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Course Summary

This seminar explores histories of racism within the sciences, medicine and the university, with a particular focus on histories of Eugenics research and advocacy at Yale. A highlight of the course will be trips to view archival collections on campus including those at the Medical Historical Library, Sterling Memorial Library, the Yale Peabody Museum as well as a trip to the Connecticut Valley Hospital cemetery in Middletown, CT.

The course is open to students with a broad range of academic backgrounds and interests. No prior coursework or experience on the topic is assumed or required. Students will have the opportunity to conduct original research in Yale University archives on a topic of their choice with support of the instructor and archivists with the Manuscripts & Archives division.

Students in the course will also be invited to participate in the ongoing work of the Anti-Eugenics Collective at Yale (AECY), whose website can be viewed here. This group of students, K-12 educators, and other scholars conducts collaborative research, collective inquiry, and public education to realize the “collective creation of an equitable and healthy world for all.”
Background

In the late 1920s, an organization called the **American Eugenics Society** (AES), led by a prominent set of Yale faculty and administrators, established its national headquarters on the New Haven Green 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 for involuntary sterilizations of the “unfit,” together with race-based immigration exclusions. 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.

Yet an important body of scholarship and critique, built from social movement practices, has 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, and engages with the histories of racism in medicine and the sciences more broadly. Many of the assignments and course activities will be collaborative and public facing, as we aspire to use our energy and labor from the seminar to contribute to broader public knowledge and collective action.
As a Yale Summer Session Class, we are operating on a compressed timeline, which makes class attendance and engagement particularly important. Please see the student handbook for Summer Session here for additional requirements and expectations.

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 from the Yale bookstore or another book seller:


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

1. **WEEKLY ACTIVATION ASSIGNMENTS.** During our first seminar meeting each week on Monday, you will receive a short assignment that will be due the following Monday. The assignment will generally invite you to *apply* some dimension of the materials engaged in the class to a broader context. Several of the assignments will involve contributions to the Anti-Eugenics Collective at Yale website. (40% of final grade).

2. **CAPSTONE ASSIGNMENT.** The capstone assignment for the seminar will invite you to produce a paper, roughly 5-7 pages in length, in which you take an object, event, organization, or figure associated with the history of Eugenics or racism in sciences and medicine at Yale, and propose a new public-facing framing and explanation that situates it for a broader public audience. This project will be done in several stages introduced each week. A list of potential topics will be provided during the first class meeting. Collaborative projects are welcome. Details will be provided during the first seminar meeting and during individual meetings with the instructor. You can view a list of possible topics here. (40% of final grade).

3. **PARTICIPATION, AFTER CLASS POSTING, AND ATTENDANCE.** Attendance is taken every class; advanced reading and participation are critical. There will be regular in class writing, research and collaboration activities that will also be required, including a Canvas posting after every class meeting. Please notify the instructor in advance if you anticipate missing a class meeting. (20% of final grade).

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

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**1A: Why are we here? On Eugenics and histories of racism in science, medicine and the academic disciplines (5/27)**

As this course collaboratively builds on research done by Yale students who have completed similar projects, in our first week, we will engage some of the initial findings of this team about the history of Eugenics research and scientific racism done by Yale faculty, and its ongoing influence on the academic disciplines and the institution.

- After class discussion post (about 250 words) on Canvas: “What brings you to this class? What questions would you like to explore and answer? What work do you want this class to do for you?” Post on Canvas by 5/31 @10 AM.

**1B, Eugenics, Science & Knowledge Production in the Modern University (5/29)**

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.

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:**

1. How do the primary documents and secondary scholarship (Isenberg, Farber and DeSalle) challenge the dominant assumptions about Eugenics in the history of the U.S.?
2. What connections do you see between the claims Eugenicists were making in the 1920s and the contemporary discourse and debates about race, reproduction, public policy, and science?
3. How might the American Museum of Natural History attempt to explain its role to Museum visitors today in legitimating the American Eugenics movement? What suggestions would you have for their curators?

**Readings:**

- **Primary documents: Eugenicists in their own words:**


● **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. Available [here](#). This is the official program for the 1921 International Eugenics Conference. Please read the first 60 pages to get a sense of how the organizers and presenters framed and articulated their work. Then please select one of the exhibits/presentations listed in the latter half of the document to read in more detail.

**B. Situating the Eugenics movement in the history of late 19th and early 20th century US racial formation:**


**C. Eugenics research and the role of biologists and geneticists:**


*Watch/Listen as optional alternative to DeSalle article above:*

2A: Eugenic Knowledge Production at Yale and (6/3)

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. This week we are engaging the scholarship on Eugenics research and advocacy at Yale. What new insights did this work produce for you the ways Yale contributed to the broader American Eugenics movement?

2. In week one we read about challenges facing the Eugenics movement in the early 1920s as well as strategies pursued by Eugenics advocates to overcome those challenges? How do you see those challenges and strategies operating in today’s readings?

3. What questions are you left with after engaging today’s texts?

In the second part of this session, we will meet at the Beinecke Library with Bill Landis, Education Program Director, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript 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. Please see this handout for a list of materials we will be seeing on Monday.

Readings/Watch:

● John Doyle, "Measuring "Problems of Human Behavior": The Eugenic Origins of Yale's Institute of Psychology, 1921-1929" (2014). MSSA Kaplan Prize for Yale History. Available here (This undergraduate senior essay done by a Yale History of Science and Medicine student is one of the first pieces of original research done on the institutional history of Eugenics at Yale).


● Select one of three undergraduate senior essays to read below. All of the essays were done by members of the Anti-Eugenics Collective at Yale based on archival research conducted at Yale and other collections:
• **Watch:** Selections from, “It Also Happened Here: Eugenics and Its Afterlives at Yale” public event sponsored by the Anti-Eugenics Collective at Yale and recorded May 1, 2023. Watch [here](#) beginning at 18:20 through the end of the presentation at 38:20. (Collaborative presentation by Guo, Laufenberg and Magliato based on their presentations).

**Discussion post question (post by Weds at 10 AM):** Visits to the archive often raise specific research questions about particular histories, figures, forces, concepts and/or events. In this post of about 250 words, please reply to these two questions:

1. Select one document (or group of documents) that you viewed in the archives today. Describe what the document is and how it relates to one or more of the themes you have encountered in course readings so far. Thus, you are being asked to connect a reading from the course thus far to a document you viewed in the visit to the archive on Monday.

2. Describe a question that has emerged for you based on the same archival document. After viewing this document(s), what do you want to learn more about?

**2B: “Intelligence,” Measurement and Scientific Technology (6/5)**

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS**

(1) How do the articles this week by Croizet, Ewen and Ewen, and DuBois give you context to understand the objects from the Peabody viewed in seminar on Wednesday?

(2) After completing the readings for today, what status do you think cognitive and psychometric testing have in educational systems today? Should they be eliminated altogether? Revised or limited in some way? Continued in the same fashion?

(3) What questions are you left with after engaging today’s texts and viewing the objects?

Please meet at the classroom by 1pm and then we will walk together to ESC> In this session we will meet for the entire seminar at ESC 100 located at 21 Sachem Street (see map [here](#)) with Alexi Baker, PhD, Division of the History of Science and Technology, Yale Peabody Museum. The visit will focus in particular on a series of scientific research instruments. Please read the background [here](#) on the objects we will be viewing.

the critiques such tests met from early Black psychologists). Available on Canvas under ‘Files.’

- **Stuart Ewen** and **Elizabeth Ewen**, “Morons in Our Midst” in *Typecasting: On the Arts and Sciences of Human Inequality* (Seven Stories Press, 2008). (Provides important cultural, historic, and political context to the rise of categorization, testing and Eugenics in the 1920s). Available on Canvas.


- **W.E.B. DuBois**."Race Intelligence." *The Crisis*, v.20, n.3 (July 1920). Available here. (This 1920 editorial in the main journal of the NAACP provides a stinging critique of the racist underpinnings of early intelligence tests, confounding the claim that ‘no-one knew any better.’)

- Background here on the objects we will be viewing.

Discussion post question (post by Friday at 10 AM):

How did the articles this week by Croizet, Ewen and Ewen, and DuBois give you context to understand the objects from the Peabody viewed in seminar on Wednesday? That is, what insights did you get about the objects from the reading(s) that you would not have had if you had viewed the objects without the readings?

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS**

(1) What new insights do you get when you put the readings by Marks, Morrison, and Briggs together that you would not get by reading them alone?

(2) How does the reading by Marks help you to better understand and situate the visits to the archives last week?

(3) What connections do you see between DuBois’s critique of intelligence testing from Week 2 and Morrison’s essay read for today?

(4) How might Morrison counsel us to approach our work in the archives around histories of Eugenics?

3A: “Science,” knowledge production, and race (6/10)

● Jonathan Marks, *Is Science Racist?*, Chapters 1 and 2.

● 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).

**Discussion post question (post by Wednesday at 10 AM):**

How has your understanding of the word ‘science’ changed after completing the reading and discussion from today? What ideas or assumptions did you have about the term that have shifted in light of these texts and exchanges?

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**3B: Histories of Race and Inequality in Medicine (6/12)**

For this seminar meeting we will meet with Melissa Graffe, PhD, John R. Bumstead Librarian for Medical History, Head of the Medical Historical Library. We will be meeting at the Medical Historical Library (333 Cedar Street) in the Cushing Center Conference Room. (You can read more about the history of the Cushing Center here). We will have a chance to engage some of the artifacts in the Library’s collection related to the history of Eugenics and scientific racism at Yale and beyond.

**Readings:**


**Discussion post question (post by Friday at 10 AM):**

How did the readings this week by Willoughby and Marks give you context to understand the objects from the Medical History Library viewed in seminar on Wednesday? That is, what insights did you get about the objects from the reading(s) that you would not have had if you had viewed the objects without the readings?

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**4A: Reproductive Regulation, Sterilization, and Justice (6/17)**

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS**

(1) What connections do you see between the sterilizations described in the readings for today and the earlier history of Eugenic policy?
(2) The sterilizations we are reading about for today took place in a range of settings–ICE detention facilities, California prisons, public hospitals, and by the Indian Health Services. What connections can you make between these sites?

(3) How does the reproductive justice work of SisterSong relate to the history of involuntary sterilizations?

Readings:


- Please read the SisterSong definition of Reproductive Justice [here](#).


- Listen to this podcast (about 50 minutes) from the KQED public radio regarding histories of forced sterilizations in California and efforts at reparations, including today's guest speaker Stacy Diaz Cordova.

- In class guest speaker: **Stacy Diaz Cordova** (Via Zoom), niece of one of the victims of involuntary sterilization in California in the 20th century, will describe efforts at repair and reparation.

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

4B: Policing Black Motherhood (6/19)

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What similarities and differences do you see between the ways that reproduction was regulated by the Eugenicists in the early 20th century to the episodes described in the pieces by Villarosa, Roberts and Johnson?

- How can you apply the framework of reproductive justice framework described by Roberts to her discussion of the prosecution of Black mothers?


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

● We will spend the second part of class at Manuscripts and Archives.

5A: (6/24) Working Day in the Archives

For this class meeting, students will work for the entire period with one of the archival collections in either Manuscripts and Archives, the Beinecke Library, or the Medical Historical Library. Details to be provided in class.

Readings:
● Marks, Is Science Racist? Chapter 5.

5B: (6/28) Impossible Justice: Memory & History at the Connecticut Valley Hospital Cemetery

For this class meeting, we will be taking a field trip to the Connecticut Valley Hospital Cemetery in Middletown. Indigent patients at what was formerly called the Connecticut General Hospital for the Insane were buried there from the facility’s founding in 1878 until 1957, encompassing nearly 1700 burials. At least two dozen (and likely more) documented Eugenic sterilizations took place at the hospital during this period. Criteria for admitting patients to the hospital included “insane immigrants, long-lived lunatics, crazed alcoholics, the senile, and almshouse denizens” among the "insane" reflecting the dominant categories used by Eugenicists.

Readings: The readings for this meeting are quite short (about 30 pages total) and consist primarily of online blog essays detailing different aspects of the Connecticut Valley Hospital and a related facility in Norwich, CT. There is also a podcast featuring Kaitlyn Oberndorfer, a Hartford based teacher and public historian about efforts to document these histories, and a high school lesson plan about the cemetery, its history, and the work of public memory co-authored with a student.

It is important that you complete all of these readings/listening before we leave for the trip, as they will provide important context for our time at the cemetery.
Also, please remember to have your slide ready to present to the class that summarizes your final capstone project proposal. We’ll share these slides in our regular classroom when we return from the field trip.

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Optional readings on race and genomics (formerly on syllabus for Week 4).

- **Watch**: Al Jazeera, “CRISPR: What is the future of gene editing” 7 minutes Available here. (A good explainer about gene editing and CRISPR).
- **Watch Conversation between Natalie Koehler 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).
Optional readings on Eugenics, Racism and the Body

- **Watch**: “Revisioning Fitness”-Video produced by Into the Light initiative, University of Guelph.
- **Listen**: Maintenance Phase’s podcast episode on the President’s Physical Fitness Test: Available [here](#).
- **Mary Coffey**, American Adonis: A Natural History of the “Average American” (Man), 1921-1935.

Capstone projects due July 1 via email.

Other Course Policies

1. **CLASSROOM CONDUCT & CLIMATE.** We are all accountable to create a climate of mutual respect and engagement in the classroom. We aspire to build a culture in which differences of opinion, perspective and analysis are encouraged and co-exist with a commitment to mutual respect, listening, and non-discrimination.

2. **ATTENDANCE.** Our classes will be most engaging and productive when everyone arrives on time, stays for the entire class, and balances participation and listening. 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. Guidelines on proper citation practices and avoiding plagiarism can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

4. **ACCESSIBILITY.** Your success in this class is important to me, and across the seminar more broadly we will reflect on issues of ableism, accessibility, and universal design. 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. **CANVAS/DIGITAL RESOURCES**: Relevant class materials posted on Canvas are indicated. Please check the Canvas site regularly and make sure it is linked to your email so that you will be notified of announcements and updates.