May 7, 3:30-6:30 (cumulative)**

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY: You will be required to sign the Academic Integrity Policy on all major work that you submit for this course. Please check the UNCG *Undergraduate Bulletin* for full statement of that policy.

ATTENDANCE POLICY: There is no attendance policy; but because we will discuss the readings in class, your grade will likely suffer from poor attendance. **Please come to class having read the assignment, and be prepared to talk about it in class.** Your exams will cover the topics discussed, and we will use the readings cover how to frame an informed answer and describe historical trends on exams. Both the participation portion of your grade and your exam performance will benefit from regular attendance.

I do not give late exams without a documented medical or family emergency. So, please contact me immediately via e mail if you have an emergency. Unless there are extenuating circumstances, if your contact is delayed by a week or more, you will not be permitted to take a make up.

Finally, please be courteous and turn *off your cell phones* in class.