HISTORIES OF RACISM IN SCIENCE, MEDICINE & THE UNIVERSITY

Illustration by Dora Guo, ’23

HSHM 455; ER&M 391
Draft Course Syllabus, Summer 2023, Session A, May 29-June 30
M & W, 1:00-4:15 pm,

Instructor: Professor Daniel Martinez HoSang (daniel.hosang@yale.edu)
Office Hours: M/W, 11:30-12:30 or by appointment

Course guide for conducting research on Eugenics using Yale Libraries developed by Bill Landis, Associate Director for Public Services, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library.

Course Summary

This seminar explores histories of racism within the sciences, medicine and the university. A particular focus will be placed on researching and engaging histories of Eugenics research and advocacy at Yale and other universities in the 20th century.

The course is open to students with a broad range of academic backgrounds and interests and no prior coursework or experience is required. A significant component of the course supports students in conducting original research in Yale University archives on a topic of their choice with support of the instructor and archivists with Yale Library’s Manuscripts & Archives division.
Introduction

In the late 1920s, an organization called the American Eugenics Society (AES), led by a prominent set of Yale faculty and administrators, met regularly at its New Haven headquarters at 185 Church Street. There, leading scholars from across the nation turned to the most advanced research findings in medicine, psychology, economics, sociology, and other disciplines to support their emerging science of “race betterment,” linking the regulation of reproduction to the future health of the nation. Many Eugenicists advocated that involuntary sterilizations of the “unfit,” together with race-based immigration exclusions were necessary to safeguard the well-being of the nation and its white Anglo-Protestant heritage. Their research and findings were eagerly consumed and championed by colleagues in Nazi Germany, as well as within the many dozens of hospitals, prisons and other state institutions where tens of thousands of Americans were involuntarily sterilized in the early 20th century.

The building housing the AES has long been demolished; their research and findings widely discredited. But the influence and legacy of their work in the university and the academic disciplines persists, often in subtle ways.

The impact and assumptions of Eugenics with its focus on cultural, intellectual and hereditary hierarchies and its disavowals of domination and power, continues to shape the academic disciplines today. Celebrations of “racial colorblindness,” race neutrality, and even diversity have not displaced these inheritances. These traditions shape research designs in sociology and political science. They constitute the interpretive practices and organization of art history, literary studies, musicology and other humanistic fields. They influence the periodization and privileged regions of study within history, geography, and anthropology. They shape the trajectory of biomedical research, and the organization of subfields and research paradigms in psychology and economics.

Yet an important body of scholarship and critique have contested these traditions, and reimagined the production of knowledge outside of these parochial constraints.

A. Seminar Description

This seminar, intended for students from all disciplines and majors, examines how Eugenics and other academic discourses have shaped the university and the academic disciplines. The texts and themes highlight both the emergence of Eugenics across nearly every academic discipline during their formative periods.
We will make special use of the archives held within Yale Libraries of key figures in the American Eugenics Society, including economist Irving Fisher, geographer Ellsworth Huntington, medical school dean Milton Winternitz, and many others.

B. Readings and required text

As the syllabus indicates, most of the weekly readings will be drawn from a combination of scholarly articles and book chapters, with some supplementary audio and video texts. One book is required for purchase:


C. Assignments (All of the assignments below must be completed in order to pass the course).

1. **WEEKLY READING RESPONSE PAPERS.** Each week students will submit a 1-2 page response paper synthesizing the key insights and questions from the readings. The discussion prompts will be provided for each week—they will often be oriented towards students’ respective disciplines and objects of study. These papers should be submitted via Canvas by 12 PM every Monday, with the exception of Week 1. **(40% of final grade).**

2. **RESEARCH PAPER.** Students will produce an original paper for the seminar, 7-10 pages in length, based on archival research conducted in Yale Special Collections or a related archive. Collaborative projects are welcome. Details will be provided during the first seminar meeting and during individual meetings with the instructor. **(40% of final grade).**

3. **PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE.** Attendance is taken every class; advanced reading and participation are critical. Please notify the instructor in advance if you anticipate missing a class meeting. **(20% of final grade).**

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**UNIT ONE: THE EMERGENCE OF THE Eugenic Worldview**

*In this unit we will be examining the foundational role of Eugenics in the University and the academic disciplines, including an extended study of Eugenics research at Yale.*

**1A: Why are we here? On Eugenics, racial domination, and the academic disciplines (5/29)**
As this course collaboratively builds on research done by Yale students last year, in our first week, we will engage some of the initial findings of this team about the history of Eugenics research done by Yale faculty, and its ongoing influence on the academic disciplines and the institution.

Please read/listen in advance:

- Watch presentations of the “Afterlives of Eugenics at Yale” research project at the “Legacies of Eugenics in New England” Conference, hosted by the Hutchins Center at Harvard, and part of the From Small Beginnings international project that addresses the shadows of Eugenics in different regions of the world.
  - Part I (starts at 1 hour, 55 minutes)-30 minutes long
  - Part II (Begins at 2 hours, 9 mins)-30 minutes long

1B, Racism, Science and Medical Education (5/31).

For this class, we will read a range of pieces by advocates of Eugenics centered on the 1921 International Congress of Eugenics at the American Museum of Natural History. The Conference would lead to the creation of the American Eugenics Society, whose founding chair, Yale’s Irving Fisher, attended the 1921 conference. We will also read several chapters from a recent book about race, slavery, and medical education.

Readings:

- **Harry Laughlin.** “The second International Exhibition of Eugenics held September 22 to October 22, 1921, in connection with the Second International Congress of Eugenics in the American Museum of Natural History.” New York. Vol. 1. Williams & Wilkins, 1923. Selections. Available [here](#). Please read from the Preface to page 60 (many parts can be skimmed) detailing the exhibits at the Congress. Then choose one of the exhibits (from pages 66 to 166) to analyze in closer detail.

Watch/Listen

2A: Eugenics at Yale (6/5)--Meet at Gates Special Collections Classroom in Sterling Library. (Map to the classroom is [here](#)).

![Illustration by Dora Guo](#)

In this session we will meet at Sterling Library with Bill Landis, Associate Director for Public Services, Manuscripts and Archives at Sterling Library. We’ll get an overview of the collections held by Yale Libraries that relate to Eugenics research in the 20th century, learn how to access those collections, and spend time with a selection of these materials.

**Readings:**


**2B: Anti-Eugenics Projects and Higher Education (6/7)**

*Reading:*

● **Angela Saini**, *Superior: The Return of Race Science* (Beacon, 2019). Selections


*Listening:*

● Please listen to one episode of your choice from "*The Eugenics Podcast*" hosted by Professor Marius Turda. The interviews cover a wide range of topics, and I hope they will help you think about both your research interests for the class and the question of how this research gets presented to the public. You’ll do a short pair/share with a classmate to share what you listened and learned.

● Then please listen to this podcast (about 25 minutes) from the *LA Times* regarding histories of forced sterilizations in California and efforts at reparations, which we’ll discuss in small groups.

● **Toni Morrison**, “A Humanist View.” Speech delivered at Portland State University, May 1975, here. Or listen to Morrison deliver the speech here (starts at 7:15 and listen through 43:15).

*Watch in class:*

● Selections from *A Dangerous Idea: Eugenics, Genetics and the American Dream* (2018)
3A: Sterilization and Reproductive Justice (6/12)

- Please read the SisterSong definition of Reproductive Justice here.

In class we will view selections from No Más Bebés (2015, Renee Tajima-Peña, Virginia Espino).

3B: Incarceration & institutionalization (6/14)

Readings:

In class we will view selections from Belly of the Beast (2020, Erika Cohn).

4A: Child Development, Intelligence, and Education (6/19)

Readings:
- Marilyn Brookwood, The Orphans of Davenport: Eugenics, the Great Depression, and the War over Children’s Intelligence Hardcover (Liveright, 2021)-Chapter 4: “From a Dog You Do Not Get a Cat.” (Canvas)
- Clyde Chitty, Eugenics, Race, and Intelligence in Education. (Continuum International Pub Group, 2007). “The Durability of Eugenics Theories” and “Epilogue.” (Canvas)

4B: Genomics, Medicine and the Natural Sciences (6/21)

Readings:

- Al Jazeera, “CRISPR: What is the future of gene editing” 7 minutes Available here. (A good explainer about gene editing and CRISPR).
- Conversation between Natalie Koefler and Angela Saini in this video (Starts at 1:06:30 and ends at 1:36:00). (Discusses the relationship between gene editing, genomics research, and the continuity of Eugenical ideas in contemporary life science research).

5A: Indigenous & Anti-Colonial Scholarship (6/26)

Readings:


Watch selections in class:

5B: Where Do We Go From Here? (6/28)
Readings:


Other Course Policies

1. **CLASSROOM CONDUCT & CLIMATE.** We are all accountable to create a climate of mutual respect and engagement in the classroom. While differences of opinion, perspective and analysis are important and will be encouraged, common courtesy as well as University policy prohibit personal attacks and discriminatory conduct.

2. **ATTENDANCE.** You are expected to arrive on time and stay for the entire class (whether in person or Zoom) and participate fully in class discussions. Please contact me in advance to request accommodation for any anticipated absences. If illness or concerns about Covid exposure require you to miss class, please contact me for accommodations and support.

3. **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY.** All work submitted in this course must be your own and produced exclusively for this course. The use of sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly acknowledged and documented. Penalties for plagiarism can include a failing grade for the course. Guidelines on proper citation practices and avoiding plagiarism can be found here: http://writing.yalecollege.yale.edu/advice-students/using-sources/ and here: http://ctl.yale.edu/writing/using-sources/understanding-and-avoiding-plagiarism/what-plagiarism.

4. **ACCESSIBILITY.** Your success in this class is important to me. We will all need accommodations because we all learn differently. If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or that form barriers to your inclusion, please let me know as soon as possible. Together we’ll develop strategies that can enable you to succeed in the course. I encourage you to visit Student Accessibility Services to determine how you could improve your learning as well. If you need official accommodations, you have a right to have these met. The SAS is located at 35 Broadway, Room 222 and can be reached at 203-432-2324.

5. **SYLLABUS CHANGES:** Changes to the syllabus may be made during the term and will be announced in class and on Canvas.

6. **LATE SUBMISSION POLICY:** Generally, a letter grade will be deducted for any assignments submitted after the due date.

7. **DIGITAL RESOURCES:** Relevant class materials posted on Canvas are indicated. Students are expected to check the course site regularly.