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The Role of the Eugenics Movement in the Consolidation of Early American Psychology: An Analysis of the Initial Period of the Eugenical News Bulletin (1916–1922)

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the complex epistemological trajectory and sociopolitical implications of the intersection between psychology and eugenics within the American scientific landscape from the late 19th to the first third-20th century.

It analyzes how the emergence of a biomedical paradigm and a hereditary interpretation of the human condition, alongside Darwinian interpretations, facilitated the acceptance of degeneration theory and, subsequently, eugenics. We frame the influence of figures such as Charles Benedict Davenport and Harry Hamilton Laughlin, who—together with the institutionalization of the Eugenics Record Office (ERO) and its dissemination organ, *Eugenical News*—played a crucial role as the main vehicle for popularizing narratives of social control, particularly regarding immigration policies and sterilization programs.

The article also examines how the development of intelligence testing, such as the Stanford-Binet Scale by Lewis Terman and its promotion by Robert Mearns Yerkes, became a fundamental tool for categorization and population control—operating, in contemporary biopolitical analyses, as a technology for regulating social bodies. Thus, despite growing internal dissent and ethical criticism, psychology provided crucial “scientific support” for eugenic policies, including immigration and sterilization laws. Finally, the article reflects on the slow decline of scientific eugenics in the U.S., its transformation, and the legacy of its ideals of “social control” and “efficiency” in public opinion, even after World War II.

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El papel del movimiento eugenésico en la consolidación de la primera psicología estadounidense: Un análisis del periodo inicial del boletín *Eugenical News* (1916-1922)

R E S U M E N

Palabras clave

Eugenesia,
Eugenical News,
Eugenics Record Office (ERO),
Charles Benedict Davenport,
Eugenics Research Association (ERA)

Este artículo explora la compleja trayectoria epistemológica y las implicaciones sociopolíticas de la intersección entre la psicología y la eugenesia, dentro del panorama científico estadounidense desde finales del siglo XIX hasta mediados del siglo XX.

Se analiza cómo la emergencia de un paradigma biomédico y una interpretación hereditaria de la condición humana, junto a interpretaciones darwinistas, facilitaron la aceptación de la teoría de la degeneración y subsecuentemente, la eugenesia. Enmarcamos la influencia de figuras como Charles Benedict Davenport y Harry Hamilton Laughlin, que junto a la institucionalización de la Eugenics Record Office (ERO) y su órgano de difusión la *Eugenical News*, jugaron un papel crucial como vehículo principal para popularizar narrativas de control social, particularmente en lo que respecta a políticas de inmigración y programas de esterilización.

También, se examina cómo a través del desarrollo de las pruebas de inteligencia como la Escala Stanford-Binet por Lewis Terman y la promoción de Robert Mearns Yerkes, se convirtió en una herramienta fundamental para la categorización y el control poblacional —operando, en los análisis biopolíticos contemporáneos, como una tecnología destinada a regular los cuerpos sociales. Así, a pesar de las crecientes disensiones internas y las críticas éticas, la psicología proporcionó un “apoyo científico” crucial a las políticas eugenésicas, incluyendo las leyes de inmigración y esterilización. Finalmente, se reflexiona sobre el lento declive de la eugenesia científica en EE. UU., su transformación y el legado de sus ideales de “control social” y “eficiencia” en la opinión pública, incluso después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial.

1. Introduction: From Degenerationism to Eugenics

Formulations of the human condition in strict biological and physiological terms emerged in the final third of the 19th century, a period marked by a shift in biomedical paradigms. In psychiatry, the decline of “moral treatment” gave way to anatomoclinical approaches—neurohistological and neuropathological—championed by the emerging German school¹. There were exceptions, such as efforts to preserve the moral treatment of mental patients through methods inspired by the utilitarian logic of achieving well-being and happiness via technology. A notable example is the therapeutic-architectural models developed in the United States by the Quaker-born alienist Thomas Story Kirkbride (1809–1883) (Pérez-Fernández & López-Muñoz, 2019; López-Muñoz & Pérez-Fernández, 2023). In some regions, a culture of asylum care centered on assistance and charity persisted, as was the case with the Spanish network (Pérez-Fernández & Peñaranda-Ortega, 2017). However, the dominant trend, grounded in the paradigm consolidated by Charles Darwin

(1809–1882), led to a hereditary and somatic interpretation not only of mental pathology but of the human condition itself. This shift revolutionized the perception and treatment of both mental patients and criminals (Pérez-Fernández, 2006). Such developments resulted from a fortunate convergence of various research and intellectual currents. A terminological clarification is in order: throughout this article, terms such as ‘pseudoscientific’ are used in their contemporary historiographical sense. We acknowledge that many of the research traditions discussed enjoyed institutional legitimacy in their own time, even as some contemporaries criticized their evidential standards and ideological assumptions.

Degeneration theory gained popularity through a confluence of elements: 1) an exaggerated interpretation of Mendelian laws of inheritance; 2) the eugenic contributions rooted in Galtonian biometrics and psychometrics; 3) biomedical readings of criminality disseminated by Lombrosian thought and the Positive School of Criminal Law; and 4) a confusing amalgam of theoretical and methodological perspectives such as phrenology, craniometry²,

¹ By the mid-19th century, somaticist movements began to emerge within the field of psychiatry, driven by figures such as Jacques-Joseph Moreau de Tours (1804–1884) and Wilhelm Griesinger (1817–1868). These currents posited that the etiology of “madness” lay in structural alterations of the brain. Over time, these ideas evolved and culminated, toward the end of the century, in the degenerationist theories of Bénédict Augustin Morel (1809–1863), which emphasized hereditary transmission as the primary cause of mental disorders, thereby attributing to them an incurable nature.

² Craniometry, phrenology, and physiognomy formed part of contested 19th-century research traditions that sought lawful associations between morphology and mental traits. While they enjoyed institutional legitimacy and professional acceptance at the time, they were also subject to methodological criticism by some contemporaries. In present-day historiography, they are widely regarded as pseudoscientific and ideologically driven precursors to later biotypological models (Gould, 1981).

anthropometry, and *Bertillonage*³ (Thorvald, 1966; Pérez-Fernández, 2004). Many of these proposals—now recognized as pseudoscientific—enjoyed, at the time, broad legitimacy within the prevailing scientific language and operated under a considerable professional consensus, further reinforced not only by a white, Westerncentric view of civilization shaped by colonialism, but also by specifically American traditions of white supremacy and AngloSaxon exceptionalism that framed national identity in hierarchical racial terms and legitimated projects aimed at preventing the propagation of allegedly ‘degenerate’ or ‘unfit’ elements. Nonetheless, even within that historical context, there were critical voices—such as Rudolf Virchow (1821–1902), Franz Boas (1858–1942), and others—who questioned their methodological limitations and ideological biases, thereby anticipating their subsequent reassessment as practices lacking a solid scientific foundation. (López-Muñoz & Pérez-Fernández, 2023).

By the early 20th century, it was considered a “fact” that mental life, as a direct manifestation of heredity, could be explained in deterministic and materialist terms—and, accordingly, modified on that same basis. Given this prevailing scientific view, it was logical for it to become the foundation of sociopolitical discourse (López-Muñoz & Pérez-Fernández, 2020a). The debate had shifted from the realm of biological inheritance *sensu stricto* to the relative weight assigned to phylogenesis—*nature*—versus ontogenesis—*nurture*—in shaping individuals (Ridley, 2004), a topic that continues to spark heated cyclical debates today (Wade, 2014). Consequently, the legislative and governance trends of the period, adopting perspectives that have never fully disappeared from certain ideological discourses—such as social Darwinism—were not inherently malevolent constructions that emerged from nowhere. Rather, they were paradigms grounded in popular interpretations of contemporary scientific research (Sandín, 2000; Yakushko, 2019).

Eugenic proposals were rooted in earlier scientific aspirations that never truly disappeared but remained stored in the attic of Western culture. The degenerationism that preceded the later, more “refined” eugenic model was essentially a modernized reformulation of ancient traditions imbued with the same deterministic view of human nature, such as humoralism (López-Muñoz & Pérez-Fernández, 2020a). The earliest positive approaches to understanding psychic life emerged through various avenues, but the most successful began with protomedical, morphological, and biometric studies aimed at unraveling the “mysteries” of personality. It is often forgotten that modern medicine began precisely through anatomical research and the rediscovery of the human body (García Guerrero, 2012). Thus, first Giovanni Battista della Porta (n.d.–1615) and later Johann Caspar Lavater (1741–1801), authors of the most successful works in physiognomy, laid the groundwork for this path toward the somatization of the psyche, which would later be consolidated by the phrenological work of Franz Joseph Gall (1758–1828) and Johann Caspar Spurzheim (1776–1832) (Altuna, 2010). In this environment,

favorable to reductionist frameworks for explaining the human condition, Darwinism arrived as a breath of fresh air.

Although the thesis of evolutionism—the “natural” opposite of diluvianism—was not new to the Western intellectual landscape (Young, 1998), Darwin’s achievement was to propose an efficient model of the process, grounded in empirical data, based on reasonable theoretical premises, and with powerful practical consequences⁴. Its core elements allowed little room for effective counterargument. It was not the “scandalous” nature of Darwin’s thesis that caused alarm, but rather its robustness, which provoked panic among traditionalists (Andrade, 2009). The fierce attacks Darwin received—mostly fallacious—stemmed more from fear than from religious fervor or “morality” (Darwin, 1984; Young, 1998). Ultimately, Darwinism’s most fundamental contribution was epistemological: it solidified the idea that biological phenomena should be analyzed and understood exclusively through the lenses of environment and heredity.

Darwin’s influence reached psychiatry and the emerging field of psychology with the publication of *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), a text that introduced the evolutionary perspective into the realm of the mind. Only by understanding behaviors, emotions, and cognitions as hereditary and adaptive—thus subject to natural selection—did it make scientific sense to inquire into observable interindividual differences among humans beyond metaphysical considerations, and to establish solid criteria for distinguishing between “normal” and “pathological” (Carpintero, 2003; Saiz Roca, 2011; López-Muñoz & Pérez-Fernández, 2020b).

To this was added the concern of emerging industrial societies over the nascent “social question.” Everything seemed to be moving in the same direction: Thomas Malthus (1766–1834), whose *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) inspired a generation; the quantification of social problems through “moral statistics” proposed by figures such as André-Michel Guerry (1802–1866) and Adolphe Quetelet (1796–1874)⁵; the subsequent consolidation of scholastic positivism in the social sciences; and the biomedical degenerationist current. All this converged with Darwinism to consolidate eugenic thought in the final third of the 19th century (Pérez-Fernández, 2002). Suddenly, for example, the skulls of the mentally ill, criminals, drug addicts, or the “degenerate” could be thought to possess certain “regular” and “measurable” hereditary traits, the knowledge of which might be useful for preventing social ills. The thesis that everything could be

⁴ The term “diluvian” is linked to the biblical “Great Flood.” In geology, it referred to a trend that sought to reconcile the Earth’s geological history with the Genesis narrative—specifically chapter 7 (verses 1–24). Diluvianism suffered a decisive blow with the scientific consolidation of the Darwinian model, which completely transformed the geological and stratigraphic interpretation of the fossil record. However, this has not prevented the continued emergence of geologists—particularly in the United States—who attempt to introduce alternative proposals through the often classified in contemporary philosophy of science as a pseudoscientific alternative to evolutionary theory of “intelligent design” (Isaak, 2007).

⁵ Also known as the Cartographic School, it was a direct precursor of the positivist sociological model. The central idea was that every social event is a collective phenomenon governed by quantifiable laws—not by natural criteria, but by sociocultural principles that can be recorded and cataloged in the form of statistics. Thus, it was established that the appropriate method for studying any social event had to be quantitative. Others who adhered to this approach included Alexander von Oettingen (1827–1905), Rawson W. Rawson (1812–1899), and Henry Mayhew (1812–1887).

³ It is a methodology for measuring and cataloging human anatomical and bodily differences, originally intended for forensic identification tasks. Its creator was a clerk employed by the Parisian Sûreté, Alphonse Bertillon (1853–1914), who ventured into the territory of eugenics by deducing that criminals shared certain catalogable and hereditary physical characteristics.

quantified and classified took strong root in 19th-century science, reinforcing new perspectives within the biomedical and psychosocial traditions that continue to this day (López-Muñoz & Pérez-Fernández, 2020a). These developments unfolded against the backdrop of rapid industrial consolidation, unprecedented demographic pressures, and the emergence of progressive reformist ideals, which together created a highly receptive environment for eugenic and other scientific proposals aimed at regulating populations.

Physicians such as the Scottish doctor James Bruce Thomson (1810–1873), who argued that criminality was a hereditary condition six years before Lombroso, relied on observations based on the statistical recording and analysis of cranial configurations from over 5,000 inmates (Thomson, 1870). Thus, emerged theories that, with the support of proponents of hereditarianism and the study of individual differences—such as Francis Galton (1822–1911) and his followers—were widely accepted with little resistance. The popularization of Mendelian laws of inheritance by Hugo de Vries in 1900⁶, remarkable for their precision in predicting the manifestation of hereditary traits, further fueled interest and helped consolidate the idea that the psyche was just another biological phenomenon—integrated into the natural order, unique in its expressions, but of shared nature and therefore predictable. The problem then shifted from the origin of “the mental”—which could now only be “natural”—to determining whether heredity or environment was the more decisive variable. The extension of these ideas into the sociopolitical realm was only a matter of time: controlling the flow of bodies became the “scientific” means for managing, preventing, and sanitizing the great social issues that had suddenly become matters of public health (Pérez-Fernández, 2006).

To conclude this introduction, it should be noted, regarding objectives and sources, that this article offers a historically grounded analysis of *Eugenical News* with a focus on its institutional trajectory and its intersections with early American psychology, rather than an exhaustive, itembyitem exegesis of each issue. Our evidentiary strategy privileges (I) a clearly delimited publication window (1916–1922), (II) issuelevel patterns (topics, actors, institutional initiatives), and (III) crosschecking with contemporaneous psychological debates and secondary historiography. Consequently, we cite *Eugenical News* selectively—at nodal moments, programmatic statements, and points of institutional inflection—to avoid redundancy and maintain analytical coherence. Tables and figures synthesize broader patterns and identify the most salient psychologists and themes, while the narrative integrates these patterns into the larger historical argument. This design choice keeps the article within reasonable length, enhances replicability, and prevents the dispersion that would result from extensive block quotations of routine items.

2. Galton Crosses the Ocean

The term *eugenics* synthesized the results of statistical analysis on the variation and distribution of anthropometric and mental characteristics across different groups of individuals (Galton, 1883). Francis Galton conceived eugenics as the procedure to be followed for the “preservation of genius,” promoting and accelerating the aims of evolution through the application of appropriate technologies. This would enable the selection and breeding of an elite capable of improving the quality of a human population’s genetic stock (Paul, 1995). His influence on later psychology lies less in the eugenic project itself and more in the design of measurement systems for detecting and analyzing individual differences—an effort that would, in the medium term, give rise to psychometrics.

The context was favorable, as the hereditarian analysis of the social question opened compelling possibilities (Caponi, 2009): through the selective breeding of the “fittest” individuals within a population, it would be possible to “design” a society in continuous “improvement.”⁷ Thus, the biometric and mathematical approach introduced by Galton served as a gateway to the quantitative boom in early psychology (Doyle, 2014). Many American experimental psychologists, always oriented toward applied issues, sought to legitimize their professional field through mathematization: the discipline was useful for the measurable growth and improvement of individuals, businesses, schools, and so on. The psychologist experimented, measured, controlled variables, and modified them (Pickren & Rutherford, 2010). This was already evident in the influence of the first major American experimentalists, such as Hugo Münsterberg (1863–1916) and James McKeen Cattell (1860–1944), the latter a student of Galton in London (Woodworth, 1944; Willis, 2007).

American psychology was imbued with the pragmatism that had inspired it and with the sociopolitical values of the country, built upon the ideal of “progress.” It was believed that by fully embracing scientific and technological advances, the happy utopia promised by the Founding Fathers could be achieved (Doyle, 2014). Thus, psychologists saw the opportunity to quickly carve out a professional niche by applying their discipline to education, advertising, industry, and mental hygiene, becoming influential agents in government actions aimed at social control. In this context, it was only logical that the first experts in the matter—led by Cattell and the British immigrant William McDougall (1871–1938)—would become enthusiastic supporters of the eugenic discourse⁸.

⁶ The laws of inheritance were published in 1866 by Gregor Mendel (1822–1884) in a little-known journal. De Vries, along with Carl Correns (1864–1933) and Erich von Tschermak (1871–1962), rediscovered these laws—but not without controversy. The Dutch botanist published an article in 1899 in which he appeared to claim the discovery for himself, although De Vries would later acknowledge Mendel’s priority (Ridley, 2004). The famous “three laws” have received various criticisms and revisions, and therefore should no longer be interpreted literally (Nissani, 1994). Moreover, Mendel never spoke of “genes” or “genetics”: the concept of the gene was introduced in 1909 by Wilhelm Ludwig Johannsen (1857–1927).

⁷ While eugenics, strictly speaking, referred to selective breeding rather than birth control policies, the historical record shows areas of overlap and strategic alliance. In the United States, some eugenicists supported contraceptive initiatives when these were framed as means to prevent the reproduction of the “unfit.” Conversely, leading birthcontrol advocates occasionally mobilized eugenic arguments to broaden political and philanthropic support. A prominent case is Margaret Sanger (1879–1966), whose activism—despite its primary focus on women’s autonomy and public health—intersected at times with eugenic rationales and received backing from eugenicsminded colleagues; Sanger herself hosted eugenics speakers and accepted the language of “selective” reproduction in specific contexts. Thus, although eugenics and birth control were not identical in aims or constituencies, their instrumental convergence in the 1910s–1930s complicates any sharp separation between the two (*Eugenical News*, 1917: 51).

⁸ McDougall engaged in a heated debate with second-generation American psychologists, most of whom were supporters of behaviorist environmentalism. Par-

The focus of part of American psychology on eugenics would become a divisive issue for both academia and the profession in the medium term, especially due to the inevitable theoretical and ethical consequences it raised. Establishing social and legal categories based on heredity could contradict the individual rights protected by the country's constitutional model. Additionally, there was the problem of disregarding environment and development—key topics for a psychology that aimed to study psychic function, behavior, and adaptation to the environment (Pérez-Garrido, Tortosa & Calatayud, 1998)—and which viewed eugenics as a “betrayal” of the spirit of legitimate Darwinism. For example, eugenicists like Henry Herbert Goddard (1866–1957) believed that, regardless of environment, individuals with disabilities, “deviants,” and the poor—poverty rooted in a family was seen as a symptom of hereditary unfitness—were mentally “unfit.” Thus, in a theoretical move that revived the spirit of 19th-century degenerationism, he proposed that “mental deficiency” and maladaptive behavior in children were hereditary traits, fully traceable through a genealogy he labeled “feeble-mindedness” (Goddard, 1912; Cruz, 2020).

The use of experimental psychology for eugenic purposes reached its peak with the development and application of intelligence tests, enthusiastically viewed as tools for identifying the “least fit” or “least adaptable” population groups (Doyle, 2014). Goddard himself, in 1908, decided to import the scales originally designed for other purposes by Alfred Binet (1857–1911) and Théodore Simon (1873–1961), to apply them to the evaluation of racial and social groups (Zenderland, 1998). The test, later revised in 1916 at Stanford University by Lewis Madison Terman (1877–1956), would become the famous and widely used *Stanford-Binet Scale* (Fancher, 1987; Doyle, 2014). In fact, Terman—also sympathetic to eugenics—believed that the nation's general intelligence could be increased through systematic use of the test, as individuals with below-average intellect could be identified and their offspring controlled. While the success of these initiatives was limited, the idea of population control through psychometric testing took root⁹. Indeed, Terman, along with other specialists such as Robert Mearns Yerkes (1876–1956), would go on to achieve great academic and professional success.

This “Stanford Revision of the Binet-Simon Scale,” soon called simply the “Stanford-Binet,” was by far the best of all available individual intelligence tests, in terms of its reliable norms for all ages from early childhood through mid-adolescence. The Stanford-Binet quickly dominated the field and became the standard against which all subsequent American intelligence tests—whether group or individual—would be measured. The 1916 Stanford-Binet also brought with it a popular new term.

Terman adopted William Stern's suggestion that the ratio between mental and chronological age be taken as a unitary measure of intelligence but then multiplied that result by 100 to get rid of decimals. This resulting “intelligence quotient,” which Terman dubbed the “IQ” for short. [...] The Stanford-Binet established Terman's high reputation among mental testers and made him one of the first to be tapped by Yerkes in 1917 for service on the army testing program. Shortly after the war, Terman collaborated with Yerkes and some others to introduce the National Intelligence Tests, constructed on the army Alpha model, to measure the intelligence of groups of schoolchildren (Fancher, 1987:140-141).

The first intelligence tests were biased, but they offered eugenicists a “proven” method to “indisputably” characterize the mental fitness of different races and ethnicities¹⁰. Supported by psychologists, American and Canadian eugenicists campaigned for strict immigration and reproductive control policies to preserve the racial and intellectual homogeneity and survival of a supposedly “superior” Anglo-Saxon white ethnicity¹¹. For example, educator Harry Hamilton Laughlin (1880–1943), director of the Eugenics Record Office (ERO) from its founding in 1910 until its closure in 1939, testified before the United States Congress in 1923 with the aim of implementing a national program of eugenic policies. Most of the research he cited during his testimony was psychological in nature, used to argue that the heredity of immigrant populations was poor and that their entry into the country—as well as their reproduction—should be restricted (Ludmerer, 1972).

These congressional hearings led to the approval of the 1924 National Origins Act and the establishment of annual immigration quotas. In fact, the advancement of eugenic legislation across the United States and Canada was largely based on the research of psychologists and psychiatrists who—whether through complicit silence or by seeking to benefit from this symbiotic relationship to advance their careers—provided scientific support for sociopolitical ideas and projects that would, in theory, foreshadow the practical disasters of Nazi Germany¹² (Sofair & Kaldjian, 2000; López-Muñoz et al., 2007; López-Muñoz & Pérez-Fernández, 2023).

There have long been two general approaches to establishing mental deficiency: the psychometric and the social. 30

ticularly intense was the “great instinct controversy,” which he maintained with John B. Watson. Watson strongly opposed McDougall's hereditarian stance, to the point of asserting that there was no such thing as ability, talent, temperament, or mental constitution—concepts championed by eugenicists (Pérez-Garrido, Tortosa & Calatayud, 1998).

⁹ A proposal that was supported at the time in many Western countries. Consider, for example, the journal *The Eugenics Review* (1909–1968): the publication served as the official outlet of the Galton Institute, founded in Britain in 1907 as *The Eugenics Education Society (EES)* by the young social reformer and feminist Sybil Gotto—later Sybil Neville-Rolfe (1885–1955)—and Francis Galton himself.

¹⁰ Although the Committee on Scientific and Professional Ethics of the American Psychological Association (APA) was established in 1938, it was not until 1953 that the organization issued its first Ethical Code, which already established the idea that psychometric measurement was a supportive tool and should not be used as an absolute parameter. What is particularly significant about the APA Code is that it was the result of thorough field research, which allowed for the precise identification of the ethical dilemmas faced by practicing psychologists (Ferrero, 2005).

¹¹ The issue of “racial quality” was nothing new. The work *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races* (1853–1855), by French aristocrat Arthur de Gobineau (1816–1882), had already proposed a form of “pseudoscientific” racism, suggesting the existence of superior races—destined to create and dominate—and inferior races, lacking creative capacity and condemned to obey.

¹² Nazism, considered by numerous authors as a political project of applied biology, sought to justify and legitimize a biological solution—initially through sterilization programs and bans on interracial marriages, and later through mass murder—to address certain socially relevant issues of the time, such as diversity, difference, and even illness.

The psychometric method assesses mental ability using a standardized psychological test, generally known as an intelligence quotient (IQ) test; the resulting IQ score does not indicate why a child may score exceptionally low. The social method assesses the child's progress in school and whether he or she is able to carry out the basic requirements of daily living, but it also explores the possible environmental sources of mental deficiency. The AEB considered only the psychometric evidence, primarily the IQ score (Wahlsten, 2020: 62).

As experimental psychology and its public utility grew, so too did the eugenics movement (Table 1). The best example of this was the enormous success of the Second International Congress of Eugenics, held in 1921 at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Not only did it attract hundreds of the world's most prominent

eugenicists, but it also featured such a massive exhibition of research and eugenic projects that the program and display of materials lasted an entire month (Doyle, 2014).

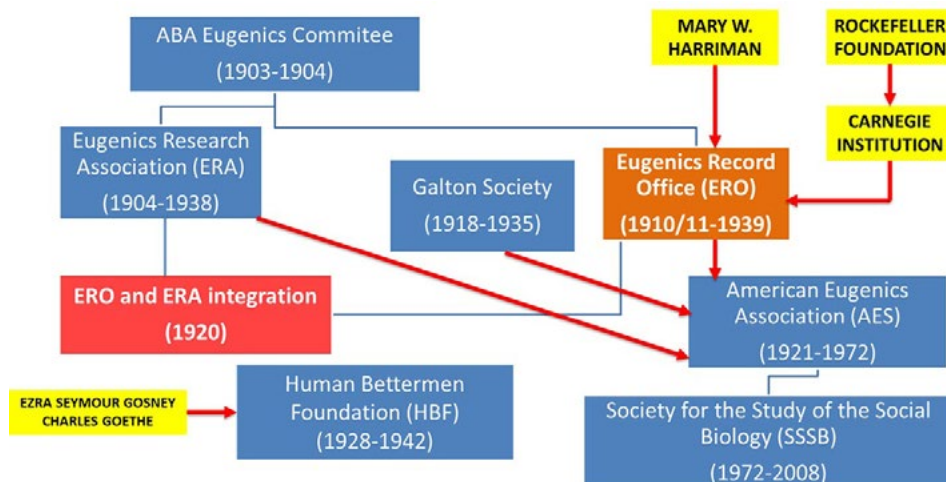
A simple glance at the index of the event's proceedings reveals that, alongside genetics, psychology was the most represented discipline, with contributions from figures such as Knight Dunlap (1875–1949)—APA president in 1922—Thomas R. Garth (1872–1939), Carl C. Brigham (1890–1943), Edward Thorndike, and Lewis Terman (Laughlin, 1923). One of the most important institutional outcomes was the formation of the American Eugenics Society (AES)—not the first, but later the most influential organization in this field in the United States (Figure 1). Its first president was Irving Fisher (1867–1947), an economist trained at Yale University, who established the organization's headquarters in New Haven (Doyle, 2014).

Table 1. *Milestones of the International Eugenics Movement (1901–1924).*

YEAR	MILESTONES / PUBLICATIONS	LEGISLATION / OFFICIAL INSTITUTIONS
1901	Galton, Weldon (1860–1906) and Pearson (1857–1936) founded <i>Biometrika</i> . David Starr Jordan (1851–1931): <i>The Blood of the Nation</i> .	
1904	Alfred Ploetz (1860–1940): <i>Archiv für Rassen</i> .	
1905		British Parliament: Aliens Act. Pensilvania: Sterilization Law.
1906	Foundation of American Breeder's Association.	Ontario (Canada) establishes the position for 'Inspector of the Mentally Weak'.
1907	Gran Bretaña: Eugenics Education Society / National Eugenics Laboratory.	Indiana: Sterilization Statute. Alberta (Canada): Act Respecting Insane Persons.
1908	Nova Scotia (Canada): League for the Protection of the Mentally Weak	Inform of the British Royal Comission on the Care and Control of the Feeble-Minded.
1909	Born of The Eugenics Review. James S. Woodsworth (1874–1842): <i>Strangers Within our Gates</i> .	California: Sterilizarion Act. Washington: Sexual Sterilization Act. Connecticut: Eugenics Legislation.
1910	The American Association for the Study of the Mentally Retarded supports the use of the Binet-Simon Scale, as well as the use of the term 'moron'. Eugenics Records Office (ERO).	Canada: Immigration Act.
1911		Nevada: Sterilization for men convicted of sexual crimes. It is never enforced. New Zealand: Mental Defectives Act. New Jersey: Sexual Sterilization Act. Iowa: Sexual Sterilization Law.
1912	London I International Congress of Eugenics. Jean Webster (1876–1916): <i>Daddy-Long-Legs</i> .	New York: Sexual Sterilization Act.
1913		Michigan: Forced Sterilization Act. Kansas: Sexual Sterilization Act. North Dakota: Sexual Sterilization Law. British Parliament: Mental Deficiency Act. Wisconsin: Sexual Sterilization Legislation.

Table 1. Milestones of the International Eugenics Movement (1901–1924). (Continuación)

AÑO	MILESTONES / PUBLICATIONS	LEGISLATION / OFFICIAL INSTITUTIONS
1915	Jean Webster: Dear Enemy. Charlotte Perkins Gillman (1860-1935): Herland.	
1916	William E. Castle (1867-1962): Genetics and Eugenics: A Textbook for Students of Biology and a Reference Book for Animal and Plant Breeders.	Alberta (Canada): Lunatics' Estates Act.
1917		Oregon: Sexual Sterilization Legislation. South Dakota: Sexual Sterilization Legislation. New Hampshire: Voluntary Sterilization Act. Kansas: Second Sexual Sterilization Act.
1918	Charles Binet-Sanglé (1868-1941): Le Haras Humain (censored in France, but not in English: The Human-Stud Farm). Madison Grant (1865-1937): The Passing of the Great Race.	Idaho: Sterilization Law (limited to institutionalized individuals with intellectual disabilities). Canadian National Committee for Mental Hygiene.
1919	Eduardo Urzaiz Rodríguez (1876-1955): Eugenesia. Campaigns for the eugenic sterilization of United Farm Women of Alberta.	Alberta (Canada): Mothers Allowance Act. Alberta (Canada): Act Respecting Mentally Defective Persons. North Carolina: Sexual Sterilization Law. Alabama: Sexual Sterilization Law.
1920	Karl Binding (1841-1921) y Alfred Hoche (1865-1943): Die Freigabe der Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens. Helen McMurphy (n.d.): A Study of the Feeble-Minded.	
1921	Mental Hygiene Survey of the Province of Alberta. New York: II International Congress of Eugenics.	
1922	G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936): Eugenics and Other Evils. Harry H. Laughlin: Eugenical Sterilization in the United States.	
1923	The publication of the eugenics book series To-day and To-morrow begins. The series will conclude in 1931.	Delaware: Sexual Sterilization Act. Montana: Sexual Sterilization Act. Canada: Chinese Immigration Act. Canada: Mandatory admission of 'mentally deficient' individuals under the age of 18 to the Provincial Training School in Alberta.
1924		West Virginia: Racial Integrity Act and enactment into law of Eugenical Sterilization Act.

Figure 1. Institutional Historical Structure of the American Eugenics Movement

From a contemporary theoretical perspective, these initiatives can also be interpreted within a biopolitical framework, insofar as psychometric testing contributed to the production and management of population-level classifications. Although not articulated in such terms at the time, the deployment of intelligence testing effectively operated as a technology of governance aimed at regulating social bodies through ostensibly scientific criteria.

3. From Davenport to Eugenical News

In 1901, Charles Benedict Davenport (1866–1944) published one of the first significant articles on Mendelism in the American context. A graduate in engineering in 1887 and descendant of a respectable New England family, Davenport earned his Ph.D. from Harvard in 1892 with a dissertation on morphology—biomechanics—and taught at Harvard until 1899, then at the University of Chicago until 1904. He is remembered as a man “lacking in humor,” but also as someone who earned the general respect of the scientific community, even becoming a member of the National Academy of Sciences and the National Research Council (Allen, 1986). A skilled expert in both biomechanics and mathematics—a rare combination at the time—he was particularly receptive to the ideas of Galton and Karl Pearson (1857–1936), and was, in fact, the only American scientist included on the first editorial board of the journal *Biometrika*.

After several attempts, Davenport convinced the Carnegie Institution of Washington in 1904 of the importance of founding an experimental laboratory for the study of evolution. With an initial budget of \$34,250, a 50-year lease was secured on a 10-acre plot in Cold Spring Harbor, New York—a location specifically chosen by Davenport. There, under his strict supervision and with the guidance of Columbia University zoologist Edmund Beecher Wilson (1856–1939), construction of the laboratory began. The center was inaugurated in 1906 as the *Station for Experimental Evolution* (SEE), with the goal of studying heredity in animals and plants (Allen, 1986).

At that time, the American Breeders' Association (ABA)—founded in 1903, with Davenport as a founding member—established a eugenics committee among its 43 subcommittees. Its purpose was to investigate, analyze, and report on human heredity. Initially chaired by Stanford ichthyologist David Starr Jordan (1851–1931), it became the first official eugenics organization in the country. It was during 1907–1908, spurred by his ties to the ABA, that Davenport began to focus on the Mendelian inheritance of human traits—their patterns, control, and selection—thus devoting himself fully to eugenics research. His interest was further fueled by the referenced work of Henry Herbert Goddard.

By 1910, eugenics research had become a scientific frontline in the U.S., and Davenport positioned himself at the forefront of the movement. With philanthropic funding from Mrs. E. H. Harriman—Mary Williamson Averell (1851–1932), widow of the famous railroad magnate—he acquired a 79-acre farm near the

SEE, where he built an office building and established the *Eugenics Record Office* (ERO). This institution, dedicated specifically to the study of human heredity and the control of the genetic flow of the American population, was led by the respected educator and committed eugenicist Harry Hamilton Laughlin (1880–1943). Over time, Laughlin would become one of the movement's leading spokespersons and a tireless promoter of its agenda (Allen, 1986). The ERO's field researchers—mainly women (psychologists, educators, nurses)—found in this institution one of the few scientific niches where professional advancement was relatively accessible. They attended intensive summer courses on heredity, Darwinian theory, basic statistics, and eugenics legislation (e.g., *EN*, 1916, 1(8), 56–57; Magliato, 2023).

From 1910 onward, the ERO worked intensively to collect family stories, which were stored to facilitate future longitudinal studies on physical and mental illnesses. Over time, field researchers—still mostly women—gathered data including hundreds of thousands of biographical records and family genealogies, obtained through fieldwork and archival research¹³. The importance of this work was underscored by the First International Congress of Eugenics—held in London—whose central aim was to debate the goals of eugenics and position the field at the scientific forefront. The event was attended by over 100 delegates, and advisory committees from the U.S., Belgium, France, Germany, and Italy enabled elite researchers and educators from all relevant disciplines to contribute to the planning (Magliato, 2023). The U.S. committee included professors from Harvard, Chicago, and Johns Hopkins. Its secretary and treasurer were Davenport himself. Just one year after the international meeting, the ERO published its first activity report (Laughlin, 1913).

The outbreak of World War I (1914–1919) led to the cancellation of the Second International Congress—originally planned for London in 1915—and caused a sharp decline in European contributions. As a result, American researchers were left largely on their own, and the ERO took the lead by launching *Eugenical News*. Initially conceived as a simple four-page bimonthly newsletter for informational and propaganda purposes, it aimed to disseminate “eugenic truths” through news, book reviews, and the often-questionable use of official statistics (*EN*, 1(1): 1). The bulletin was very well received and quickly became a monthly publication, doubling in length (*EN*, 1(2): 8). While in its early years *Eugenical News* focused solely on the two most active and organized eugenics movements—the American and the British—by 1920, with the postwar international resurgence, it began to expand its content and scope, both in length and in thematic range. During this period, the journal rarely published signed articles or precise bibliographic references, aside from book and

¹³ Years after the center's closure in 1939, the ERO's records were donated to the University of Minnesota to be used at the Dight Institute for Human Genetics. However, once it was discovered that the material was useless—due to the fact that the methodology used to collect it was riddled with biases, subjectivity, and uncontrollable, pseudoscientific variables—it was preserved for its historical value and stored in three institutions: the American Philosophical Society, the Jackson Laboratories, and the Utah Genealogical Society (Osborn, 1974; Allen, 1986; Magliato, 2023).

article reviews; most texts were editorial work. As the culmination of this first institutional phase, in December 1917 the ERO came under the sole control of the Carnegie Institution of Washington—afterwards, Mrs. Harriman donated it, along with the land and a \$300,000 endowment. Under the terms of the agreement, which reflects the high level of scientific confidence placed in the field at the time, the new parent organization committed to ensuring the ERO's survival with a minimum annual allocation of \$25,000 (EN, 1918, 3(1): 4).

Beyond its 'negative' strand (immigration restriction and sterilization laws), the American eugenics movement also advanced a robust 'positive' pedagogical agenda aimed at shaping private conduct and family formation. *Eugenical News* devoted sustained attention to marriage counseling, mate selection, and domestic education as levers for population improvement, often drawing on psychological constructs—personality measurement, aptitude, adjustment, and notions of compatibility—alongside allied fields such as sociology and home economics. Figures such as Paul Popenoe (1888–1979), prominent in disseminating eugenic marital pedagogies, explicitly mobilized psychological language to justify the importance of assortative mating and to legitimate 'scientific' guidance for prospective couples. In this sense, psychology functioned as an auxiliary toolkit that translated eugenic ideals into everyday prescriptions, thus reinforcing the movement's 'positive' program.

4. The Psychological Connection

Psychology grew rapidly in the United States, quickly expanding and popularizing its areas of interest. Between 1880 and 1894, 26 experimental psychology laboratories were established, along with five scientific journals and a significant incorporation of psychology into university curricula, which resulted in more than twenty doctoral degrees and the emergence of a respected and increasingly relevant professional niche (Pérez-Garrido, Calatayud & Civera, 1998). So much so that in 1892, the American Psychological Association (APA) was founded (Fernberger, 1932).

Psychologists felt an urgent need to penetrate public life to become socially and politically useful, thereby establishing their profession. This need, especially through the Galtonian connection, led psychology and eugenics into a mutually reinforcing relationship. As William McDougall would proclaim,

It is generally recognised that eugenics has to find one of its principal supports in biology; but it is not so generally recognised that it must rely even more directly upon psychology, conceived as the empirical study of the mind. [...] Psychology is taking shape as an observational and experimental science which pursues its own problems by its own methods. And it is therefore of the first importance that the applied science of eugenics should take pains to establish intimate relations with psychology, and that it should apply its results and adopt and adapt its methods of research for application to its own problems (McDougall, 1914: 296–297).

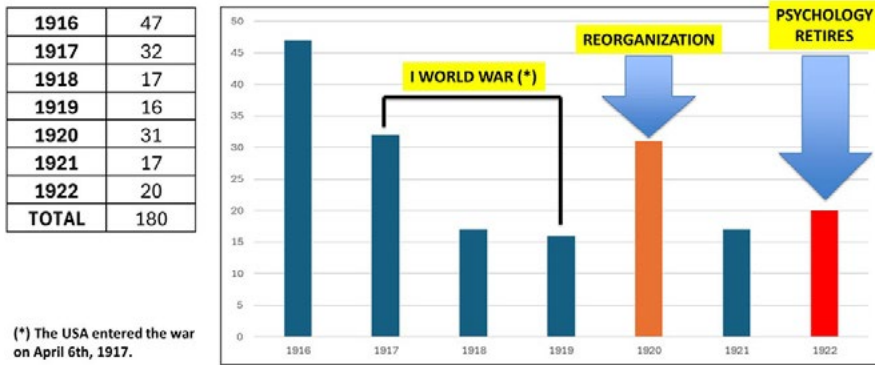
Although McDougall was never affiliated with the ERO—or the later AES—due to the questionable methodological rigor of his proposals, this did not prevent him from promoting "scientific" eugenics from within academia, which drew him into many controversies (Paul, 2014). In any case, the 1916 adaptation of the Binet-Simon test accelerated the link between psychology and eugenics, as the successful *Stanford-Binet Scale* became a universal standard for measuring mental capacity (Fancher, 1987; Doyle, 2014). As previously noted, Lewis Terman had "grand plans" for the political and social application of psychometrics. Shortly afterward, in 1917, the expected occurred: then-president of the APA, Robert Mearns Yerkes (1876–1956)—also a proponent of eugenics—saw a major opportunity to promote the growth of applied psychology with the U.S. entry into the European conflict, advocating for the organization of the Army's mental testing service (Fancher, 1987). Yerkes had been involved with the influential ERO project from the beginning, which helped facilitate this initiative¹⁴. At that time, the office had already trained 156 fieldworkers—131 women and 25 men—including a significant number of psychology graduates who would support the military psychometric service.

In absolute terms, neither Goddard's 1908 introduction of the Binet-Simon test nor Terman's later revision had initially made much impact on the broader landscape of American science. Not even Yerkes himself, focused on comparative psychology, gave it much importance beyond its educational applications. But the war changed his perspective, as he recognized the great technical and professional potential of emerging psychometrics (Yerkes, 1917a; 1917b; 1918). And during that expansion, psychometric measurement reached the very heart of the eugenics movement. This led to a significant increase in the visibility of psychological activities in the pages of *Eugenical News*.

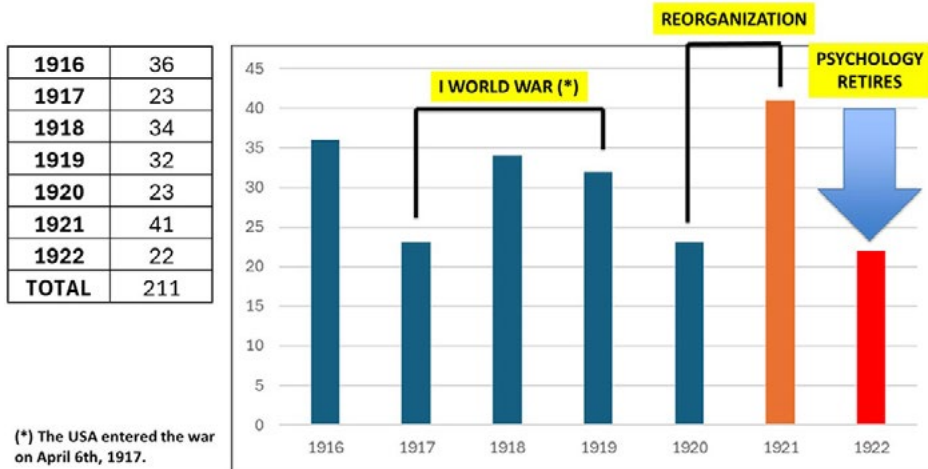
What follows is a set of graphs and tables offering a general overview of this connection, referencing both authors and articles by year in which psychologists are mentioned (Figure 2 and Table 2), as well as psychological and psychiatric topics (Figure 3 and Table 3). Their evolution is also shown in relation to the broader sociohistorical context and the development of the psychology and eugenics frontlines.

When looking specifically at Figures 1 and 2, it becomes clear that psychology had a strong emergence within the eugenics context—particularly during the 1916–1917 period—receiving a very positive reception. This impact diminished in 1917 with the U.S. entry into the global conflict and the enlistment of psychometricians into the Army. After the war—during the 1920–1921 period—American psychologists traditionally linked to eugenics reorganized, which led to a renewed surge of interest in the topic, reflected in the

¹⁴ "A meeting of the Eugenics Committee of the National Committee on Prisons was held at the home of Mrs. E. H. Harriman on January 27. The committee is composed of Dr. Walter E. Fernald, Mrs. E. H. Harriman, Drs. August Hoch, Woods Hutchinson, A. J. Rosanoff, Professor Robert M. Yerkes, Police Commissioner Arthur Woods, and Dr. C. B. Davenport. It was decided that the Committee's work would consist of studying the early development and family history of prisoners arrested in New York City." (*Eugenical News*, 1916, 1(3): 19).

Figure 2. Number of Eugenical News articles referencing the work of a psychologist (1916–1922).**Table 2.** Psychologists most frequently mentioned in the pages of Eugenical News (1916–1922).

AUTHOR	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	1921	1922	TOTAL
Williams, J. Harold	7	2	1	1	2		2	15
Yerkes, Robert Mearns	4	7	1	1	2			15
Haines, Thomas H.	8	3						11
Goddard, Henry Herbert	1	1	1	1		4	1	9
Kendig, Isabelle V.	4	1	1	1	1			8
Crane, Harry Wolven		3	1	1			2	7
Dealey, William Learned			3	1		1	2	7
Wallin, John E. Wallace	2				5			7
Cattell, James McKeen	2	2				2		6
LaRue, Daniel W.		1		1	2	1		5
Terman, Lewis Madison	2	2			1			5
Weidensall, Jean		2	3					5
Hyatt, Sybil	3			1				4
Thorndike, Edward Lee	2	1	1					4
Jastrow, Joseph		2			1			3
Kohs, Samuel Calmin	3							3
Porteus, Stanley David						2	1	3
Pyle, William Henry		1		2				3
Seashore, Carl Emil					1	2	3	3
Spaulding, Edith R.							3	3
Stanton, Hazel Martha						3	3	3

Figure 3. Specific texts on psychological topics published by Eugenical News (1916–1922).**Table 3.** Psychological and psychiatric topics specifically addressed in Eugenical News, by number of articles (1916–1922).

TOPICS	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	1921	1922	TOTAL
Studies in Sex / Sexology	5	3	4	5	5	5	6	33
Child (Education / Development)	5	6	5	4	5	1	2	28
Feeble-Minded / Subnormality / Idiocy / Defectives			10	3	3	10	2	28
Adolescence (Delinquency / Treatment)		1	2	1	4	10	3	21
Temperament / Racial Traits / Mentality	12			1	1		2	16
Mental Tests	7			2	1	1	1	12
Aptitude / Ability / Skills		2	3	3			2	10
Mental Hygiene		4	1			4		9
Environment (Influence)	3		1	1		1	1	7
Suicide			4	1		2		7
Intelligence	1			1	1	1	2	6
Mental Health / Insanity	2	1			1	2		6
Personality		1		1	1	1		4
Psychopathics		1	1			2		4
Effects of Alcohol		2					1	3
Supernormal	1			2				3
Vocational Education				2	1			3
Emotion / Sentiment				1		1		2

increased presence of psychology in the pages of *Eugenical News*. However, by the end of the publication cycle under study, it is evident that this peak was short-lived. A variety of reasons explain this decline, to the point that psychology, while not disappearing entirely, withdrew from the central themes of the bulletin after 1923.

First, the psychometric movement faced significant theoretical—and political—disagreement regarding the approach to personnel selection in the U.S. Army. Opposing the more biologically and eugenically oriented faction led by Yerkes, which focused on “mental capacity,” was the more functionalist movement of Walter Dill Scott (1869–1955), a professor at the Carnegie Institute of Technology. Scott leaned more toward psychotechnics and personnel selection and distanced himself from Yerkes’s original proposal to the APA. He believed that a massive evaluation of the troops’ “mental capacities” was both exaggerated and unnecessary. Furthermore, he considered that delving into the “mental deficiency” of recruits was not only scientifically questionable but also risked creating conflict between psychologists and military physicians, as it encroached on their domain. As a result, in August 1917, and parallel to the APA’s efforts, Dill Scott and Walter Bingham (1880–1952) launched their own military psychometric initiative, which never collaborated with the APA’s: the *Committee on the Classification of Personnel in the Army* (CCPA). Yerkes managed to have Scott—despite never engaging in direct confrontation with him—appointed to the organization’s leadership, but it was a symbolic position, as he did not participate in its activities (Von Mayrhauser, 1987)¹⁵.

Preparations began for the general evaluation of intelligence in the U.S. Army. After some modifications, Test A was named *Alpha*; another test, for those who could neither read nor write, was called *Beta*; and yet another was prepared for special evaluations of individuals with intellectual disabilities. A special school was established in Georgia to train those who would serve as evaluators—individuals who were partially trained as psychologists. Facilities were also set up across the country to store the tests. The monthly test quota jumped from 12,000 to 20,000. By the end of the war, the total number of tests administered had reached 1,750,000 (Gundlach, 1999: 172, own translation).

This story has been extensively recounted on various occasions (e.g., Yerkes, 1948; Gundlach, 1999; Naglieri, 2015). What is important to highlight is that, despite the vast number of tests conducted and the enormous volume of data collected, as Dill Scott had predicted, things were not easy for Yerkes’ psychometric program. Many military doctors refused to administer the tests—or to collaborate with the psychometrists—viewing the initiative as an intrusion into their authority, orchestrated by civilians. Thus, in January 1919, Merritte Weber Ireland (1867–1952), newly appointed Surgeon General and head of the War Plans Division, halted the implementation of Yerkes’ psychometric program after reviewing the volume of complaints.

Years later, he would admit that his approach had been “naive”: the fact that a civilian had accepted the role of leading a military operation became an obstacle (Yerkes, 1948). Walter Dill Scott and his CCPA fared much better, focusing on the measurement of “skills” and “aptitudes.” Only two civilian specialists were integrated into the CCPA—Edward Thorndike (1874–1949) and Raymond Dodge (1841–1942)—and with their respective tests for selecting pilots and sailors, they were able to enter the realm of personnel potential without friction (Gundlach, 1999).

The second issue arises from 1920 onward. The ERO was always part of the Eugenics Research Association (ERA), and *Eugenical News*, since its founding in 1916, was considered its official publication. However, at this point, the eugenics movement had gained sociopolitical momentum, and the bulletin, now fully controlled by the ERA’s agenda, took on a strong ideological tone aimed at promoting eugenics among the public, in education, and in legislation. It wasn’t just that Laughlin testified before the U.S. Congress; an extremely radical discourse also emerged against immigrants, minority ethnic groups, the “feeble-minded,” and “inferior races.” This shift would literally divide science, and a psychological profession increasingly obsessed with methodological values, experimental rigor, and data reliability. In psychology specifically, a rapid process of “functionalization” was underway, aligning with the environmentalist parameters of behaviorism.

Ironically, of the 21 individuals who joined the ERA in 1920, 15 were prominent psychologists, including John B. Watson (1878–1958) himself (*EN*, 5(7): 53). It is true that many of them are mentioned only once in the bulletin—at the time of their enrollment in the ERA—which somewhat artificially inflates the number of cited psychologists. For this reason, many of these anecdotal mentions have been excluded from Table 1. It is likely that some joined the ERA out of institutional interest, as most of these individuals rarely engaged actively or conducted research in the field. There were exceptions, of course: figures like Yerkes and Daniel W. LaRue (n.d.) remained closely involved, serving on organizing committees for the Second International Congress of Eugenics. A third group of professionals, led by renowned figures such as Adolf Meyer (1866–1950), who had initially supported the eugenics movement, eventually distanced themselves—and even became highly critical—once they recognized the movement’s ideological drift, methodological weakness, and ethical implications, anticipating its later discrediting¹⁶. Still, it would be inaccurate to speak of a “stampede.” Although the institutional groundwork had been laid and by 1925 it was clear that little scientific or professional value remained in eugenics without long-term harm, psychology’s withdrawal was gradual. In 1921, the Second International Congress of Eugenics—held in New York—still featured public presentations by psychologists such as Bingham, Thorndike, Yerkes, Terman, and even Watson, who had already left academia. In fact, a glance at the event’s proceedings index reveals that, alongside genetics, psychology was the most represented discipline (VV. AA., 1923; Laughlin, 1923). Nevertheless, it seems evident that something was breaking with the generational shift, as

¹⁵ It should be noted that Dill Scott’s actions were not well received by many of his colleagues, who accused him of being an “opportunist” and of showing little commitment to the scientific rigor of his methods (Gundlach, 1999).

¹⁶ The last appearance of Meyer in the pages of the journal occurred in February 1920 (*EN*, 5(2): 15).

the congress opened with a debate on the lack of a “formidable” and unified American eugenics movement. Emphasis was placed on the need to create a continuous program of popular eugenics education driven by a national eugenics’ society. This laid the foundation for the AES: the Eugenics Committee of the United States of America (Osborn, 1974).

5. Final Reflections

The advancement of eugenic legislation across the United States and Canada was built upon the research of psychologists, psychiatrists, and educators who—whether through tacit silence or by seeking to benefit from a unique symbiotic relationship to ensure their own progress—provided scientific support to highly questionable sociopolitical ideas and projects that foreshadowed the future horrors of Nazi Germany (Sofair & Kaldjian, 2000; López-Muñoz & Pérez-Fernández, 2023), where the term “eugenics” was replaced by “racial hygiene” (*Rassenhygiene*) (López-Muñoz et al., 2006).

It is true that around 1925, scientific—though not ideological—eugenics in the U.S. began a slow decline that would continue into the 1940s, as its proponents, whether out of conviction or self-interest, resisted relinquishing their scientific and academic privileges. This was not only due to the growing number of experts and data challenging the “old eugenics” model. A powerful sociopolitical protest movement also emerged, opposing the alignment undertaken by intellectual, political, judicial, and business elites traditionally linked to the ideals of the eugenics movement. Additionally, the socioeconomic balances that had once made institutions like the ERO attractive to their founders and benefactors were shifting. Ultimately, the rise of fascism in Europe and its extreme racial policies “dealt the final blow” to the movement in the eyes of the broader public. The ideals of “social control” and “efficiency” that had guided the nation’s efforts between 1880 and 1920—a period marked by industrial growth, social conflict, and mass immigration from a crisis-stricken Europe—were beginning to be replaced by more nuanced psychosocial perspectives.

To halt this decline, the Eugenics Society of the United States was reestablished in 1926 as the American Eugenics Society (AES), a tax-exempt official organization headquartered in New Haven until its relocation to New York City in 1936 (*Report of Activities of the American Eugenics Society*, 1937). New Haven was an ideal location: situated among major universities, close to the ERO, and near Yale University, the alma mater of many of its founders (Magliato, 2023). Seeking ground in the public sphere, the AES focused on education and proselytism, adopting two main approaches: formal education and public education. The goal was to promote the idea of eugenics as a public health issue by introducing it at all academic levels, from primary school to university. Universities were expected to incorporate the subject into curricula for disciplines such as sociology, biology, zoology, and ethics. All students, regardless of age, were to master the language and arguments of eugenics so that its principles would become as familiar to youth as any other body of knowledge (Pernick, 1997). Regarding public education, the aim was to promote eugenics education programs targeted at the public. The AES, which enjoyed substantial financial support for a time, contributed to

smaller eugenics initiatives such as the Galton Society in New York and the Foundation for Racial Betterment in Battle Creek, Michigan, and influenced U.S. Supreme Court eugenics policy in landmark cases like *Buck v. Bell* (1927) and *Skinner v. Oklahoma* (1942) (Gur-Arie, 2014).

In truth, between 1915 and 1945, the eugenics movement and its supporters produced such an overwhelming volume of publications—manuals, novels, pamphlets, essays, journals—that it inevitably permeated the collective imagination of American society (Yakushko, 2019). This contrasts with events such as the Carnegie Institution reconsidering its funding of the ERO in 1929 and establishing an initial investigative commission to decide on the matter—an indication that the ethical and political drift of the time was beginning to raise concerns among some sponsors. The ERO was not shut down at that point, but the warning regarding Harry Laughlin’s increasingly public alignment with Nazism was clear (McDonald, 2013).

By 1932, when the Third International Congress was held in New York—presided over by a retiring C.B. Davenport—nine prominent psychologists remained active members of the AES: Bingham, Arnold Gessell (1880–1961), Harry W. Crane (1873–1967), Terman, Thorndike, Helen Thompson Wooley (1874–1947), June Etta Downey (1875–1932), Hazel Martha Stanton (1890–1977), and Florentine Hackbush (n.d.). At that time, and participating in the New York event, the renowned Nazi biologist Ernst Rüdin (1874–1952) presided over the International Federation of Eugenics, of which the AES was a member¹⁷. Psychology specialists such as Wilhelmine E. Key (1872–1955), Florentine Hackbush herself, and Margaret Vera Cobb (1884–1963) also presented papers (VV. AA., 1932). At the eugenics exhibition hosted by the famous American Museum of Natural History, the contribution of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology in Berlin-Dahlem—Germany—played a prominent role, both institutionally and ideologically linked to the AES. It can thus be inferred that the racial discourse of National Socialism, which would later lead to well-known tragedies (López-Muñoz et al., 2007; Cuerda & López-Muñoz, 2020), was not something entirely new: it merely changed location and language¹⁸. A paradox not as obvious as one might think, since even after World War II—and once the horrors of the extermination camps became widely known and publicized—

Aversion to Nazi practices did not eliminate eugenic sterilization. Forced sterilization continued in the United

¹⁷ Ernst Rüdin, a central figure upon whom the Nazi regime’s eugenic policy was based, was a professor of psychiatry at the University of Basel and later became the director of the Department of Genealogy and Demography at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute in Munich, as well as a professor of psychiatry at that university. Among his “academic achievements” was the alleged demonstration, in 1916, of the hereditary nature of schizophrenia (*dementia praecox*), which effectively implied that mental disorders were resistant to any therapeutic intervention. The solution proposed by Rüdin and other geneticists was the “cleansing of the race’s genes,” that is, the elimination of the “putrid flock of the social body” (López-Muñoz et al., 2007).

¹⁸ “Anthropological racism, medical somaticism, the militarization of science, the persecution of the abnormal or the outsider, etc., are some of the elements amalgamated in the socio-political program of the National Socialist Party, which found fertile ground for the promotion of these ideas in the economic crisis of the late 1920s, in the sense of oppression and victimhood felt by the German people after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles (1919), and in the development of the neocolonialist policies of interwar Europe.” (López-Muñoz et al., 2006, p. 252).

States beyond the civil rights movement of the 1960s, and though the Civil Rights Act of 1965 outlawed segregation, of course, racial prejudice and discrimination continue (Turiel, 2020: 105).

The persistence of eugenic thinking after 1945 can be understood considering two major shifts. First, although the Nazi atrocities delegitimized overt ‘racial hygiene’, many of the underlying concerns about population management, public health, and social efficiency remained embedded in institutional and scientific practices. Second, eugenic discourse was gradually reframed under new labels—such as ‘human genetics’, ‘population studies’, or later ‘social biology’—which allowed its core assumptions to survive by adopting the language of neutrality and scientific modernization. These semantic transformations reflected a profound post1945 reorientation: explicit racial hierarchies became untenable, but the aspiration to manage populations through biomedical and demographic expertise persisted. Publications such as *Eugenical News*, often fueled by serious and top-tier scientists, helped keep the torch of the international eugenics’ movement alive.

In 1954, still under the control of the American Eugenics Society (AES) and now in a standardized journal format, the publication was renamed *Eugenics Quarterly*. It continued to include some in-depth editorial work and the usual “newsletter” section. Among the members of its editorial board was obstetrician Alan Frank Guttmacher (1898–1974), a significant figure given his strong advocacy for family planning, abortion, and birth control—topics traditionally off-limits for old-school eugenicists. The publication had shifted its focus toward themes such as sociobiology and retained little more than the name from traditional “eugenics.” The journal’s title changed again in 1969, when the concept of “eugenics” was definitively rejected, adopting the supposedly neutral name *Social Biology*. The topics, however, remained the same: interdisciplinary research on the biological and sociocultural forces affecting human populations. Its first editor was Robert C. Cook (1898–1981), a demographer and geneticist known for his work at the intersection of biology and sociology. Finally, in 1972, the AES was restructured as the Society for the Study of Social Biology (Osborn, 1974). By then, the work of sociopolitical awareness-raising around racial issues in the U.S. had already been—very effectively—accomplished.

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