Eugenics: Myth or Miracle?

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In the late 19th century, a new science was promulgated that promised to purify the human race. Eugenics would allegedly produce a society that was physically, intellectually, and morally superior to any prior civilization by means of carefully controlled breeding. The concept became popular in the United States, where legislation was written to keep unclean immigrants from entering the country and to allow for the forced sterilization of those too ignorant and/or poor to protect themselves.

Scientists identified a new classification of mental detectives. Labeled “feebleminded,” they were considered dangerous to society and were a target of involuntary sterilization. The case of Buck v. Bell provided the rubber stamp of legality to the persecution of these unfortunates. Margaret Sanger started her career running a birth-control clinic in Brooklyn. Multiple clinics were established in Harlem, promoting birth control, sterilization, and abortion, to achieve better health rates and lower infant mortality rates; the unspoken goal was to decrease populations in these segregated communities.

In Nazi Germany the ideas flourishing in the U. S. were perverted to support Hitler’s “final solution” Race, religion, and social and economic status became the standards of those who were eugenically unfit. Not until the horrific scope of the atrocities in Nazi Germany was uncovered and broadcast did the science of eugenics lose its credibility and popularity. Forced sterilization, ethnic cleansing, and the use of genetics in fertility clinics, however, are still prevalent today. Apparently, the ideas behind the eugenics movement are still alive and well, albeit practiced under different guises.

Works Cited


