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Paper 8: Science for Oppression in the Early Twentieth-Century US

In the early twentieth century, the US was deeply influenced by the eugenics movement, which espoused the idea of improving the genetic quality of the population through selective breeding and sterilization. Pseudo-scientific notions of racial superiority and inferiority played a significant role in shaping the US ethnic landscape during this period. In Montrie's book, it is stated that “ ‘The master race of the world is Caucasian,’ Buck declared in his polemic’s opening lines, and that dominance was sustained, he claimed, by a singular devotion to both ‘Civilization and Christianity’ ”(Montrie, 2). Statements like these and the use of phrases like “The master race” show what the perception of ethnic communities may have been in the early twentieth century. These theories not only contributed to a sense of superiority among white Americans but also fueled discrimination and segregation against non-white communities, particularly African Americans.

Another significant force shaping US ethnic communities in the early twentieth century was the rise of violent vigilantism, with the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) emerging as one of the most notorious organizations. The KKK, which had its roots in the post-Civil War South, was reborn in the 1910s and 1920s with a broader focus, extending its hatred not only to African Americans but also to immigrants, Catholics, Jews, and other non-Protestant groups. The KKK also

managed to spread in Minnesota, “By the summer of 1923, some of the Minnesota Klan’s most fruitful recruiting was happening in rural counties and towns, where the number of African Americans also happened to be in steady decline” (Montrie, 77). The combination of these factors leads to a deep separation between the white community and any type of minority community. The violent vigilantism of the KKK and their recruiting tactics created a sense of fear among the minority communities especially the African Americans.

Reference

Montrie, Chad. Whiteness in Plain View: A History of Racial Exclusion in Minnesota. Saint Paul
Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2022.