History of Eugenics

William Schneider, Professor of History (IUPUI)

Outline of Talk

Period before 1900

Developments towards the end of 19th century:
  - Darwin and Mendel
  - Broader developments in society, politics, and technology

Eugenics movement from 1900-1945:
  - Goals and means

Eugenics in Indiana

Lessons: useful, and not so useful
Period before 1900
- common notions about heredity
- ancient Greeks
- heredity and disease
- Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, (1744-1829)
  “acquired” characteristics
- Darwin and blending

Mendel’s key findings
- inheritance of discrete characteristics
- small whole number ratios suggested internal factors
- Dominant and recessive
Social and political setting

Progressive Era (U.S.)

National Efficiency (U.K.)
- public health
  - mandatory declaration of disease
  - compulsory vaccination
- temperance movement
- anti-tobacco leagues

Summary: three new developments by the end of 19th century that led to eugenics

- Darwin’s theory of evolution through natural selection
- Mendel’s study that showed living organisms contain genes that transmit discrete characteristics
- Democratic governments desire and ability to promote and protect public welfare
Eugenics movement from 1900-1945: Goals and Means

Positive eugenics: encourage positive traits (and genes)

Negative eugenics: eliminate negative traits (and genes)

Negative Eugenics: Fears

- Old Fears:
  - Sick
  - Poor
  - Lazy
  - Stupid
  - Criminals
  - foreigners

- New Developments
  - Urbanization
  - Immigration
  - “scientific” discoveries
  - National rivalry
Other negative eugenics measures:
- marriage restrictions
- birth control
- sterilization

Summary: Eugenics Goals and Means, 1900-1945
“Scientific” pedigree and IQ studies
Positive eugenics
Negative eugenics:
- immigration restriction
- marriage restrictions
- Birth control
- sterilization
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1879</td>
<td>Asylum for Feeble-minded Children established; moved to Ft. Wayne in 1890; 1893 name changed to Indiana School for Feebleminded Youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>Harry Sharp appointed physician and surgeon at Indiana State Reformatory in Jeffersonville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>Sharp’s first vasectomy of prisoner; 345 done by 1907, without legal authorization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>Sharp publishes paper on his operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>Indiana sterilization law is passed. Sharp performs another 120 “legal” vasectomies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>Gov. Thomas Marshall orders sterilizations stopped (found unconstitutional in 1921)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913-1917</td>
<td>Gov. Samuel Ralston holds sterilization law in abeyance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 6, 1915</td>
<td>Ralston appoints Indiana Committee on Mental Retardation (8 lawmakers and doctors).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>First summary report of Comm. On Mental Retardation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Second report of Committee estimates 56,000 “mental defectives” (2%) of population</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1927-1974 additional 2,000 men and women in Indiana sterilized before law was abolished. Comparison of Indiana with other states. The total number of involuntary eugenic sterilizations estimated for all U.S. is 65,000.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Total sterilized</th>
<th>Time period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>19,042</td>
<td>1909-1949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>5,366</td>
<td>1909-1942</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>3,001</td>
<td>1913-1949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>1907-1949</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eugenics in Indiana: summary

1907 Sterilization law
1915 Indiana Committee on Mental Retardation
1927 New sterilization law
1974 Repeal of sterilization law
Lessons

• Not useful: those were “bad old days”
• Get science “right” or be a little humble
• Beware of simple solutions
• Lessons for Science and the public