

Session 10: Genetics in the Archives

We have pulled primary source documents related to the five following topics: activism around the proposed Center for the Study and Reduction of Violence; forced sterilization discussions in chicano-focused journalism; discourse of race, genetics, and IQ throughout the 20th century; Scientific activism and social responsibility in the 1970s; and eugenics and anti-miscegenation.

Below are overviews of what the primary source documents entail, and major themes that are brought up with through the documents.

During this class you will have three 20-minute long sessions to have thoughtful discussions of the documents. At the end, there will be two speed rounds so you can be exposed to the other documents, but you will not have as much time with them. Please fill out your preferences [here](#).

[Activism around the proposed Center for the Study and Reduction of Violence](#)

[Background](#)

[Themes](#)

[Forced sterilization discussions in chicano-focused journalism](#)

[Background](#)

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[Race, genetics, and IQ](#)

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Activism around the proposed Center for the Study and Reduction of Violence

Led by: Alvina

Background

In January 1973 the Governor of California, Ronald Reagan, announced that the proposed Center for the Study and Reduction of Violence at UCLA was close to fruition. This program was staunchly opposed by many civil rights organizations, including the NAACP, the National

Organization for Women (NOW), the Mexican-American Political Association, and the California Prisoners' Union. Part of the opposition to the Center was that it would focus on biological causes for aggressive behavior, rather than taking into account the social context/environment, and would attempt to falsely prove damaging stereotypes of marginalized individuals. For example, one proposed research focus of the center was understanding how XYY males might be more aggressive through mass screening programs. There were also fears around [psychosurgery](#), or using surgical procedures to "correct" aggressive behavior, which had already gained a reputation for ethical abuses and exploitation of already-vulnerable populations. Thanks to a slew of public activism against the Center, the proposed state funding was eventually blocked, and the Center was never opened.

Themes

Genetic determinism, scientific activism, sex and gender, stakeholderism and community engagement, race and genetics

Forced sterilization discussions in chicano-focused journalism

Led by: Alanna

Background

The eugenics movement of the 20th century had a global reach, with forced sterilization programs implemented in countries around the world. The movement reflected a belief in the genetic superiority of certain groups and the desire to eliminate those deemed "unfit" or "undesirable." These policies were deeply connected to racism, classism, ableism, and xenophobia, and resulted in the forced sterilization of thousands, if not millions, of people. The legacy of forced sterilization continues to impact marginalized communities, particularly women of color, who were disproportionately affected by these practices. Chicano-focused journalism informed their community about these sterilization efforts, and highlighted efforts of activists fighting against it. The documents in this section are written in both English and Spanish, and they discuss forced sterilization across multiple locations, including Los Angeles, California; Puerto Rico; and India.

Themes

Reproductive genetics, eugenics, scientific activism

Discourse of race, genetics, and IQ throughout the 20th century

Led by: Justin

Background

In 1916, [Lewis Terman](#), a professor of psychology at Stanford, developed the Stanford-Binet intelligence test, forming the basis for modern-day IQ testing. Terman's work played a huge role in the eugenics movement in the early 20th century. Following the Holocaust, eugenics concepts fell out of favor for some time, but saw a resurgence in the mid 20th century thanks to [William Shockley](#). Shockley was a Nobel laureate in physics and Stanford professor who spoke against improvements in education for African Americans, arguing that they were genetically less capable of education. Shockley later funded the work of [Arthur Jensen](#), who would go on to be an educational psychologist at UC Berkeley and whose research claimed that genetic variation drove racial differences in IQ. Jensen was a major player in the rise of genetic determinism and scientific racism towards the end of the 20th century.

The materials in this section reference a variety of perspectives from key academics in this history – both those supporting racial essentialism and genetic determinism of IQ (Lewis Terman, William Shockley, Arthur Jensen) and those opposed ([Stephen J Gould](#), [Richard Lewontin](#), Leon Kamin, Luca Cavalli-Sforza, Herbert Apterker).

Themes

Racial essentialism, genetic determinism, scientific activism

Scientific activism and social responsibility in the 1970s

Led by: Naomi

Background

In the 1970s and 80s, in response to a divisive political climate and the resurgence of racism and sexism – both within the academic realm of evolutionary biology, as well as the Boston community and U.S. more broadly – two important left-wing organizations were formed at Harvard. The Committee Against Racism (CAR) was an organization dedicated to anti-racism and was one chapter of what would eventually become an [international organization](#). CAR was active in protesting racist rallies by the KKK and other white supremacist groups, as well as promoting racial integration of the Boston public school system via “busing”. In parallel, the [Sociobiology Study Group](#) was an academic organization that focused on countering what they saw as the inherent racism and sexism in [sociobiology](#), a sub-field that sought to explain various features of human society using the principles of evolutionary biology.

Prominent members of CAR and the Sociobiology Study Group included [Stephen Jay Gould](#) and [Richard Lewontin](#) (who wrote the iconic 1972 paper on “The Apportionment of Human Diversity”, declaring race to be of “virtually no genetic or taxonomic significance”).

Themes

Scientific activism, social responsibility, racial essentialism, genetic determinism

Eugenics and anti-miscegenation

Led by: Anjali

Background

The American eugenics movement emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, largely in response to Darwin's theory of evolution and driven by the idea of improving the human species through selective breeding and the suppression of traits deemed undesirable. One of the key focuses of the movement was opposition to interracial marriage, as eugenicists believed that such unions would result in the "degeneration" of the white race. Many eugenicists were influential geneticists who argued that certain races were genetically inferior to others – in particular that Black people who were believed to be less intelligent than white people. They used their scientific authority to promote various laws and policies, including "anti-miscegenation" laws that criminalized interracial marriage. Materials in this section include views from both eugenicists, as well as those who opposed eugenics.

Themes

Eugenics, race and ancestry, racial essentialism