

Modern Day Eugenics

What is Eugenics?

Eugenics is the study of how to arrange ‘favorable traits’ by means of reproduction. This study has been widely discredited as it is rooted in racism and has the goal of achieving ‘racial purity’ which aligns with white supremacy. Eugenics has been practiced through sterilization, genocide, assimilation, and systemic discrimination.

Eugenics has been prominent throughout America’s history, most notably with the Indigenous communities during the colonialization of this continent through the means of assimilation, smallpox, forced starvation via the buffalo massacre, and attempted genocide. Although It is commonly believed that it is an obsolete practice, it is not. It has been hidden in our current society through the normalization of discrimination and injustice against marginalized communities.

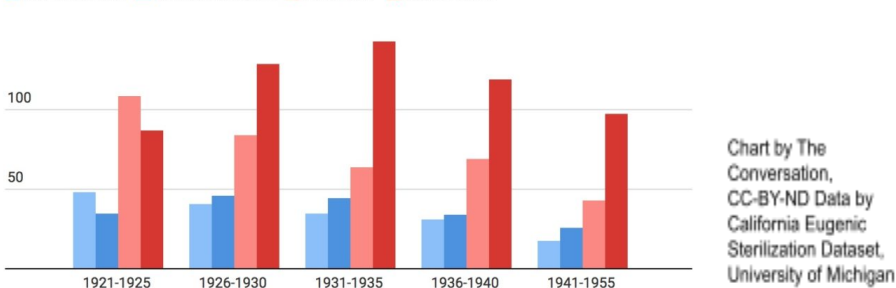
Forced and Coerced Sterilization Of Black Women

Within prisons, both on the federal and state level, coerced and forced sterilization occurs due to the prison system and government deeming incarcerated and institutionalized individuals “unfit to reproduce”. These sterilization programs disproportionately target the Latino community, people with disabilities, Black women, and even those with past children out of wedlock. From 1909 to 1978, under California's state eugenics laws, about 20,000 people in state institutions were sterilized without consent or knowledge of what was being done to their bodies. The average age of victims was 17, and they even included children as young as 12 years old.

Sterilization rates per 1000 institutionalized patients

In the first half of the twentieth century, approximately 20,000 people – many of them Latino – were forcibly sterilized in California.

■ Non-Latino Men ■ Non-Latina Women ■ Latino Men ■ Latina Women

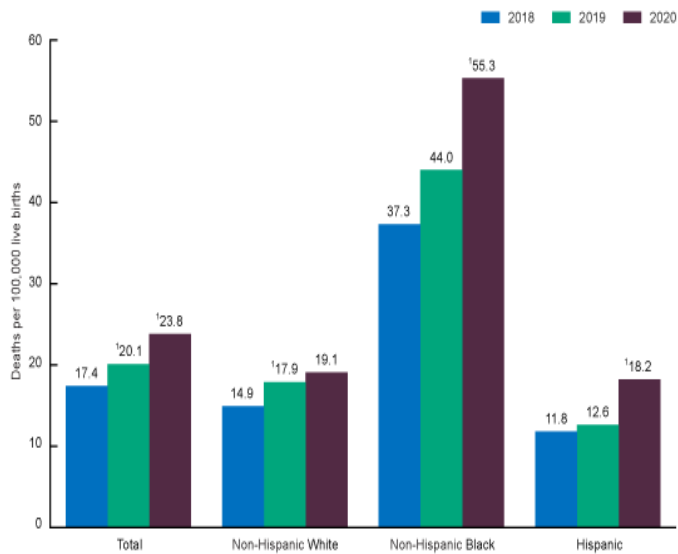


“When you take many thousands upon thousands of women of color, Black women of reproductive age, and you put them in prison during that period of their reproductive age and then you slowly kill them due to the problems of inadequate healthcare, then that’s also a eugenics program” Diana Block of the California Coalition for Women Prisoners

Mortality Rates Among Black Women During Child Birth

The lack of care for Black women within the medical world is a prejudice that has lingered from slavery to current times. During the slave era and not so coincidentally the boom of the scientific study of gynecology, Black women were used as test subjects for invasive surgeries because it was believed that Black individuals did not feel pain the same way the white individuals do or did not feel pain at all. There were beliefs that Black individuals had skin that was thicker and a less responsive nervous system, meaning torturous surgeries and experiments would not affect them like they would if performed on white people, thus creating the ingrained bias that Black people do not feel pain.

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“40% of first- and second-year medical students endorsed the belief that “black people’s skin is thicker than white people’s.” Janice A. Sabin, Ph.D., MSW

This bias lives on today within our medical world, even though many studies have disproved this belief and have shown that all ethnicities experience pain in the same way. This bias has resulted in extreme neglect of Black women during childbirth, the outcome of this is disproportionate rates of death for both mother and child during labor, and these rates continue to rise.

This is not the only reason that contributes to these numbers, and it is unfair to discuss this topic without a holistic view. There is inequitable access to health care for People of Color, which also adds to these mortality rates. On average 9.7% of Black individuals are uninsured, while their white counterparts have an average of only 4% uninsured. When it comes to fertility and reproductive rights, lack of health insurance makes the mother/birther and fetus not receive the necessary care required, inherently resulting in critical health issues and increased rates of complications during childbirth which may result in death.

Environmental Injustice and its Affect on fertility

Environmental hazards and stressors can affect fertility when an individual is exposed. This becomes an injustice when environmental hazards target specific populations. Environmental pollutants, industrial chemicals, and radiation are known to cause or contribute to infertility in both men and women. These pollutants are disproportionality found in areas with larger populations of People of Color. Lead poisoning is often contracted through water with lead pipes, contaminated soil, lead paint chips that infants often eat, and toys made with lead paint. Lead poisoning can result in mental defects, fertility issues, a higher risk of cancer, and overall health complications. In the United States, Black individuals are disproportionality affected by lead poisoning due to poor infrastructure left over by redlining. In 2013 the CDC released a report stating that children ages 1 to 5 years old are at a higher risk for serious adverse health effects if they have a blood lead level of 5 micrograms per deciliter. The average for Black children was 5.6 micrograms of lead per deciliter. This rate is over two times the average blood level found in white children.

Lead poisoning has serious health effects, that often negatively impact the chance of having children, this issue is a predominant issue for Black individuals in America.

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How this Affects the Family

Looking at how higher mortality and sterilization rates of People of Color affect family units is full of intersecting topics. An important one to understand in relation to the family is generational trauma. Generational trauma is trauma passed down through the family from generations before you. People of Color in the United States have much higher rates of experiencing trauma due to the discrimination they face. Most People of Color, in the United States, carry generational trauma due to how their ancestors were treated. The results of trauma range from physical to mental effects. A large negative side effect of trauma is poor coping skills which can be but is not limited to aggression, poor communication skills, substance abuse, social withdrawal, and mental health issues. The result of trauma being in a family can often create a cycle of continuance due to these stunted coping and communication skills. This cycle of continuance places people of color at higher risk to face adverse experiences, which can result in less healthy connections to family.

Eugenics *noun*

The idea that it is possible to improve the human race by choosing who is allowed to have children

from the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary

Does this Qualify to be Eugenics?

These qualify as systemic issues created and perpetuated by the government of the United States. There is research, data, and evidence ensuring that People of Color are disproportionality targeted when it comes to lack of access to health care, safe housing environments, and protection for their bodies in terms of reproductive rights. This information is known but continues to remain unchanged, Its effects have been studied but left unaddressed and ignored, so in turn, the outcome of these effects are intentional. Everything that has been mentioned above continues to kill People of Color and minimize their chances of raising a family.

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