A National Threat: Eugenic Perspectives on Mexican Immigrant Labor in the United States During the Great Depression

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- Abstract -
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This thesis explores developments that occurred in American eugenics during the late 1920s. Specifically, through looking at eugenic and medical literature, this research explores the shift in focus towards financial issues in American eugenics during the Great Depression. Like a great deal of American society, the American eugenics community came to frame many of their arguments through the lens of financial issues. At the same time, Mexican immigrants were the largest group of racialized Others entering the United States. Eugenicists aimed their new focus towards Mexican immigration and a great deal of eugenics literature highlighted how much Mexican immigration purportedly cost the white American public. In exploring how Mexican-American racial identities were constructed and re-framed by eugenicists and other members of the scientific community during the Great Depression, this thesis also considers the motivation for these developments and in doing so address a silence within existent historical literature on American eugenics.

- Acknowledgements and Dedication -

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- Introduction -
New Concerns in American Eugenics:
Financial Costs of Immigration

In the July 1929 edition of *Eugenics: Biological and Medical Journal of Race Betterment*, prominent eugenicist Henry Pratt Fairchild commented on the cost of immigrants to the American public:

> Our prisons, almshouses, insane asylums, and homes for the feebleminded are overflowing with society's rejects. The vast funds spent for charity are accused of intensifying the very evils they seek to relieve. They prevent the elimination of socially inadequate types by the ruthless process of evolutionary selection.[1]

In the months leading up to and during the Great Depression in the United States, eugenicists increasingly viewed traditional eugenic concerns of heredity and race through a financial lens. The new trend in eugenic writing to highlight the economy often meant that in addition to discussing miscegenation, eugenicists came to focus on the various ways that immigration cost the United States and its citizen's money. While immigration had always been a topic of interest and concern for American eugenicists, as part of the new trend to frame eugenic topics with economic problems, eugenicists linked established anxieties about social deterioration to economic concerns about immigration. Like many eugenicists during this period,

[1] Henry Pratt Fairchild, "Should they get more attention?," *Eugenics: Biological and Medical Journal of Race Betterment*, Vol. 2, No. 7 (July 1929): 19. Fairchild was a sociology professor at Yale and NYU, a charter member of the American Eugenics Society, president of the Peoples League for Economic Security, president of Planned Parenthood from 1939-48, and president of the American Sociological Society in 1936.

Fairchild blamed failing social services and overspending of public money on immigration in order to advance his eugenic argument. My thesis explores the historical contexts of statements like Fairchild's that blamed the economic depression on American immigrants and called for restricting immigration for the eugenic and economic prosperity of the nation. I am interested in the role that immigration played in the eugenics community during the transitional years of the Great Depression, including the months preceding the dramatic stock market crash in October 1929, and how and why eugenicists utilized economic anxieties. Furthermore, I am interested in how Mexicans' racial characteristics were re-framed by eugenicists as incompatible with the welfare of the United States during the Great Depression. I focus on Mexican immigration to the American Southwest because eugenicists during this period singled out Mexican immigration for critique in their literature and congressional lobbying.

Eugenics was a science that focused on improving the inborn characteristics of a race by regulating human breeding. Rooted in the understanding that many characteristics, (usually those attributed to race) such as intelligence, criminality, and feeblemindedness, were passed unchanged from generation to generation, the eugenics movement aimed to direct human evolution by controlling procreation. Eugenics emerged in the United Kingdom during the late nineteenth century and quickly moved to the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century, and was based on beliefs in a racial hierarchy. Eugenicists believed that the white race was the most evolved of all the races and that procreating with people situated lower on the racial hierarchy would result in an evolutionary decline.

Immigration was a topic in American Eugenics discourse since the formation of an organized eugenics movement at the end of the nineteenth century. Before the Great Depression, there were two predominant eugenic interests in immigration. First, eugenicists focused on the dangers of miscegenation that would inevitably result from diverse races entering the United States. Eugenicists argued that immigration could undermine a eugenically fit population by permitting racially inferior immigrants to enter the United States, interbreed with superior races, and dilute the gene pool. Second, eugenicists also considered how specific kinds of immigration could be used to maintain and even enhance the racial character of the United States by allowing racial elites to naturalize and subsequently disseminate their superior congenital traits. Many eugenicists maintained that encouraging immigration from Nordic countries, where citizens were believed to be genetically superior in the same way as white Americans, would result in an increase of genetically superior American citizens. Furthermore, eugenic interest in immigration prior to the Great Depression was fairly evenly distributed amongst all immigrant groups in the United States. However, changes in the national origins of migrants entering the United States, that came as a result of the 1924 Immigration Act that significantly reduced immigration from most countries except those in the Western Hemisphere, as well as the shifting socio-economic climate associated with the Great Depression, resulted in increased attention on Mexican immigration from the eugenics community in the mid 1920s. While traditional eugenic issues of miscegenation and degeneration continued to circulate, in the early years of the Depression the eugenics community also began to focus on the financial cost of

Mexican immigration to the American public. By discussing immigration in economic terms, some eugenicists made use of pervasive cultural concerns prominent during the economic recession in order to advance their position of further restricting the entry of radicalized Others, this time Mexicans, into the United States. Similar to Fairchild's framing of immigration as a social and economic problem, eugenicists constructed Mexican immigration as both a eugenic and economic concern. Eugenicists tied concerns about miscegenation and racial degeneration to the financial cost of Mexicans to the white, American public.

Eugenicists came to focus on Mexican immigration in the 1920's for a number of reasons. During the first three decades of the twentieth century the American Southwest saw increasing numbers of Mexican migrants crossing the border to work. Beneficial to both Mexican laborers and the American agriculture and construction industries, the demand for laborers in the United States provided Mexicans with much needed employment opportunities while Mexicans filled unskilled labor positions for lower wages than American citizens, or any other immigrant group, were willing to accept. However, the onset of the Great Depression put an end to the reluctant acceptance Mexican laborers had been granted. For many Americans, the huge demand for laborers during the prosperous years of the 1920s justified the otherwise problematic presence of Mexicans. However, as jobs became scarce, Mexican immigrants were increasingly framed as

competition for jobs and a drain on overburdened public services such as health care.[2]

During the Great Depression, eugenicists in the American Southwest found concerns about money and stability to be useful topics for gaining the attention and support of the white American-born public. Twentyfive percent of all workers and 37 percent of all non-farm workers were completely out of work in the United States, making unemployment and its associated concerns a prominent anxiety for many Americans.[3] Additionally, many Americans were underemployed and depended on rapidly disappearing savings. Even those who managed to remain employed during the Depression were affected by food shortages, disease outbreaks, and failing social services. Eugenicists capitalized on the cultural anxieties specific to the Great Depression and aligned their interests in miscegenation and racial deterioration with economic concerns about failing public services and joblessness. Professional eugenicists lobbied and influenced legislation and were motivated to appeal to the general public's sensibilities in order to garner their support. While it is not unusual for socio-political movements to construct specific campaigns for particular audiences, for the most part historians have not discussed how eugenicists shifted their arguments towards financial topics during the Great Depression or considered the motivation for the shift in focus. Developments in American eugenics during the Great Depression illuminate the connections between politics and science, and how scientific perspectives are not

[2] Natalia Molina, *Fit to be Citizens? Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1897-1939* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2006), 116.
[3] Gene Smiley, "The Great Depression," *The Concise Encyclopedia of Economics*, http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/GreatDepression.html

neutral and unbiased, but rather are intimately connected to social, cultural, and political processes. Throughout my thesis, I focus on historical documents from the scientific community in order to demonstrate how politics can influence scientific agendas. Eugenic science aligned itself with popular opinions outside of the scientific community to attract new members and secure the future of eugenics in the United States. By focusing on scientific literature rather than literature from the popular press, I provide numerous examples that contest the idea that science is objective and separate from culture, and demonstrate that science is often intimately connected to the wider society.

In chapter one, I begin my thesis by discussing some of the historical scholarship on eugenics. I argue that my thesis addresses a silence within the existent literature in its consideration of the motives for the shift in American eugenics towards economic and financial issues and how Mexican-American racial identities were reframed during this period. Later in chapter one, I discuss how Mexicans were racialized in the American Southwest during the Great Depression. Eugenics and the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) worked together to construct and perpetuate ideas about the racial characteristics of Mexican immigrants and in turn these constructions were used in arguments opposing Mexican immigration. While the USPHS and eugenicists popularized and effectively institutionalized negative understandings about Mexicans in America, many of the core ideas about the racial inferiority of Mexicans had been popular in the United States since before the Mexican-American War in the mid-nineteenth century. I consider how and why notions about Mexican racial identities that had been

popular for decades were re-envisioned by eugenicists as fundamentally incompatible with American life during the late 1920s. In chapter two, I provide some history of American eugenics, specifically, the rise of eugenics in the United Kingdom and the transition to the United States in the early twentieth century. I consider how eugenic science developed in the American context and the possible reasons why American eugenics became distinct from its roots in the United Kingdom. In order to highlight the rapid transition to economic issues in the eugenic community at the onset of the Great Depression, I consider the role that immigration played in eugenics prior to the late 1920s before financial issues came to dominate American eugenics discourse. In chapter three, I discuss early twentieth century Mexican labor in America. Specifically, I look at factors that caused Mexicans to immigrate to the United States and eugenic reactions to the mass migration. In chapter four, I explore eugenic interests in Mexican immigration during the Depression years. Specifically, how eugenicists broadened their traditional focus from concerns about racial degeneration to include interests in financial concerns during the economic crisis. My thesis aims to explore how eugenicists effectively aligned their own interests in reducing populations of racialized Others in the United States with prominent national concerns associated with the failing economy during the Great Depression.

While many of the ideas about Mexican racial characteristics were the same both before and during the Great Depression, eugenic literature positioned these characteristics to have new relevance in the late 1920s. As defined by eugenicists, Mexican racial attributes did not change between the early and late 1920s. Mexicans

were believed to be lower on the racial hierarchy and a potential threat to the white race. However, despite a static understanding about Mexicans, the acceptance that Mexicans experienced in the United States changed at the onset of the Great Depression. Throughout my thesis, I am interested in considering how the eugenics community in the late 1920s re-envisioned what it meant to be Mexican-American.

- Chapter One -
Eugenic Literature and Mexican Americans

Explanation of Thesis Historical Sources

A number of peer reviewed journals that focused on eugenics circulated in the United States during the first three decades of the twentieth century. A few of the more popular journals included: *Annals of Eugenics Journal*, published between 1925 and 1954, *Genetics*, first published in 1916, *Eugenics: Biological and Medical Journal of Race Betterment*, published from October 1928 to 1931, and *Eugenical News*, published between 1916 and 1938. Eugenicists also published their own articles and books independently. Both Charles Davenport and Harry Laughlin, two of the leading American eugenicists in the 1920s, published a number of books and articles independently. The popular press also published articles written by eugenicists and/or articles exhibiting eugenic perspectives. *Eugenics: Biological and Medical Journal of Race Betterment* and *Eugenical News* were two journals that focused on the eugenic aspects of immigration and both journals contributed to the

debate about restricting Mexican immigration and therefore provide insight into the eugenic perspective on these topics.

Eugenics was the official monthly journal of the American Eugenics Society (AES) and articles on immigration in *Eugenics* are overwhelmingly negative and focus predominantly on Mexican migrants. Members of the AES received a copy of *Eugenics* monthly as a prerequisite of membership. According to a column in *Eugenical News*, "*Eugenics* publishes articles dealing principally with eugenical education, with molding public opinion along eugenical lines, encouraging eugenical legislation and the practical application of eugenical principals."[4] Given their goals outside of the eugenics community, it is likely that *Eugenics* was widely disseminated and played a key role in popularizing eugenic ideology. Leading members of the AES and other prominent American Eugenicists frequently published in *Eugenics* and articles reflect the eugenics community's more conservative, though popular, ideas.[5] Furthermore, *Eugenics* functioned partly as a

[4] Senator Reed, "Immigration," *Eugenical News*, Vol. 2, No. 6 (June 1929): 82.

[5] Charles M. Goethe, the founder of the California branch of the AES and president of the Eugenics Research Association from 1936-1937, published his famous, "The Influx of Mexican Amerinds" in *Eugenics* in 1929. The following Eugenicists also published in *Eugenics: Biological and Medical Journal of Race Betterment* between 1929 and 1931: Robert DeCourcey Ward contributed to the monthly column on immigration in *Eugenics.* Ward was a member of both the AES and the Eugenics Research Association, and was also a founder of the Immigration Restriction League. Albert Johnson, Congressman form the third district of Washington from 1913 – 1935 and president of the Eugenics Research Association in 1923. Henry Pratt Fairchild, named Special Immigration Agent for the U.S. Department of Labor in 1923 and charter member of the AES. Charles Davenport, member of the original founding Committee of the Eugenics Committee, Vice-Chairman of the Eugenics Committee of the U.S. 1923-26, Chairman of the AES committee on Research Problems in Eugenics and on the AES Board of Directors from 1926-1930. Samuel Jackson Holmes, on the advisory council of the AES 1923-1935, and on the AES Board of Directors, 1935-1940. Arles Hrdlicka was a member of the AES Sub-Committee on Anthropometry and on the Advisory Council 1923-1935. Thomas Nixon Carver was on the AES Advisory Council 1925-1935. Irving Fisher was President of the Eugenics research Association in 1920, and President of the AES 1923-1926, President of the Third International Congress of Eugenics, and Chairman of the Board of Scientific Directors of the Eugenics Record Office. William McDougall was on the Advisory Council of the AES from 1923-1935. Frank Hankins was on the AES Board of Directors in 1940.

medical journal and was likely read by scientific Eugenicists. *Eugenics* published reviews of medical books such as, *Infant Mortality and its Causes* written by physician Dr. Woodburry,[6] and *Organic Inheritance in Man*, a series of lectures delivered to members of the medical profession at Birmingham University.[7] Reviews of books written by physicians indicate that the journal was at least partly intended for the medical community.

Like *Eugenics*, *Eugenical News* also weighed in on the immigration debate. *Eugenical News* was published by the Eugenics Research Association (ERA) and the Galton Society. It was the official publication of the ERA as well as the AES before the AES began publishing their own journal, *Eugenics: Biological and Medical Journal of Race Betterment*. Articles in *Eugenical News* largely focused on the results of eugenics research, including, "facts and records of eugenical work and events" and "…first-hand eugenical researches."[8] *Eugenical News* also published the scientific papers given monthly at the Galton Society.[9] The Galton Society was also known as the Eugenics Education Society, the Eugenics Society, and later the Galton Institute, and was the first and most prominent eugenics organization in England. Eugenic sympathizers and/or those outside of the medical community were more likely to read a publication like *Eugenical News,* which focused on the socio-political aspects of Eugenics. Articles reported on topics such as immigration identification cards and population statistics, issues likely more engaging to the non-medical public than

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All biographical information of AES members from Barry Alan Mehler, "A History of the American Eugenics Society, 1921-1940," (PhD diss., University of Illinois,1988).
[6] Samuel J. Holems, "Books and Bibliography," *Eugenics*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (March 1929): 38.
[7] Samuel J. Holems, "Books and Bibliography," *Eugenics*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (March 1929): 39.
[8] Senator Reed, "Immigration" *Eugenical News*, Vol. 2, No. 6 (June 1929): 82.
[9] Senator Reed, "Immigration" *Eugenical News*, Vol. 2, No. 6 (June 1929): 82.

topics found in *Eugenics*. Unlike *Eugenics*, *Eugenical News* tended to focus more broadly on the problems with immigration as a practice, rather than targeting Mexican migrants. However, like *Eugenics*, *Eugenical News* is overwhelming negative about the dangers of immigration. These two journals, along with publications by the American Eugenics Association and reports from eugenic organizations are my main historical sources for the eugenic perspective on Mexican immigration during the Great Depression.

Articles about immigration in eugenic journals during the early years of the Depression represent a period of transition in the history of Mexican immigration to the United States. Following the onset of the Great Depression; the American Southwest experienced a significantly decreased demand for the unskilled labor that Mexican immigrants had been providing for three decades. In *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity*, David Gutiérrez claims that most scholars agree that at least one million, and possibly as many as a million and a half Mexican immigrants entered the United States between 1890 and 1929.[10] These large numbers are in stark contrast to the repatriation campaigns that began in 1929. Scholars estimate that at least 350,000 and maybe as many as 600,000 Mexicans returned to Mexico during the Great Depression.[11] Unlike the beginning of the twentieth century, when Mexican laborers in the United States were valued by farmers, agricultural workers, and the construction industry

[10] David G. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1995), 40.
[11] Gutierrez, 72.

for the cheap labor they provided,[12] articles in eugenic literature indicate that the Depression influenced American tolerance for Mexican immigrants.

Historiography of American Eugenics

While some historical scholarship about American eugenics deals with eugenic interest in immigration, none of the major works specifically address developments that occurred during the Great Depression. Many of the changes in American eugenics during the Depression were subtle and the fundamental structure of the eugenics movement stayed the same. Concerns about miscegenation and racial deterioration continued to be rooted in beliefs about heredity and inherited characteristics. Furthermore, eugenicists were interested in immigration well before the Great Depression and for many of the same reasons. Therefore, it is understandable that historians often overlook the growing interest in specifically Mexican immigration and financial topics that occurred in the eugenics community during the Depression. It might also be viewed as an obvious development and therefore not worthy of historical investigation that eugenic literature would shift focus towards the economy given that most Americans were interested in financial concerns. However, the history of eugenics during the Depression is an important moment in the racialization of Mexican-Americans. The increased attention towards Mexican migrants and what the specific characterizations attributed to them by eugenicists came to mean was fundamentally tied to the economic depression and

[12] Molina, 116.

represents an important moment in American race history that has been largely overlooked by historians writing about the history of American eugenics.

Until very recently, a great deal of scholarship on the history of eugenics focused on Nazi eugenics. It is only recently that historians have begun to focus their attention on American eugenics and because of this, scholarship on eugenics can be divided into two main camps; historians who focus on Nazi eugenics and historians who challenge the primacy of Nazi eugenics in historical literature. For the most part, in my literature review I concentrate on scholars who in some way challenge the predominant historical focus on German eugenics and instead concentrate on American eugenics simply because American eugenics is more relevant to the topics that I address.[13]

Edwin Black's *War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America's Campaign to Create a Master Race* (2003) falls within the greater historical tradition of concentrating on Nazi eugenics. However, his focus is somewhat different from the primary focus on fascist eugenics that many scholars set out to challenge, as he is interested in how American eugenics influenced Nazi eugenics. Black begins by discussing the birth of eugenics in America and then moves onto how American eugenics influenced Nazi eugenics, and finally ends with how popular conceptions about Nazi eugenics influenced American eugenics after WWII. He argues that eugenics began in the United States and was linked to the German scientific

[13] While Nazi eugenics form a considerable amount of the scholarship on eugenics, this period comes well after the historical period I focus on. I therefore only discuss this period in my review of scholarship that focuses on eugenics.

establishment through money, scientific practices and theories, and politics.[14] In spite of his focus on Nazi eugenics, Black challenges the primacy of Nazi eugenics in historical scholarship by illustrating that eugenics was present in the United States long before the Second World War. He argues that a great deal of eugenics "…churned throughout America years before the Third Reich rose in Germany," and in doing so makes a point to discuss eugenic practices and policies that do not take place in Nazi Germany.[15]

Both Alexandra Minna Stern's *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (2005) and Nancy Leys Stepan's, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America* (1991), explicitly challenge prevailing notions of eugenics as primarily a Nazi movement. While Stern is careful to not minimize the atrocities of German racial hygiene and genocide, she argues that the "looming presence of the Holocaust in our collective memory…flatten and simplify the historical terrain."[16] Her book seeks to explore areas of American eugenic history that have traditionally been ignored. Stern argues that despite the tendency in historical literature to align eugenics with the holocaust, eugenics persisted well into the post war period. She argues that Herditarianism, the core belief structure in eugenics, did not disappear following WWII. Rather, it was repackaged, and efforts to encourage better breeding continued in more personal arenas of family planning, population control, and genetic and marital counseling.[17] *Eugenic Nation* deals

[14] Edwin Black, *War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America's Campaign to Create a Master Race* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2003), xvii.
[15] Black, xvi.
[16] Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2005), 2.
[17] Stern, *Eugenic Nation,* 4.

mainly with the post-war period until the 1960s on the American West Coast and explores topics specific to this region, such as tropical medicine and eugenics at the United States – Mexico border.

Like Stern, Stepan argues that limiting historical focus to the history of Nazi eugenics conceals how globally widespread eugenics was. She argues that focusing mainly on Nazi eugenics conceals the continuities between fascist and pre-fascist periods and generally ignores the role other nations played in the eugenics movement.[18] Stepan argues that a detailed history of eugenics in Latin America challenges the notion that eugenics was confined to Europe and the United States while also illustrating the extensive parameters of eugenics and its universal appeal as a scientific reform movement in the first half of the twentieth century.[19]

Stern, Stepan, and Black's texts all have specific geographical focuses. While Stern and Stepan argue for the importance of their geographic specificity, Black argues for the importance of connecting eugenic practices from one geographic region to another. Similarly, in a very straight forward examination of how sex, race, and science intersect in eugenics, Edward Larson in *Sex, Race, and Science: Eugenics in the Deep South* (1995) discuses eugenics in the Southern United States. Unlike all of the previously discussed texts, one of Larson's main focuses is on mental health and the eugenic practices that identified and prevented those with mental health disorders from having children.[20]

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[18] Nancy Leys Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and nation in Latin America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 4-5.
[19] Stepan, 2-3.
[20] Edward J Larson, *Sex, Race, and Science: Eugenics in the Deep South*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

While some of these scholars discuss immigration, most of them do not make it a main focus. One exception is Peter Schrag. In *Not Fit for Our Society: Nativism and Immigration* (2010), Schrag's primarily focus is the history of America eugenicists' interest in immigration. His main goal is connecting current racist American immigration practices to their historical roots in eugenically influenced policy in the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. He begins the book by providing a detailed history of the major players in the American eugenics movement from its inception to the Second World War, and discusses their interests in immigration. In the last chapters of the book, he moves onto recent immigration practices and discusses their similarities to how race and citizenship were conceived of in the early twentieth century. Throughout the book, Schrag focuses on debates that surrounded the politics, ideas, organizations, and movements aimed to restrict immigration in the United States since the mid-nineteenth century.[21]

Another exception to the general trend of historians to skim over eugenic interest in immigration is a chapter in Stern's *Eugenic Nation,* "Quarantine and Eugenic Gatekeeping on the U.S. – Mexico Border" that discusses the disinfection process Mexican migrants were subjected to when they crossed the border. Her discussion focuses on how the USPHS quarantine helped to solidify a previously porous border region while also aiding in the construction of Mexican immigrants as racialized others. Mainly because the quarantine operated from 1917 until the

[21] Peter Schrag, *Not Fit for Our Society: Nativism and Immigration*, (Berkley: University of California Press, 2010), 15.

1930s without significant change, Stern does not include a discussion on the Depression.[22]

Like Stern, Nancy Ordover in *American Eugenics: Race, Queer Anatomy, and the Science of Nationalism* (2003), also includes a chapter on immigration in her broad survey of American eugenics from the late nineteenth century to the 1990s. In her chapter on immigration, "National Hygiene: Twentieth-Century Immigration and the Eugenics Lobby," she mainly discusses congressional debates on immigration and how eugenics influenced immigration policies. Unlike Black, she skips over the years following the 1924 National Origins Act, including the Great Depression years, and goes directly into war-time eugenics. She does exactly what Black warns is a mistake when she fails to acknowledge how American pre- war eugenics is connected to WWII eugenics.[23]

Paul A. Lombardo's *Three Generations, No Imbeciles: Eugenics, the Supreme Court, and Buck v. Bell* (2008) is a departure from the previously mentioned texts in its consideration of eugenic sterilization laws in the United States. Lombardo writes a narrative history that follows two stories; one about Carrie Buck and her family and another about the legislative process that resulted in Virginia's sterilization law. Carrie Buck was sterilized following the Supreme Court's validation of a Virginia law that allowed for the sterilization of people deemed socially inadequate. Lombardo offers biographical information for Buck, as well as the lawyers and judges involved in the court case. He also provides an anecdotal history of sterilization in Virginia

[22] Stern, *Eugenic Nation*, 57-81.
[23] Nancy Ordover, *American Eugenics: Race, Queer Anatomy, and the Science of Nationalism*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

and the United States and brings this history into conversation with Buck's life story. Lombardo claims that his interest in the case is because of its influence and importance for eugenic sterilization in the US, "The *Buck* case confirmed the theory of hereditary defect, providing legal approval for operating on more than sixty thousand Americans in over thirty states and setting a precedent for more than a million other surgeries around the world."[24] However, other than the years directly following the case, Lombardo spends little time considering the historical effects of the case. Rather, he spends most of the book providing biographical information and extensive details of the case, which while interesting does not accomplish what he sets out to do.

Unlike all of these scholars, my thesis deals primarily with eugenics during the Great Depression. While a few of these texts mention the Great Depression, none of them make it their main focus and none of them discuss the rapid change in focus in the eugenics community that occurred at the onset of the Depression. Furthermore, the previously discussed scholars do not discuss how during the Depression years, eugenics was framed as a potential solution to many problems associated with the economic crisis. My examination of the changes in eugenic literature in the months proceeding and during the Great Depression, specifically how financial concerns came to be highlighted and how Mexican racial identities were re-envisioned, as well as the potential reasons for these changes, illuminates the obscured era of the history of American eugenics during the Great Depression.

[24] Lombardo, x.

Constructing Mexicans as Racialized Others

Together, eugenics and the USPHS defined what it meant to be Mexican in the American Southwest during the first three decades of the twentieth century. Popular ideas about the racial characteristics of Mexicans in the United States were largely constructed and disseminated by these authoritative scientific bodies and their ideas, along with long held societal beliefs about immigrants and Mexicans, formed the bases for discrimination and domination of Mexicans in the United States. Constructions of Mexicans by eugenicists and the USPHS as public health threats, unintelligent, racially mixed, and unassimilable constituted both the motivation and the justification for restricting and/or putting an end to Mexican immigration to the United States.

In my consideration of how American scientific bodies that maintained that race was biologically predetermined racialized Mexicans, I follow in the tradition of scholars whose work aims to illuminate the origins and functions of racial categories. My thesis relies on the work that numerous scholars have done in order to assert that race is a social construction, rather than a biological fact, and that race should be understood as a social and political category that in many moments in American history has functioned to allow social inequality and domination. Scholars such as Franz Boas and W.E.B. Du Bois began to question the notion that race is a physical trait in the first half of the twentieth century. In "Unyielding Positions: A Critique of the 'Race' Debate," Claire Jean Kim argues that it was only in the closing decades of the twentieth century that most scholars in the United States, including

most scientists, came to agree that racial categories have been generated by humankind for purposes relating to exclusion and/or domination.[25] Negative representations of Mexican-Americans were supported by the powerful sign of science and were linked to power relations in society that functioned to discriminate against them in many ways, including denying civil rights and attempting to restrict their entry to the United States. Constructions of Mexican-Americans illustrate how scientific and political discourses structured power relations between citizens and immigrants in American society and how they functioned to marginalize immigrants.[26]

While eugenics and the USPHS were initially separate endeavors, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the USPHS and the eugenics movement began forming connections and many of the ideas prominent in eugenic arguments opposing Mexican immigration have connections to public health projects. In *Fit to be Citizens? Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939,* Natalia Molina argues that while the majority of public health officials distanced themselves from extreme eugenic policies, many public health professionals shared core values with eugenicists. Like eugenicists, public health ideology maintained that Mexicans required more racial uplift than other racial groups and that whites occupied the top

[25] Kim, 338.

[26] While the historical documents I refer to are about Mexican immigrant labor during the Great Depression, this is not a history of Mexican-Americans. Rather, these documents represent some of the more popular and pervasive ideas about Mexican-Americans. Characterizations of Mexicans in eugenic literature reflect cultural priorities and not specific details of Mexican character. Therefore, Eugenic literature that focuses on Mexican immigrants and their labor must be placed into at least two contexts; the Great Depression and Eugenics. How these contexts functioned together to produce specific and unique category

position in the racial hierarchy.[27] Furthermore, eugenicists used public health data to support their work. Molina argues that, "Birth and disease rates became fundamental building blocks in efforts to construct Mexicans as dangerous."[28] Eugenic discourse that positioned Mexicans as a danger to white American health was often supported by birth and disease rates gathered and published by the USPHS.

In the late nineteenth century, there were a number of factors that made immigration a journey increasingly mediated by science and public health.[29] Howard Markel and Alexandra Stern in "The Foreignness of Germs: The Persistent Association of Immigrants and Disease in American Society," (2002) argue that the role of the USPHS in governmental affairs began to grow during this period and that many "began to consider a comprehensive public health apparatus as essential to making America a modern nation."[30] In many places, particularly ports of entry, the USPHS demonstrated its considerable and growing authority by displacing local officials. For example, despite resistance from the San Francisco Board of Health, the USPHS established control in 1910 when they opened Angel Island and all Asian immigrants were forced to pass through elaborate public health screenings based on the eugenic understanding that immigrants brought disease into the United States.[31] In *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown,* Nayan Shah discusses the considerable authority of public health, calling it "one of

[27] Molina, 111.
[28] Molina, 124.
[29] Howard Markel and Alexandra Minna Stern, "The Foreignness of Germs: The Persistent Association of Immigrants and Disease in American Society," *The Milbank Quarterly*, Vol. 80, No. 4 (2002): 261.
[30] Markel and Stern, 761.
[31] Markel and Stern, 761-762.

the most agile and expansive regulatory mechanisms in nineteenth-century American cities."[32] Angel Island also illuminates the intimate connections between eugenics and public health during this period, as many of the health screening procedures were based on eugenic ideas that connected race to disease. Furthermore, the rise of bacteriology led many public health professionals to believe that germs could be contained and controlled and many public health service projects, including Angel Island, were premised on this understanding.

In addition to new understandings about the pervasiveness of germs and their association with disease, many early twentieth century physicians believed that certain races were more prone to diseases that were caused by bacteria and were more likely to spread them to the American population.[33] P.J. Imperato in "The Medical Exclusion of an Immigrant to the United States of America in the Early Twentieth Century. The Case of Cristna Imparato," argues that the association of immigrants with communicable diseases was initially based on the history of attributing cholera epidemics to European immigrants. Interestingly, he points out that while Cholera likely came to the United States from Europe, it was not only immigrants who transported the illness, but also traveling nationals. Imperato points out that Cholera quarantines isolated immigrants as well as traveling Americas returning home, but this fact failed to convince those who associated the disease with immigrants.[34]

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[32] Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown*, Berkley: University of California Press, 3.
[33] P. J. Imperato and G. H. Imperato, "The Medical Exclusion of an Immigrant to the United States of America in the Early Twentieth Century. The Case of Cristina Imperato." In *Journal of Community Health* No. 33, Vol. 4, (August 2008): 225-240.
[34] Imperato, 228.

A fundamental moment in the construction of Mexicans as health threats was the USPHS disinfection plant on the United States – Mexico border that demonstrated many of the same eugenic ideas as the Cholera quarantines and Angel Island. All Mexicans passing into the United States after 1917 were subjected to a disinfection process and medical inspection. According to Claude C. Pierce, a senior surgeon with the USPHS and overseer of the disinfection plant, migrants were forced to strip naked and were sprayed with a mixture of soap, kerosene, and water. Migrants' heads were checked for lice, the vectors of typhus, and if any were found their heads were shaved and medically treated. Meanwhile, clothes were chemically cleaned. In addition to the disinfection, migrants underwent a medical inspection, including psychological profiling.[35] The quarantine was based on the USPHS assumption that, "all persons coming to El Paso from Mexico [were] considered as likely to be vermin infested."[36] The stated purpose of the disinfection plant was to prevent outbreaks of typhus. However, several months after the disinfection process had been in effect, officials reported that the threat of typhus had disappeared. Despite the elimination of the purported threat, the plant continued to operate until the late 1920s, helping to create and reinforce ideas about Mexican immigrants, and immigrants in general, as dirty and diseased.[37] Projects like the United States – Mexico border procedures, Cholera quarantines, and Angel Island, that infused

[35] Alexandra Minna Stern, "Buildings, Boundaries, and Blood: Medicalization and Nation-Building on the U.S. – Mexico Border, 1910-1930," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* Vol. 79, No. 1 (Feb, 1999), 45-46.
[36] CC Pierce one of 12 senior USPHS surgeons at USPHS. Quoted in Stern, *Buildings*, 45.
[37] Markel and Stern, "The Foreignness of Germs," 764-765.

eugenic ideas about immigrants and disease into public health projects, often made it difficult to tell eugenic and public health projects apart.[38]

Nayan Shah in *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* provides a global historical context for the El Paso disinfection plant. He argues that, "medical inspections were part of an emerging worldwide network of quarantine and health inspection that served as the 'imperial defense' against the potential invasion of epidemic diseases into metropolitan ports in North America and Europe."[39] Ports throughout the globe were monitored for epidemic diseases and this information was sent back to the imperial powers of the United States and Europe. Shah argues that this information was used to respond to widespread fears that immigrants carried disease into the United States by establishing measures to detect diseased aliens and deny them entry.[40]

While the quarantine at the United States –Mexico border helped to solidify constructions of Mexicans as vectors of disease, public health as a race-making institution had been attributing illness and filth to Mexican immigrants for years.[41] In 1891, one USPHS health inspector stated that smallpox had been prevalent in Juarez Mexico since "time immemorial."[42] Therefore, understandings about filthy Mexicans were already familiar to most of the general public when the eugenics community began using these ideas in their campaign to restrict Mexican immigration in the late 1920s. Furthermore, the notion that Mexicans were racially

[38] For an in depth discussion on the history of quarantine and immigrant medical inspection see Nayan Shah's, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* and *Science at the Borders: Immigrant Medical Inspection and the Shaping of the Modern Industrial Labor Force*.
[39] Shah, 179.
[40] Shah, 180.
[41] Molina, 120.
[42] Stern, "Buildings, Boundaries, and Blood, 64.

distinct from white Americans and other American immigrants was not a concept new to the Great Depression. Many of the characteristics attributed to Mexicans were well known prior to the anti-Mexican backlash in the late 1920s. In "Significant to Whom? Mexican Americans and the History of the American West," David Gutierrez argues that a great deal of anti-Mexican sentiments in the period before and after the United States annexed Northern Mexico in the middle of the nineteenth century were based on beliefs about their inferior mixed-blood.[43] He argues that Americans developed, "a detailed demonology about Mexicans (and about Spaniards before them) even before they had established regular contact with Spanish-speaking people in the region in the 1820s."[44] While the specific details about what the Mexican menace encompassed broadened when Americans and Mexicans had more regular contact, core beliefs about their lower racial makeup based on mixed race origins stayed the same. Furthermore, claiming Mexicans were a public health threat, as well as beliefs about the danger of Mexican migration and miscegenation were popular notions by the turn of the century. However problematic Mexicans in the United States were believed to be, before the Depression their racial characteristics were not reason enough to prevent more Mexicans from entering the Unite States. Nevertheless, with the onset of the Depression, based on ideas that had existed for decades, Mexicans became fundamentally incompatible with American eugenic goals. Whether Mexican's poor hygiene, predisposal to disease, and

[43] David G Guterrez, "Significant to Whom? Mexican Americans and the History of the American West," *The Western Historical Quarterly,* Vol. 24, No. 4 (November 1993): 521-522.
[44] Ibid.

substandard intelligence could be accommodated for in light of their cheap labor changed dramatically when their labor was no longer required.[45]

In addition to public health projects like the quarantine, eugenic ideas were made popular through eugenic publications. In the December 1928 edition of *Eugenics*, Robert DeCourcey Ward, writing about Mexican sanitation stated, "They know and care little or nothing about sanitation. They live huddled together in shacks or freight cars… without proper sanitary facilities. They are prone to disease and their death rate from tuberculosis is high."[46] Eugenic literature also often attributed sexually transmitted infections to Mexican migrants as part of their efforts to construct them as dangerous health threats. For example, in January 1929, Goethe claimed that, "Venereal disease is widespread among peons."[47] Historian Alan Brant argues that venereal disease was "preeminently, a disease of the 'other,' be it the other race, the other class, the other ethnic group."[48] Attributing sexually transmitted infections to immigrants would have functioned to stigmatize not only their health, but also their sexualities, and for many would also have been associated with fears of miscegenation. Goethe also suggested that unrestricted Mexican immigration would result in an American epidemic of Amoebic dysentery, similar to

[45] There was little distinction between the institutions that constructed the negative representations of Mexicans and the organizations that, in turn, used these ideas in their lobbying against Mexican immigration. There appears to have been very little effort to conceal the close relation of the purported unbiased science that played a significant role in defining what it meant to be Mexican-American, and the politics that depended on these constructions for their efforts to discriminate against and exclude Mexicans from immigrating. It is possible that those involved in this process did not feel the need to disguise these relations because the ideas were already so pervasive.

[46] Robert DeC Ward, "Immigration: Peons," *Eugenics Biological and Medical Journal of Race Betterment*, Vol. 1, No. 3. (Dec 1928): 7.
[47] C. M. Goethe, "The Influx of Mexican Amerinds," *Eugenics: Biological and Medical Journal of Race Betterment*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (January 1929): 6.
[48] Allan M. Brandt, *No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease in the United Stated Since 1880*, Expanded edition (New York: Oxford, 1987), 23.

the outbreak in Asia. He claimed that, "Amoebic dysentery has gained a foothold on Mexico's West Coast. Those who know it in the Orient shudder at unrestricted Mexican immigration."[49] Like his peers, Goethe unambiguously used the pervasive idea that Mexicans spread disease in order to call for restricting Mexican immigration. While sentiments that positioned Mexicans as a health threat due to poor sanitation was a popular trope in eugenic literature both before and during the Great Depression, health threats before the Depression tended to focus specifically on health concerns, while Depression era writing concentrated on the financial cost of sick Mexicans.

In addition to attributing specific disease outbreaks to Mexican immigrants, eugenicists also held immigrant populations responsible simply for *disease*. Oftentimes, eugenicists offered few details about what the threat of disease looked like, and thus made everyone a potential victim, and therefore enemy, of Mexican immigrants. As previously discussed, Goethe attributed specific diseases to Mexican immigrants, but he also blamed *disease* more generally on them. For example, Goethe claimed that, "the peon is, from a sanitation standpoint, a menace. He not only does not understand health rules: being a superstitious savage, he resists them."[50] He constructed Mexicans as malicious perpetrators of disease and as active agents, rather than passive vehicles, of illness. Goethe also argued that all illnesses endemic to Mexico would travel with Mexican migrants to America: "When we have people coming who know nothing about sanitation, the tendency for all disease

[49] Goethe, "The Influx of Mexican Amerinds," 7.
[50] Goethe, "The Influx of Mexican Amerinds," 6.

endemic among them to spread in our population is very great."[51] Goethe's argument that Mexican immigrants would bring disease into the United States ensured that even those whose family and community remained healthy had reason to fear Mexican immigrants. Goethe situates Mexican's poor sanitation and disease as justification for exclusion.

Goethe's loathing for Mexican immigration, and the way he used negative representations as justification for restricting immigration and deporting Mexican immigrants, was not uncommon among eugenicists and public health professionals. Molina calls attention to Edythe Tate-Thompson, the director of California's Bureau of Tuberculosis, response to unrestricted Mexican immigration. In her article, "A Statistical Study of Sickness among the Mexicans in the Los Angeles County Hospital," Tate-Thompson used TB rates to argue that Mexicans were a drain on municipal governments' budgets and demanded the United States government fortify the borders by placing physicians at ports of entry.[52] Furthermore, part of the curriculum of Americanization programs that were run by public health departments was teaching American sanitation practices, presupposing that Mexican immigrants did not conform to American standards. In *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945,* George J. Sanchez discusses Americanization programs that taught Mexican mothers sanitation. Sanchez quotes Pearl Idelia Ellis' "Americanization Through Homemaking," (1929) who said, "Sanitary, hygienic, and deictic measures are not easily learned by the Mexican. His philosophy of life flows along the lines of least

[51] Goethe, "The Influx of Mexican Amerinds," 7.
[52] Molina, 120-122.

resistance and it requires far less exertion to remain dirty than to clean up."[53] Eugenicists and public health professionals in the American South effectively placed threats of illness and disease primarily on the shoulders of Mexican migrants and these ideas that had been circulating since the turn of the century were used in arguments opposing Mexican immigration in the late 1920s.

In addition to claiming Mexicans were a public health threat, another element that aided in the construction of Mexicans as racialized Others was the eugenic perspective that Mexican-Americans were racially inferior because they were mixed race: Indian and Spanish. Based on their mixed ancestry, and probably also due to their momentary designation as white in the American census,[54] in the late 1920s and early 1930s there was a preoccupation with how to racially categorize Mexican immigrants. In *By the Sweat of their Brow*, Reisler refers to East Texas Congressman John C. Box, a politician with strong eugenic convictions, who actively campaigned against Mexican immigration, and referred to Mexicans as "low-grade Indian-Spanish hybrids."[55] Based on assumptions about their mixed racial makeup, the 1926 Box Bill was the first piece of legislation that proposed extending the quotas of the 1924 Immigration Act to Mexico.[56] Box argued that in order to protect "American racial stock from further degeneration or change through mongrelization," Mexican immigration needed to be stopped.[57] In addition

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[53] George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 102.
[54] "Mexican Migration: The Turn of the Tide," *Eugenical News*, Vol. 17, No. 11, (Nov, 1931): 109.
[55] Mark Reisler, *By the Sweat of their Brow: Mexican Immigrant Labor in the United States, 1900-1940* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1976), 153.
[56] Molina, 118.
[57] Gutiérrez, 54. As I will discuss in more detail later, applying quotas to Mexican immigration was a popular topic of debate in the Eugenics community during the Great Depression.

to constructing them as neither white or black, claiming Mexicans were of mixed race origins functioned to racialize and delegitimize migrants in significant ways; claiming Mexicans were mixed racially would have been associated with narratives about miscegenation. A demographic that was already as diverse as eugenicists believed Mexican laborers to be indicated a propensity for inter-racial procreation. In "The Influx of Mexican Amerinds," Goethe revealed his concern with Mexicans' mix raced origins by discussing Mexican families who immigrated to America. He referred to one family as, "…a series of hybrids."[58] He also considered how many children the average Mexican father had, suggesting that Mexicans not only produced mixed raced children, they did it at a high birthrate:

> One Immigration Study Commission Field-worker asked Jose Sanchez, driving one car, how many children he had brought in. The reply was 'once' (eleven). Pablo González had 'nueve' (nine). Pedro Alvarado's brood numbered 'ocho' (eight). Juan Garcia's were 'diex' (ten).[59]

Several eugenicists expressed concern about Mexican migrants' purported inclination towards miscegenation and used this as justification for restricting their immigration to the United States.[60]

Despite the focus on their diverse origins, eugenicists did not necessarily think that mixed raced people were the overwhelming majority in Mexico. However, they did believe that Mexicans who immigrated to America were mostly racially mixed. While they believed that about half the population in Mexico was mixed race, the authors of *The Fourth Report* argued that Mexican-Americans were

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[58] Goethe, "Influx of Mexican Amerinds," 9.
[59] Goethe, "Influx of Mexican Amerinds," 9.
[60] For an in depth discuss on the role of law in defining race, see Ian Haney Lopez, *White By Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

predominately mixed race, "In the Mexican immigration which enters the United States the percentage of Indian or Mestizo is certainly as high and probably higher than is the general Mexican population, since the majority of the whites are not found in the ranks of unskilled labor."[61] Furthermore, eugenicists called on the well-established eugenic notion that mixed races were degenerate and weak, thereby easily stigmatizing and delegitimizing Mexican immigrants. A column in *Eugenical News* in September 1931 went so far as to argue that even the difficulty in categorizing Mexican immigrants was grounds for exclusion:

> Mexicans – Practically all Mexican laborers are of a racial mixture difficult to classify, though usually well recognized in the localities where they are found. In order to obtain separate figures for this racial group, it has been decided that all persons born in Mexico, who are not definitely white, Negro, Indians, Chinese, or Japanese, should be returned as Mexican.[62]

Many eugenicists were concerned with the mixed ancestry of Mexican immigrants and these beliefs about their racial composition, as well as their racial characteristics that were made popular by the USPHS and eugenicists, comprised many of the ideas that informed eugenic arguments for restricting Mexican immigration.

Another characteristic attributed to Mexican immigrants that was used in the campaign to restrict immigration was their purported inability to assimilate to American life. Gutiérrez argues that regardless of citizenship or how well they acted American, Mexican-Americans and Mexican immigrants experienced discrimination: "many Mexican Americans and resident Mexican immigrants could see little reason

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[61] Madison Grant, et al., *Fourth Report of the Committee on Selective Immigration of the American Eugenics Society, Inc.,* (June 30, 1928): 8.
[62] "Racial Classification in 1930 Census," *Eugenical News*, Vol. 20, No. 9 (Sept 1931): 150.

either to abandon their cultural heritage by attempting to assimilate into American society or their cultural ties to one another."[63] Mexicans were subjected to discrimination regardless of their lifestyles, suggesting that anti-Mexican sentiments had more to do with racism than with their ability to perform American life.

Another characteristic attributed to Mexicans that was used as justification for exclusion was their supposed inferior capacity for intelligence. According to an article in *Eugenical News* in July 1929, "The Intelligence of Mexican School Children," Mexicans' substandard intelligence made them unfit for American citizenship. Professor Garth reported that a study of 1,004 Mexican school children found that "Mexican children are, on the average, 1.1 years mentally younger than the white for the corresponding school grades." The same study concluded that, "the retardation of Mexican children is very high, 80.5 per cent. On the average."[64] The article came to the conclusion that based on these figures, Mexicans were not a good choice for naturalization: "While native intelligence, which these tests measure, is not the sole basis for good citizenship and national progress, still it is perhaps one of the three or four major factors in such."[65] According to eugenicists, Mexican immigrants' limited intelligence rendered them incapable of successfully participating in the demands of citizenship, specifically voting. An article in *Eugenics* August 1929 edition states that, "A majority of the Mexicans…will never reach high school despite our compulsory education laws: yet every one of them will be able to vote in a few

[63] Gutiérrez, 70.
[64] "The Intelligence of Mexican School Children," *Eugenical News*, Vol. 14 (July 1929): 12.
[65] Ibid.

years."[66] The preoccupation with Mexican citizenship was based on birthright citizenship that maintained that all those born in America are American citizens regardless of their parents' birthplace. In light of this, potentially even seasonal Mexican migration to the United States could result in Mexican-American citizens. Intelligence testing had been a part of American eugenics since the turn of the century and was used to delegitimize many racialized Others. In fact, America's first intelligence tester was invited by the editor of *Eugenics* to publish an article in 1930. He submitted, "The Child's Inheritance and What Can Be Done With It"[67] and while the article was never published, it demonstrates eugenic support for intelligence testing and the belief that intelligence was inherited.

Furthermore, in efforts to keep Mexican immigrants out of the United States, several eugenicists quoted an antiquated law that legislated that only white and black racial backgrounds could legally naturalize in America, rendering Mexican migrants ineligible for citizenship. An article about Mexican immigration in *Eugenical News* in September 1930, rejected Mexican immigration in the context of the law that only "white persons or persons of African descent" could naturalize. The author expressed concern that there was no consensus about the racial makeup of Mexicans and argued that a standardized method of categorizing Mexicans racially would be beneficial: "It would constitute a valuable public service if a test case could be carried through the courts which would result in determining whether

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[66] William A. Matson, "A Chosen Seed for a Chosen People," *Eugenics: Biological and Medical Journal of Race Betterment,* Vol.2. No. 8 (August 1929): 6.

[67] For a history of intelligence testing and the role that intelligence testing played in American eugenics see, Leila Zenderland, *Measuring Minds: Henry Herbert Goddard and the Origins of American Intelligence Testing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

the average Mexican who applied for admission into the United States is or is not 'a white person or a person of African descent.'"[68] Another article in the December 1929 edition of *Euegnics* was more explicit in stating the eugenic function of this law. Kinnicutt argued that a method that determined Mexicans were neither white nor African American would function to legally exclude Mexicans from immigrating:

> Our naturalization laws provide generally that a person is eligible for citizenship only if he is a free white person or of African descent. It is well known that the present immigration from Mexico is almost exclusively of the labor class and includes few persons who can qualify for legal entry under these provisions.[69]

However, this law was only sporadically mentioned in arguments against Mexican immigration in eugenic literature and is only a fragment of the motivation for conclusively categorizing Mexican-Americans. Furthermore, it is likely that this law was not more prominent in eugenic arguments against Mexican migrants because it would have had very little effect on excluding the majority of Mexicans coming to America, as most were not trying to naturalize, but rather simply trying to work.

Andrea Smith in "Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy: Rethinking Women of Color Organizing," offers some additional context for understanding the motivation to racially categorize Mexicans in America. She argues that status differences between Blacks and natives in America are informed by the different economic positions African Americans and American Indians have in American society. Smith writes, "African Americans have been traditionally valued for their labor, hence it is in the interest of the dominant society to have as

[68] "Mexican Immigration," *Eugenical News,* Vol. 15, No. 9 (Sept 1930): 132.
[69] Francis H. Kinnicutt, "Immigration: The Next Step" *Eugenics: Biological and Medical Journal of Race Betterment,* Vol. 2, No. 12 (December 1929): 34.

many people marked 'black,' as possible, thereby maintaining a cheap labor pool."[70] Similarly, the status of Mexicans was directly related to how much their labor cost. Categorizing them as not white and not Indian meant they were not eligible for civil rights. Furthermore, constructing a racial category for Mexicans also functioned to devalue their skills and labor in order to pay them less.

Treatment of Mexican immigrants in the United States was deeply tied to understandings about their purported racial attributes. Whether they were capable of voting, their intelligence, how they cleaned their homes and bodies were all believed to be intrinsic traits. Exactly how Mexicans came to be racialized was a combined result of several historical contexts during the early decades of the twentieth century. American science, where scientists racialized and delegitimized non-whites in order to exclude and dominate them was common practice. Characterizations of Mexicans were also a result of both the American eugenics tradition to reject foreigners from South of the border, and the general publics' resistance to any non-white people from socially, culturally, and otherwise mixing with white Americans. Furthermore, industry in the United States during this period demanded cheap labor and racializing Mexicans in specific ways functioned to fulfill this need. Moreover, the racial hierarchy that characterized a great deal of socio-cultural practices in the United States during the early twentieth century contributed to understanding non-white migrants like Mexicans as lower beings

[70] Andrea Smith, "Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy: Rethinking Women of Color Organizing," *The Color of Violence: The Incite! Anthology*, eds. Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, (Cambridge: South End Press, 2006): 71.

than white Americans and many Europeans. All of these contexts functioned to racialize Mexican migrants in the late 1920s in particular ways.

- Chapter Two -

Eugenics and American Immigration, 1880s to 1924

In order to understand why Mexican immigration became a central focus in the eugenics community in the 1920s, it is important to first understand how eugenics became popular in the United States and the role that immigration played in the American eugenics community. In this chapter, I discuss the birth of eugenics in the United Kingdom and its subsequent transition and transformation in the United States. From the beginning of the American eugenics movement, American eugenics demonstrated significant differences from its parent movement in the United Kingdom. Many of the differences were due to the popularity of an

evolutionary racial hierarchy and associated degeneracy theory in the United States. I discuss how these popular understandings produced a culture that was more than willing to accept a eugenic ideology and corresponding practices that were considerably different from those first seen in the United Kingdom. I also discuss the major players involved in bringing eugenics to the United States and the men who participated in the eugenics immigration debate in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Eugenics was never a fringe movement in the United States but rather from the beginning was a mainstream science supported by powerful members of American society. The roles that eugenicists played in American governmental politics demonstrate the power of eugenics in the United States. Furthermore, in this chapter I also discuss the history of immigration restriction in the United States and eugenics role in immigration. The United States had a long history of restricting the entry of racialized Others before eugenics made the transition to the United States. Therefore, there was an established tradition of racial profiling in immigration services when eugenicists began lobbying for the restriction of Mexican immigrants based almost entirely on their racial attributes.

The rise of eugenics in the United States took place amongst significant social and cultural changes. During the nineteenth century the United States experienced industrialization, urbanization, increasing immigration, imperialism, and secularization, all of which functioned to create a changing society. The United States and other developed nations saw significant technological advances take root as well as many medical discoveries, including the rise of microbiology and bacteriology that became central to eugenic medicine. Alongside these changes

came new social ills, including disease outbreaks, as well as racial, cultural, and class tensions. Developed nations during this period were characterized by beliefs in an evolutionary racial hierarchy that placed whites and Europeans at the top of civilization, blacks and Africans on the bottom, and everyone else "in the suboptimal middle position of hybridity and mongrelization."[71] Many who believed in the evolutionary hierarchy also believed that humanity could experience an evolutionary decline. The process whereby the white race could regress from its purported position at the apex of the human evolutionary ladder came to be referred to as *degeneration*, and was a common concern amongst many who believed in evolutionary theory, including eugenicists, during the first half of the twentieth century. In "The Way of All Flesh: Degeneration, Eugenics, and the Gospel of Free Love," George Robb defines degeneration as the "shadow side of evolutionary progress whereby the human species could become biologically debilitated and enter a downward spiral of disease, insanity, and sterility."[72] Alexandra Minna Stern in *Eugenic Nation* maintains that, "In the United States, degnerationism translated into alarm about immigrant invasions, and miscegenation, and admonitions against 'race suicide,' which President Theodore Roosevelt, for one, was convinced was jeopardizing America's vitality and global structure."[73] In order to address degeneration, many turned to eugenic science to redirect the evolution of white America.

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[71] Stern, *Eugenic Nation,* 13.
[72] George Robb, "The Way of all Flesh: Degeneration, Eugenics, and the Gospel of Free Love," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (April, 1996): 589.
[73] Stern, *Eugenic Nation,* 14.

While a great deal of eugenics' popularity and global significance came after it made the transition to the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century, eugenics did not have its foundation in the United States. Eugenics was founded by a British statistician and cousin of Charles Darwin, Francis Galton. Commonly known as the father of eugenics, Galton coined the term *Eugenics* in 1883 and defined it as, "the science which deals with all influences that improve the inborn qualities of a race; also those that develop them to the utmost advantage."[74] Galton was inspired by Gregor Mendel's theory of heredity that was founded by experimenting with breeding pea plants. Galton applied Mendel's findings, that crossing breeds produced an inferior new generation in pea plants, to human breeding.[75] Galton also inferred from Mendel's experiments that hereditary material was transmitted from generation to generation with no modification. Based on beliefs in Mendel's theories of transmission, Galton began to organize eugenic projects to stimulate breeding among the upper classes.[76] Galton's eugenics in the United Kingdom was primarily *positive* eugenics that involved encouraging the upper classes to breed and produce biologically superior offspring.[77] While American eugenics included positive eugenic practices of identifying and attempting to perpetuate purported desirable characteristics in the population, American eugenics also quickly came to promote *negative* eugenics. Negative eugenics identified undesirable characteristics, such as blackness and feeblemindedness, and discouraged people with these characteristics

[74] Sir Francis Galton, *Essays in Eugenics,* (London: The Eugenics Education Society, 1909): 35.
[75] Stern, *Eugenic Nation, 14.* And Schrag, 77-78.
[76] Stern, *Eugenic Nation*, 15.
[77] Schrag, 78.

from procreating and diluting the gene pool.[78] Negative eugenic tactics in America included forced sterilization, and in the German Nazi context eventually resulted in genocide.

Negative eugenic methods were not a part of British eugenics in the founding moments. However, negative eugenics was a part of American eugenics since the science became popular in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century. In the United States, a great deal of eugenic practices were rooted in degeneracy theory and the desire to weed out the genetically unfit. Negative eugenics appealed to those who ascribed to degeneracy theory because unlike positive eugenics, negative eugenics directly eliminated degenerate genes from the breeding pool and therefore speed up the process towards eugenic goals. Another factor that resulted in the popularity of negative eugenics was the increase in immigration during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Eugenicists believed many immigrants carried defective genes and negative eugenics helped to quickly eliminate them. Many historians argue that Richard Dugdale's work on the degenerate Jukes family, a clan of petty criminals whose criminality purportedly all stemmed from the same genetic source, Margaret the Mother of Criminals, was the model for studies of degenerate families. Well before eugenics took root, Dugdale published his study on the Jukes family in 1877 and helped popularize degeneracy theory in the United States. American scientific interest in degeneracy theory and a

[78] Stern in *Eugenic Nation* challenges the common distinction in historical scholarship between positive eugenics, that fosters the reproduction of those deemed eugenically fit, and negative eugenics that impedes the reproduction of those deemed unfit. Stern argues that usually eugenicists practiced both negative and positive and that a distinction between the two often fails to recognize that the most strident eugenicists, such as Popenoe and Goethe, supported both negative and positive practices.

desire to repair the bad heredity that was infiltrating the American nation was the foundation of negative eugenics in the United States.[79]

Charles Davenport was the first prominent eugenicist in the United States and is often sited as the primary architect of American eugenics. An admirer of Galton, Davenport secured funding from the Carnegie Institution of Washington and established the first American eugenics organization, the Station for Experimental Evolution in Cold Spring Harbor in 1904. In 1910, Davenport started the Eugenics Record Office next to the Experimental Evolution office and recruited Harry Laughlin as the superintendant.[80] Davenport was also actively involved with the American Breeders Association, which was the first scientific body to actively support eugenics research.[81]

Davenport and Laughlin helped bring eugenics to the United States where concern about degeneration made Americans eager for a science that could help with their immigrant problem. American's concerns about immigration were one of the primary reasons eugenics became popular in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century. Peter Schrag in *Not Fit for Our Society: Immigration and Nativism*, argues that the goal of American eugenics was, "the revival of the great nation and culture that was being defiled by alien degenerates."[82] Since the beginning, eugenics in the United States was significantly involved in immigration politics and three of the major players in the eugenics community at the beginning

[79] David Micklos, "Engineering American Society: The Lesson of Eugenics," *Nature Review Genetics,* Vol. 1, No. 2 (November, 2000): 153.
[80] Schrag, 78.
[81] Micklos, 153.
[82] Shcrag, 78.

of the twentieth century were involved in immigration politics. Henry Fairfield Osborn was one of the leading race theorists at the beginning of the twentieth century who believed in Nordic racial superiority. Osborn was a prolific writer who published over one hundred texts, including several theories on race. Osborn maintained that education and environment could not significantly change racial differences. In addition to his writing, Osborn promoted his eugenic and anti-immigration ideas by hosting the Second and Third International Congress of Eugenics in 1921 and 1932 at the American Museum of Natural History where he was president. Osborn collaborated with Davenport and Madison Grant. Grant authored, *The Passing of the Great Race*, and in it argued against miscegenation. All three men were proponents of immigration restrictions and focused a great deal of their attention on protecting America's racial superiority from the immigrant menace by advocating negative eugenic practices and immigration restrictions.[83]

American elites had been interested in problems associated with immigration long before eugenics came to the United States. By the time eugenicists focused their attention on immigration in the early twentieth century, there was already an established tradition of restricting immigration to the United States. The 1891 Immigration Act declared that certain classes of individuals were unfit to become American citizens:

> Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the following classes of aliens shall be excluded from admission into the United States…All idiots, insane persons, paupers or persons likely to become a public charge, persons suffering from

[83] William K. Gregory, "Biographical Memoir of Henry Fairfield Osborn, 1857-1935," *National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America Biographical Memoirs Volume XIX – Third Memoir*. Presented to the Academy at the Autumn meeting, 1937.

> a loathsome or a dangerous disease, persons who have been convicted of a felony or other infamous crime or misdemeanor involving turpitude, polygamists, and also any person whose ticket or passage is paid for with the money of another…[84]

Many of these restrictions have similarities to eugenic attitudes, such as attributing illness and disease to immigrants and the obvious concerns about public health. Additionally, many of the concerns in the 1851 restrictions are economic. The act demonstrates concerns about the heredity of insane people and criminals alongside concerns about those *likely to become a public charge.*

Following the 1891 Immigration Act, immigration restriction gained momentum and a number of subsequent laws expanded upon reasons for exclusion. In 1903 Congress added anarchists to the list of inadmissible aliens, and in 1917 enacted a literacy requirement as well as further restrictions against immigrants from Asia.[85] Also, in 1911 the Dillingham Commission published a 42-volume report to warn against immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe. [86] Even before eugenics firmly took route in the United States, a number of immigration restrictions exhibited attitudes about immigrants similar to those eugenicists would soon express.

Eugenics as an ideology and a science demonstrated its power in America in the 1920s when it achieved two significant victories; *Buck v. Bell*, the United States Supreme Court case that upheld the constitutionality of Virginia's sterilization law was passed in 1927, and the Johnson-reed Immigration Act, that set a quota of 2

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[84] H. R. Rep. Fifty-first Congress, Session 2, Chapter 55, March 3.
[85] "Aspiration, Acculturation, and Impact: Immigration to the United States, 1789-1930," Harvard University Library Open Collection Program. http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/immigration/timeline.html Accessed April 14, 2011.
[86] Ibid.

percent on all immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, was passed in 1924. Stern argues that, "these triumphs worked to naturalize eugenics into the body politic and into state, federal, and county institutions and laws."[87] The eugenics community's heightened interest in Mexican immigration, that tended to emphasize economic concerns in the months leading up to and during the Great Depression, was part of a general trend of eugenicists' focus on immigration. Based largely on eugenic ideas about race, restricting Mexican immigration to the United States has been debated by eugenicists since the late nineteenth century. Edwin Black, in *War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America's Campaign to Create a Master Race*, argues that, "the campaign to keep defective immigrants out of the country was considered equally important in the crusade to cleanse America of its genetic undesirables. This meant injecting eugenic principles into the immigration process itself".[88] Furthermore, it is significant that one of eugenics major accomplishments in America during the early decades of the 20th century, the 1924 Immigration Act, was in the arena of immigration. Eugenicists considered immigration to be central to both negative and positive eugenic agendas.

A combination of factors increasingly drew eugenicists' attention towards Mexican immigration during the mid 1920s. Eugenic demands for restricting European immigration had largely been met with the 1924 Immigration Act. Also called the Johnson-Reed Act, and the National Origins Act, the Immigration Act of 1924 stipulated a 2 percent quota per nationality according to the figures of the 1890 census and was heavily biased against immigrants from Eastern and Southern

[87] Stern, *Eugenic Nation,* 17.
[88] Black, 185.

Europe, but left Latin America and the Caribbean unaffected.[89] In *Not Fit for Society: Immigration and Nativism*, Peter Schrag points out that in 1890, Northern Europeans were the largest immigrant group and immigration quotas based on the 1890 census, rather than more recent immigrant population statistics, ensured that Northern Europeans would remain the largest immigrant population.[90] Additionally, the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, that disallowed Chinese workers from immigrating, and the 1907 Gentlemen's Agreement, that restricted immigration from Japan but allowed laborers who were already in America to send for their wives and children, reduced the availability of Asian immigrant laborers.[91] Because legislation significantly reduced the availability of working class laborers from Europe and Asia, businesses requiring affordable labor increasingly turned towards Mexico, where immigration remained unrestricted. As Mexican immigration increased, eugenic arguments for extending quotas to the Western Hemisphere and reducing Mexican immigration intensified.[92]

Of the many political eugenicists involved in the immigration debate, three men standout as particularly engaged in pursuing more rigid immigration laws in the 1920s: Congressman Albert Johnson, Harry Laughlin, and Charles Davenport. Like other eugenicists who focused on immigration in the lead-up to the Great Depression and during the Depression, these men tended to highlight financial problems associated with Mexican immigration. Johnson was one of the major

[89] Stern, "Buildings, Boundaries, and Blood," 74.
[90] Schrag, 8.
[91] Molina, 55. And Shah, 37. The Gentlemen's Agreement was based on eugenic principals and was passed according to the belief that if Japanese women were allowed to immigrate, Japanese men would not mix with white American women.
[92] Reisler, 151.

players involved in congressional immigration in the 1920s. He was not only a member of Congress from 1907 to 1933, but also a raceologist and eugenicist, who acted as president of the Eugenics Research Association in 1923 and served as chair for the House Committee on immigration from 1919 to 1931. Johnson believed that, "No one acquainted with the fundamental truths of genetics as applied to humankind in eugenics [could] oppose the principal of immigration restriction."[93] Johnson worked closely with Harry Laughlin, the first superintendent of the Eugenics Record Office in Cold Spring Harbor, New York, from its founding in 1910 until 1935, and the editor of the first edition of *Eugenical News* in 1916, the journal of the Eugenics Record Office.[94] Laughlin also published eugenic treatises, such as "The Report of the Committee to Study and to Report on the Best Practical Means to cut off the Defective Germ-Plasm in the American Population" (1914). Johnson named Laughlin, "Expert Eugenics Agent" in 1921, which among other powers enabled him to present his ideas about immigration to congress with authority. This position also allowed him to circulate official committee correspondence and questionnaires and mail them *en masse* at House expense.[95] He took full advantage of this opportunity and circulated several surveys. His first, "Racial and Diagnostic Record of State Institutions," asked 370 state institutions, including hospitals, prisons, and asylums across the country to report the nationalities, races and problematic natures of their residents. The construction of the survey ensured that immigrants would be represented as a drain on public services since only public

[93] Albert Johnson, "The National Origins Principle," *Eugenics: Biological and Medical Journal of Race Betterment*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Jan 1929): 21.
[94] Black, 98.
[95] Black, 190.

institutions were subjected to the survey, thus ensuring that only the most needy, which inevitably included immigrant groups, reported data. Laughlin presented this information to congress in a publication titled, "Analysis of America's Modern Melting Pot," which contained his views on America's immigrant problem. He was also a semiofficial scientific advisor to Albert Johnson's House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization.[96] Laughlin and Johnson's position, that immigration was a fundamental problem for the progress and stability of the United States, was hugely influential in Congress and resulted in a number of immigration restrictions, the most significant being the 1924 Immigration Act.[97]

Johnson and Laughlin worked together with Charles Davenport, a Harvard professor who was a charter member and Vice-Chairman of the Eugenics Committee from 1923-1926, Chairman of the AES Committee on Research Problems in Eugenics, and on the AES Board of Directors from 1926-1930.[98] Davenport's role in Congress included, but was not limited to, president of the Third International Congress of Eugenics.[99] These three Eugenicists were the most influential anti-immigration politicians of the early twentieth century and together they influenced and directed immigration procedures by introducing debate into the House, forming commissions on eugenics, and introducing bills to restrict immigration. All three men were involved in a series of proposals to restrict immigration that culminated in the passage of the 1924 National Origins Act. While Johnson, Laughlin, and Davenport were the most powerful and active political eugenicists during this

[96] Schrag, 8.
[97] Black, 190.
[98] Mehler, 329.
[99] Mehler, 329.

period, a number of other eugenicists were involved in immigration legislation. John C. Box was among the first to propose extending immigration quotas to the Western hemisphere in 1926 in order to reduce Mexican immigration. A great deal of politicians weighed in on the Box bill and eventually House Immigration and naturalization Committee chose not to act due to too many divergent opinions.[100] These men demonstrate the extent to which eugenicists influenced policy and government in the United States during the first three decades of the twentieth century.

Unlike eugenic literature written about immigration during the Great Depression, eugenic interest in immigration prior to the Great Depression rarely mentioned financial and socio-economic issues. While the desire to closely regulate immigration was the same both before and during the Great Depression, many of the purported dangers changed, and how to protect America against the immigrant menace was different. Eugenic literature during the Depression never advocated immigration for any reason as doing so would have undermined the seemingly unanimous eugenic position that Mexicans and other immigrants were a financial burden to the American economy. In contrast, before financial issues began to dominate eugenic literature, eugenicists often discussed how immigration could help maintain and construct a eugenically fit population. Eugenic literature before the Great Depression tended to take one of two approaches when writing about immigration. Both concentrations were concerned with central eugenic issues of race and heredity, and in many ways mimicked traditional avenues of positive and

[100] Molina, 118.

negative eugenics. In the positive eugenic tradition, eugenicists concentrated on how immigration could be used as a tool to maintain America's racial character. Eugenicists believed that by encouraging and permitting white and middle class immigrants to enter America the white race would and should be preserved. Schrag situates the campaign to select the right kinds of immigrants alongside other positive eugenic traditions, claiming, "By the beginning of World War I, the campaign to select the right stock was well under way, not only at the immigration ports, but in efforts to encourage the proper American women to produce more children.[101] Moreover, in the negative eugenic tradition, eugenicists argued that immigration could sabotage the existing racial character of the United States by introducing racialized Others. Based on their supposed ability to dilute the gene pool, some eugenicists asserted that immigrants should be prevented from entering the United States.

In the mid 1920s, one of the major concerns in the eugenics community was the connections between immigration and America's racial character. Throughout *The Second Report of the Sub-Committee on Selective Immigration of the Eugenics Committee of the United States of America (*1925), and in subsequent reports from the same committee, eugenicists argued that immigration laws should be concerned with the multi-generational eugenic goals of encouraging good families to breed and ensuring the predominant race in America remained white. The Eugenics Society of the United States of America published the reports annually and *prominent members of the eugenics community, including Laughlin and Johnson, authored The Second*

[101] Schrag, 68.

Report. The reports were almost certainly read by members of the Eugenics Society and while it is difficult to establish how widely read the reports were outside of the organization, they echo many ideas found in *Eugenical News* and therefore provide understanding of the eugenic perspective on immigration during this period. *The Second Report* was written to discuss the eugenic implications of recent radical changes to immigration policy that came as a result of the Immigration Act of 1924 and begins by discussing how immigration could be useful for achieving eugenic goals: "The Immigration Act of 1924 established a new American immigration policy. It expressed the conviction of the American people that, "immigration is a long-time investment in family stocks rather than a short-term investment in productive labor'; that it is a question of future race character, and not primarily an economic problem."[102] In the positive eugenic tradition, eugenicists situated immigration as vital to their goal of constructing and maintaining a eugenical population by alluding to a popular eugenic argument that only those races that currently reside in the United States (according to eugenicists, white and black) should be allowed to immigrate. In addition to asserting that the eugenic opinion was the dominant American position on immigration, the authors of *The Second Report* also countered the popular opinion that immigration could be financially viable by providing labor. Instead, by adopting language used by big business, they argued that immigration should be an *investment* in producing a eugenical population. This is in contrast to Depression era eugenic writing where economic concerns are usually highlighted. While labor is mentioned, it is only to argue that

[102] Madison Grant, et al., *Second Report of the Sub-Committee on Selective Immigration of the Eugenics Committee of the United States of America* (March 9, 1925), 1.

while immigration solves short-term labor needs, it does so at a great risk to America's future.

At this point in American eugenics' history, and in stark contrast to the Depression era, eugenicists were not necessarily anti-immigration. In contrast to the Depression era eugenic position on immigration that demanded the Mexican/American border be closed, some eugenicists acknowledged the importance of immigration for achieving their goals. In *The Fourth Report of the Committee on Selective Immigration of the American Eugenics Society*, published June 30th, 1928, eugenicists appeared to support specific kinds of immigration:

> The purpose of these reports, and of the investigations on which they are based, is to find out the most practicable means by which immigration may be made to maintain the essential racial character of the American people and to advance their inborn hereditary capacities.[103]

In some contexts, eugenicists understood immigration as a useful tool for directing the population towards eugenic ends, which likely meant more white immigrants from Nordic countries. Later in the same document, the authors discussed eugenic stakes in immigration and specified how to achieve their goals: "…the regulation of the racial character of the immigration to the United States, whether by the quota system, numerical restrictions, or otherwise, is a factor and an important one in determining the future of our population…"[104] In no uncertain terms, eugenicists argued that regulating immigration was necessary for the welfare of the nation.

Also before the onset of the Great Depression, eugenicists constructed numerous reasons why immigration laws should be informed by eugenic ideology,

[103] Madison Grant, *Fourth Report,* 2.
[104] Madison Grant, *Fourth Report*, 15.

making their agenda popular to a diverse audience. Writers of *The Second Report* argued that provisions in the 1924 Immigration Act were designed to limit the number of immigrants in America, while also insuring that, "the bulk of these [immigrants] are to be of the same racial stocks as those which originally settled and developed the country, founded its institutions, framed its constitution and today still make up the bulk of its population."[105] Eugenicists became adept at constructing reasons why immigration law should be informed by eugenic ideology, including arguing for the continuation of America's colonial practices by only allowing migrants from the metropoles. This is only one of many examples where a eugenic strategy includes both keeping undesirable immigrants out, while also ensuring desirable migrants were allowed in.

Part of eugenic interest in how immigration affected the racial character of the United States included considering how to prevent diseased immigrants from entering the country. Racialized Others were often accused by eugenicists of carrying disease. Restricting immigrants for public health reasons was a popular topic both before and during the Great Depression. However, eugenic literature published during the Depression tended to emphasize the cost while before the Depression eugenicists were more interested in constructing immigrants as vehicles of disease and immigration policy was closely tied to public health and safety. In "A Hunt for Society's Danger Spot," (1928) Leon F Whitney, the executive secretary of the American Eugenics Society wrote about smallpox, "It can usually be traced to a newcomer from some distant city, or to an infection received by a native who has

[105] Madison Grant, *Second Report*, 1.

traveled away from home."[106] Immigrants were framed as responsible for outbreaks of disease and thus efforts to restrict their entry, as well as to prevent interaction with white Americas, were justified as necessary public health and safety measures. According to the authors of *The Second Report*, the 1924 Immigration Act was designed to prevent diseased migrants from entering the US, something that the Immigration Act of 1917 apparently failed to do: "The Act of 1917 has, however, by no means accomplished the complete exclusion of the diseased…"[107] One of the benefits eugenicists saw in the 1924 Immigration Act was that immigrant medical examinations became more efficient: "The decrease in numbers of immigrants resulting from the new Immigration Act of 1924 has made possible a much more through medical examination."[108] Immigrant medical inspections prior to the Depression were somewhat constructed with financial concerns in mind, though in a very different way than during the Depression. Amy Fairchild in *Science at the Borders: Immigrant Medical Inspection and the Shaping of the Modern Industrial Labor Force* argues that immigrant medical inspections were not necessarily to reduce immigration but rather to ensure that immigrants were fit to work. Between 1891 and 1930, the Public Health Service inspected more than 25 million immigrants out of which approximately 79,000 were denied entry for medical reasons.[109] Fairchild argues that the medical exam was to ensure immigrants were

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[106] Leon F. Whitney, "A Hunt for Society's Danger Spot," *Eugenics: Biological and Medical Journal of Race Betterment*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (October 1928): 11. Biographical information obtained from, "Eugenics: Who's Who," *Eugenics: Biological and Medical Journal of Race Betterment*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (November 1928): 40.
[107] Madison Grant, *Second Report*, 3.
[108] Madison Grant, *Second Report*, 3.
[109] Amy L. Fairchild, *Science at the Borders: Immigrant Medical Inspection and the Shaping of the Modern Industrial Labor Force*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 4.

capable of remaining healthy and productive workers who would not become dependant on the state.[110] In contrast, during the Depression immigrants looking for jobs were seen as national threats.

Focusing on the cost of immigration to the white American public was not entirely absent from eugenic literature before the Great Depression, though it was not often a main focus. *The Fourth Report* was published before the Great Depression and mentioned the cost of immigration, "The expense is already very large."[111] However, after a brief discussion on the cost of immigration, the writers immediately returned to concerns of miscegenation, saying, "Certainly if the specialized qualities of the white race and a white civilization generally are thought worth preserving in the United States, the admixture of the blood of a Mexican Indian can only be regarded as hurtful."[112] Despite sporadic mentions of financial concerns in eugenic literature before 1929, eugenicists' main interest in immigration prior to the Great Depression was how it threatened the racial character of the white population.

The most prominent eugenic topics prior to the onset of the Great Depression was ensuring the racial character of the United States remained white and preventing sick immigrants from entering the country. In the period following the passage of the 1924 immigration act and the onset of the Great Depression, eugenicists became concerned with the increasing numbers of Mexican immigrants entering the United States and began applying these arguments to Mexican

[110] Fairchild, 14.
[111] Madison Grant, *Fourth Report*, 9.
[112] Madison Grant, *Fourth Report*, 9.

migration. Statements that targeted Mexico began to appear with increasing frequency and the second, third and fourth reports from the committee on selective immigration, were all published in this interim period and they all situate Mexican immigration as a main focus. Authors of *The Second Report* wrote, "With the increasing restrictions which have been put upon immigration, the smuggling and surreptitious entry of aliens across the Canadian and Mexican borders and by sea have naturally enormously increased."[113] Similar sentiments are found in the third and forth reports. Partly in reaction to increasing Mexican immigration and partly because Mexican immigration was in this period the largest unregulated immigrant group still entering the United States, the reports also argued in favor of extending the 1924 quotas to the Western hemisphere:

> Because of the great necessity of preserving the white race in the United States, as well as the desirability of protecting American standards of living, the Act of 1924 should be extended so as to place quota restrictions on all those countries of the Western Hemisphere where the population is not preponderantly of white stock.[114]

Applying quotas to the Western Hemisphere was one of the central arguments in the reports and they allude to both disease as well as race in order to make their argument. All of these arguments carried forward into the Depression era, but were reframed in many circumstances to highlight economic concerns.

Since the rise of eugenics in the United States at the turn of the century until the beginning of the Great Depression in the late 1920s, eugenicists demonstrated their ability to influence public opinion and public policy. Several well-known eugenicists were in positions of power, giving the eugenics community a strong

[113] Madison Grant, *Second Report,* 4.
[114] Madison Grant, *Fourth Report,* 9.

foundation as the United States made the transition into a massive economic recession. While many of the same issues continued to be part of the eugenics movement in the United States during the Depression, the eugenics community demonstrated their resourcefulness by redesigning many of their issues in order to be relevant to a society in an economic crisis.

- Chapter Three - Early 20th Century Mexican-American Labor and Migration

The large and growing Mexican population in the American Southwest in the early decades of the twentieth century was one of the leading factors that drew eugenicists' attention to Mexican immigration. The sudden increase in Mexican-American immigration, as well as the considerable interest in demographics from early twentieth century institutions such as public health, Congress, and eugenics, has pushed historians to construct theories explaining why Mexican immigration to the United States increased so dramatically during the first three decades of the twentieth century. In this chapter, I discuss some of the most prevailing theories about how and why Mexican immigration increased so rapidly in the American Southwest in this period. Furthermore, not surprisingly, eugenics was not the only community that expressed concern about the Mexican presence in the United States during this period. Many powerful institutions central to regulating and controlling

socio-cultural perceptions exhibited anxieties about Mexican immigrants. Following my discussion about how and why Mexicans came to be in the United States, I discuss opinions about Mexican immigrants in public schools, churches, and social work. All three of these institutions discriminated against Mexican immigrants based on ideas similar to those held by eugenicists.

The most pervasive framework for understanding the significant numbers of Mexicans migrating to the American Southwest is the push/pull thesis that is modeled on supply and demand economics. Push factors are generally associated with the 1910 Mexican civil war that left many unemployed and living in poverty. In "Empire and the Origins of Twentieth-Century Migration from Mexico to the United States," Gilbert González and Ral Fernandez argue that, "The Mexican revolutionary period beginning in 1909-1910 spurred the first substantial and permanent migration to the United States…By liberating masses of people from social as well as geographic immobility, [the Revolution] served to activate a latent migration potential of vast dimensions."[115] In addition to joblessness, the violent uprising disrupted social structures that anchored Mexicans to their lives in Mexico making it easier for them to leave their homes. Factors pulling Mexicans to the American Southwest are often understood by historians as resulting from economic development and modernization. New technologies of refrigeration that aided the growth of the citrus industry and railroad construction that not only provided transportation between nations, but also provided work for Mexican migrants. The

[115] Gilbert G. Gonzalez, Raul A. Fernandez, *A Century of Chicano History: Empire, Nations, and Migration* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 33.

American Southwest had a growing demand for unskilled workers.[116] Before 1900, few Mexicans immigrated to the United States.[117] In contrast, the first three decades of the twentieth century saw over 674,00 Mexicans migrate North of the American border.[118] After 30 years, the mass migration came to a halt when the Great Depression dramatically changed the economic prosperity of the American Southwest.

One of the most common critiques for understanding Mexican migration in terms of supply and demand is that the push/pull thesis presupposes that Mexico and the United States functioned independently of each other.[119] González and Fernandez challenge this assumption by arguing that America's economic conquest of Mexico joined the push and the pull into a single process: "Just as American capital fashioned the development of industrial enterprises within Mexico, the same capital propelled migration within Mexico and eventually that migratory flow entered the United States."[120] While this might be a valid critique for understanding international relationships between Mexico and the United States, the push/pull thesis is useful for my purposes in understanding how Mexican immigration functioned as a eugenic topic precisely because the push/pull thesis inadvertently encapsulates how many eugenicists conceived of Mexican migration. Eugenicists

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[116] Gonzalez and Fernandez, 133.
[117] Reisler, 3.
[118] Gonzalez and Fernandez, 44.
[119] For a critique of the push/pull thesis by world systems theorists see, Gilbert G. Gonzales and Raul Fernandez, "Empire and the Origins of Twentieth-Century Migration" in *A Century of Chicano History: Empire, Nations, and Migration* (New York: Routledge, 2003). For a nuanced discussion on the push/pull thesis see, Gilbert G. Gonzalez, "Peaceful conquest and Mexican Migration within Mexico and to the United States" in *Culture of Empire American Writers, Mexico, and Mexican Immigrants, 1880-1930* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004).
[120] Gonzalez and Fernandez, 106.

and the USPHS understood the United States as a distinct and separate nation from Mexico and tended to highlight the distinctions in their opposition to Mexican immigration.

While Americans understood Mexico as a different country from the United States for decades, although with a flexible and changing border, the process of reinforcing and solidifying the differences between the two nations intensified alongside increasing demands for Mexican labor. Part of amplifying the distinction between the two nations involved solidifying the border. In "Buildings, Boundaries, and Blood: Medicalization and Nation-Building on the U.S. – Mexico Border, 1910-1930," Alexandra Minna Stern discusses the role that the USPHS and eugenic ideology played in solidifying a previously flexible border region. While the border between Mexico and the United States was officially demarcated in 1848 and modified in 1853, the border region remained porous and Mexican laborers were met with little resistance as they crossed back and forth.[121] Stern argues that the increasing presence of the Immigration and Naturalization Service in the 1910s and the creation of the border patrol in the 1920s, in conjunction with the work of the USPHS at the United States – Mexico border, functioned to produce an increasingly impenetrable border by 1917. The solidified border was one of the first moments of American state resistance to Mexican immigration.

Despite critiques that argue the increasing interdependence between Mexican and American economies at the beginning of the twentieth century make it difficult to meaningfully discuss them apart, Mexican labor needs were often met

[121] Reisler, 17.

north of a relatively new border and eugenicists demonstrated an inclination to emphasize the geographic otherness of Mexico. Possibly because of relatively recent historical events like Mexican Secession that made geographical distinctions between Mexico and America somewhat vague, eugenic literature highlighted the significance of the spatial division between Mexico and the United States. Articles published in eugenics journals with titles such as *The Mexican Influx* and Goethe's "The Influx of Mexican Amerinds," illustrate that eugenicists felt it necessary to emphasize that Mexicans originated from other, distinctly un-American, places. As previously discussed, eugenicists as well as business employing immigrants had stakes in emphasizing the otherness of Mexican migrants in order to devalue their labor and justify paying them less.

In addition to titles of articles, eugenicists demonstrated anxieties about the supply and demand relationship between Mexico and the United States in the content of their articles on Mexican immigration. Many eugenic articles revealed a concern with the employment arrangement between Mexican laborers and American employers because it brought Mexicans to America in large numbers. In the October 1929 edition of *Eugenics*, Roland M. Harper, a botany Professor at the University of Alabama, framed Mexican migration to the United States in terms of *pull* factors. Harper argued that immigrants came to the United States "in the hope of bettering their economic condition."[122] Furthermore, in the March 1930 edition of

[122] Ronald M. Harper, "Some Neglected Aspect of the Immigration Problem," *Eugenics: Biological and Medical Journal of Race Betterment,* Vol. 1, No. 3 (Oct 1929): 22. Biographical information from, "Bulletin of the Torrey Botany Club," Vol. 96. No. 2 (March-April 1969): 232.

Eugenics, the current editor Francis Kinnicutt also referred to factors that pulled Mexican immigrants to the American Southwest:

> Many people seem to be of the opinion that the business man as representing the manufacturer or industrialist is strongly in favor of no restriction upon immigration in order that cheap and plentiful labor may be secured. It is true that for many years manufacturers and other business men did hold just such views.[123]

While Kinnicutt goes on to argue that business no longer advocated unrestricted immigration, which if true could be understood as a result of the Great Depression, he acknowledged that the previous years offered Mexican immigrants job opportunities. Even during the Depression years, in the September 1930 issue of *Eugenics*, Kinnicutt argued that, "Mexican labor is in demand by industries and agricultural interest which seek cheap labor, regardless of the ultimate cost in terms of American welfare and progress."[124] Kinnicutt and his peers framed what contemporary scholars understand as *pull factors*, mainly employment opportunities, as a eugenic problem because they drew Mexicans into American territory. During the Great Depression, *pull factors* became a central topic for eugenicists as they began to argue that with high rates of American unemployment, there was no excuse for allowing outsiders to take American jobs.

Eugenicists were likewise concerned with factors that pushed Mexicans away from their homes, though not only because they functioned as the impetus of migration, but also because poor conditions in Mexico produced hardy laborers that became significant competition for white American laborers. In the September 1930

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[123] Francis H. Kinnicutt, "Immigration: Enlightenment," *Eugenics: Biological and Medical Journal of Race Betterment*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (March 1930): 156.
[124] Francis H. Kinnicutt, "Immigration," *Eugenics: Biological and Medical Journal of Race Betterment*, Vol 3, No. 9 (Sept 1930): 359.

edition of *Eugenics*, Kinnicutt wrote, "…white Americans cannot live in competition with peons trained by 400 years of Spanish oppression and political and economic exploitation, to live on next to nothing in the way of subsidence and shelter."[125] Kinnicutt's intentions were to illustrate that Mexican laborers introduced unfair competition for jobs and he does so by referring to *push* factors.

Charles Goethe, one of the strongest voices against unrestricted Mexican immigration and the founder of the Eugenics Society of Northern California, echoed Kinnicutt's concerns about push factors enabling Mexicans to become unfair competition for American jobs. In the January 1929 edition of *Eugenics*, Goethe published a photograph of Mexican laborers carrying rocks on their backs. Accompanying the image was the caption,

> Labor methods are often extremely primitive in Mexico and the peon's back takes the place of the machinery used in other lands. Huge rocks are carted about by the workers in baskets slung from their shoulders. These men were paid about twenty cents daily.[126]

Goethe's implicit message was that Americans could not compete with Mexican laborers and that the state should intervene to protect American employment opportunities. Goethe also positions Mexico as primitive in comparison to the progressive United States and this is another example that illustrates how eugenicists emphasized the distinction between the United States and Mexico.

Mexican laborers were in high demand by American business because they made significantly less than white Americans, and even less than other immigrant groups. Mark Reisler in *By the Sweat of their Brow: Mexican Immigrant Labor in the*

[125] Kinnicutt, "Immigration," Sept 1930.
[126] Goethe, "The Influx of Mexican Amerinds," 7.

United States, 1900-1940 refers to statistics from the Bulletin of the Bureau of Labor and the Department of Commerce and Labor's Annual Report, reporting that in 1908 the Southern Pacific Railroad paid Greek section hands $1.60 per day, Japanese $1.45, and Mexicans $1.26.[127] Mexicans were also geographically the closest immigrant labor force and therefore the cheapest to import. Of course, the demand for Mexicans' cheap labor was a concern for eugenicists because it made them more attractive to American business. In the March 1929 edition of *Eugenics*, Samuel J. Holmes wrote, "Having to live with the Mexicans is one of the consequences of their employment as cheap labor."[128] Regardless of their contributions, eugenicists saw Mexicans living in the United States as too high a price, and convincing industries that employed Mexicans, as well as those in charge of regulating Mexican immigration, became a central focus during the Great Depression.

The demand for immigrant labor was sometimes justified by those who employed immigrants with claims that since the United States began accepting immigrants, Americans had stopped performing manual labor. Many believed that regardless of the potential dangers that immigration posed to the United States, immigrant labor was required to perform work that Americans would no longer carryout. Francis Amasa Walker was the first president of MIT, superintendent of the Census Bureau, and president of the American Statistical Association. In the June 1896 edition of *Atlantic Monthly,* he published "Restriction on Immigration," and in

[127] Reisler, 4.
[128] Samuel J. Holmes, "Books and Bibliography," *Eugenics: Biological and Medical Journal of Race Betterment*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (March 1929): 39.

it asserted, "When was it that native Americans first refused to do the lowest kinds of manual labor? I answer, When the foreigner came. Did the foreigner come because the native American refused longer to perform any kind of manual labor? No, the American refused because the foreigner came."[129] Statements like this indicate that immigrants usually filled lower paid positions and that the United States had become dependant on immigrant labor.

Regardless of eugenic opposition, the labor that Mexicans provided was in such heavy demand at the beginning of the twentieth century that farmers and state officials alike constructed creative ways to prevent their employees from going elsewhere for work. Once they had Mexicans in their employment, in order to prevent them from leaving in the middle of the night, some farmers would hide shoes and pants belonging to Mexican laborers.[130] Furthermore, recruitment agents met migrants at the border and acted as liaisons between laborers and the employers who paid hansom commissions. Due to competition for staff in more Northern states, the Texas State Legislature passed the Emigrant Agent Act that levied an annual tax of $1000.00 on any agent in Texas who sent laborers outside of the state.[131] Another method used to draw Mexican immigrants into employment was capitalizing on family connections. Railroad foremen distributed writing materials so that employees could write to family members and encourage them to make the trek. Furthermore, some employers only provided return transportation

[129] Schrag, 50.
[130] Reisler, 10-11.
[131] Reisler, 58.

for those who completed their contracts.[132] These are only a few of many tactics used to garner Mexican laborers and maintain their employment in the competitive market.

Eugenicists did not readily accept the reality that American business' demand for affordable labor inevitably led to a large Mexican population in the American Southwest. However, there was considerable opposition to reducing immigrant labor from the communities that employed Mexicans. Therefore, American business' demand for Mexican labor led many eugenicists to try and convince legislators that there would be no repercussions from the business community for restricting Mexican immigration. Eugenicists often argued that despite common assumptions, the United States business community was not universally in favor of unrestricted Mexican immigration. In the March 1930 edition of *Eugenics*, Kinnicutt argued that while Congress and business were historically opposed in the immigration debate, with congress aiming to reduce, and business aiming to increase, Mexican immigration, business increasingly opposed Mexican immigration:

> In connection with the struggle now being made in Congress to restrict the influx of Mexican Amerinds into this country, it is interesting to find industrial and commercial leaders coming to a more enlightened view of the dangers of this immigration. The plea in support of it has almost always been that the cheap labor afforded by the Mexicans was needed; but this theory is coming to be suspected. [133]

With business and congress in agreement, supporting limiting Mexican immigration would have little political repercussions. Attitudes that claimed business and

[132] Gonzales and Fernandez, 131.
[133] Kinnicutt, "Immigration," March 1930.

industry were not as enthusiastic about Mexican immigrant labor as was usually believed can be found throughout eugenic literature. In the June 1929 edition of *Eugenics*, Senator Reed argued that simply showing businessmen the eugenic perspective would cause them to change their opinion on unrestricted Mexican immigration and conform to the eugenic perspective: "Business groups are not infallible in their judgments with respect to their own problems and I feel confident that with more mature study they will conclude that the National Origins law offers the best basis which has been proposed for the regulation of our future immigration."[134] Reed's suggestion that people who advocated for unrestricted immigration were simply uninformed, as well as statements that attempted to confirm that big business was aligned with eugenic concerns, suggest that Congress and policy makers were wary of a backlash from businesses for reducing their cheap labor pool. By claiming that those who employed Mexicans were not against restricting immigration, eugenicists likely hoped to cater to those who were concerned with potential repercussions of reducing immigrant labor.

In addition to unsubstantiated claims that big business did not support unrestricted Mexican immigration, eugenicists also argued that regardless of the affordability of their labor, Mexican immigration was not worth the risk it posed to America. In the November 1929 edition of *Eugenics*, Robert DeCourcey Ward referred to Mexican immigration as, "the old, old plea for more 'cheap' labor" and vaguely situated it as bad for America, "…cheap labor makes cheap citizens, and also cheap fathers and mothers of future Americans" and that restricting Mexican

[134] Senator Reed, "Immigration," *Eugenics: Biological and Medical Journal of Race Betterment,* Vol. 2, No. 6 *(*June 1929): 34.

immigration was "very necessary for the welfare of the United States."[135] He positioned Mexican immigration as bad for the long-term future of the United States though does not offer any details about why. Eugenicists often took the position that Mexican immigration was bad for America, and that immigration restrictions were the responsible action.

Negative attitudes towards Mexican immigrants were not limited to the eugenics community. Eugenicists were often powerful members of their communities and their ideas were pervasive and convinced many different demographics of the value of eugenic ideology. Moreover, as with any science, eugenics did not exist in a vacuum isolated from socio-cultural influences. Rather, eugenics was influenced by cultural conceptions of race that had been popular for centuries. The formation of ideas inside and outside of the eugenics community were intimately connected by a flow of ideas emanating from socio-historical sources as well as from new ideas constructed by eugenicists and scientific bodies.

During the first half of the twentieth century, schools in California held eugenic-like principals about the inferiority of Mexicans. Many schools stated displeasure at interracial associations between Mexican and white kids and sought ways to limit their contact. In "Schools and Ethno-Racial Boundaries in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles," Mark Wild argues that most schools in Los Angeles followed California's long tradition of segregating Mexican children.[136] Like schools, many churches in the American Southwest were also segregated. In, "Facing Jim

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[135] Robert DeC. Ward, "Quota-Mindedness Toward Mexico: Should the Policy Be Abandoned?" *Eugenics: Biological and Medical Journal of Race Betterment*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Nov 1929): 19.
[136] Mark Wild, "Schools and Ethno-Racial Boundaries in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles," *The Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 33. No. 4 (Winter, 2002): 458.

Crow: Catholic Sisters and the 'Mexican Problem' in Texas," Robert K. Trevino discusses how Mexican-Americans in Houston were told at an Anglo church to attend the Mexican church that was much farther away. While Mexicans were sometimes allowed to attend the Anglo church, they were only permitted to sit in the back pews if space permitted. Trevino claims that there were social consequences for Mexicans who did not abide by the segregation rules, including public humiliation by being escorted off the premises.[137] However, while many churches demonstrated racist exclusionary behavior towards Mexican immigrants, the Catholic Church was not always aligned with eugenic ideology. In Sharon Leon's, "Hopelessly Entangled in Nordic Pre-Suppositions: Catholic Participation in the American Eugenics Society in the 1920s," she argues that while the Catholic Church shared some understandings about the pronatalist elements of positive eugenics, they often fundamentally opposed negative eugenic practices of sterilization and immigration restriction.[138] Therefore, while churches may have exhibited behavior that appeared to conform to eugenic practices, they were likely not following eugenic ideology.

While Trevino argues that the church did not set the standard of behavior towards Mexican immigrants, but rather followed general consensus, churches were powerful regulators of public opinion. Regardless of whether segregating Mexicans from the rest of the congregation was due to external influences, this public display

[137] Robert R. Trevino, "Facing Jim Crow: Catholic Sisters and the 'Mexican Problem' in Texas," *The Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 1. No. 2 (Summer, 2003): 143-145.
[138] Sharon M. Leon, "Hopelessly Entangled in Nordic Pre-suppositions: Catholic Participation in the American Eugenics Society in the 1920s," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, Vol. 59. No. 1. (2004): 5.

of discrimination against Mexicans would have significant effects on the status of Mexican-Americans in the greater society. If churches believed it was necessary and appropriate to segregate it is likely that other, less influential, institutions would enforce similar rules. Similarly, schools taught the dominant norms of a society to future generations. Schools that taught racist segregation were preparing future citizens to perpetuate discriminatory behavior towards Mexicans that was based on beliefs in their inferiority.

Like schools, social work also taught dominant norms to the wider society and social workers are usually understood as playing a major role in the construction of Mexicans, and immigrants in general, as dependant and in need of reform. In "Little Alien Colonies: Representations of Immigrants and their Neighbors in Social Work Discourse, 1875-1924," Yoosun Park and Susan Kemp argue that the influx of new immigrants resulted in increased perceptions of immigrants as social problems, and these ideas resulted in the emergence of philanthropic projects to assist immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[139] Park and Kemp argue that while social worker ideology aimed to dismantle popular sentiments about the inferiority of immigrants, social work ideologies were informed by wider understandings of immigrants and therefore often reinforced dominant understandings, "many of these social work discourses supported (while

[139] Yoosun Park, Susan Kemp, "Little Alien Colonies: Representations of Immigrants and their Neighbours in Social Work Discourse, 1875-1924," *The Social Service Review*, Vol. 80, No. 4 (December 2006): 706.

purporting to redress) the larger discourses that made possible the exclusion of immigrant communities from full participation in American society."[140] (707)

Because many of the most vocal eugenicists were politically involved and because there is no distinction between politicians with eugenic beliefs and eugenic politicians, it is difficult to meaningfully discuss politicians and eugenicists' perspectives on Mexican immigrants apart from on another. However, regardless of political or eugenic perspectives on Mexican immigration, Mexican immigrants experienced discrimination in the legal and political systems. Aguila quotes a contemporary immigration expert on Mexican immigration:

> Over no conceivable subject is the legislative power of congress more complete. Thus, in the exercise of its broad power over immigration and naturalization, Congress regularly makes rules that would be unacceptable if applied to citizens.[141]

Laws in place during the first half of the twentieth century ensured that Mexicans did not experience the same civil rights as white citizens. Due to eugenic involvement in politics and government, as well as eugenic-like ideas in a number of powerful institutions central to cultural knowledge production, it was not surprising that some laws exhibited ideas similar to those held by eugenicists. Like other powerful institutions that regulated social behaviors, laws in the first half of the twentieth century made it acceptable to discriminate against Mexicans in America.

Likely due in large part to the considerable changes in racial makeup, that included but was not limited to the dramatic increase of Mexicans in the American Southwest during the first three decades of the twentieth century, several

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[140] Park and Kemp, 707.
[141] J. R. Aguila, "Mexican/U.S. Immigration Policy Prior to the Great Depression," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (April 2007): 214.

institutions central to shaping socio-cultural norms exhibited negative understandings about Mexican-Americans that were similar to those held by eugenicists. By looking at the beliefs and practices concerning the treatment of Mexicans by eugenics, schools, churches, social work, and legislation, the process of how ideas were reinforced and made stronger, and how discriminatory behavior based on systemic racism became the norm, becomes apparent. Though their positions on how to control Mexican immigration were not necessarily the same, all of these institutions shared similar ideas with eugenicists about Mexican immigrants' racial characteristics.

- Chapter Four -
Changing Gears, The Depression Years

Resistance to Mexican immigration increased alongside the growing Mexican population in the United States. As previously discussed, eugenic opposition to Mexican immigration prior to the Depression tended to concentrate on health and race. Many eugenicists relied on constructions of Mexicans as vectors of disease and public health threats in their arguments against Mexican immigration. Eugenic opposition to Mexican immigration had also traditionally been interested in excluding people believed to be racially inferior. Many eugenic-minded citizens were concerned that Mexican immigration would negate eugenic policies designed to preserve the purity of America's genetic pool.[142] While these ideas continued into the Depression era, they were accompanied by new eugenic concerns about jobs, overburdened public services, and the economy. Furthermore, previously popular eugenic concerns were reframed and newly viewed through a financial lens that gave eugenics during the Depression the sense of being predominantly interested in economic matters. Furthermore, while previously eugenicists had primarily been interested in immigration as it related to miscegenation, with the onset of the Depression eugenicists changed their focus to the financial cost of immigrants to the white American public.

In this chapter, I begin by discussing how eugenic attention towards Mexican immigration escalated and why this increase aligned with the Great Depression. Second, I discuss the specific topics that constituted the increase in attention. For

[142] Reisler, 153.

example, eugenicists often argued that immigration introduced competition for American jobs. Third, I consider the eugenic community's motivation in turning their attention towards the financial aspects of Mexican immigration. I argue that political opportunism played a large role in the eugenic community's new focus and that by focusing on the financial aspects of immigration, eugenicists made themselves relevant to a changing society in an economic recession. Fourth, I discuss the predominant eugenic position on how to deal with Mexican immigration. Many eugenicists advocated extending existing immigration quotas to Mexican immigration and therefore shutting down unrestricted immigration. Fifth, I discuss how deportations and threats of deportation functioned to decrease already declining Mexican immigration and the eugenic response to this decline. Sixth and lastly, I discuss how despite the absence of quotas for Mexican immigrants, eugenicists became satisfied with the decrease in immigration from Mexico and many considered the problem to be solved by 1932.

Increasing eugenic attention towards Mexican immigration mimicked the slow increase of concerns about the economy in the months prior to the stock market crash and the formal beginning of the Great Depression in October 1929. Many historians argue that while the most dramatic stock market dips occurred on October 24, 1929 (Black Thursday) and October 29, 1929 (Black Tuesday), the stock market crash was more gradual than two sharp drops and actually began on September 3 and ended on November 13, 1929.[143] Historian Robert S. McElvaine in *The Great Depression: America, 1929-1941* argues that powerful members of society

[143] Robert S. McElvaine, *The Great Depression: America, 1929-1941*, (New York: Times Book, 1984), 46.

predicted the stock market crash. According to McElvaine, President Hoover ordered his financial agent to sell off his personal stocks, "as possible hard times are coming,"[144] thereby indicating that the president during the Great Depression predicted an economic decline. Furthermore, both domestic and international economies were fundamentally unsound by the late 1920s before the stock market crash.[145] McElvaine argues that while the stock market crash is important for understanding how and when the Great Depression happened, the American economy was already in trouble.[146] Therefore, it is reasonable that eugenic interest in Mexican immigration turned towards the economy before the stock market crashed.

Another reason why eugenicists began to focus on the financial aspects of Mexican immigration even before the formal beginning of the Great Depression, is that unlike many other industries, the agriculture industry where most Mexicans were employed experienced several recessions throughout the 1920s. W. Cochrane, in *The Development of American Agriculture: A Historical Analysis* argues that while the economic depression began for most of the nation with the collapse of the stock market, for farmers it began in 1920. According to Cochrane, relief efforts from World War I tapered off in 1920 and as a result farm prices began to fall in the summer of 1920.[147] McElvaine echoes Cochrane when he argues that farmers and the agricultural industry experienced the Great Depression differently than other

[144] McElvaine, 47.
[145] McElvaine, 49.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Willard W. Cochrane, *The Development of American Agriculture: A Historical Analysis*, (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1979), 3.

industries. While other sectors of the economy recovered from the recession of 1920-1922, in agriculture that depression continued until it bled into a new one at the end of the decade.[148] McElvaine also argues that farmers were hit harder during the Great Depression. In 1929, the annual per capita income of farm persons was $273, while the average was $750. Like the economic decline in the agriculture industry, the shift to focusing on the financial aspects of immigration in eugenic literature began to intensify before the stock market crash.

While Mexican immigration had been opposed on eugenic terms since the beginning of the twentieth century, Gutiérrez argues that anti-Mexican sentiments increased in the years leading up to the formal beginning of the Great Depression. Like many historians writing about Mexican immigrant labor during the first three decades of the twentieth century, Gutiérrez notes that increasing intolerance towards Mexican immigrants at the beginning of the Great Depression was dramatic.[149] While anti-immigration activists saw the reduction of European and Asian immigration following the 1924 Immigration Act to be a victory, most of them maintained that Mexican immigration remained a problem. Following the passage of 1924 Immigration Act, eugenicists suggested that Mexican immigrants were sneaking into the United States by often referring to the United States – Mexico border as the *back door* to the country, apparently disregarding that there were no laws banning their entry. In a statement made during a house debate on immigration in 1924, Congressman Albert Vestal asked, "What is the use of closing the front door to keep out undesirables from Europe when you permit Mexicans to

[148] McElvaine, 21.
[149] Gutiérrez 52.

come in here by the back door by the thousands and thousands."[150] Mexicans came to be seen by the eugenics community as America's primary immigration problem, mainly because after the 1924 Immigration Act, they were the largest racialized group still entering the United States.

A topic that gained significant attention in eugenic literature during the Great Depression was how immigration introduced competition for American jobs. The part-time editor of *Eugenics*, Francis. H. Kinnicutt, was a staunch anti-immigration advocate who wrote a monthly column on immigration. A main topic in Kinnicutt's immigration column was how Mexican migrants stole jobs from American citizens. Kinnicutt argued that Mexican immigration introduced unnecessary competition into the American job market, claiming that, "Mexican immigration, both legal and illegal, occurring in recent years, has had the result of depriving American labor of jobs."[151] Kinnicutt framed his position against unrestricted Mexican immigration as important for those concerned with the high rate of unemployment, arguing that, "In view of the nation-wide unemployment unfortunately prevailing at the present time, immigration statistics are of more than usual interest."[152] He referred to his position on Mexican immigration as, the "restriction of the unassimilable immigration from Mexico,"[153] and situated restriction as a partial solution for American unemployment. In his arguments opposing Mexican immigration, Kinnicutt combined well established eugenic concerns about the racial characteristics of

[150] Gutierrz 52.
[151] Francis H. Kinnicutt, "Immigration," *Eugenics: Biological and Medical Journal of Race Bettermet*, Vol. 3, No. 11 (November 1930): 432.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Francis H. Kinnicutt, "Immigration," *Eugenics: Biological and Medical Journal of Race Betterment*, Vol. 3. No. 1 (January 1930): 33.

Mexican immigration with contemporaneous concerns about unemployment. These kinds of combination arguments characterize eugenic literature during this period and were probably constructed in order to draw support from multiple sources, including the considerable number of Americans whose jobs were affected by the Great Depression.

Sentiments that situated Mexican immigration as one of the causes for the high rate of unemployment are repeated in several of Kinnicutt's monthly columns and were accompanied by concerns about Mexicans' use of public services. In the April 1930 edition of *Eugenics*, Kinnicutt claimed that the American Federation of Labor asked Congress "to reduce the increasing Mexican immigration, which was undoubtedly taking work away from American born laborers in many parts of the country."[154] In order to further support his position against Mexican immigration, as well his argument that Mexican laborers took jobs away from American citizens, Kiniccutt referred to a statement made by the president during the Great Depression, "The recent announcement by the President that a provision of the present immigration law will be availed of to effect further restriction of immigration while there is large unemployment in the United States will meet with general approval."[155] In order to argue for restricting Mexican immigration, Kinnicutt emphasized the economic burden of Mexican immigration, a particularly powerful angle in the socio-cultural climate of the Great Depression. Previous to the Depression, concerns about the American economy were not eugenic topics as they

[154] Francis H. Kinnicutt, "Immigration," *Eugenics: Biological and Medical Journal of Race Betterment*, Vol. 3. No. 4 (April 1930): 157.
[155] Francis H. Kinnicutt, "Immigration: Unemployment," *Eugenics: Biological and Medical Journal of Race Betterment*, Vol. 3, No. 10 (Oct 1930): 395.

did not factor into concerns about heredity and racial degeneration. While there was often a subtext of class concerns, where poverty and issues associated with poverty such as health and education were seen as genetic conditions, these issues were rarely discussed in financial terms. It is possible that eugenicists saw an opportunity to appeal to Americans who were not involved with eugenics and therefore combined eugenic issues with financial concerns to attract new supporters and make eugenics relevant in the new economic climate. Furthermore, as previously discussed, eugenics was influenced by socio-cultural factors and eugenics was just one of many issues during the Depression came to be seen through the lens of the economy.

Competition for jobs and blaming immigrants for aggravating the high rate of unemployment was not the only new eugenic focus on immigration during the Great Depression. Eugenicists also came to pay a great deal of attention to Mexican immigrant use of public services like public health programs and schools. A photograph was published alongside one of Kinnicutt's articles that showed four Mexican children being examined by a white nurse and physician, the caption read: "The Mexican immigration into the southwest has necessitated increased free clinic facilities like these."[156] Calling attention to the high cost of public health associated with the poor health and sanitation of Mexican immigrants was fairly common in eugenic literature during this period. Charles Goethe in his famous, "The Influx of Mexican Amerinds," published in *Eugenics* in January 1929, and also reprinted as a broadside for free distribution, calls attention to the extreme measures that the

[156] Kinnicutt, "Immigration," January 1930, 33.

California Public Health Service went to in order to eradicate the bubonic plague from the Mexican quarter. Goethe wrote, "Fully 145,000 rats were exterminated, 2,473 buildings demolished, and 7,500 buildings were rat-proofed, cost $2,777,000."[157] Goethe argued that the purported poor sanitation in the Mexican community was not only costly in terms of medical care, but that Mexican immigration was also responsible for costs associated with pest control (as well as the apparent abundance of pests), and even loss of urban infrastructure. Like Kinnicutt, Goethe relied on prevailing ideas about Mexicans in his portrait of them as social and economic burdens.

In order to demonstrate Mexican use of publicly funded systems, eugenicists also called attention to Mexican children's attendance at public schools. As previously discussed, a common topic in eugenic literature both before and during the Depression was the high birth rate in Mexican immigrant communities. In addition to concerns of miscegenation and race suicide that eugenicists associated with Mexican procreation, during the Great Depression eugenicists also claimed that the plethora of Mexican children attending public schools was a drain on the system. In the March 1929 edition of eugenics, Paul S. Taylor's "*Mexican Labor in the United States Imperial Valley"* was reviewed and quoted as reporting, "In twenty-two of the forty-three school districts Mexican children constitute over 40 per cent of the enrollment in the elementary schools."[158] While public services were struggling to make ends meet during the Great Depression, pointing out how the public school

[157] Goethe, *Influx of Mexican Amerinds*, 6.
[158] Samuel J. Holmes, "Books and Bibliography," review of "Mexican Labor in the United States Imperial Valley," by Paul S. Taylor, *Eugenics: Biological and Medical Journal of Race Betterment*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (March 1929): 39.

system was in trouble would have been a particularly potent rhetorical device to sour public perceptions of Mexican immigrants. Popular narratives often situated children as the future solution to the economic decline and their education played a vital role in their preparation as future savors of the nation. In "The Business Community and the Public Schools on the Eve of the Great Depression," Alexander Rippa argues that the gradual restriction of immigration in the United States caused people involved in business and industry to become anxious about the availability of skilled labor. Discourses about training American kids to fulfill skilled labor positions increased as immigration decreased and more attention was paid to public school and how education could train American children for business and industry demands. Rippa writes, "The children of today, businessmen were reminded, are the workers of tomorrow."[159] Mexican children attending public schools in a period where the system barely functioned to meet the requirements of American kids would have been particularly disturbing during this period where significant importance was placed on educating future American skilled laborers.

One eugenicist also suggested that Mexicans' inferior natures made them dependent on American charity. In the December 1928 edition of *Eugenics*, Ward connected common understandings of Mexicans as unintelligent to their purported dependency on American charity. He argued that Mexicans' need for support was only going to increase: "The expense is already very heavy. This burden upon our charitable agencies will increase as more and more Mexicans migrate northward and spend the winters in cold climates to which they are not accustomed, and for

[159] Alexander Rippa, "The Business Community and the Public Schools on the Eve of the Great Depression," *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Mar 1964): 34.

which they have neither the means nor the foresight to prepare."[160] As part of arguments to delegitimize the Mexican presence in America, this author calls on the notion that Mexicans are too unintelligent to survive in the United States on their own and that they will require expensive state intervention.

In addition to the new concerns of unemployment and failing public services during the Great Depression, similar to previous years eugenic literature continued to emphasize the high social cost of Mexican immigration. In a full-length article on immigration in the January 1929 edition of *Eugenics*, "Immigration in Congress," Kinnicutt argued that those members of Congress who supported applying quota restrictions to Mexico considered Mexican immigration to be, "…the most serious present menace [to the United States]…"[161] It was not uncommon for eugenicists to vaguely attribute social problems to Mexican immigration. In the August 1929 edition of *Eugenics*, an unnamed author argued that while immigration was potentially good for the economy, though only short-term, it was too high a price socially: "The selfish desire for cheap labor has acted as a boomerang. The negro, the later European, and the Mexican have all helped temporarily to build up our economic prosperity while producing some of our most difficult social problems."[162] The author argued that businesses that employed immigrant labor were primarily concerned with their own personal profit and that the practice of employing Mexican immigrants lacked consideration for others. Goethe's, "The Influx of Mexican Amerinds" also argued that problems associated with Mexican

[160] Ward, "Immigration: Peons," 7.
[161] Framcis H. Kinnicutt, "Immigration in Congress," *Eugenics: Biological and medical Journal of Race Betterment,"* Vol. 2, No. 1 (Jan 1929): 29.
[162] Matson, 5.

immigration, specifically purported social dangers and financial costs, would cause future generations to resent those who failed to stop Mexican immigration: "Will they not have the right to rise up and curse us, Americans of today, for failing to close, by adequate legislation, that Back Door?"[163] In the same article, Goethe also integrated social community concerns with financial business concerns when he argued that the affordable labor provided by Mexicans came with significant social costs, "Cheap labor was proving costly to employer, to community."[164] While arguments about how Mexican immigration was bad for the economy was a major topic in eugenic literature during the Depression, eugenicists also attended to issues not related to the economy. Eugenicists constructed diverse arguments against Mexican immigration by appealing to those who remained unconcerned about the economy even during the Depression and/or those who benefited financially from Mexican workers. They argued that even if Mexican immigration was good financially, it was still too high a price socially.

The predominant argument made by members of the eugenics community on how to best deal with Mexican immigration was to extend the 1924 Immigration Act quotas to Mexican immigration. While arguments for extending the quotas began almost immediately following the passage of the Act, they dramatically increased in the months leading up to the formal beginning of the Great Depression. In the December 1928 edition of *Eugenics*, Ward argued that,

> …the Immigration Act of 1924 should be extended so as to place quota restrictions on all those countries of the Western Hemisphere where the population is not predominately white. Until numerical restrictions are

[163] Goethe, "The Influx of Mexican Amerinds," 9.
[164] Goethe, "The Influx of Mexican Amerinds," 8.

> imposed on Mexico, and the other countries to the south of us, one of the principal objects of the Act of 1924 cannot be attained.[165]

Extending existing immigration quota systems to Mexican immigration was also suggested in the November 1929 edition of *Eugenics*, in a debate titled, "Quota-Mindedness Toward Mexico." James J. Davis, the United States Secretary of Labor from 1921 to 1930 and a senator from Pittsburgh from 1930-1945 and Stuart Fitzpatrick both argued that Congress should extend immigration quotas to Mexican immigration.[166] Davis wrote, "The quota system is the most effective and at the same time the most humane method yet found so far as actually limiting immigration into the United States is concerned."[167] In the same edition of *Eugenics*, Robert DeCourcey Ward echoed sentiments he made in 1928 when he argued that, "The menace of Mexican immigration makes it necessary, as well as logical, to extend our quota restriction policy to Latin America."[168] Unsurprisingly, one of the most eugenic arguments for applying quotas to Mexican immigration came from Goethe in a column debate titled, "A Eugenic or Dysgenic Force?" where he argued that in order to be a eugenic nation, quotas needed to be extended to Mexican immigration, "The Immigration Study Commission is profoundly convinced that, to preserve the purity of our blood stream, the Mexican Amerind peon should be placed under the same quota as Europeans."[169] Traditional eugenic arguments about race and

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[165] Ward, "Immigration: Peons," 7.
[166] "United States Department of Labor: History at the Department of Labor," www.dol.gov/ossam/programs/history/dpt.htm and "Biographical Directory of the United States Congress," http://bioguide.congress.gov. Accessed April 1, 2011.
[167] James J. Davis, "Quota-Mindedness Towards Mexico: Should the Policy Be Abandoned?" *Eugenics: Biological and Medical Journal of Race Betterment*, Vol. 3, No. 11 (Nov 1929): 18.
[168] Ward, "Quota-Mindedness," 19.
[169] C. M. Goethe, ""A Eugenic or Dysgenic Force?" *Eugenics: Biological and Medical Journal of Race Betterment,* Vol. 3, No. 2 (Feb 1930): 60.

miscegenation continued alongside financial issues. In Kinnicutt's immigration column in the December 1929 edition of *Eugenics*, he wrote,

> If Mexican immigration is to be narrowly restricted in accordance with what we believe to be the overwhelming sentiment of the American people today, either the precisions of the present law above referred to must be strictly enforced [the law that only people racialized white or black can naturalize in America] or a definite and small immigration quota established for Mexico.[170]

According to Kinicutt, either by racist quota restrictions or an antiquated colonial law, Mexican immigration should be restricted. Eugenic journals combined concerns about racial purity with cultural anxieties about immigration.

Despite demands from the eugenics community, no quotas were applied to Mexican immigration by Congress during the Depression years. However, Reisler argues that the border was virtually shut down regardless of the lack of any additional legislation preventing Mexican immigration. Based on the grounds that they were likely to become public charges within five years of their arrival, the State Department refused most Mexicans work permits.[171] Furthermore, by 1931, California, Arizona and Illinois had passed legislation mandating that all laborers on public works projects be American citizens and Texas passed a law that mandated that American citizens receive preferential treatment for highway construction jobs.[172]

While extending immigration quotas to Mexican immigration as a method to reduce the flow of non-white immigrants appealed to many eugenicists, some

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[170] Francis H. Kinnicutt, "Immigration: The Next Step," *Eugenics: Biological and Medical Journal of Race Betterment*, Vol.2, No. 12 (December 1929): 34.
[171] Reisler, 231.
[172] Reisler, 228.

eugenicists maintained that applying quotas was too lenient. In the January 1929 edition of *Eugenics*, Congressman Albert Johnson wrote,

> Proposals to restrict immigration from Mexico, South America and Canada cannot be made on the same basis. To restrict from Mexico, on a 2 per cent of the 1924 Mexican population in the United States will not fit the National Origins plan. We need no labor except domestic servants, and we cannot hope to help the future of the United States with the arrival of a continuous line of servants of all degrees.[173]

Johnson was a leader in congressional immigration and was in a good position to propose extreme immigration reform. He played a major roll in passing the 1924 Immigration Act and it is likely that his opinion to totally shut down Mexican immigration, rather than the more popular plan to extend quota restrictions, was well heard by Congress.

Laws reducing the eligibility of Mexican employment in the United States were combined with sporadic deportations as well as threats of deportation that functioned to scare many immigrants back to their native lands. Deportations and the threat of deportation were part of the mass exodus of Mexicans from the United States during the Great Depression. In *Fit to Be Citizens*, Molina argues that deportation programs that began in 1929 relied heavily on images of Mexicans as charity seekers.[174] The protocol for deporting legal immigrants on health grounds involved identifying people considered candidates for deportation and then requesting authorization for funds for travel back to Mexico. Legal immigrants could also be deported if they became a public charge within five years of entering the

[173] Johnson, 20.
[174] Molina, 137.

United States.[175] Ironically, deporting illegal immigrants was more expensive and time consuming than deporting legal immigrants as it required a formal federal hearing and evidence of unlawful entry. For the most part, government officials avoided the expensive and time consuming formal channels for deporting Mexicans. Reisler claims that local officials, particularly in Los Angeles, believed that several well publicized deportations would cause a mass of self-motivated departures.[176] The few formal deportations were well publicized and the Los Angeles district director of immigration noted that thousands of Mexicans, "have been literally scared out of Southern California."[177]

Regardless of the lack of additional legislation applying quotas to Mexican immigration, by 1931 the eugenics community seemed content with the decrease in Mexican immigration. In "Mexican Migration: The Turn of the Tide," published in the November 1931 edition of *Eugenical News*, the unnamed author considered the problem of Mexican immigration to be solved:

> During the year a great number of Mexican laborers, amounting to a considerable fraction of the whole number in the United States, have returned to Mexico. This 'tide turning' has been largely due to economic depression with its consequent lack of employment for those Mexicans north of the Rio Grande. There has been a tightening up of border patrol which in the future is looked to to prevent illegal entry of Mexicans into the United States. Thus the problem of Mexican immigration has largely solved itself, so far as the danger of Mexican conquest of the southwest by immigration is concerned."[178]

This author found a positive eugenic interpretation for the Great Depression by positioning it as the main impetus for considerable numbers of Mexicans returning

[175] Molina, 138. And Reisler, 231.
[176] Reisler, 230.
[177] Reisler, 231.
[178] "Mexican Migration: The Turn of the Tide," *Eugenical News*, Vol. 17, No. 11 (Nov 1931): 199.

to Mexico. In the April 1931 edition of *Eugenical News*, in a column titled "Voluntary Deportation" the author highlighted the federal government's plan to provide free passage home for "jobless alien in the United States."[179] Eugenic approval for the increased border patrol and the federal government paying for Mexicans to return to Mexico is somewhat incompatible with other eugenic arguments that criticized Mexican immigrants for how much they cost the American government. Both the border patrol and fees associated with Mexican's traveling to Mexico would have been significant, but eugenicists were more interested in getting Mexicans out of America than with costs associated with Mexican deportation. By supporting costs associated with keeping Mexicans out of the United States, eugenicists demonstrated a willingness to use whatever rationalization allowed them to argue that Mexican immigration should be restricted. In the May 1931 edition of *Eugenical News*, an article about immigration reported on Mexicans' departure from Southwestern California: "Without new legislation but in response to stricter enforcement of immigration laws and the 'economic depression,' many thousands of Mexicans – men, women and children – are reported to be leaving Southern California for Mexico. The stream seems to be a steady and growing one."[180] In contrast to the eugenics community's repeated call for formal quotas in the years between 1928 and 1930, eugenicists expressed satisfaction with the informal removal of Mexicans from the Southwest.

Through a series of developments not necessarily connected to any of the efforts made by the eugenics community to reduce Mexican immigration, towards

[179] "Voluntary Deportation," *Eugenical News*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (April 1931): 49.
[180] "Temporary Immigration," *Eugenical News*, Vol. 16, No. 5 (May 1931): 68.

the middle of the Great Depression many eugenicists found they were satisfied with the reduction of Mexican immigration to the United States. The eugenics community's complete reversal of their position that Mexican immigration was a monumental problem in the United States and needed serious consideration, to the position that the problem of Mexican immigration had been solved, did not necessarily constitute wasted efforts on behalf of the eugenics community. The topic of Mexican immigration allowed the eugenics community to popularize many of their opinions about immigration, a topic central to many of their goals. While eugenicists had reasons for focusing specifically on Mexican immigrants that could be easily connected to core eugenic beliefs in a racial hierarchy, constructing their arguments against Mexican immigrants in financial terms was likely partially political pandering. Financial issues were not regularly seen in eugenic publications until the Great Depression. However, with a considerable number of Americans extremely interested in financial issues, eugenicists framed their concerns about race and heredity in economic terms and likely gained the attention of many Americans who were affected financially by the Great Depression.

- Conclusion - Perspectives on Mexican Immigration: Then and Now

Many of the changes that occurred in the American eugenics movement during the late 1920s and early 1930s mimicked changes occurring in the greater

society. Like a great deal of American society, in the months preceding and during the Great Depression, American eugenics came to focus on economic issues. Eugenics was a science defined by the primary goal of directing human evolution and predicated on beliefs in a racial hierarchy that put everyone who was not white, and/or American or Nordic, in a substandard category. Therefore, other than funding issues, the economy did not hold a primary position in eugenic goals as they simply did not factor into how to direct human evolution towards eugenic ends. However, the Great Depression made the economy important to almost everyone in American society and eugenicists capitalized on this interest by making their issues relevant to a society in an economic recession. They aligned their interest in reducing populations of racialized Others with society's broader interest in the economy. Eugenicists came to focus on how much immigrants cost the white American public just as issues of unemployment and failing public services were becoming of paramount importance to a great deal of Americans. The failing economy also aligned with increasing concerns in the eugenics community with Mexican immigration. Due in large part to the 1924 Immigration Act, that significantly reduced immigrant labor from almost all places outside of the Western hemisphere, Mexican-Americans became the largest immigrant group of racialized Others entering the United States. Because of this, eugenicists came to focus their new interest in the economy on specifically Mexican immigrants and arguments about how much immigrants cost the white American public were usually focused on Mexicans.

Throughout my thesis, I have focused on medical and eugenics literature in order to demonstrate not only how eugenics literature changed during the Great Depression, but also how changes in eugenics were motivated by political opportunism. Eugenics and medical literature from this period provide insight into how and why eugenicists aligned themselves with understandings and beliefs in the greater society and provide one example of how science is not isolated from socio-cultural factors, but rather is intimately connected to politics and public opinions. Eugenics journals as well as the USPHS played a significant role in creating and popularizing the ideas that became central to eugenic calls for stopping the flow of immigration from Mexico. Ideas about the poor sanitation habits of Mexicans, as well as about the propensity of Mexicans to spread disease were central ideas to several USPHS projects and these ideas are often encountered in American eugenic literature during the 1920s and 1930s. The notion that Mexicans were a health threat was used as both an example of how Mexicans were incompatible with American life, as well as one of the ways that Mexicans cost the United States money. In addition to claiming they were public health threats, eugenics claimed Mexicans were not fit for American life because they had mixed race origins and were unintelligent.

The American eugenics movement repeatedly demonstrated its ability to make itself relevant in a changing society. At the turn of the twentieth century the founding members of the eugenics community found immigration to be a useful topic for popularizing the science in the America. Because immigration was already a popular topic in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century, early

eugenicists made immigration a central topic in their new agendas and gained the attention of Americans already interested in the purported immigration problem. At the onset of the Great Depression, eugenicists again demonstrated their agility when they changed their focus to financial concerns during the economic recession. Eugenics had a strong foundation in regulating immigration before the economic recession hit the United States in the late 1920s. In fact, eugenicists' history of influencing public opinion about immigrants as well as their experience in influencing immigration policy put them in a good position to further stimulate fears about immigrants entering the United States at the beginning of the Great Depression.

The large and growing population of Mexicans in the American Southwest at the beginning of the twentieth century was a result of a number of factors both North and South of the Rio Grande. On the surface, the relationship between Mexico and the United States appeared symbiotic; the United States provided jobs for Mexicans and Mexicans provided labor for the United States. However, eugenicists saw both the factors that pushed Mexicans away from Mexico as well as those that drew them to the United States to be problems as it resulted in increased numbers of Mexicans in the United States. Eugenicists made several attempts to reduce the flow of Mexican immigration, the most significant being lobbying Congress for quotas on Mexican immigration. However, no quotas were applied to Mexican immigration during this period.

Eugenicists, the USPHS, and Congress, as well as likely many other members of American society gained interest in Mexican immigrants at the beginning of the

Great Depression. A significant amount of scholarship has been published that documents and theorizes the history of attributing social problems to immigrants, particularly during times of economic unrest. In, "Economic Insecurity, Prejudicial Stereotypes, and Public Opinion on Immigration Policy," Peter Burns and James Gimpel argue that "prejudice is ultimately an expression of self-interested calculations based on one's economic position; and anti-immigration attitudes are traceable to economic anxieties."[181] Hispanics in the United States are currently experiencing discrimination similar to what Mexicans experienced during the Great Depression. With the global economic recession, sometimes referred to as the Great Recession or the Late 2000s Recession, that began in the United States in December 2007, immigrants from South of the border have once again become the target of increased racist discrimination. One current new example of discrimination in the legal system is the Arizona Immigration Law that was passed in April 2010 that allows law officials to detain anyone suspected of being an illegal immigrant and makes failure to carry immigration papers a crime. The *New York Times* reported that some have called the Arizona Immigration law an open invitation for the harassment and discrimination against Hispanics regardless of their citizenship status.[182] The law has been referred to colloquially as "walking while Hispanic," which suggests that regardless of citizenship or immigration status, Hispanics in Arizona are treated like they are breaking the law. While significant differences exist between the Arizona Immigration Law and the multiple calls for restricting Mexican

[181] "Peter Burns, James Gimpel, "Economic Insecurity, Prejudicial Stereotypes, and Public Opinion on Immigration Policy," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 115, No. 2 (Summer 2000): 203.
[182] Randal C. Archibold, "Arizona Enacts Stringent Law on Immigration," *New York Times*, (April 23, 2010).

immigration in the late 1920s and early 1930s, there are also striking similarities. Both occurred during a time of economic recession and high unemployment and target the Hispanic population, one of the most impoverished demographics in the region. Furthermore, both periods rely on constructed racial characteristics in order to discriminate and demonstrate a tendency to target racialized others from South of the border for racist discrimination during times of economic unrest.

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