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“Securing a Health and Vigorous Descent”: The Idea of Eugenic Motherhood in Virginia and  
Veracruz, 1910-1945

In 1914, former President Theodore Roosevelt published an article in *The Outlook* magazine praising the eugenics movement, and justifying its necessity in an American society that was on the verge of committing widespread race suicide.<sup>1</sup> Roosevelt’s article reflected popular eugenic beliefs in America at the time—that the white race in the United States, the true American race, had become increasingly threatened by the increased reproductive rate of poor whites, who were believed to be plagued by idiocy and antisocial and criminal behaviors, and by the decreased birth rate of educated, higher-class whites. In his article, Roosevelt expresses his acute desire that, “the wrong people... be prevented entirely from breeding.”<sup>2</sup> He singled out criminals and “feeble-minded persons,” who he believed should be “forbidden to leave offspring.”<sup>3</sup> He lamented that there was “no way possible... which could prevent all undesirable people from breeding”; instead, eugenicists should turn their focus to “getting desirable people to breed.”<sup>4</sup>

In this quote, President Roosevelt accurately expressed the two ways in which eugenicists in the United States often imagined effective eugenic legislation— either it should be focused on preventing undesirable people from reproducing, or it should concentrate on

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<sup>1</sup> Eugenics is based on an idea that it is possible to breed better human beings. In both countries that will be discussed in this paper, eugenics was often associated with nationalism, as eugenics could, in theory, produce a strong, healthy, and eugenically fit national race. This is why eugenicists often worried about, and sought to strengthen, the character and biological composition of the American and Mexican race, respectively.

<sup>2</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, “Twisted Eugenics,” *The Outlook*, January 1914, 32.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

encouraging people who were deemed eugenically fit to reproduce at an increased rate. In 1914, as President Roosevelt alluded to, the state had limited ability to prevent the reproduction of unfit individuals. However, just a few years after Roosevelt's article was published, the eugenics movement had gained enough widespread popular appeal among elites and lawmakers that states had begun to pass legislation which allowed for the involuntary sexual sterilization of those deemed undesirable by eugenicists. The particular targets of sexual sterilization laws, and other eugenic legislation like it, would be women, a trend that would extend to other parts of North America as well.

In 1923, Mexico City hosted its second Mexican Congress of the Child, a meeting which invited "all people who [were] interested in the wellbeing of childhood and problems pertaining thereto" to attend.<sup>5</sup> The leaders of the Congress organized committees to address childhood wellbeing from the point of view of a variety of sciences, including hygiene, pediatrics, and eugenics. Leaders of the eugenics committee wrote down "official themes of eugenics," which the leaders hoped the committee members would discuss at the Congress.<sup>6</sup> Eugenicists at this Congress sought to study the causes of prenatal defects and mortality, as well as the "character and biological adaption of Mexican and mestizos among other races."<sup>7</sup> While some of these terms were not gender specific, many specifically referenced women and their role in eugenics. The influence of women as a eugenic factor was to be discussed, as well as how to educate women on their proper eugenic role.<sup>8</sup> Most tellingly, eugenicists at the Congress also wished to

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<sup>5</sup> "Segundo Congreso Mexicano Del Niño," *El Universal*, June 6, 1923.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

discuss how to exert social and legal control over fertility.<sup>9</sup> As in the United States, eugenicists in Mexico made women their special targets of eugenic projects.

By analyzing how the state in Virginia and Veracruz acted in similar ways to regulate women's behavior, I contend that these movements were similar, despite their superficial differences, because of eugenicists' deep concern for the longevity of their nation's race. Their anxieties motivated them to define eugenic motherhood, often by defining what eugenic motherhood was not. In Veracruz, responsible mothers were viewed in contrast to prostitutes; in Virginia, responsible motherhood was defined in opposition both to "modern" womanhood, which had resulted in women marrying later and bearing fewer children, and to the dangerous reproductive habits of poor white women. Though eugenicists in both countries held distinct and, at times, opposing beliefs, eugenicists in Virginia and in Veracruz used legislation and rhetoric to regulate women's behavior and role in society through their codified definition of eugenic motherhood.

In the United States, sterilization laws often developed alongside laws that banned interracial marriage. Together, these laws worked to regulate which people could be allowed to reproduce, and whom they could be allowed to reproduce with. As most eugenicists believed that a woman's "main duty always has been and always will be the family," these laws disproportionately affected women, who were deemed responsible for ensuring the purity and longevity of the white, American race.<sup>10</sup> Educated women, and women with jobs outside the home, were often held responsible for the decline in birth rate; one eugenicist, reflecting the beliefs of many others, urged women to "give up their outside aspirations and produce healthy

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<sup>9</sup> "Segundo Congreso Mexicano Del Niño," *El Universal*, June 6, 1923.

<sup>10</sup> "Feminist Aims All Nonsense, Says Eugenicist," *The New York Herald Tribune*, August 23, 1932.

babies in quantity.”<sup>11</sup> While educated women became targets of eugenicists’ rhetoric, poor women became targets of eugenic legislation. Sterilization and anti-miscegenation laws worked together to limit the reproductive freedom of those whose genes were considered degenerate, and therefore threatening. Thus, while the 1920s saw significant strides in women’s rights, it also saw the concurrent rise of the eugenics movement, which sought to regulate white women’s behavior.

No state better exemplified eugenic legislation and the regulation of women more than Virginia. In 1924, the Virginia General Assembly passed both the Sterilization Act and the Racial Integrity Act, which allowed for the involuntary sterilization of any patient in a mental institution afflicted with “insanity...idiocy, imbecility, feeble-mindedness or epilepsy,” and which forbade “any white person [in Virginia] to marry any save a white person” or a white person with less than 1/16<sup>th</sup> American Indian ancestry.”<sup>12</sup> While neither act was the first of their kind in the United States, they both were unique, as the Supreme Court eventually ruled on the constitutionality of both laws. Additionally, as this paper will show, these laws were both explicitly influenced by eugenics, a distinction that, while certainly found in other states’ sterilization laws, was not present in other states’ anti-miscegenation legislation. The significance of Virginia in the American eugenics movement is undeniable; its legislation often epitomized eugenic beliefs in the United States. While Virginia proved to be a state that embodied core beliefs of the eugenics movement in the United States, it is not entirely representative of the eugenics movement outside the country. In Mexico, it would be another state, Veracruz, that would best typify the Mexican eugenics movement.

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<sup>11</sup> “Feminist Aims All Nonsense, Says Eugenicist,” *The New York Herald Tribune*, August 23, 1932.

<sup>12</sup> Lisa Lindquist Dorr, “Arm in Arm: Gender, Eugenics, and Virginia’s Racial Integrity Acts of the 1920s” *Journal of Women’s History* 11 no. 1 (Spring 1999): 146.

Although scholars have historically viewed the Mexican eugenics movement as diametrically opposed to the American eugenics movement, Mexican and American eugenicists shared many common beliefs.<sup>13</sup> Similar to the anxieties expressed by American eugenicists, Mexican eugenicists were primarily concerned with improving the Mexican race. The Mexican Revolution had devastated the population—over the course of ten years, the country lost five percent of its population due to violence, disease, and emigration.<sup>14</sup> After the Revolution, Mexico’s infant mortality rate remained remarkably high, surpassing 20 percent.<sup>15</sup> Much of Mexico’s adult population continued to be afflicted by a variety of venereal diseases, which, in turn, negatively affected the new generation of Mexicans; between 1916 and 1920, syphilis was the leading cause of miscarriage and stillbirth in Mexico City.<sup>16</sup> This problem did not abate at the end of the Revolution; by 1925, the mortality rate of syphilis was still climbing in Mexico’s capital.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, although Mexican eugenicists hailed from the elite class, as they did in the United States, many Mexican eugenicists came from the medical field.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the Mexican eugenics movement initially arose out of an immediate concern for treating and preventing these serious epidemics. Improving public health, particularly improving maternal and infant health, became a central concern for Mexican eugenicists.

As in the United States, women became special targets of eugenical projects and legislation in Mexico. Mexican eugenicists espoused beliefs that women were “essentially

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<sup>13</sup> Julie Tervalá, Interview with Karim Roseblatt, Personal Interview, College Park, November 3, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Alexandra Minna Stern, “Responsible Mothers and Normal Children: Eugenics, Nationalism, and Welfare in Post-revolutionary Mexico, 1920-1940,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 12, no. 4 (December 1999): 370.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Katherine Elaine Bliss, *Compromised Positions: Prostitution, Public Health, and Gender Politics in Revolutionary Mexico City* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 99.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>18</sup> Stern, “Responsible Mothers and Normal Children,” 371.

created for motherhood, that is their biological function.”<sup>19</sup> Motherhood became the most important role for women—their responsibility for raising healthy babies became intimately connected to Mexico’s “need to secure a vigorous and healthy descent.”<sup>20</sup> The success of a post-revolutionary Mexico depended on the ability of Mexican mothers to produce a new and healthy generation of Mexicans who would ensure the longevity of the Mexican race. Thus as eugenicists strove to find a way to regulate and monitor Mexican motherhood, they simultaneously looked to rid Mexico of the corrupting influence of prostitution. Prostitutes threatened the success of eugenical laws. Eugenicists believed that not only did prostitutes spread dangerous venereal diseases and encourage promiscuous behavior, they also could corrupt otherwise upstanding women and girls, and persuade them to pursue a career that was antithetical to eugenic motherhood.<sup>21</sup> Various states and cities passed legislation that regulated or banned prostitution, and allowed the state to fine and imprison women who violated these laws. The eugenics movement functioned as part of a larger state project that aimed for the state to replace the father and husband as the ultimate patriarchal authority figure in the Mexican household.

Like Virginia in the United States, Veracruz epitomized the Mexican eugenics movement. The laws passed were intended to target women. Not only did the state pass a law that forbade the commercial sex work, as well as a law that gave the state the authority to locate and treat anyone in Veracruz known to have a venereal disease, the state also passed Latin America’s only sterilization law.<sup>22</sup> Although sterilization was never implemented in any other state in Mexico, Veracruz’s passage of the law should not be looked at an anachronism in the

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<sup>19</sup> Stern, “Responsible Mothers and Normal Children,” 377.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 375.

<sup>21</sup> Bliss, *Compromised Positions*, 105.

<sup>22</sup> Stern, “‘The Hour of Eugenics’ in Veracruz: Radical Politics, Public Health, and Latin America’s Only Sterilization Law,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 91, no. 3 (2011): 438.

Mexican eugenics movement. On the contrary, Mexican eugenicists had historically advocated for sterilization policies in their congresses.<sup>23</sup> Veracruz was simply the only state or city that achieved success in passing this policy. As in Virginia, the state of Veracruz represented the most pure interpretation of the Mexican eugenics movement, as it was the only state that passed legislation that strictly adhered to a variety of eugenic principles advocated for by leading Mexican eugenicists. Because of this, I believe that Veracruz deserves a greater examination in scholarship on the Mexican eugenics movement than it has historically been given.

Why did Virginia and Veracruz develop similar eugenic laws in the 1920s and 1930s when their cultures and situations were in many ways so different? How did the eugenics movement in both states influence lawmakers to pass legislation aimed at regulating women's behavior? How did the enforcement of this legislation reinforce the state's control over women? My paper will answer these questions by using a comparative framework to analyze the eugenics movement in Virginia and the eugenics movement in Veracruz. Despite how scholars have conventionally viewed Mexican and American eugenics, I see important similarities between these two movements. I will focus on Virginia and Veracruz in particular because their policies most closely followed eugenic ideas in each of their countries. As such, I see these two states as exemplary examples of the eugenics movements in each of their countries.

There are notable limitations of this paper. Due to my lack of Spanish fluency, all my secondary sources are in English. While I have been able to consult some primary sources in Spanish, such as Mexican newspaper articles and some texts written by Mexican eugenicists, my analysis has primarily relied on English-language sources. Additionally, I regret that this paper will not be able to examine how the people whom were most targeted by eugenic legislation were affected by its implementation and enforcement. The limited time frame of this project

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<sup>23</sup> "El Congreso Mexicano Del Niño," *El Universal*, May 23, 1920.

meant I had limited time to investigate primary sources. Thus, I have not able to find or use testimonies from victims of sterilization in either country, nor any other accounts from women who were subjected to greater scrutiny and regulation under eugenic law. Like scholars who have studied the eugenics movement before me, I am limited by the availability of sources, and thus, have confined my scope to examining elites in the movement and elites in government and society. As this paper is primarily concerned with how leaders in the eugenics movement acted to influence legislation, and how they enforced that legislation, I have relied primarily on analyzing the legislation itself, as well as books, letters, editorials, speeches, and essays produced by leading figures of the movements in both countries. I have also examined leading newspapers in both countries to in order to gauge how non-state actors viewed the eugenics movement. Lastly, I have interviewed Dr. Karim Roseblatt, a scholar currently writing a transnational history of the American and Mexican eugenics movement, and have used her expertise and insight into the movements throughout this paper.

### **Literature Review**

While the historiography of the eugenics movement in both countries is fairly comprehensive, there are notable gaps in the existing scholarship. First, little comparative work has been done between the eugenics movement in the United States and the eugenics movement in Mexico. If scholars do compare the movements, they argue that they were antithetical to one another, a claim I have not found to be true in my research. Additionally, there are no existing analyses that compare the movements in individual states in both of these countries to one another. Second, although much has been written about the eugenics movement in the United States, significantly less has been said about the movement in Mexico. The breadth of existing scholarship on the American eugenics movement has allowed scholars to study the movement

using a variety of approaches. Scholars have become increasingly interested in examining the intersectionality of race, gender, and class in the American eugenics movement. As *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation*, which was published in 1991, was really the first to thoroughly examine the eugenics movement in Mexico, the scholarship is not nearly as extensive. Scholars still tend to focus almost exclusively on the national eugenics movement; if they do concentrate on individual regions, scholars typically look at eugenics in Mexico City. Veracruz is virtually left out of their discourse entirely. While historians have not yet analyzed how race and gender connect in the movement, some scholars of Mexican eugenics have successfully linked gender and class together, specifically by examining the role of prostitution in the Mexican eugenics movement. By discussing how scholars have analyzed the eugenics movement in both countries, I will not only be able to situate my research in the larger historiography of the topic, I will also be able to effectively argue for the importance of my own work.

### **Eugenics in Virginia**

Virginia has historically been interesting to scholars, as its laws set the precedent for eugenic policies across the United States. The two main legislative acts scholars have concentrated on in the state are the Racial Integrity Act and the Sterilization Act. Lisa Lindquist Dorr in her article, “Arm in Arm: Gender, Eugenics, and Virginia’s Racial Integrity Acts of the 1920s,” as well as Pippa Holloway in her book, *Sexuality, Politics, and Social Control in Virginia, 1920-1945*, both argue that these acts worked together to reinforce traditional gender roles, and to regulate the sexual behavior of white, middle-class women, as these were the women who eugenicists held responsible for ensuring the purity and longevity of the white race in America. Holloway goes a step further in her argument; she contends that elite white men who

controlled Virginian government passed these acts so they could eliminate a threat to their authority, and ensure the continuation of their hegemony in Virginia politics and society.

Holloway and Dorr use the same approach---they both largely concentrate on the beliefs and policies enacted by elites. John Powell and Earnest Sevier Cox, co-creators of the exclusive Virginian Anglo-Saxon Clubs, and Walter Ashby Plecker, head of Virginia's Bureau of Vital Statistics, are frequently cited in each. Holloway does discuss how non-state actors, such as doctors, psychiatrists, educators, clergy, and at times, even regular citizens, enforced the Racial Integrity and Sterilization Acts, but she dedicates most of her book to examining the beliefs and practices of lawmakers. The experiences of those were most affected by these laws are largely excluded from Holloway and Dorr's analyses.

I will use the framework utilized by these scholars in my own paper. As these historians have articulated, there are clear connections between race, gender, and class in eugenic legislation and its enforcement in Virginia, an idea I will further strengthen in my paper. What is lacking from their arguments is a discussion on how the Virginian eugenics movement relates to eugenics movements in other places. In my paper, I draw a clear connection between eugenic legislation passed in Virginia and remarkably similar legislation passed in Veracruz.

### **Eugenics in Mexico**

Although I hope to focus my paper specifically on eugenics in Veracruz, little has been said about the eugenics movement in the state. Instead, scholars tend to write about the national eugenics movement. If they do focus on one particular area, their research usually centers around eugenics in Mexico's capital. The following analysis of scholarship, then, is concentrated on the broader eugenics movement in Mexico, with a small section devoted to analyzing how eugenics in Veracruz has been historically been viewed.

Scholars often write about Mexican eugenics as the antithesis of American eugenics; as Alexandra Minna Stern argues in her article, “Responsible Mothers and Normal Children: Eugenics, Nationalism, and Welfare in Post-revolutionary Mexico, 1920-1940,” puericulture, “the scientific cultivation of the child,” and homiculture, which focused on improving the human species as a whole, “stood in contradistinction to eugenic discourses and practices in Anglo countries.”<sup>24</sup> Similarly, a central argument of Nancy Ley Stepans’ *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* is that Latin American eugenicists did not just misunderstand or pervert “mainline” eugenics movements occurring in Europe and the United States; instead, she contends that Latin American eugenicists, and especially Mexican eugenicists, reinterpreted, and at times, flatly rejected European and American eugenical ideas to fit the specific needs of their country. Stepans, Stern in “Responsible Mothers and Normal Children” as well as in “‘The Hour of Eugenics’ in Veracruz, Mexico: Radical Politics, Public Health, and Latin America’s Only Sterilization Law,” and Vania Smith-Oka in *Shaping the Motherhood of Indigenous Mexico* all argue that what distinguished Mexican eugenics from American eugenics, as well as from some eugenics movements in other parts of Latin America, was how the government used eugenics to promote public health measures that were particularly focused on improving maternal and infant hygiene. Smith-Oka and Stern in “Responsible Mothers and Normal Children” both explicitly draw the connection between these measures and the Mexican state’s attempt to reshape patriarchal order after the Mexican Revolution; they argue that the state used eugenic ideas to define and control women, and especially mothers, by promoting an idea of “responsible motherhood,” which at times meant counseling expectant mothers, and at others meant encouraging women deemed biologically ineffective to avoid

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<sup>24</sup> Alexandra Minna Stern, “Responsible Mothers and Normal Children: Eugenics, Nationalism, and Welfare in Post-revolutionary Mexico, 1920-1940,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 12, no. 4 (December 1999): 372.

impregnation.<sup>25</sup> Katherine Bliss in *Compromised Positions: Prostitution, Public Health, and Gender Politics in Revolutionary Mexico City* expands on this argument, adding that eugenicists passed laws that regulated motherhood alongside laws that banned prostitution, further evidence of the state's attempt to define proper womanhood in Mexico.

As Bliss, Stern, Smith-Oka, and Stepan are most concerned with Mexican eugenic policies, they primarily examine how eugenicists influenced laws, and, in Stern's articles, how Mexican physicians carried out the policies of the state. Smith-Oka does include the testimonies and viewpoints of indigenous women in the rest of her book, but her section on eugenics follows the same top-down approach used by Bliss, Stern, and Stepan. As with scholarship on Virginia, the experiences of those targeted by eugenic legislation in Mexico are largely left out of the scholarship.

Although the effects of eugenics on the conception of race in Mexico is discussed by Stepan and Smith-Oka, these scholars analyze eugenical ideas about gender and public health separately from their discussion of racial eugenics. Stern does not devote any significant portion in either of her articles to race, presumably because she does not see a notable overlap between gender and race in eugenic policy or procedure. While she does note that, "the cult of mestizo was reshaping arts, music, and cultural politics," she stops short of drawing any relationship between mestizophilia and the public health legislation she discusses in her article.<sup>26</sup> Stepan and Smith-Oka both exclude an analysis of the relationship between race and gender in the Mexican eugenics movement in their scholars as well.

Despite this absence, it is important to note that scholars studying the Mexican eugenics movement have examined, in varying degrees of detail, how gender and class intersect in the

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<sup>25</sup> Stern, "Responsible Mothers and Normal Children," 375.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 371.

movement. Stepan, Stern, and Bliss have all analyzed the ways in which eugenicists attempted to regulate women of all classes through various policies. While regulating prostitution, banning cantinas, and mandating testing for venereal diseases primarily affected poorer women, Mexican eugenicists' definition of responsible motherhood affected women of all socioeconomic statuses. I will expand on this argument in my own paper by arguing that eugenicists often conceived of womanhood in dichotomous terms; either a woman could be a responsible mother who followed proper eugenic practices, or she was a prostitute, who needed to be punished and prevented from further contaminating the Mexican race. While this virgin-whore dichotomy has been studied outside of the context of the eugenics movement, my paper will analyze how it was directly reflected in how eugenic legislation and its enforcement sought to define and control women based on these terms.

Of the scholarship I have read, eugenics in Veracruz is rarely discussed. This is likely due to the limited amount of sources available. The Mexican eugenics movement, like the Mexican government itself, was centralized.<sup>27</sup> As such, many more records are available for the national eugenics movement, and for a movement based in Mexico City. Despite these limitations, Stepan does dedicate a portion of a chapter to analyzing the movement in Veracruz, which Stern builds on in her article, “The Hour of Eugenics’ in Veracruz Mexico.” However, both of these analyses focus almost exclusively on the socialist and anticlerical politics of the governor of the state, Adalberto Tejeda, and his influence on eugenic legislation, and not on how the legislation Tejeda passed reflected ideologies expressed by leading Mexican eugenicists. Although Stern does include an analysis of Veracruz’s law banning prostitution in her article, she does not argue that these laws, or the infamous sterilization law enacted in Veracruz, were designed to regulate women’s behavior, something I contend in my own analysis. Additionally, though the virgin-

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Karim Roseblatt.

where dichotomy is discussed in other works on Mexican eugenics, the same framework is curiously not applied to Veracruz. Despite its absence from scholarship, I argue that this dichotomy was reinforced through the legislation passed in Veracruz.

My paper will attempt to fill significant gaps in scholarship. In order to understand the importance of Virginia and Veracruz in each of their countries, it is important to provide the historical background of these national movements. I will first discuss the national eugenics movement in the United States, which will then allow me to argue for the importance of Virginia in the context of the larger movement. I will then investigate the national Mexican eugenics movement, closely examining the movement in Veracruz. I argue that because lawmakers in Virginia and Veracruz implemented eugenical legislation that most closely followed eugenic principles in both countries, and because eugenicists in both these states also used eugenic rhetoric to argue for the importance of women adhering to eugenic principles, these two states best exemplified the eugenics movements in each of their countries. I will examine the intricacies of each movement, paying special attention to how leading eugenicists in both states used legislation and rhetoric to define women's roles in society.

### **The National Eugenics Movement in the United States**

The belief that the human race could be improved through better breeding rose to popularity at the beginning of the twentieth century. The term "eugenics" was coined by British scientist Francis Galton in 1883.<sup>28</sup> Galton was primarily interested in scientifically proving the superiority of the British aristocracy, but American eugenics had a different goal: to create a better American race.<sup>29</sup> The validity of the eugenics movement relied on the popular science of the day. Though the idea of biological inheritance was discovered in the nineteenth century, it

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<sup>28</sup> Steven Selden, *Inheriting Shame: The Story of Eugenics and Racism in America* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999), 2.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

was not until the beginning of the next century that these ideas were reinterpreted and applied to the finding reasons behind, and solutions for, the social ills plaguing American society. The eugenics movement in the United States became a haven for the elites--doctors, professors, scientists, and lawmakers all became members of the eugenics movement, as they all shared a common concern that the American race had become increasingly threatened by the degeneracy of the poor and working class. To confront this threat, eugenicists turned their attention to women.

As American eugenicists became increasingly focused on improving the American race, they began to emphasize women's biological roles in achieving this goal. Eugenicists frequently held educated women responsible for what they perceived to be the rapid degeneration of American society that they saw occurring during the first decades of the twentieth century. As one eugenicist said, "woman, rather than man, have always been the conserver of race purity."<sup>30</sup> In an article published in 1915 in *The New York Times* entitled, "Women and the Fading of Maternal Instinct," the author was alarmed that "a large proportion of...college women avoid motherhood."<sup>31</sup> He argued that the "the future of mankind" is dependent on the reproduction of these "finest" women.<sup>32</sup> Eugenicists also criticized women who had careers outside the home; one *New York Times* article reported that Dr. C. G Campbell, head of the Eugenics Research Organization, disapproved of women placing greater value on their careers than marriage and a family.<sup>33</sup> Campbell hoped that at least some women would see how crucial their role as mothers were "not only [for] the national future but in their own sex as well."<sup>34</sup> Another eugenicist, Leonard Darwin, son of Charles Darwin, reaffirmed the idea that women could not have a career

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<sup>30</sup> "Plan Nation-Wide Eugenics Society," *The New York Times*, November 16, 1913.

<sup>31</sup> "Women and the Fading of Maternal Instinct," *The New York Times*, September 5, 1915.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> "Eugenicist Predicts Alien Rule Here," *The New York Times*, June 4, 1933.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

and be “fruitful mothers.”<sup>35</sup> However, educated women and women with careers were not the only targets of eugenicists.

Eugenicists were similarly concerned with the rapid reproduction of those deemed socially inadequate—a large category including, but not limited to: alcoholics, criminals, the feeble-minded, the epileptic, the insane, the blind, the deaf, the deformed, those infected with a hereditary or venereal disease, or those who considered dependent, in this case, meaning orphans, the homeless, and “ne’er do wells”.<sup>36</sup> In an article entitled, “Check on Society’s Defectives Seen as Urgent Need of Nation,” journalist Harry Olsen reasons that the “defectives” inherent irresponsibility has caused them “[to multiply] as never before in the history of the race.”<sup>37</sup> Leaders of the national eugenics movement did not explicitly condemn the activities of unfit women as they did with women of higher socioeconomic status; although their reproductive capability mean that unfit women were believed to be largely responsible for the perceived increase in degenerates, eugenicists’ criticism was not as obviously gendered as it was for educated and working women. However, despite the lack of rhetoric, national eugenicists made poor women the central targets of their legislation. Eugenicists the country over sought to restrict these women’s reproductive rights by any means necessary.

### **The Eugenics Movement in Virginia**

Although many states implemented eugenical laws, Virginia is particularly important, not only because the state saw itself as a leader in progressive legislation, but also because the Supreme Court ultimately ruled on the constitutionality of Virginia’s two most infamous eugenic

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<sup>35</sup> “Want More Babies in Best Families,” *The New York Times*, September 25, 1921.

<sup>36</sup> Harry Laughlin, *Eugenical Sterilization in the United States* (Chicago: Psychopathic Laboratory of the Municipal Court of Chicago, 1922), 447.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

laws, the Sterilization Act and the Racial Integrity Act.<sup>38</sup> Here, as in the national movement, eugenicists reacted to the perceived dangerous activities of women of all classes. While most of the eugenic rhetoric was directed towards upper-class women, primarily evident in newspaper articles and editorials written by prominent Virginian eugenicists, the legislation passed in Virginia was intended to limit the reproductive freedom of poor and working class women.

During the 1920s, eugenicists grew concerned about the increasing freedom of women in Virginian society. Many in Virginia, eugenicists and non-eugenicists alike, saw these new freedoms as signs of the increasing irresponsibility of women. Increased access to education meant that women had begun to marry later, spreading fears in Virginian society that the institution could be eliminated entirely.<sup>39</sup> Virginian eugenicists became particularly concerned about this delay in marriage, as it implicitly meant a delay in bearing children. Women could not contribute to racial longevity if they were not producing children.<sup>40</sup> Eugenicists thus blamed women's education and careers for this perceived decline of Virginian society.<sup>41</sup> The only solution would be for these women to return to their traditional roles and, as leading Virginian eugenicist Walter Plecker argued, "show their patriotism and love for their State and race by producing six, eight, ten, or twelve children."<sup>42</sup> While eugenicists encouraged increased reproduction encouraged for upper and middle class women, they strongly argued against poor and working class women's unrestricted reproduction, and worked to pass legislation that regulated it.

### **Virginia's Sterilization Act**

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<sup>38</sup> Pippa Holloway, *Sexuality, Politics, and Social Control in Virginia, 1920-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 43.

<sup>39</sup> Dorr, "Arm in Arm," 148.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Holloway, *Sexuality, Politics, and Social Control in Virginia*, 132.

Virginian eugenicists argued for the sterilization of the “lower strata,” that is, the eugenically unfit, for largely the same reasons that national eugenics leaders argued for its nationwide implementation.<sup>43</sup> The rapid reproduction of the white lower classes threatened American civilization.<sup>44</sup> Eugenicists therefore sought a way to definitively control the reproduction of these classes. Sterilization became a favorite method of eugenicists, as it provided a way to ensure that the lower classes, the people who were believed to be most prone to criminality and idiocy and other kinds of degeneracy, would not continue to reproduce. If eugenics was a way to, according to Charles B. Davenport, a leader in the national eugenics movement, “strengthen the race by cutting off its weakness,” then eugenicists believed that the sexual sterilization of the unfit could be utilized effectively to eliminate their weakness from the larger American race.<sup>45</sup> Although in later decades sterilization efforts both inside and outside Virginia would primarily focus on black and Native American women, from the 1920s to the 1940s, the primary targets were poor white women, as eugenicists were focused exclusively on improving the purity of the white race. So long as women of other races did not marry and reproduce with white men, behavior that was later nominally banned by a marriage restriction laws in a variety of states, then eugenicists considered their reproduction habits unimportant to their larger eugenical project.

Virginia’s Sterilization Act passed on March 20, 1924. Although Indiana had passed a sterilization law as early as 1907, Indiana’s law and similar sterilization laws in other states like it, were legally flawed and subsequently challenged and easily overturned by state courts.<sup>46</sup>

Harry Laughlin, a leader of the national eugenics movement, sought to write a state law that

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<sup>43</sup> Holloway, *Sexuality, Politics, and Social Control in Virginia*, 132.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> “Social Problems Have Proven Basis of Heredity,” *The New York Times*, January 12, 1913.

<sup>46</sup> “Buck v. Bell Trial,” *Eugenics Archive*, accessed November 15, 2015, <http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/html/eugenics/static/themes/39.html>.

would be able to stand up to close legal examination. In 1922, Laughlin, with the help of renowned legal scholars, designed a Model Sterilization Law, which he hoped would guide states in crafting their own sterilization legislation.<sup>47</sup> Two years later, Virginia legislators implemented the Model Sterilization Law, with only small modifications. The law did prove to be legally sound; it was declared constitutional by the Supreme Court in 1927 in their *Buck v. Bell* decision. Laughlin's law would later help another country write its sterilization law as well. The Nazi government borrowed from the Model Sterilization Law to create the Law for the Prevention of Defective Progeny, which was passed in 1933.<sup>48</sup> The Nazis' success in enforcing their law prompted one Virginian eugenicist, a superintendent and physician at a state institution, to declare, "the Germans are beating us at our own game."<sup>49</sup>

An important qualifier for sexual sterilization was institutionalization. Physicians in Virginia could not legally sterilize anyone who had not already been committed. As Holloway artfully argues, even though physicians had the ultimate say in who would undergo sterilization, the process of commitment to a state institution required the participation of more than just physicians. Families, too, worked to nominate candidates for institutionalization.<sup>50</sup> Many of those who were committed and sterilized were women accused of immoral or degenerative behavior by members of their family. In the infamous case of Carrie Buck, the woman's whose sterilization case would later reach the Supreme Court, it was her adoptive family that wanted her committed.<sup>51</sup> At age 16, Carrie became pregnant after being raped by her cousin; after she could no longer conceal her pregnancy, her adopted family sent her to the Virginia Colony for Epileptics and Feeble-Minded, using her pregnancy as evidence of her mental defectiveness and

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<sup>47</sup> Laughlin, *Eugenical Sterilization in the United States*, 446.

<sup>48</sup> Eugenics Archive, "Eugenic Sterilization Laws."

<sup>49</sup> "Hitler's Debt to America," *The Guardian*, February 5, 2004.

<sup>50</sup> Holloway, *Sexuality, Politics, and Social Control in Virginia*, 54.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

moral degeneracy.<sup>52</sup> In a less famous, though equally revealing case, Sallie Ann Johnson Wilcher, another young Virginian woman, was committed to a state institution by her grandmother after Sallie became pregnant at age sixteen by her brother-in-law.<sup>53</sup>

In re \_\_\_\_\_, Register No. \_\_\_\_\_ }  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Inmate }  
 Order for  
 Sexual Sterilization

Upon the petition of \_\_\_\_\_,  
 Superintendent of \_\_\_\_\_,  
 and upon consideration of the evidence introduced at the hearing of this matter, the Board finds that the said inmate is

{ insane  
 { idiotic  
 { imbecile  
 { feeble-minded  
 { epileptic } and by the laws of heredity is the probable potential parent of socially  
 inadequate offsprings likewise afflicted; that the said inmate may be sexually sterilized without detriment to  
 {his } general health, and that the welfare of the inmate and of society will be promoted by such sterilization.  
 {her }

Therefore, it appearing that all proper parties have been duly served with proper notice of these proceedings, and have been heard or given an opportunity to be heard, it is ordered that \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ {perform  
 (Superintendent) {have performed

by Dr. \_\_\_\_\_, on the said inmate the operation of {vasectomy }  
 {salpingectomy }

after not less than thirty (30) days from the date hereof.

Eugenics Archive, “Virginia Order Form for Sterilization Procedure,” American Philosophical Society.

The picture above shows the form that doctors had to fill out in order to sterilize a patient. Eugenic principles are on display here, both in the fact that physicians had to declare the patient “insane, idiotic, imbecile, feeble-minded, [or] epileptic” in order to sterilize them, and because the “laws of heredity” dictates that they will have “inadequate offspring likewise afflicted.”<sup>54</sup> Additionally, the form states that their sterilization will benefit both the inmate and society, a principle frequently cited by eugenicists.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Paul A. Lombardo, *Three Generations, No Imbeciles: Eugenics, the Supreme Court, and Buck v. Bell* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2008), x.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Eugenics Archive, “Virginia Order Form for Sterilization Procedure,” American Philosophical Society.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

Although men committed into state institutions in Virginia were sterilized, the majority that underwent sterilization were women. Women represented 60 percent of those sterilized in Virginia between 1928 and 1940.<sup>56</sup> Keeping in line with eugenic principles, the women committed and sterilized overwhelmingly hailed from the poor or working class.<sup>57</sup> Eugenicists did not try to conceal their classism; John H. Bell, the superintendent of the Lynchburg State Colony, a state institution where many women were sterilized, once said that that one could distinguish between a “normal” individual and an individual who should be sterilized by looking at whether or not the individual’s two preceding generations had “produced a single socially or economically inadequate person.”<sup>58</sup> Additionally, another study found that of the first 1,000 Virginians to be sterilized after 1927, 812 came from poor or “low class” families.<sup>59</sup> Virginian eugenicists found Virginia’s sterilization to be an effective way to regulate which socioeconomic class of women could contribute to Virginian society. As eugenicists saw genetics as the main reason behind poor and working class women’s poverty and moral degeneracy, sterilization became an excellent tool to remove the threat to racial purity that these women’s biology represented. The Racial Integrity Act, a law passed on the same day as the Sterilization Act, would be another method eugenicists could use to regulate women’s behavior.

### **Virginia’s Racial Integrity Act**

Anti-miscegenation legislation based on the idea of white superiority was not a new concept in Virginia, nor was it a particularly new concept in the United States. The constitutionality of anti-miscegenation laws was upheld by the Supreme Court in 1883.<sup>60</sup> As the laws would, in theory, punish both blacks and whites equally for breaking the law, the Court

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<sup>56</sup> Holloway, *Sexuality, Politics, and Social Control in Virginia*, 57.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Pace v. Alabama*, 106 U.S. 583 (1883).

ruled that these laws did not violate the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment.<sup>61</sup> From 1871 to 1928, three proposed constitutional amendments that would ban interracial marriage were introduced in Congress.<sup>62</sup> In Virginia, the first law banning interracial marriage and fornication was passed in 1661.<sup>63</sup> Virginia passed similar laws throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth using a variety of biblical and moral justifications.<sup>64</sup> In the twentieth century, however, the justification shifted to science. Eugenics now provided a biological basis for anti-miscegenation.

The science of eugenics now “proved” that blacks were a biologically inferior race that must, at all costs, be kept from reproducing with the genetically superior white race. Eugenacists saw preventing interracial breeding as paramount to ensuring racial purity; they feared the “mongrelization” of the white race would destroy the integrity of the American race.<sup>65</sup> As Madison Grant, a prominent eugenicist in the national movement, argues in his book *The Passing of the Great Race*, “the cross between a white man and a negro is a negro...the children of mixed marriages between contrasted races belong to the lower race.”<sup>66</sup> This fear was echoed by John Powell, a leading Virginian eugenicist, in an article he wrote to urge the Virginian General Assembly to pass a law preserving racial purity. Powell shares Grant’s belief that, “once a drop of inferior blood gets in [the] veins [of a person], he descends lower and lower in the mongrel scale.”<sup>67</sup> Powell goes further in admitting his fear that “America is headed towards mongrelization”; he believed that only measures “to retain racial integrity [could] save

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<sup>61</sup> *Pace v. Alabama*, 106 U.S. 583 (1883).

<sup>62</sup> John R. Vile, *Encyclopedia of Constitutional Amendments, Proposed Amendments, and Amending Issues, 1789-2002* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2003), 243.

<sup>63</sup> Dorr, “Arm in Arm,” 145.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> J. David Smith, *The Eugenic Assault on America* (Fairfax: George Mason University Press, 1993), 13.

<sup>66</sup> Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race, or, the Racial Basis of European History* (New York City: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1916), 13.

<sup>67</sup> Smith, *The Eugenic Assault on America*, 19.

the country from becoming negroid in population.”<sup>68</sup> Powell was one of a number of Virginian eugenicists who argued for the urgency of passing the Racial Integrity Act, an act which would ensure that those who participated in interracial marriages, and thus, the degeneration of their race, would be punished.

The Racial Integrity Act passed, in large part, due to the influence of Anglo-Saxon Clubs, an organization with the explicit goal of “[preserving] and [maintaining]...Anglo-Saxon ideals and civilization in America.”<sup>69</sup> The clubs, cofounded by Powell, advocated for a law that could encompass the following practices that would guarantee white racial purity:

1. There shall be instituted immediately a system of registration and birth certificates showing the racial composition (white, black, brown, yellow, red) of every resident of this state.
2. No marriage license shall be granted save upon presentation and attestation under oath of both parties of said registration or birth certificate.
3. White persons may only marry whites.
4. For the purposes of this legislation, the term ‘white persons’ shall apply only to individuals who have no trace whatsoever of any blood other than Caucasian.<sup>70</sup>

These petitions were shown to the General Assembly in the first months of 1924.<sup>71</sup> The Racial Integrity that passed on March 20, 1924 included most of the provisions the Anglo-Saxon Clubs recommended. The act did not require Virginians to register the racial composition of their child with the state, but only recommended it. Additionally, the law made a small, but notable revision, of the Clubs’ definition of whiteness. As many of Virginia’s “First Families,” the wealthiest and most socially and politically powerful families in Virginia, claimed Pocahontas and John Rolfe as their ancestors, the law allowed anyone who had 1/16<sup>th</sup> or less of American

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<sup>68</sup> Smith, *The Eugenic Assault on America*, 19.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

Indian ancestry to claim whiteness.<sup>72</sup> After the passage of the law, the leaders of the Anglo-Saxon Clubs launched an attempt to eliminate this provision from the law; however, it proved unsuccessful. The First Families wielded too much control.<sup>73</sup> Despite their failure to legislate their definition of whiteness, eugenicists had significant power in enforcing the Racial Integrity Act. Like the Sterilization Act, women would effectively be the sole targets of its enforcement.

In Southern society, relationships between white women and black men had long been severely punished, while relationships between white men and black women were tacitly accepted.<sup>74</sup> Lynching, because its victims were historically black men who showed either real or imagined sexual interest towards white women, exemplifies this unequal treatment of interracial relationships in the South.<sup>75</sup> Southern culture, based on ideas of Southern chivalry, had historically perpetuated the idea it was women's behavior, and not men's, which had to be regulated and monitored, an idea that was only strengthened by the eugenics movement. As eugenics had placed a new biological importance on women, and especially white women, eugenicists saw the prescription of white women's behavior as imperative to ensuring racial purity. Promiscuous women and women who had no concept of racial pride, women who were often of lower socioeconomic standing, could not be allowed to practice this kind of dangerous behavior that could threaten the success of the Racial Integrity Act.

It is important to note that, despite the misleading name of the act, the Racial Integrity Act was only concerned with ensuring the racial integrity act of the white race. To eugenicists, it did not matter if other races intermarried; it was only the miscegenation of whites and any other race that threatened white racial integrity. Therefore, though women of other races were made

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<sup>72</sup> Kevin Maillard, "The Pocahontas Exception: The Exemption of American Indian Ancestry From the Racial Purity Law," *Michigan Journal of Race & Law* 12 (Spring 2007): 9.

<sup>73</sup> Hollway, *Sexuality, Politics, and Social Control in Virginia*, 40.

<sup>74</sup> Dorr, "Arm in Arm," 146.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

targets of other eugenic projects, the rhetoric surrounding the Racial Integrity Act, and the enforcement of the law, primarily affected white women. Members of the Anglo-Saxon Clubs, in their lobbying for the Racial Integrity Act Women, had been primarily concerned with the behavior of white women. Sharing the concerns of those who advocated for the Sterilization Act, eugenicists who fought for the passage of the Racial Integrity Act expressed anxiety over the changing gender roles of white, middle and upper class women.<sup>76</sup> To reverse the decline of American, and Virginian civilization, these women had to return to their traditional, domestic roles as wives, and most importantly, mothers.<sup>77</sup> Of course, women of any class were not allowed to join these clubs, and thus, were left entirely out of these discussions. As Dorr argues, this fact in and of itself represents the disempowerment of women in the Virginian eugenics movement; as Dorr suggests, this policy prohibiting women from joining influential eugenic clubs in which their own roles in society were defined “embodied eugenic beliefs that man-made...laws should control women’s sexual and reproductive function,” an idea that is further proven by the enforcement of this law.<sup>78</sup>

Like the Sterilization Act, women were affected most by its enforcement, as they were the ones who were required to register the race of their child.<sup>79</sup> Below is an excerpt of a letter, which is representative of the types of letters eugenicists sent to women who disobeyed the Racial Integrity Act, sent to a white woman who presumably registered her child as having a white mother and a white father:

Dear Madam:

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<sup>76</sup> Dorr, “Arm in Arm,” 152.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 153.

We have a correction to the [birth] certificate sent to us from the City Health Department at Lynchburg in which they say that the father of this child is a negro. This [letter] is to give you a warning that [your child] is a mulatto child and you cannot pass it off as white. A new law passed by the last Legislature says that if a child has one drop of negro blood in it, it cannot be counted as white. You will have to do something about this matter and see that this child is not allowed to mix with white children. It is an awful thing.<sup>80</sup>

However, it was not just personal correspondence with violators of the law that reveal the gendered enforcement of it. In 1926, *The Richmond Times-Dispatch* published a series of articles by John Powell that detailed various cases of interracial couples blatantly disobeying the Racial Integrity Act.<sup>81</sup> Of the 80 cases published in the newspaper, just two were concerning a white man's relationship with a black woman.<sup>82</sup> The rest were instances of white women violating the law. While the enforcement of the law was not as explicitly classist as the enforcement of the Sterilization Act, the danger of the limited reproduction of white women was often mentioned alongside discussions of poor and working class women's disregard for racial pride when considering their sexual partners; prominent Virginian eugenicists Walter Plecker stated, that it was "sickening and saddening" that a "considerable number of degenerate white women [were] giving birth to mulatto children."<sup>83</sup> Eugenicists like Plecker believed it was primarily eugenically undesirable women who had to be prevented from becoming involved in interracial relationships. Middle and upper class women were not the ones believed to be currently violating social mores restricting interracial reproduction, as promiscuity and a willingness to have sexual relationships with other races were more often associated with "feeble-mindedness," and thus implicitly

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<sup>80</sup> Smith, *The Eugenic Assault on America*, 62.

<sup>81</sup> Dorr, "Arm in Arm," 155.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> "Walter Ashby Plecker," *Project Gutenberg*, accessed December 5, 2015, [http://www.gutenberg.us/articles/Walter\\_Ashby\\_Plecker](http://www.gutenberg.us/articles/Walter_Ashby_Plecker).

associated with women of the lower classes.<sup>84</sup> Nonetheless, the passage of the law not only reflects the belief that middle and upper class women's increased freedom and desire to marry later and bear fewer children directly threatened Virginian society, but also the fear that middle and upper class women would start mimicking the behavior of poor and working class women.<sup>85</sup> If the Racial Integrity Act could penalize the sort of eugenically dangerous behavior practiced by poor whites, then it would make it less likely for women of higher socioeconomic status to behave in a similar manner. Ensuring the purity of the white race depended therefore on regulating the behavior of women of all classes.

Both the Sterilization Act and the Racial Integrity Act worked to explicitly control women's actions, and implicitly define womanhood in relation to motherhood. Eugenacists passed legislation that restricted or entirely excluded poor and working class women from reproducing, either because these women were not considered eugenically healthy, or they were not following eugenic practices, or both. They could never be responsible mothers. By the same measure, eugenacists believed that middle and upper class white women were not performing their proper eugenic duty if they were not reproducing, and thus used rhetorical appeals in newspapers, and legislated penalizations of eugenic violations, to encourage women to fulfill their biological roles as mothers. For eugenacists in Virginia, responsible motherhood was eugenic motherhood, an ideal that only certain classes could attain. In Mexico, a similar principle was applied to women; however, in Veracruz, it was the behavior of prostitutes that was considered antithetical to that of eugenic motherhood.

### **The National Eugenics Movement in Mexico**

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<sup>84</sup> "Mental Illness," *Eugenics Archive*, accessed December 5, 2015, [http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/eugenics/topics\\_fs.pl?theme=9](http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/eugenics/topics_fs.pl?theme=9).

<sup>85</sup> Dorr, "Arm in Arm," 150.

Eugenicists in Mexico shared similar goals to eugenicists in the United States: they sought to improve the health of the race. Unlike American eugenics, however, the idea of the Mexican race was not directly tied to whiteness, nor was it overtly tied to class. The ideal Mexican race was not one that could only be white and wealthy. As such, while some aspects of the eugenics movement in Mexico were directly concerned with race, namely mestizophilia, an idea that promoted racial mixing in order to form a “cosmic race,” eugenic policies and projects intended to improve the health of the Mexican race were ostensibly aimed at all Mexican citizens, no matter their race or socioeconomic standing.<sup>86</sup> <sup>87</sup>Still, as eugenicists were immediately concerned with helping the Mexican population rebound after the devastation of the Mexican Revolution, a goal that could not be achieved without improving maternal and infant health, women were subject to greater supervision and regulation under these new laws.

Though eugenicists in Mexico shared a definition of eugenics with eugenicists in the United States---they both wanted to breed a better race—the scientific principles that influenced eugenics in the Mexico differed from those that influenced American eugenics. Mexican eugenicists placed a greater emphasis on the influence of the environment, while eugenicists in the United States believed in the concept of a “germ plasm,” the idea that genes were transmitted unalterably from one generation to the next.<sup>88</sup> While Mexican eugenicists did ascribe to ideas of genetic heredity, many also stressed the importance of nurture; a good or bad environment could impact to what degree undesirable traits were passed down to the next generation.<sup>89</sup> The description of the causes of prostitution in Mexican society by Alfredo Saavedra, a leading Mexican eugenicist, exemplifies the way in which Mexican eugenicists used a variety of

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<sup>86</sup> Stern, “Responsible Mothers and Normal Children,” 371.

<sup>87</sup> An important exception to this was, as Dr. Roseblatt notes, the treatment of the Chinese in Mexico; the Chinese were left out of inclusive racial policies, as they were considered inherently eugenically unfit.

<sup>88</sup> Stern, “Responsible Mothers and Normal Children,” 372.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

scientific theories to explain the prevalence of social ills in society. Saavedra explains that there are many causes for the existence of prostitution in Mexico; he believes it is prevalent because of “mental weakness, eroticism, and innate predisposition, lack of education and culture, poverty and social inertia.”<sup>90</sup> Many eugenic policies in Mexico, therefore, concentrated both on providing proper instruction for women, and especially for mothers, on how to contribute to improving Mexican society, and on preventing eugenically unfit people from contributing to the further degeneracy of the Mexican race.

### **Eugenics and Educating Mothers**

Mexican eugenicists were most concerned with improving child health, as evidence by that eugenics made its first appearance in Mexican society at a Child Congress, wherein all persons who [wished] to the study the defense and physical and moral development of the child” were invited to attend.<sup>91</sup> However, eugenicists soon realized that child health could not be improved without the participation of the mother. Additionally, rebuilding Mexico after its revolution relied on mothers.<sup>92</sup> The success of the new nation depended on building a strong and healthy populace, which could not be accomplished without strong and healthy mothers. The eugenic committee organized in 1920 at the first Child Congress did not discuss, in detail, maternal education; however, just a year later, eugenicists were actively involved in maternal education efforts.<sup>93</sup> In 1921, The School Hygiene Service published a manual instructing mothers on how to best take care of their children, including descriptions on how best to clean their house and personal items, and how to properly breastfeed their children.<sup>94</sup> The official terms of the

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<sup>90</sup> Alfredo Saavedra, *Eugenesis y Medicina Social* (Mexico: D.F, 2003), 77.

<sup>91</sup> “El Congreso Mexicano Del Niño,” *El Universal*, May 23, 1920.

<sup>92</sup> Erin E. O’Connor, *Mothers Making Latin America: Gender, Households, and Politics Since 1825* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2014), 21.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Stern, “Responsible Mothers and Normal Children,” 376.

eugenic committee at the Second Child Congress three years later further demonstrate that eugenicists had now shifted their priorities to educating mothers.<sup>95</sup> Unlike eugenicists in the United States, eugenicists in Mexico did not restrict the idea of responsible motherhood to certain classes; they wanted women, wealthy or poor, to be able to contribute to improving the Mexican Race. Thus, eugenicists offered lectures and radio addresses, with titles like “Prenatal Advice,” in order to reach a wider audience.<sup>96</sup>

Women who were not yet mothers were also subject to these education efforts. Eugenicists believed, as one declaration made by the Public Health Department in the 1930s makes evident, that “every woman living in the territory of the Mexican Republic...has the duty to contribute...to the principles of eugenics, to fomenting a strong and healthy populace.”<sup>97</sup> This belief motivated eugenicists to not only to look for methods that would allow them to properly counsel and instruct mothers on how to best raise their child, but also to find a way to reach the population of women and girls who would someday be responsible for contributing to the health and longevity of the Mexican race. Books like *Doña Eugenesia Y Otros Personajes*, written by eugenicist Dr. Manuel Gonzalez Rivera, were intended to reach this population.

*Doña Eugenesia*, a morality tale about a chaste and trusting young woman, appropriately named Guadalupe, and her suitor, Rodrigo, was written in order to teach women about the importance of choosing a eugenically fit marriage partner. Medical certificates requiring fiancés to have themselves declared disease-free by doctors had been required since 1914; however in 1926, the Sanitary Code placed a special importance of ensuring that both marriage partners were syphilis-free, reflecting increased fears of the spread of venereal disease, and especially

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<sup>95</sup> Stern, “Responsible Mothers and Normal Children,” 376; “El Segundo Congreso Mexicano Del Niño,” *El Universal*, June 6, 1923.

<sup>96</sup> Stern, “Responsible Mothers, and Normal Children,” 376.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

syphilis, in Mexico.<sup>98</sup> This fear of venereal disease can be found in *Doña Eugenesia*, as the reader is informed that Rodrigo was “hopeless,” as he was “a drunk, gambler, and womanizer” and a carrier of disease because he had spent too many “nights in houses of ill repute.”<sup>99</sup> As such, Rodrigo refuses to undergo the required medical certification in order to marry Guadalupe, and begs Guadalupe to forgo this formality and elope with him.<sup>100</sup> Luckily, Guadalupe attends a “Eugenics Talk,” where she learns the danger of marrying someone with venereal disease, and the negative effects syphilis can have on a man’s physicality and temperament. After attending the talk, Guadalupe decides not to marry Rodrigo, as she decides instead to contribute to “the physical and biological improvement of the race.”<sup>101</sup> Although the purpose of *Doña Eugenesia* was primarily to remind women to consider their biological roles before committing to a marriage partner, the story also reinforces the link between prostitution and moral and physical corruption. Rodrigo visits a brothel, contracts a venereal disease, and becomes eugenically unsuitable to marry. Prostitution represented a clear threat, because, as Alfredo Saavedra writes, it was a “perennial source of social unrest.”<sup>102</sup>

### **Eugenics and Prostitution**

Eugenicists considered banning prostitution essential to preventing the spread of venereal diseases. In this way, eugenicists reflected popular beliefs that prostitution could cause, as one newspaper editorial put it, “social dissolution.”<sup>103</sup> It was believed that prostitutes, and importantly not their male clientele, were primarily responsible for the rampant spread of sexually transmitted diseases in Mexico during the first decades of the twentieth century,

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<sup>98</sup> Stern, “Responsible Mothers, and Normal Children,” 378.

<sup>99</sup> Manuel González Rivera, *Doña Eugenesia Y Otros Personajes: Cuentos De Higiene* (Mexico: Talleres Tipográficos Modelo, s.a., 2003), 14.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Stern, “Responsible Mothers and Normal Children,” 380.

<sup>102</sup> Saavedra, *Eugenesia y Medicina Social*, 92.

<sup>103</sup> “Alcoholismo, Prostitucion Y Juego,” *El Universal*, March 14, 1922.

something made evident by Alfredo Saavedra's leading publication on eugenics, *Eugenesia y Medicina Social*. Not only did Saavedra tackle the issue of prostitution and venereal disease in one chapter, he also argued in his book that, in order for Mexico to effectively treat its venereal disease problem, prostitution had to be banned.<sup>104</sup> In Mexico City, prostitutes were treated as a threat to society that had to be monitored and contained; as Bliss details, if a woman over the age of 18 who was not a virgin wished to become a prostitute, she was required by law to "register with health authorities, undergo weekly inspections for signs of venereal disease, and submit to hospitalization if found to be suffering from a contagious affliction."<sup>105</sup> Men who sought out these prostitutes were not held to the same medical or indeed, social standard; both Mexican society and eugenicists viewed their visits to brothels as, normal, if not regrettable, expressions of male sexuality.<sup>106</sup> In contrast, eugenicists saw the women who chose to become prostitutes as abnormal and inherently dangerous to society.<sup>107</sup> Prostitutes did not undermine social stability simply because of the diseases they were thought to carry; eugenicists believed that the existence of the institution threatened the very idea of proper womanhood.

In Mexican society, women were not supposed to exhibit overt sexuality, an idea that is reinforced in Saavedra's book in his contention that "in the moral aspect, a prostitute is every woman living in simultaneous or successive promiscuity."<sup>108</sup> The virgin-whore dichotomy had long existed in Mexico, but had found scientific backing with eugenics. A new emphasis on women's biological function meant that proper womanhood was now explicitly tied to responsible motherhood; as Bliss argues, "the 'good' woman sought her 'natural' expression in

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<sup>104</sup> Saavedra, *Eugenesia Y Medicina Social*, 91.

<sup>105</sup> Bliss, *Compromised Positions*, 3

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

motherhood.”<sup>109</sup> The existence of prostitution was seen as a failing of society, which did not teach women how to properly behave; a sentiment echoed by Saavedra in his idea that a “real campaign” to combat prostitution would be one that would “awaken the concept of femininity and maternal instinct.”<sup>110</sup> A newspaper editorial further reflected this idea by suggesting that prostitution could be combatted if women were properly educated and protected.<sup>111</sup> Educators and doctors considered prostitution evidence of “wayward femininity,” a problem that eugenicists hoped to solve through better education and the regulation or banning of sexual commerce.<sup>112</sup> Eugenicists believed that all members of society, but especially women, had to be protected from the kind of sexual perversion prostitutes embodied. A healthier generation of Mexicans able to contribute to building a new, post-revolutionary Mexico depended on the regulation of this kind of dangerous behavior. While most states in Mexico were unable to accomplish an outright abolition of prostitution, the state of Veracruz stands out as a state that was able to codify this eugenic principle into law.

### **Law 362 in Veracruz**

The state of Veracruz has historically faced serious health problems, which in turn, created or exacerbated existing social problems at the beginning of the twentieth century. These problems were embodied in the city of Veracruz. As Andrew Grant Wood notes in *Revolution in the Street: Women, Workers, and Urban Protest in Veracruz, 1870-1927*, the city of Veracruz’s rapid growth and industrialization in the early 1900s had caused overcrowding, resulting in lack of potable water, drainage, and ventilation.<sup>113</sup> The lack of clean water resulted in a variety of

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<sup>109</sup> Bliss, *Compromised Positions*, 132.

<sup>110</sup> Saavedra, *Eugenesia y Medicina Social*, 79.

<sup>111</sup> “Alcoholismo, Prostitucion Y Juego,” *El Universal*, March 14, 1922.

<sup>112</sup> Bliss, *Compromised Positions*, 114.

<sup>113</sup> Andrew Grant Wood, *Revolution in the Street: Women, Workers, and Urban Protest in Veracruz, 1870-1927* (Wilmington: SR Book, 2001), 9.

problems. As *veracruzanos* had no access to clean water, they turned to *pulque* instead.<sup>114</sup> Poor sanitation made it easy for deadly diseases to spread; when the U.S. invaded the city of Veracruz in 1914, a *New York Times* article noted that it was disease, and not bullets, that represented the real threat to American soldiers.<sup>115</sup> In 1920, 46 cases of bubonic plague were found in the city of Veracruz, resulting in 13 deaths.<sup>116</sup> Two years later, the Veracruz City Council issued a report declaring that immediate measures had to be taken in order to stop the “spread of exotic diseases in the country,” and to prevent the “degeneration of the race.”<sup>117</sup> During the same period, the city experienced significant social unrest, as prostitutes and tenants launched massive protests against unsanitary and unhygienic housing conditions they were forced to live and conduct business in.<sup>118</sup> The climate in the state, then, was ripe for the eugenics movement, which, promised, if certain eugenic policies were enacted, better health and hygiene for citizens and with it, the amelioration of social problems.

Eugenic policies were first enacted by the governor of Veracruz, Adalberto Tejeda, in his second term in office. In 1929, Tejeda, believing that alcohol was the “cause of degeneration of the human species,” banned the further establishment of bars and cantinas.<sup>119</sup> Invoking common eugenic beliefs that alcoholism and prostitution had to be combatted together, Tejeda also began to attack the institution of prostitution.<sup>120</sup> The business of prostitution had long enjoyed success in Veracruz, as it was a state that housed a bustling port city. However, this success was quickly ended in Tejeda’s second term. In 1930, Tejeda passed Law 362, which abolished prostitution

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<sup>114</sup> Wood, *Revolution in the Street*, 9.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>116</sup> “Plague Mild in Vera Cruz,” *The New York Times*, July 10, 1920.

<sup>117</sup> Stern, “‘The Hour of Eugenics’ in Veracruz,” 435.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*; Advertisement, March 9, 1922, *El Universal*.

entirely.<sup>121</sup> The punishment for women who violated Law 362 was a 15-day imprisonment and a fine to set between 15 and 20 pesos.<sup>122</sup> Law 362 also gave the state license to locate and treat any citizen in Veracruz suspected to have a venereal disease. Judging by its enforcement, it is evident that the law was used to primarily treat sex workers.<sup>123</sup> The law is praised by Saavedra in his book, as he claims that over 18,000 prostitutes in Veracruz had undergone treatment for venereal diseases.<sup>124</sup> Saavedra notes that this law had effectively decreased venereal disease in Jalapa, another city in Veracruz.<sup>125</sup> Saavedra expresses his desire that similar legislation would be enacted throughout the country; he claims, “*que se dirá del resto del Estado; pues eso que acontecía en Veracruz, sucede en todos el país.*”<sup>126</sup>

Although not specified by Saavedra or Tejeda, Stern argues that it is likely that the majority of these prostitutes were treated against their will.<sup>127</sup> By passing Law 362, the state legislated its definition of proper behavior for women. As Stern notes, Tejeda, like others who held eugenical beliefs, believed that prostitution not only aided the spread of “dreaded venereal diseases,” but also “[enslaved] and [corrupted] women.”<sup>128</sup> Abolishing the institution meant the state had codified its disapproval of this expression of deviant female sexuality. Additionally, because the law allowed the state to forcefully treat women suspected of carrying venereal disease, the state exercised even greater power over women than normal eugenic policies usually permitted. The state was no longer just regulating women’s behavior and restricting their societal roles; it now could monitor the most intimate aspect of women’s bodies, usually without their

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<sup>121</sup> Stern, “‘The Hour of Eugenics’ in Veracruz,” 438.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Saavedra, *Eugenesia Y Medicina Social*, 83.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Stern, “‘The Hour of Eugenics’ in Veracruz,” 438.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 437.

permission. During the same time, Veracruz, under the guidance of the Rockefeller Foundation, held “niños sano” contests, with the intended purpose of “[encouraging] Mexican mothers to better educate and prepare their children.”<sup>129</sup> Mexican mothers, according to one doctor who worked with the Coordinated Sanitary Services of the State, needed educational programs to help her “fill her home with happiness and prepar[e] a better, stronger, healthier race.”<sup>130</sup> Veracruz epitomized the dichotomy between prostitute and mother that the eugenics movement had strengthened; while the behavior of both needed to be scrutinized by the state, one was an expression of proper eugenic womanhood, while the other was subject to fines, imprisonment, and forced medial monitoring. Eugenic motherhood was an idea that all *veracruzano* women were expected to aspire to; when they deviated from it, they faced punishment from the state. Veracruz’s anti-prostitution law was the first act to regulate woman’s behavior; Law 121 would go further in restricting their reproductive ability.

### **The Sterilization Law in Veracruz**

Although Veracruz has the dubious distinction of being the only state in the entirety of Latin America to enact a sterilization law, sterilization as an expression of eugenic principles had garnered support by a variety of Mexican eugenicists in the movement. In 1921, during the Mexico’s first Child Congress, the organizer and president of the Congress proposed eugenic sterilization for “criminals, degenerates, and incurable neuropaths,” which was later approved by the Congress by seven votes.<sup>131</sup> In the 1930s, other Mexican eugenicists had similarly expressed support for a sterilization policy.<sup>132</sup> Why Veracruz was the only state in Mexico to pass a law that allowed for involuntary sexual sterilization is not entirely clear. From published scholarship, it

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<sup>129</sup> Stern, “‘The Hour of Eugenics’ in Veracruz,” 436.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 438.

<sup>131</sup> Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics*, 131; “El Congreso del Niño,” *El Universal*, May 23, 1920.

<sup>132</sup> Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics*, 131.

seems that Tejeda simply believed in eugenic principles more than other state officials did. In *The Hour of Eugenics*, Stepan cites the radical politics of Tejeda as a reason for his eugenic policies; as noted by Stepan, Tejeda was “fanatically anticlerical,” moreso than other state governors at the time.<sup>133</sup> Stepan goes on to suggest that Veracruz’s eugenic sterilization policy was thus “an expression of [Tejeda’s] anticlericism and secularism,” and his strong belief in the potential of eugenics to improve the Mexican race.<sup>134</sup> Stern in “‘The Hour of Eugenics’ in Veracruz” corroborates this argument, using his large personal collection of eugenic books as evidence that he was an avid follower of the science.<sup>135</sup> Given Veracruz’s historic health problems, and Tejeda’s radical politics, it follows that Tejeda would become a follower of eugenics, and try to enact policies in his state that strictly adhered to eugenic principles.

The initial version of Law 121 that Tejeda passed in July 1932 did not allow for sterilization. The first iteration of the law did, however, officially create a new department, the Eugenics and Mental Hygiene Section that would later carry out the sterilizations.<sup>136</sup> Law 121 first asked that the newly created department investigate and collect statistics about the “the mental state of criminals, alcoholics, prostitutes and [other] vicious individuals.”<sup>137</sup> An addendum to the law six months later would officially include Tejeda’s sterilization policy.<sup>138</sup> On the basis of ensuring the “regulation of the reproduction and feasible applications of a methodical eugenics,” the law permitted the Section of Eugenics and Mental Health to legally sterilize “the insane, idiots, degenerates, or those demented to a degree that their defect is considered incurable

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<sup>133</sup> Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics*, 131.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> Stern, “‘The Hour of Eugenics’ in Veracruz,” 439.

<sup>136</sup> Ley 121, *Gaceta Oficial* 28, no. 82 (9 July 1932): 4.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> Stern, “‘The Hour of Eugenics’ in Veracruz,” 440.

or hereditarily transmissible.<sup>139</sup> Similar to the sterilization law in Virginia, three physicians had to agree that the patient was eugenically unfit before the sterilization was performed.<sup>140</sup> However, in contrast to the Sterilization Act in Virginia, there was no stipulation that the patient had to be institutionalized by the state to be sterilized.<sup>141</sup> Additionally, unlike the policy in Virginia, sterilizations were never widely performed, perhaps because Tejeda was unseated as governor just a few months after the sterilization policy was enacted.<sup>142</sup>

There is little data on how many *veracruzanos* the state actually sterilized. As Stern notes, the state does not house records that provide any data on how many sterilizations were performed.<sup>143</sup> At the time *The Hour of Eugenics* was written, Stepan argued that it was “highly unlikely” that any sterilizations actually took place.<sup>144</sup> Stern was able to locate some records that mention “operations” performed by state physicians, although, admittedly, there are no direct references to sterilization within these records.<sup>145</sup> After Tejeda left office, there are no references to sterilization in state records or in popular press, meaning, as both Stepan and Stern argue, that, if any sterilizations ever occurred, they were likely only performed during the months immediately following the passage of the law, and before Tejeda ceased to be governor of Veracruz. By the time Nazi eugenic sterilization law was enacted in 1933, Mexican eugenicists during the “Second Eugenics Week” had decided that they could not support the law, given that they did not believe the laws of heredity could justify such wide-reaching legislation.<sup>146</sup> As Stepan notes, this declaration effectively signaled the end of the eugenic sterilization in Mexico.

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<sup>139</sup> Stern, “‘The Hour of Eugenics’ in Veracruz,” 440.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 441.

<sup>141</sup> Stern, “‘The Hour of Eugenics’ in Veracruz,” 440.

<sup>142</sup> Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics*, 132.

<sup>143</sup> Stern, “‘The Hour of Eugenics’ in Veracruz,” 441.

<sup>144</sup> Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics*, 132.

<sup>145</sup> Stern, “‘The Hour of Eugenics’ in Veracruz,” 441.

<sup>146</sup> Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics*, 133.

The enforcement of the sterilization law in Veracruz varied significantly from the enforcement of Virginia's sterilization policy. Recent investigation into state records in Veracruz does not reveal specificities of the way in which the law was carried out; scholars are unsure whether or not any sterilizations actually happened, let alone if women were sterilized more than men. However, despite these obscurities, the language of the law is still revealing of how the state sought to control women. As the addendum to Law 121 specifically referenced reproductive regulation, and as eugenicists had already made clear that women, and not men, were entrusted with primary reproductive responsibility, it can be assumed that the law was directed towards women, and likely, prostitutes. The original law had already asked the state to investigate the mental state of prostitutes, and the addendum to the law that permitted sexual sterilization also allowed physicians to take sex workers into custody if they violated Law 362.<sup>147</sup> Given that Law 121 entrusted doctors with identifying candidates for sterilization, and that the language of the law was vague enough to allow for the sterilization of "degenerates," and those whose condition was "hereditarily transmissible," a category that eugenicists would argue prostitutes would definitively fall under, prostitutes were likely the primary targets for this law. Eugenicists both inside and outside Veracruz had already argued that prostitution represented perhaps the greatest threat to sanitation, the eradication of venereal disease, and to social stability; as Mexican eugenicists also promoted the idea of environmental influence on heredity, prostitutes represented an even greater threat to the Mexican race because they could potentially bear children who, because of genetic predisposition and the environment would likely grow up in, would likely become prostitutes themselves.<sup>148</sup> As the eugenics movement rose to prominence in the years following immediately following the Mexican Revolution, the importance of

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<sup>147</sup> Stern, "'The Hour of Eugenic,' in Veracruz," 442.

<sup>148</sup> Bliss, *Compromised Positions*, 115.

eliminating this threat from Mexican society became paramount; a new Mexico could not succeed without a healthy populace. Sterilization was a way to eradicate this threat entirely from the Mexican race. Although the law was not enforced to the extent that it was in Virginia, the language and implications of the sterilization law in Veracruz nonetheless sought to regulate women's behavior. Prostitutes could not be allowed to further contaminate the race with their degenerate children. Eugenicists firmly believed that prostitutes could not raise children in an eugenic manner, and thus, they should not be given the chance to become mothers.

### **The Fate of Eugenics**

Eugenic sterilization may have never been as widespread in Mexico as it was in the United States, but eugenic principles remained a part of Mexican public health policies well into the 1950s. As Stern notes, the Mexican Eugenics Society helped to lobby for a Hereditary Health Counseling Center in 1954.<sup>149</sup> Alfredo Saavedra continued to publish books and articles on eugenic ideas well into the 1970s.<sup>150</sup> Stepans argues that the continued relevance of eugenics in Mexican society reflected a belief among Mexican eugenicists that their eugenics was separate from the eugenics found in the United States, and later Nazi Germany.<sup>151</sup> While eugenicists in the United States had to take responsibility for providing inspiration to eugenic policies in Germany, the fact that sterilization was never fully endorsed by the Mexican government meant that Mexican eugenicists could distance themselves from the most horrifying aspects of Nazi eugenics. Mexican eugenicists could then continue to support their kind of eugenics in an “unselfconscious way,” as Mexican eugenics was more explicitly tied to public health measures than American eugenics ever was.<sup>152</sup> In contrast, the popularity of the eugenics movement

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<sup>149</sup> Stern, “Responsible Mothers and Normal Children,” 387.

<sup>150</sup> Stern, “‘The Hour of Eugenics’ in Veracruz, 433.

<sup>151</sup> Stepans, *The Hour of Eugenics*, 193.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

declined significantly after the Nazi government used eugenics to justify decimating the European population.<sup>153</sup> The Eugenics Record Office, arguably the headquarters of the American eugenics movement, officially shut its door in 1940.<sup>154</sup> Nevertheless, legal sterilizations, justified in earlier decades by eugenics, persisted into the 1970s and 1980s. In total, 60,000 Americans have been sterilized, with Virginian sterilizations alone accounting for almost 1/6th of total sterilizations.<sup>155</sup> Eugenics in name could no longer be endorsed in the United States after World War II, but eugenic acts clearly could. However, despite the continuity of eugenical ideas in both countries, eugenics never reached as high a number of followers in the years following World War II as it did during the first decades of the twentieth century.

Although the eugenics movement was not identical in Virginia and Veracruz, eugenicists in both states worked to prescribe behavior for women based on eugenic principles. Eugenicists attempted to create and strengthen the connection between ideal womanhood and motherhood through the legislation they supported. In Virginia, the Racial Integrity Act limited women's choice of whom they could reproduce with, while the Sterilization Act worked to restrict poor women with eugenically undesirable traits from reproducing altogether. During the same period, eugenicists in Virginia used rhetoric to encourage middle and upper class women to contribute to strengthening the American race by reproducing white, eugenically fit babies. The state in Veracruz used similar language to ensure that mothers were aware of how to raise their children in a way that best followed eugenic principles. At the same time, Law 362 and Law 121 worked together to grant the state greater control over the behavior of prostitutes, the women considered most dangerous to the Mexican race. Eugenic motherhood was an ideal created by eugenicists in

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<sup>153</sup> Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics*, 192.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Paul Lombardo, "Eugenic Sterilization Laws," *Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory*, accessed December 7, 2015, <http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/html/eugenics/essay&text.html>.

both states that was defined by which women could never attain it. By preventing women deemed eugenically dangerous from reproducing, eugenicists attempted to ensure that the next generation would not be as genetically tainted, and thus would not face the same societal struggles that eugenicists believed were plaguing their own societies. Only by restricting women's behavior could the goal of achieving a eugenic people be achieved.