Who is Unfit?: Centering Race and Disability in Histories of Eugenics

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Pacific Colony: Confinement, Sterilization, and the Convergence of Race and Disability
Presentation Outline

• Disability and Eugenic Notions of the “Unfit”

• Pacific Colony Case Study
  • Feeblemindedness/mental defect
    • Knowledge production
    • Gendered Application
    • Implementation
  • Resistance

• Eugenic Legacies
Critical Disability Studies: Disability as a Social Construct

- Power, historical context
- Justifies inequality
- “ideological lynchpin” in the (re)constitution of “social difference along the axes of race, gender, and sexuality.” (Erevelles, Disability and Difference, 6)
Pacific Colony: A Case Study

- Where eugenic theories of feeblemindedness were both developed and implemented
- Disability and race come together: Mexican-origin youth targeted for confinement and sterilization

- 1935 CBJR Study: “Mexican” represented 15.3% of population
- 1947 Psychology Dept. Study: “Mexicans” 21.2% of population
- Admission Legers 1927-1947: “M” 21% of admissions

Figure 2. Sterilization requests by Spanish surname per year, 1928–51. See Table 4 in the appendix for the yearly sterilization request counts.
Lewis M. Terman and Knowledge Production on Feeblemindedness

- Intelligence = Social Rank and Value
  - IQ Scores
  - Social Data
  - Family Histories
- Education, Labor, Civics, reproduction
- Broad Social Implications
  - Poverty
  - Crime
  - Morality
The Convergence of Race and Disability

• ⅓-½ “delinquency in California can be prevented by segregation, in their early years, of feeble-minded children” J. Harold Williams in Report of 1915 Legislature

• “Negroes and Mexican-Indians show a greater tendency to delinquency than the whites. [...] This relationship is probably due to the higher intelligence of the whites. The average IQ’s for the delinquents of the three races were, white, .82; Mexican-Indian, .69; Colored, .77.” J. Harold Williams in Journal of Delinquency. 1920

• “Intellectually the Mexican Children are consistently inferior to American children. [...] This is not due, evidently, to the language factor, but appears to be real native inferiority. “ Mary Bees Henry in Journal of Delinquency ,1920
Gendered Application

- Gendered symptomology
  - Young men
    - Petty crimes & status crimes
  - Young women
    - “sexual delinquency”
Theory Meets Practice

- (Prophylactic) Institutionalization, (Nicole Rafter The First Eugenics Campaign, 1992)
- Eugenic Sterilization
- “Vocational Training” and “Industrial Parole”
(Re)Interpreting Pathologized Behaviors, Refusals, and Escapes

- Defiance and disobedience
- Refusal to consent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Reference Number</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10-5-48</td>
<td>Goddard</td>
<td>John Martinez</td>
<td>$14422</td>
<td>Patient was working on gang detail in vegetable garden. Went to get a drink and didn't return.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10-5-48</td>
<td>Goddard</td>
<td>Gilbert Macias</td>
<td>#14353</td>
<td>Patient was working on gang detail in vegetable garden. Went to get a drink and didn't return.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10-10-48</td>
<td>Paxton</td>
<td>Rosario Valverde</td>
<td>#13552</td>
<td>While patients were in yard, attendant let Valverde in sewing room at 8 PM to sweep floors. Hillman returned to sewing room at 8:20 to let him out. Patient had escaped by cutting hole through window screen.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Legacies: Continued Sites of Reproductive Injustice

• 2000s: Sterilization at California Women’s Prisons
• 2018: Kenosha Wisconsin sheriff: men accused of shoplifting should be “warehoused” for life, to “stope them, …at least some of these males, going out and getting ten other women pregnant”
• 2020: ICE Detention hysterectomies