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Eugenics - II

Lead: From its start as an optimistic approach to improving the human condition, eugenics degenerated into a racist tool in the hands of bigotry and ultimately led to the gas ovens of the Third Reich.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: The fundamental problem with eugenics, even as Sir Francis Galton articulated it in the 19th century, was that it focused primarily on inborn characteristics and almost completely disregarded

social, environmental, educational, and physical factors when examining the human race. Basically, eugenicists advocated a form of genetic determinism. A person is born with a genetic imprint that determines the course of their lives. Not surprisingly these theories became a powerful tool in the hands of racists. It all depends on who is setting the standard. If society is to improve itself, it is said, it must eliminate genetic threats to racial purity. In the sad history of eugenics, a wide variety of groups have been singled out for social restriction, sterilization, or elimination. Feeble-minded or mentally ill people, habitual criminals, sexual libertines, Negroes, Native Americans or any non-whites,

Jews, gypsies, and evangelical Christians have all fallen under the wary and sometimes fatal scrutiny of the eugenic mandate. They bore undesirable human traits.

Beginning in 1926, the American Eugenics Society advanced the notion that the white race was superior to all others and that the “Nordic” race was superior to any other white grouping. They also believed that upper classes had the ruling edge on others because they were genetically superior and thus deserved to be dominant. It was not a gigantic leap from such racial and genetic speculation to the theories of Adolf Hitler, ideas of Aryan superiority and the gas ovens of Auschwitz.

**At the University of Richmond,
this is Dan Roberts.**

Resources

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