
The Banality of Evil

The Careers of Charles Davenport and Harry Laughlin

HANNAH ARENDT, in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, made a controversial assessment of Adolph Eichmann by describing his career as “the banality of evil.”¹ Eichmann was the bureaucrat Nazi who scheduled the deportation of Jews to the killing centers in eastern Europe, and he was the recording secretary of the Wannsee Conference in 1942 that designed the “final solution” or liquidation of Jews from occupied Europe. Many objected to Arendt’s view that ordinary people are corruptible by self-interest or shallow values and capable of participating in mass murder. Those who objected preferred to see a character flaw or capacity for evil in Eichmann that is exceptional in human behavior. The debate is important, because if acts of mass murder are pathological, then only a small portion of humanity has this demonic trait, whether innate or culturally created. If Arendt is right, we have much more to worry about because humanity is constantly vulnerable to circumstances that can make ordinary people participate willingly in extraordinary crimes against humanity. At the same time, Arendt’s idea of the banality of evil gives humanity an opportunity to find ways to educate its future generations to prevent such corrupting influences. I share with Arendt this latter view and consider the two chief promoters of the American eugenics movement, Charles Benedict Davenport and Harry Hamilton Laughlin, to be prototypes of Eichmann.²

Davenport's Career as a Geneticist

Davenport's career included his work as a geneticist, his interests in eugenics, his desire to educate others about the life sciences, and his administrative skill in building and directing a major center where these three activities could be carried out. Davenport was educated in the late 19th century. He took an early interest in natural history because his father, a real estate broker in New York City, had a farm in Connecticut where they spent the summers. Davenport's father was strict and wanted a secure future for his talented son. He felt farming and natural history were not profitable careers and pushed him into engineering instead. Davenport followed his father's wishes but kept up his interests in evolution and experimental science. Eventually his father relented and Davenport returned to college for a Ph.D. in zoology. He made a name for himself by publishing a two-volume work on experimental morphology as he saw it in the late 1890s.³ It was very quantitative and strongly influenced by the prevailing Darwinian model of evolution then taught in the major universities. Character traits in this model changed very gradually, if not imperceptibly, from generation to generation. Scientists would look for subtle changes in response to temperature, centrifugation, chemical stimuli, and other environmentally introduced agents in controlled experiments. Morphology was used as the way to measure such changes with careful measurements of the lengths and ratios of limbs, wings, mouthparts, or other minor details of features.

In 1900, this prevailing biometric model championed by W. F. R. Weldon and K. Pearson was upended by the discovery of Mendel's long-forgotten findings of 1865 which showed that many traits were discontinuous and their distribution across generations was highly predictable through breeding analysis. Davenport immediately recognized the importance of the new Mendelism, and he contributed to it by showing that a number of factors in chickens were inherited according to Mendelian laws.

Davenport, independently of William Bateson in Great Britain, demonstrated that the various combs in chickens were a consequence of the interaction of two different genes (and in some cases of three different genes).⁴ He worked these out and published those results while still at Harvard. He argued that the discovery of typical and atypical Mendelian traits in animals supported a universal model of hereditary units determining character traits. He was an enthusiastic supporter of Bateson's work, which provided the most widespread confirmation and extension of Mendelism in the scientific world.⁵ Davenport was an enthusiast for the new

Mendelism and urged his colleagues in natural history, zoology, and botany to embrace it as a new tool for studying evolution.

Davenport was seen as a multi-talented, ambitious, and rising star among the older members of the American Breeder's Association. He also knew how to circulate among the wealthy elite, whose children took his courses at the Brooklyn Academy. He was selected to be fund-raiser, designer, and administrator for an enterprise set up on the north shore of Long Island, New York, at Cold Spring Harbor. Eventually, this housed all three components of Davenport's interests: the Long Island Biological Station provided the summer courses for high school teachers; the Carnegie Institution of Washington supported the basic genetic research of his permanent staff and the summer investigators who came to do uninterrupted research; and the Eugenics Record Office carried out the basic and applied human genetics that fed into the growing American eugenics movement encouraged by the American Breeder's Association and funded by a gift from the Harriman estate. The Long Island Biological Station was separately funded by donations from the wealthy families that lived on the north shore of Long Island. The building of this empire of scientific activities took place between 1903 and 1913. Davenport proved effective in designing the facilities and creating an atmosphere where basic research could be carried out by its permanent and visiting investigators, allowing scientists to exchange ideas and enjoy the stimulation of their colleagues from other universities. This was not original to Davenport; he used the Naples Station for Marine Biology in Italy as a model, even to adopting its architectural design for its chief buildings. He was also inspired by the Wood's Hole model in Massachusetts, which had a powerful impact on experimental zoology and developmental biology. The Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory was devoted to genetics and experimental evolution.⁶

Davenport's Personality

Davenport was insecure. This is a feature of many eminent persons. They compensate for their insecurities by driving themselves to prove their worth. But Davenport was also autocratic. He ran his own show and liked to surround himself with weak assistants who admired him and who were unlikely to take issue with his major views. He liked to hear good things about his work and was defensive and intolerant of criticism. These character flaws made him vulnerable to error, bias, and the corrupting influence of power.

His childhood need to prove himself to his father also played a role in his career. He saw himself as a potential benefactor to the world through his eugenic movement. In Davenport's career, these led to an over-inflated view of his contributions as a geneticist, as leader of the eugenics movement, and as a power broker in society. Davenport does not rank with E. B. Wilson, T.H. Morgan, or R.A. Emerson among the first rank of the new Mendelians in the U.S. who dominated classical genetics in the first decades of the 20th century. Nor did he catch up to them in discoveries of major importance during the years of his work at Cold Spring Harbor. This is understandable after 1910 because he was heavily involved in administration and could not do his own research on a large scale. Davenport was nevertheless recognized as a capable geneticist and a solid scientist who had earned his reputation as a leader in that field. He was elected to the National Academy of Sciences and certainly had the publication record and the quality of work from his early years to merit this distinction. Nor should one doubt the effectiveness of the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory in promoting good science through the Carnegie Institution's supported research. The publications of its basic genetic research set a standard of excellence that has continued throughout the 20th and into the 21st centuries.⁷

Davenport's Contributions to Human Genetics

It was in human genetics that Davenport sought his greatest fame. If he could analyze human traits and show which ones Mendelized and which did not, he could identify traits of value to medicine, psychology, and society. He recognized that humans cannot be bred like chickens, mice, or fruit flies to satisfy a scientist's curiosity, and he chose pedigree analysis as the most effective means of carrying out his analysis.

Pedigree analysis was initiated by Francis Galton but not for Mendelian traits. Galton used this method for what he thought were quantitative traits that ran in families—especially behavioral traits such as unusual talents in music, mathematics, and writing.⁸ It was a way of showing the preponderance of family members with eminent or potentially eminent traits. After the Mendelian rediscovery in 1900, Davenport was one of the first to apply pedigree analysis to human physical traits. He sought the help of physicians and hoped to train them in taking accurate pedigrees. This was part of his enthusiasm for a Eugenics Record Office, where such pedigrees could be maintained and where he could train field

workers to visit institutions and take family histories of the patients. It was inspired also by the work of Richard Dugdale, who compiled family histories of criminals and paupers among kindred of Dutch settlers from the early 1700s who had proliferated in the Hudson Valley near Kingston (Ulster County in New York). Dugdale was an environmentalist and his popular book on the Jukes, as he called this family, became a classic of sociology in the late 19th century.⁹ Those who read it rejected his interpretation that a good environment could reverse the bad behavior of the Jukes, and they embraced his data, reinterpreting it (from the 1880s on) as a more pessimistic evidence for fixed defects of protoplasm that were being passed on, corrupting future generations. Davenport was one of the strongest supporters of this hereditarian interpretation of the Jukes kindred. His education was heavily influenced by August Weismann's theory of the germ plasm, which (correctly) identified a separation of environmental influence on the soma (the body cells) and a relative isolation of such environmental effects on the germinal cells of the gonads (the germ plasm).

Davenport demonstrated that albinism in humans is an autosomal recessive trait (one not associated with a sexual difference in incidence).¹⁰ The parents of such a child are carriers (heterozygous in the geneticist's technical jargon) and normal in appearance, but each of their reproductive efforts leading to a child has a 25% chance of bringing the recessive genes together and producing an albino child. He also demonstrated that human skin color is a quantitative trait. He went to Jamaica in 1912 to do an extensive study of children and grandchildren of parents who were interracial couples.¹¹ He and his coworkers used a color wheel resembling a spinning whirligig that had different sectors of white, black, red, and yellow to produce a blended blur that they would apply to the inner arm of the subjects. When a matching color was found they would have a quantitative measure of the color rather than a subjective term to describe it. Davenport's findings were impressive. He exploded many folk myths about human racial hybridizing. He claimed there were two chief genes involved in human skin color and their effects were additive. There was no dominant or recessive factor for color. A person expressed as many of the color factors as were present in the genetically inferred composition (genotype) of that individual. If the color factors are A and B for melanizing pigment and a and b for the virtual absence of melanin in the skin, then African males or females are AABB and white males and females (especially the Anglican whites in Jamaica) are aabb. Their children who have brown skin are AaBb. When two such brown-skinned individuals have children, their offspring form a

spectrum of colors in a fixed ratio of 1 AABB: 4 AABb or AaBB: 6 AaBb or AAbb or aaBB: 4Aabb or aaBb: 1 aabb. Converting the intense melanin-producing factors into a color effect, this would be seen as 1 black: 4 dark brown: 6 brown: 4 light brown: 1 white. Davenport rejected a myth in southern bigotry that a white person with a black ancestor later marrying a white woman with no known black ancestry could have a black baby. His work also explained why two light brown-skinned parents could have a child darker than either parent. Thus, Aabb (light brown) × aaBb (light brown) can give one-fourth of the offspring having AaBb (brown), one-fourth aabb (white), and half Aabb or aaBb (light brown). Davenport used the work of H. Nilsson-Ehle (working with cereal grains) and E. M. East (working with maize) for this model that he applied to human skin color as a quantitative trait.¹²

Davenport was also the first to recognize and interpret what is called a founder effect in human genetics. He noted that families which are isolated geographically, socially, or by religion become genetic isolates and marry with one another. He identified each such isolated population running along the Atlantic coast from Maine to Virginia with unique Mendelian defects that were accidental manifestations of what was brought into that population by a carrier ancestor.¹³ He identified deaf mutism, albinism, midget stature, and similar recessive traits expressed in these different communities. Sometimes a dominant trait (such as Huntington disease) could be found in a community where people shunned marrying into their families and tended to breed among themselves, as the original Dr. George Huntington described on the south fork of eastern Long Island when he first described this disorder.

Davenport and the American Eugenics Movement

Davenport adopted a form of eugenics that is called negative eugenics by historians of science. Galton, who coined the term eugenics in 1883, founded a movement that is more properly called positive eugenics. In Galton's idealistic view, the history of a civilization could be measured by the contributions of a few eminent individuals. We think of Pericles, Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, Solon, Euripides, Aeschylus, and Sophocles when we dredge our memories on what made the Golden Age of Greek civilization so golden. If we were to mine the 19th century for its major contributors, we would think of Napoleon, Lincoln, Marx, Darwin, Faraday, Pasteur,

Koch, Beethoven, Van Gogh, Tolstoy, Hugo, Wordsworth, and Goethe as a sampling of the many hundreds who could be singled out for their great contributions to that century. This is known as the heroic theory of history. It assumes that major contributions to science, art, politics, literature, religion, and other hallmarks of civilization are the products of a small percentage of eminent individuals whose names we revere. Galton believed they are a national treasure who should be encouraged to reproduce more frequently than ordinary people because of their special talents. He tried to prove that such traits were inherited and claimed in his books on *Hereditary Genius* and *Natural Intelligence* that about 20% of the children or parents of an eminent individual were themselves eminent.¹⁴ Galton believed eugenics was a means of increasing the pool of talent (and thus the benefits to humanity) if they had many more children than they normally would produce. Historians call Galton's views positive eugenics.

Negative eugenics makes a different assumption. It assumes that the basic stock of a nation is healthy, and opportunity will distinguish those with ambition and talent from those who lack these traits. But among the failures of society are some notorious populations of thieves, feeble-minded individuals, lunatics, beggars, and vagrants who corrupt society by their petty crimes, demands for welfare, and ill health, requiring hospitalization and the construction of jails to keep them from preying on otherwise decent people. In the U.S. in the last half of the 19th century, families such as the Jukes in New York state and the Tribe of Ishmael in Indiana were held up as examples of pathological social failure who harbored a defective germ plasm.¹⁵ It was a theory of heredity similar to that of infectious diseases. A contaminating individual would corrupt the children of an innocent person who married such a defective person out of ignorance. Advocates of negative eugenics argued that society needed to protect itself by isolating the contaminating strains. This led to an expanded asylum movement (less for treatment than for storage to protect society) and eventually to more drastic measures such as restrictive marriage laws and compulsory sterilization laws.

These trends were already in place when Davenport received his college education and began making a name for himself as a geneticist. He shared a sympathy with those like David Starr Jordan and Alexander Graham Bell, who asked him to serve as a secretary to their newly formed committee on eugenics for the American Breeders Association. Jordan was a well-known ichthyologist and evolutionary biologist who was also a president of Indiana University and first president of Stanford University. He

was a prolific writer and popularizer of science, with books on heredity, eugenics, and evolution as well as criticisms of war (he was a leading pacifist and friend of Jane Addams).¹⁶ It was Jordan's essays that popularized the work of Oscar McCulloch on the Tribe of Ishmael. He denounced war as dysgenic, killing the most able and allowing those unfit for military service to stay home and reproduce. He also denounced the waging of war because it ignored a potential to establish an international court to adjudicate disputes among nations. His third argument against war was that it was costly and robbed nations of budgets that should be used for the education and health of its people.

Bell is best known to us as the inventor of the telephone. He had a long-standing interest in the teaching of the deaf and compiled evidence that some forms of deafness were inherited. He was concerned that sign language would encourage the deaf to form a race of their own, keeping them culturally and reproductively isolated. He also took an interest in the heredity of supernumerary breasts in sheep and demonstrated that these formed along the milk line; such extra breasts were frequently present in some strains of sheep.¹⁷ Both Jordan and Bell were enthusiasts for the new field of genetics that was emerging, and they urged the addition of a third wing to the already robust plant and animal genetics of the American Breeder's Association when they proposed adding a eugenics committee.

Davenport may have felt that although he was good at genetics research, it was not his forte. By focusing on the administration of a science complex devoted to genetics, he would certainly gain respect and recognition for the staff he would recruit. Eugenics, however, was not like experimental genetics, with its heavy demand for field work, microscopy, or crosses of living things. Those were time-dependent and did not allow much interruption for administrative work. Human genetics was different. Davenport could study pedigrees in his leisure time. He could interrupt a study of a trait and go back to it without having to start all over. But there was something special about human genetics research that made it appealing. It gave to science the potential to redirect evolution, to compensate for civilization's more charitable effect on those with defective germ plasm. It could identify the problem families and the problem traits and give those families or society itself an opportunity to limit their reproduction.

People with good intentions do not have evil thoughts in their heads. They believe they are doing the right thing. What they lack is a Promethean foresight into the implications of what they are advocating. This is why, I believe, so much harm can be done by people with good intentions. They

can lack the curiosity or talent to reflect on the possible outcomes of their ideas. Davenport can be faulted for more than this level of ignorance, which is shared by most of humanity. He was happy acquiring power, whether it was in his domain over the Cold Spring Harbor enterprise or for the emerging field of the American eugenics movement, which he tried to shape to his own values. It is this latter aspect which justifies my associating him with Arendt's judgment of practicing the banality of evil.

The Objectives of the American Eugenics Movement

The scope of Davenport's interests in eugenics is revealed in his 1911 book, *Heredity in Relation to Eugenics*.¹⁸ He was shaped by 19th-century thinking about human heredity and the classification of human traits. Modern medicine, he claimed, "has forgotten the fundamental fact that all men are created unequal in their protoplasmic makeup and unequal in their powers and responsibilities."¹⁹ His use of the term "protoplasmic" instead of "genetic" reflects this older perception. It is an unfortunate one, because protoplasmic implies a contaminating model, like an infectious disease that corrupts the child of a defective parent. The newer Mendelism should have signaled a different possibility of diverse outcomes from the breeding of allegedly defective human beings. Thus, albinos generally produce normally pigmented children when they have normally pigmented spouses. Persons with Huntington disease produce half their children without the potential for the disorder when they have children with a partner who has no history of the disorder.

Davenport's list of hereditary traits is an interesting compilation, "specifically, the Record Office sees pedigrees of families in which one or more of the following traits appears: short stature, tallness, corpulence, special talents in music, art, literature, mechanics, invention, and mathematics, rheumatism, multiple sclerosis, hereditary ataxias, Ménière's disease, chorea of all forms, eye defects of all forms, otosclerosis, peculiarities of hair, skin, and nails (especially red hair), albinism, harelip and cleft palate, peculiarities of the teeth, cancer, Thomsen's disease, hemophilia, exophthalmic goiter, diabetes, alkaptonuria, gout, peculiarities of the hands and feet and of other parts of the skeleton."²⁰ Note the absence of 19th-century categories of human heredity—criminality, psychosis, mental retardation, vagrancy, and pauperism. It is not that Davenport has abandoned these. He wants his list to reveal the potential of the new science of genetics to identify a hered-

itary basis for the “peculiarities” of human variation. He hoped to use this encyclopedic listing of potential hereditary traits as evidence that the “unsocial classes,” as he called them, were indisputably hereditary in their origin. He also assumed, erroneously, that the individuals of the unsocial classes would not be born to the middle class and to the elite readers of his books. In an oft-quoted claim, he argued “We have become so used to crime, disease, and degeneracy that we take them as necessary evils. That they were so in the world’s ignorance is granted; that they must remain so is denied.”²¹ Davenport’s use of the phrase “necessary evils” and his emphatic denial that this must be so reflects a messianic personality. He wants to convince his readers that eugenics has a social role. This includes the right of the state to control the propagation of the mentally incompetent and a rational approach to marriage. But it also presented a dilemma. Although he opposed abortion or euthanasia (destruction of the unfit before or after birth), he was concerned about the new compulsory sterilization movement launched in the late 19th century by Harry Clay Sharp in Indiana. Indiana had become the first state to make such sterilizations of degenerates legal. Davenport worried that the sterile degenerates would contribute to promiscuity with no fear of having to rear unwanted children. Later, he would abandon that argument after his student Harry Laughlin convinced him that the consequences of asylums releasing fertile degenerates would be of even greater danger to society.

Harry Laughlin and the Eugenics Record Office

Harry Laughlin was a student in Davenport’s summer program for high school teachers when it was still located in Brooklyn. Davenport encouraged Laughlin to get a Ph.D., and he contacted Edward Conklin at Princeton University. Laughlin did an undistinguished dissertation on mitosis in the onion (*Allium*) and came back with dual interests in studying the pedigrees of horses, especially thoroughbreds, and human heredity. Davenport convinced him to do the thoroughbred studies as a hobby and to devote his major efforts to running the Eugenics Record Office. He became the superintendent of the Office in 1913 and regularly attended regional, national, and international meetings on eugenics. Laughlin was born in Iowa and grew up in Missouri. His mother was a suffragette, and he admired her social activism. He had several older brothers who were successful osteopaths, and his father was a college president.²² Laughlin preferred nat-

ural history, and that was what attracted him to Davenport's institute. Laughlin was not as sophisticated as Davenport nor as broadly educated. He adored Davenport, who lifted him from the obscurity of being a country teacher and gave him a position of responsibility and the credentials to be accepted by the elite. He lived in Davenport's shadow and wanted to impress him by finding a place in eugenics that would meet his limited talents. He found that in several outlets. He was an excellent bureaucrat, and he could amass immense detail and organize it and present it. He liked lobbying for eugenics, and he recognized two opportunities to do so, one in state sterilization laws and the other in restrictive immigration legislation. An additional interest was that of being a de facto legal scholar. He affiliated himself with legal scholars so he could prepare model eugenic laws that would meet the test of constitutional challenge at the state or federal level.²³

Laughlin had few self-doubts about his values for eugenics. He believed inferior people were a menace and needed to be isolated, sterilized, or banned from entering the country. At home, the issues Davenport stressed were primarily home-grown paupers, psychotics, and the feeble-minded. But Laughlin saw an additional category emerging. He identified southern and eastern Europeans as the riff-raff of European countries who were dumping their problems on America's shore. Restrictive immigration legislation was the best response to this problem. Fortunately for Laughlin, his prejudices were widely supported in the U.S.²⁴ The new immigrants often became labor union organizers. They brought alien ideologies, especially socialism, to working-class Americans, corrupting them with a belief that their only salvation was the destruction of capitalist society. They spoke foreign languages and read their own foreign language newspapers printed in the U.S. Many lived in ghettos. They introduced an organized crime with picturesque names (the Black Hand, the Mafia, or Murder, Incorporated). Their health was bad, and many were unable to find work or keep a steady job. The Italians, Balkan nation immigrants, eastern European Jews, Serbs and Slavs of all sorts, Middle East Muslims, and hordes of Catholics were a threat to a once predominantly Protestant country with largely British and western European descendants.

Laughlin's Approach to Eugenics

Laughlin began his first effort by assessing the eugenic sterilization laws. He considered most of them worthless, because they did not meet con-

stitutional guarantees of due process and consistency. In 1914, he promoted Davenport's priorities of sexual segregation in asylums with sterilization only for those who would be released. He used phrases for the "unfit" such as the "submerged tenth" and "defective germ plasm," as carryovers from 19th-century perceptions of heredity. After his Ph.D., he shifted to a Mendelian vocabulary in describing those who should be sexually segregated, and his enthusiasm for compulsory sterilization greatly increased. By 1917, the Carnegie Institution was getting nervous, and they did not want Laughlin to lobby for sterilization laws.²⁵ They felt this would imperil their charitable status. They asked Davenport to assign Laughlin to other, less political, activities. Laughlin chose to serve as an "expert witness" at hearings in state and federal committees dealing with eugenic issues.

Laughlin did so because after 1912, a shift in eugenic interest took place. Prior to that year, the main concern was over the Jukes and other U.S.-born and rooted families. After 1912, Laughlin took a deep interest in the national origins of defectives in relief rolls, hospitals, prisons, and asylums. Within a decade, he established himself as a regular expert witness for the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, and he became a friend of Albert Johnson, its chair.²⁶ Johnson was a Republican representative from the state of Washington and virulently opposed to Japanese immigration to the West Coast. Laughlin struck up a friendship with Harry Olson, the Chief Justice of the Municipal Court of Chicago, and he worked on model eugenic laws with him and his staff.²⁷

This eventually led to cooperation between the Eugenics Record Office, the state of Virginia, and both sides of what became known as the *Buck v Bell* Supreme Court case of 1927. In that case, the legal principals in Virginia were friends and mutually agreed that whoever lost in court would continue to appeal the case to the Supreme Court. In a brilliant analysis of this case, Paul Lombardo demonstrates the way Carrie Buck was selected and railroaded to her eventual sterilization, although it was clear from the evidence, even at that time, that Carrie Buck's imbecility was highly questionable.²⁸ The 8-1 decision upholding the right of Virginia to sterilize its unfit citizens was the high point of the efforts of the Eugenics Record Office to put a eugenics program into practice.

Laughlin's efforts in promoting eugenic sterilization and restrictive immigration legislation based on the alleged inferiority of southern and eastern Europeans was much admired by the growing racial hygiene movement in Weimar, Germany, and embraced by the Nazis when they

came to power. Laughlin was thrilled and boasted, "To one versed in the history of eugenical sterilization in America, the text of the German statute reads almost like the 'American model sterilization law'."²⁹ Laughlin was honored in 1937 with an honorary doctoral degree from Heidelberg University for his contributions to eugenics, but the State Department advised him not to make the trip to Germany to accept the award. Instead he went to a smaller ceremony at the German consulate in Rockefeller Center in New York City.

The award was too late for Laughlin's career. The election of President Roosevelt in 1932 ended the Republican control of Congress, and Laughlin found he was no longer of interest as an expert witness. Davenport retired as head of the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory in 1935, and an external committee evaluated the work of the Eugenics Record Office and found virtually all of its eugenic research flawed or unworthy of further support.³⁰ Laughlin resigned and went back to Missouri to live out his retirement years.

Assessing Davenport and Laughlin

As a geneticist, Charles Davenport was never as creative, successful, committed, or gifted as his American contemporaries Morgan, Wilson, Castle, Emerson, East, or Shull. They spent their entire lives as experimentalists and made substantial contributions to classical genetics. Davenport essentially dropped out as an experimentalist after 1910, when almost all his activities were directed to eugenics and the administration of a first-class facility for studying evolution and genetics. Unlike Galton, who was a brilliant theoretician, Davenport lacked an original mind. He compensated by being an effective administrator. In this respect, he was like Anton Dohrn, who founded the Naples station in the last quarter of the 19th century. That was also true for Fernandus Payne, who became a successful Chair and Dean at Indiana University and who built a great program in genetics. Davenport was too ambitious to allow his fame to be that of an able administrator. He believed he was as good as his more famous contemporaries, and he used his power to serve on many committees promoting genetics. His good intentions were always tinged with an ambition to gain recognition. He shared many of the social prejudices of those philanthropists with whom he felt at ease. He had an opportunity at the Eugenics Record Office to develop a Mendelian study of human traits, but

he was so convinced that behavioral traits were the key to this effort that he tried to force into that new Mendelism the “submerged tenth,” the unfit, and the traditional social classes of criminals, psychotics, feeble-minded, paupers, and vagrants.

Laughlin had the misfortune to be worse. He knew he wasn't in the same league as the geneticists whose articles filled the pages of the journal *Genetics*. His work on thoroughbred horses was never successful in identifying any genes that made great horses, and the vast amount of his research went undigested and unpublished. His eugenics research was similarly void of useful publications. He satisfied himself with the only outlet for a person lacking research sophistication or creativity. Although Laughlin was never a rabid anti-Semite nor an overt bigot, as many of the more extreme officers of the KKK were during that era, he revealed his views in a letter to Madison Grant (a notorious anti-Semite, white supremacist, and racist writer).³¹ In 1932, he differed with Hitler's extreme position on Jews, but he told Grant, “a Jew must be assimilated or deported.”³² As Davenport's bureaucrat, Laughlin took the heat for many of the controversial political forays they made to extend eugenics to society. Unlike Galton, who saw eugenics in the late 19th century as a moral effort to educate his fellow elitists to have more children, Laughlin saw eugenics as a political effort to identify unfit classes and individuals and isolate them from reproducing.

But the work of Davenport and Laughlin did lead to the sterilization of over 40,000 Americans, and they lent their moral support to the early years of the race hygiene movement and the Nazi Nuremberg laws. Had the Nazis won the war, I do not doubt that if Davenport and Laughlin had been alive and in good health, they would have played major roles in cleansing the U.S. of its allegedly unfit classes (primarily by sterilization), and they would have cooperated in establishing American race hygiene programs with their German counterparts. It may be true that Davenport's enthusiasm for eugenics was misplaced out of his zeal to make a contribution to society, but it does not exempt him from the damage done to those whose opportunities to marry and have a family were permanently thwarted. Many of them were selected for nonmedical reasons and had the misfortune to be in the wrong social class. I do not consider Davenport and Laughlin to be in the same category of committing evil acts as those major Nazi criminals who faced Nuremberg trials. They never advocated mass murder of the unfit. Their eugenic ideology was muted compared to Nazi ideology.

Notes and References

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5. W.E. Castle, "The Reception of Mendelism in America" in *Genetics in the 20th Century*, ed. L.C. Dunn (Macmillan, New York, 1950). See pp. 59–76.
6. Jan Witkowski, *Illuminating Science* (Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press, Cold Spring Harbor, New York, 2000). See Witkowski's "Prologue" for a brief history.
7. *Ibid.* Witkowski has selected 20 articles from the staff between 1903 and 1969.
8. Nicholas Wright Gilham, *A Life of Sir Francis Galton: From African Exploration to the Birth of Eugenics* (Oxford University Press, New York, 2001).
9. Richard Dugdale, *The Jukes: A Study in Crime, Pauperism, Disease, and Heredity* (G.P. Putnam Sons, New York, 1877). Dugdale was born in France and raised in the U.S. His views were Lamarckian, and he saw the Jukes as victims of a bad environment. He died young of rheumatic fever, and after 1880, Weismann's views on the germ plasm replaced Lamarckism (the belief that heredity can be altered in a direct way by the environment).
10. C.B. Davenport, "Degeneration, albinism and inbreeding." *Science* 28 (1908): 454–455.
11. Charles B. Davenport and Morris Steggerda (1929) *Race Crossing in Jamaica* (Reprinted by Negro Universities Press, Westport, Connecticut, 1970). The book first appeared in 1913 as *Heredity of Skin-Color in Negro-White Crosses*. (Most of the field notes were taken by Florence H. Danielson.) Carnegie Institution of Washington Publication 188, 106 pages.
12. H. Nilsson-Ehle, "Kreuzungsuntersuchungen an Häfer und Weizen *Lunds Universitets Arsskrift*" 5 (1909): 1–122; E.M. East, "A Mendelian interpretation of variation that is apparently continuous." *Am. Nat.* 44 (1910): 65–82.
13. C.B. Davenport, *Heredity in Relation to Eugenics* (Henry Holt, New York, 1910).
14. Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into Its Law and Consequences* (Macmillan, London, 1869); Francis Galton, *Natural Inheritance* (Macmillan, London, 1899).

15. D.S. Jordan, "Hereditary Pauperism," in *Footnotes to Evolution: A Series of Popular Addresses on the Evolution of Life* (D. Appleton, New York, 1898).
16. D.S. Jordan, *The Blood of a Nation* (National Unitarian Press, Boston, 1902). D.S. Jordan, *The Heredity of Richard Roe: A Discussion of the Principles of Eugenics* (American Unitarian Press, Boston, 1911). D.S. Jordan, *Unseen Empire: A Study of the Plight of Nations That Cannot Pay Their Debts* (American Unitarian Press, Boston, 1912). D.S. Jordan, *War and the Breed: The Relation of War to the Downfall of Nations* (Beacon Press, Boston, 1915). See also Jordan's autobiography, *Days of a Man: Being Memories of a Naturalist, Teacher, and Minor Prophet of Democracy* (World Book Company, Yonkers-on-the-Hudson, New York, 1922).
17. Alexander Graham Bell, *Upon the formation of a deaf variety of the human race*. National Academy of Sciences. Memoirs, volume 4, number 2, 86 pages. (U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1884).
18. Davenport, 1910 op. cit., Preface and Introduction.
19. *Ibid.*, p. iii.
20. *Ibid.*, p. iv.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
22. Hassencahl, op. cit., p. 44. Laughlin's papers were donated to the library archives of the Truman State University Library in Missouri. It is a rich collection of correspondence for historians of the American eugenics movement.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 155.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 165. The irony of Laughlin's later life was an onset of epilepsy, once a sign of degeneracy in 19th-century social and medical thinking.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
26. Albert Johnson (1869–1957) was a newspaper publisher in Tacoma and Hoquiam, Washington, who ran for Congress in 1913 opposing citizens' rights for Japanese immigrants and Japanese naturalized American citizens. He eventually chaired the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization until his defeat in 1932. His best-known accomplishments were the 1921 and 1924 restrictive immigration acts, which limited new immigrants to the U.S. for the next 30 years. The 1924 law used the 1890 census (a largely western European majority) for national origins, and this minimized the immigration from eastern and southern Europe.
27. Harry Hamilton Laughlin, *Eugenical Sterilization in the United States*. (Psychopathic Laboratory of the Municipal Court of Chicago, Illinois, 1922).
28. Paul Lombardo, "Three generations, no imbeciles: New light on Buck v. Bell." *NYU Law Rev.* **60** (1985): 31–62.
29. Hassencahl, op. cit., p. 339.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 329.
31. Madison Grant (1865–1932) was a lawyer in New York City and a friend of Davenport. He took an interest in the conservation movement and helped establish the Bronx Zoo. He was virulently racist and anti-Semitic, and his book, *The Passing of the Great Race, or, the Racial Basis of European History* (Scribner's, New York, 1916), was a best-seller and translated into several languages, including German. It was much admired by Hitler, who called it "my bible."
32. Hassencahl, op. cit., p. 344.