

DOCUMENT SUMMARY This critical archival review exposes the foundational and pervasive influence of eugenics—the "science of racial betterment"—on the history and development of Western psychology. The author demonstrates how eugenic ideology shaped psychology's core methodologies, particularly intelligence testing and behaviorism, and promoted the biologizing of human differences while ignoring social context. This paper provides direct historical evidence for the eugenic roots of standardized testing and the pathologizing of human variation, which are central to the system Enliten seeks to dismantle.

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FORMATTED CONTENT

Eugenics and its evolution in the history of western psychology: A critical archival review

Why This Matters to Enliten

This paper is the historical backbone of the Enliten mission. It provides the academic "receipts" that prove our central argument: that standardized testing and the pathologizing of human difference are not objective science, but are rooted in the racist, sexist, and classist pseudoscience of eugenics. Yakushko meticulously documents how the founders of American psychology, the creators of the first IQ tests, and even the originators of behaviorism were all deeply enmeshed in the eugenics movement.

This research is our ammunition. It allows us to state, with scholarly backing, that the system of assessment we oppose was explicitly designed to sort humans into "fit" and "unfit" categories based on race, class, and proximity to a wealthy, white, male norm. Every fact, quote, and historical connection in this paper can be used in our whitepapers, client education, and advocacy to dismantle the perceived legitimacy of traditional psychological assessment. It proves that our "revolutionary" stance is, in fact, a necessary correction to a deeply flawed and harmful history.

Critical Statistics and Facts for Our Work

- **Definition of Eugenics:** Originally defined as the "science of racial betterment". Its name is based on the Greek words for "good" and "born".

- **Psychology Leadership's Involvement:** 31 presidents of the American Psychological Association (APA) between 1892 and 1947 were publicly listed as leaders of various eugenics organizations.
- **The Army Mental Tests:** Developed and conducted by preeminent US psychologists (Yerkes, Brigham, Terman, Thorndike, Watson), these tests on nearly two million military personnel were used to assert the intellectual inferiority of African Americans, recent non-Nordic immigrants, and Jews.
- **The Pioneer Fund:** A group denounced as a racist hate group has financed numerous prominent Western psychologists who study racial and gender hereditability of intelligence and openly support eugenics. The fund claims to have restored the "Darwinian-Galtonian perspective" to psychology.
- **Sterilization Rates:** Women and adolescent girls, especially those of color, were sterilized at a greater rate than any other group, often for perceived breaches of sexual morality.

Methodology We Can Learn From

The paper employs a

critical archival review methodology. The author systematically investigates historical documents, including scientific journals, books, publications of eugenic societies, and correspondence from key historical figures. This method uncovers the unacknowledged and minimized influence of a problematic ideology on a scientific discipline. Enlilens can use this same approach—digging into primary sources—to expose the flawed premises of modern assessment practices and to build our own evidence-based arguments for a new paradigm.

Findings That Challenge the System

The Eugenic Definition of Human "Fitness"

Eugenics was founded on Darwin's evolutionary theories, extended to human societies to justify existing social hierarchies.

- **"Fit" traits:** Fitness was defined by the values of wealthy Anglo-Saxon males: high intelligence, emotional and behavioral self-control, and specific moral behaviors. Emotional detachment was seen as a mark of superiority, while lack of emotional control was associated with "uncivilized" groups, women, and children.
- **"Unfit" traits:** Unfitness was associated with poverty, non-white race, disability, and certain personality traits like being "reckless, degraded, and... vicious". Eugenists argued that social problems were caused by overpopulation of these "unfit" groups.
- **Justifying Inequality:** These theories provided a supposedly scientific justification for the pre-eminence of wealthy Western groups and absolved them of responsibility for social problems like inequality, war, and poverty.

Psychology's Deep Entanglement with Eugenics

Western academic psychology was closely affiliated with eugenics from its inception, a fact minimally acknowledged in most historical accounts.

- **Foundational Influence:** Eugenics was fundamental to the establishment of empirical psychology's methods and its applied theories, especially behaviorism.
- **Key Figures:** Francis Galton, hailed for his contributions to psychology and statistics, developed the term and meaning of eugenics. Charles Darwin openly supported Galton's eugenic work and used his theories to proclaim "western nations of Europe... stand at the summit of civilisation" and that men were intellectually superior to women.
- **Prominent American Psychologists:** Leaders like Stanley G. Hall (first APA president), Yerkes, Terman, Thorndike, Goddard, and John B. Watson were all publicly affiliated with and produced eugenic work.

The Eugenic Origins of Standardized Testing and Assessment

The methods developed by eugenicist psychologists became the bedrock of modern assessment.

- **Intelligence Testing:** The famed Kallikak study by psychologist Henry H. Goddard (1912) traced "feeble-mindedness" through generations and was used to justify involuntary sterilization and the deportation of non-Nordic immigrants. The Army mental tests were a large-scale eugenic project to establish racial hierarchies of intelligence.
- **Biologizing Difference:** Eugenics continues to influence psychology through the tendency to "biologizing human differences while minimizing the role of social context" and dividing individuals into groups based on supposedly innate fitness levels (like intelligence and optimism).
- **Denial of Environment:** Critics like Walter Lippman questioned why blame for low IQ scores was placed on the "germplasm of the orphans" rather than their "abnormal environment".

The Eugenic Roots of Behaviorism

Behaviorism, a common form of psychotherapy, has significant eugenic influences.

- **John B. Watson:** The founder of behaviorism, Watson, emphasized that psychology's goal should be the "prediction and control of behavior". He was a leader of eugenic organizations and co-founded the Committee on the Hereditary Measurement of Mental Traits of the American Eugenics Research Association.
- **Eugenic Ideals:** Watson's behavioral manipulations promoted ideal eugenic characteristics like optimism, efficiency, and control over sexual impulses. His work, like that of other eugenicists, reduced human psychological factors to biology and denied the role of social context.

Populations Discussed

Eugenics was fundamentally about creating a hierarchy of human value, and it systematically targeted and pathologized numerous groups:

- **Race:** It provided the foundation for scientific racism, treating varied ethnic groups as different species. It specifically targeted African Americans, Jewish people, Irish people, and non-Nordic immigrants as intellectually and morally inferior.

- **Gender:** It claimed women were an "inferior sub-species". Darwin and other eugenicists asserted women's intellectual inferiority was a matter of evolutionary fact. Women's purpose was defined as breeding, and traits like depression, anxiety, or interest in education were deemed racially "parasitic".
- **Social Class:** The poor were seen as a primary cause of social problems due to overpopulation. "Industrious submissiveness" was considered a natural trait of the "lower majority," while "intelligence" and "leadership" were traits of the "upper few".
- **Disability:** People with physical and mental illnesses were considered "unfit". Eugenicists argued that treating their conditions was detrimental to evolution, and advocated for letting them die from untreated illnesses like syphilis to strengthen the gene pool.

Alternative Approaches and Voices of Resistance

While the eugenic perspective was dominant, there was resistance.

- **Within Psychology:** John Dewey and Gordon Allport were among the few early psychologists who rejected eugenics. Psychoanalysis, especially critical theory, served as a significant counterpoint by emphasizing history, social context, and subjectivity.
- **Outside Psychology:** Journalist Walter Lippman was a key opponent in the 1920s, questioning the scientific validity of intelligence testing. British writer G. K. Chesterton condemned eugenics, stating the "thing that really is trying to tyrannise through government is Science... which began with Evolution and has ended in Eugenics".
- **Anti-Colonial Critique:** Psychoanalyst and anti-colonial founder Frantz Fanon denounced the "shameful science" that used empirical "findings" (like Black people's chromosomes having "genes representing cannibalism") to strip people of their humanity and enforce oppression.

Quotes We Might Use

- **On Psychology's Core Mission:** "Since its inception Western academic psychology has been influenced by and closely affiliated with eugenics, defined by its originators as the 'science of racial betterment.'"
- **On Darwin's Racism:** Darwin stated that "the western nations of Europe, who now so immeasurably surpass their former savage progenitors, and stand at the summit of civilisation."
- **On Darwin's Sexism:** "The chief distinction in the intellectual powers of the two sexes is shewn by man's attaining to a higher eminence, in whatever he takes up, than can woman... the average of mental power in man must be above that of woman."
- **On Dehumanizing the "Unfit":** A popular eugenics text suggested that "if they [the mentally diseased] could make way with themselves 20 or 30 years earlier, their demise might be a eugenic gain."
- **On Denying Treatment:** Permitting infected individuals to die from syphilis was seen as beneficial to evolution because it "tends to eliminate some of the mentally deficient and mentally diseased, and also those lacking in self-control."
- **On Behaviorism's Goal:** John B. Watson stated that American psychology must become a "purely objective experimental branch of natural science", holding firmly to "its goal of prediction and control of behavior."

- **On the Tyranny of "Science":** G. K. Chesterton wrote that the "thing that really is trying to tyrannise through government is Science... that creed... which began with Evolution and has ended in Eugenics."
- **On Internalized Racism:** Frantz Fanon noted that the greatest violence is enforcing oppressive ideas as truths, making those targeted "haunted by a galaxy of erosive stereotypes."

Clinical Implications

The paper argues that eugenic values remain dominant in Western psychotherapy and may be the source of human suffering.

- **Implicit Values:** Therapists trained primarily in Western psychology are likely to implicitly or explicitly embrace the field's dominant values, which are rooted in eugenics.
- **Enduring Eugenic Ideals:** Values such as the focus on self-control, resilience, optimism, the use of normed assessment and testing, the minimization of history and social context, and the use of animal models of behavior are all eugenics-related values that may remain dominant in psychotherapy today.
- **Pathologizing Difference:** Ideas that view human differences (including mental health) as biological, genetic, and inherited may cause suffering for individuals who seek therapy.
- **A Call to Action:** The author concludes it is "vital that contemporary Western psychology acknowledges the historical and present-day inhumane sciences of eugenics and makes a genuine commitment to social justice and to profound respect for human dignity."