

Before starting the research process for my capstone paper, I was fairly confident about my research skills. As a history major, I had written my fair share of research papers. I had created an original argument before, and had used primary and secondary sources to support it. A few weeks into my capstone class, however, I realized I had no idea how difficult writing this paper was really going to be. I was overwhelmed by every aspect of the process—from deciding on a topic, to finding sources, to actually writing the paper. Luckily, throughout the ups and downs of researching and writing my paper, I was able to consistently rely on the library for the very best resources.

I had never heard the word eugenics until my first year of college. My mom happened to be listening to NPR public radio while I was in the car with her one weekend, and they reported on a piece of legislation working its way through the North Carolina state house that would compensate victims of forced eugenic sterilization. I was immediately interested, albeit confused. If it affected so many people, and if so many elites in American society had so vehemently believed in it, why was the eugenics movement not a part of standard high school social studies curriculum? Why had I never heard of it before? For my first History capstone course, Hist208, I had to pick a twentieth century social movement and write a twelve-page, semester-long research paper about it. I had originally planned on writing about the KKK, but after I heard the NPR report, I knew I had to change my topic to the eugenics movement.

During the preliminary research I conducted for that paper, I realized that most scholars had focused their work on arguably the most horrific aspect of the eugenics movement: forced sterilization. However, there was another consequence of the eugenics movement that I found equally distressing, which I felt scholars had largely ignored. Consequently, for my first research paper on eugenics, I wrote about how the movement had directly influenced the passage of

federal immigration restriction acts in the 1920s. Despite the focus of my research for Hist208, the involuntary sterilization procedures, and the beliefs that justified it, continued to both interest and disturb me. So three years later, when I was tasked once again with writing a research paper, I knew I had to return to eugenic sterilization.

As my class last semester was the capstone course for my Latin American Studies Certificate, this paper had to be connected to Latin America in some way. Simply by searching for books and scholarly journal articles on Latin American eugenics through the library's database, WorldCat, I found that the movement had a particularly strong following in Mexico. My initial idea was to compare the eugenics movements in both countries, but after speaking with my professor, Dr. Grinnell, I realized that the scope of my topic was too broad. I had to narrow down my topic to fit within the limits of a thirty-five-page research paper.

From the research I had done my freshman year, I knew there was an online database available through the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory that provided copies and images of various documents concerning the eugenics movement in the United States. I had relied on that database when I wrote my first paper, as it provided stirring images of posters used by leading eugenicists to explain the importance of supporting immigration restriction, as well as congressional testimony given by eugenicists in favor of restrictive immigration legislation. I returned to the database last semester to see if any of the material would be relevant to my topic now. By looking through some of those images again, specifically pictures of eugenicists' field notes during their time spent studying a eugenically unfit family, and newspaper articles written about state legislation passed that successfully supported eugenic principles, I found that Virginia was a state that, from what I could see, best embodied the American eugenics movement. The state's sterilization policy was particularly fascinating to me, as its constitutionality would later be

upheld by the Supreme Court in 1927. I now had to find a Mexican state with comparable legislation, and therefore comparable eugenic importance in Mexico.

Now that I had narrowed my topic down in the United States, I once again used the library's database, WorldCat, to search for sterilization legislation in Mexico. I discovered Veracruz, the only state in Latin America to pass legislation that legalized forced sterilization. My research led me to focus on comparing the movements in Virginia and Veracruz. However, after speaking again with Dr. Grinnell about my new topic, she suggested that perhaps it would be easier, given the page limit of the paper, to narrow my topic down once again. Again, I relied on WorldCat to search for books concerning the eugenics movement in both states to aid me in that task. I found an amazing book, *Sexuality, Politics, and Social Control in Virginia, 1920-1945* written by Pippa Holloway, which argued that the movement in Virginia specifically targeted women. I found evidence through articles written by Alexandra Minna Stern, particularly her article "Responsible Mothers and Normal Children: Eugenics, Nationalism, and Welfare in Post-revolutionary Mexico, 1920-1940," that the eugenics movement in Mexico aimed to regulate women's behavior as well. Now, I finally had my topic. I would argue in my paper that the eugenics movement in Virginia and Veracruz sought to prescribe women's behavior based on an idea of their eugenic duty.

I conducted research throughout the process of writing my paper. I found all of my secondary sources first, either through WorldCat, Google Scholar, or simply by finding other, relevant books on the shelf in McKeldin next to the book I was originally searching for. As my topic became narrower, so did my search terms. I went from searching the database using "eugenics in Mexico," to "eugenics in Veracruz," to finally, "women eugenics Veracruz." Narrowing down my search term made it easier to find more relevant secondary sources.

My search for primary sources was significantly more difficult. I found most of my sources for the Virginia movement through the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory database. When I was actually writing my paper, I used newspaper articles written during the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s I discovered through the library's newspaper database to underscore the idea that eugenicists were primarily concerned with controlling women's behavior. I even went to the Library of Congress once to find articles from a Richmond newspaper and a newspaper from Mexico City describing the eugenics movement as it occurred in the 1920s. For my argument about Veracruz, finding primary sources was more challenging. I found my most compelling primary sources, *Doña Eugenesia y Otros Personajes* and *Eugenesia Y Medicina Social* by scouring the bibliographies of journal articles and books. This proved to be the most effective method to find primary sources about eugenics in Veracruz.

During the preliminary stage of conducting my research, I checked out about twenty books from the library, and bookmarked about fifteen journal articles on my laptop. I realized fairly quickly, however, that it was not humanly possible for me to read all the material I wanted to for this paper in the time I had to read it. Luckily, as my topic became more specific, so did my sources. As there was an abundance of primary and secondary sources on the eugenics movement in Virginia, I was able to be more selective about what was and was not most pertinent to my topic. It was fairly easily to eliminate any sources that fell outside my selected time period for my paper, 1910-1945. Then I eliminated anything that did not specifically reference women. I was left with a few key books and about two key journal articles. For Veracruz, because scholars have yet to extensively research the movement in the state, I included any and all sources that referenced Veracruz at all, or anything that spoke to the connection between women and the eugenics movement in Mexico. Finding sources for my argument about

Veracruz was more difficult, but I believe I was effectively able to use the sources available to create and support my argument.

Writing my research paper was an incredibly challenging, but overall rewarding experience. I feel more confident than ever in my research abilities. Should I go to graduate school, I know I can use the same strategies I used to research this paper to research my dissertation. I found primary and secondary sources, written in English and in Spanish, and was able to effectively use them to bolster my argument in my paper. I know which databases are best for journal articles, and how to best find books about my topic in the library. I learned how important it is to look through the bibliographies of secondary sources to find the best primary sources. Finally, I learned how important it is to discuss my research project with someone else at each stage. I talked about my project with my professor, with my friends, and with my family. They all helped me in some way both to focus my research and keep me calm and motivated throughout the process.

Even though my research experience was difficult, I would probably not change anything about it at all. When I discussed my research process with my professors, they all assured me that that my process was similar to how they wrote their own papers and books. In every research project, there are times when researchers at any stage in their academic career feel insecurity, anxiety, and at times, outright terror. Those negative feelings are worth it, however, because of how much pride you feel when you complete a research paper in which the argument is entirely yours.

The library helped me immensely in researching and writing this paper. I could not have completed my paper without the databases provided by the library, and the books I found by searching through the stacks of McKeldin. I do not think the library could be any better at

providing the very best resources for students. I owe the library the quality and depth of my research paper, and I feel lucky to have been able to use it as a resource.