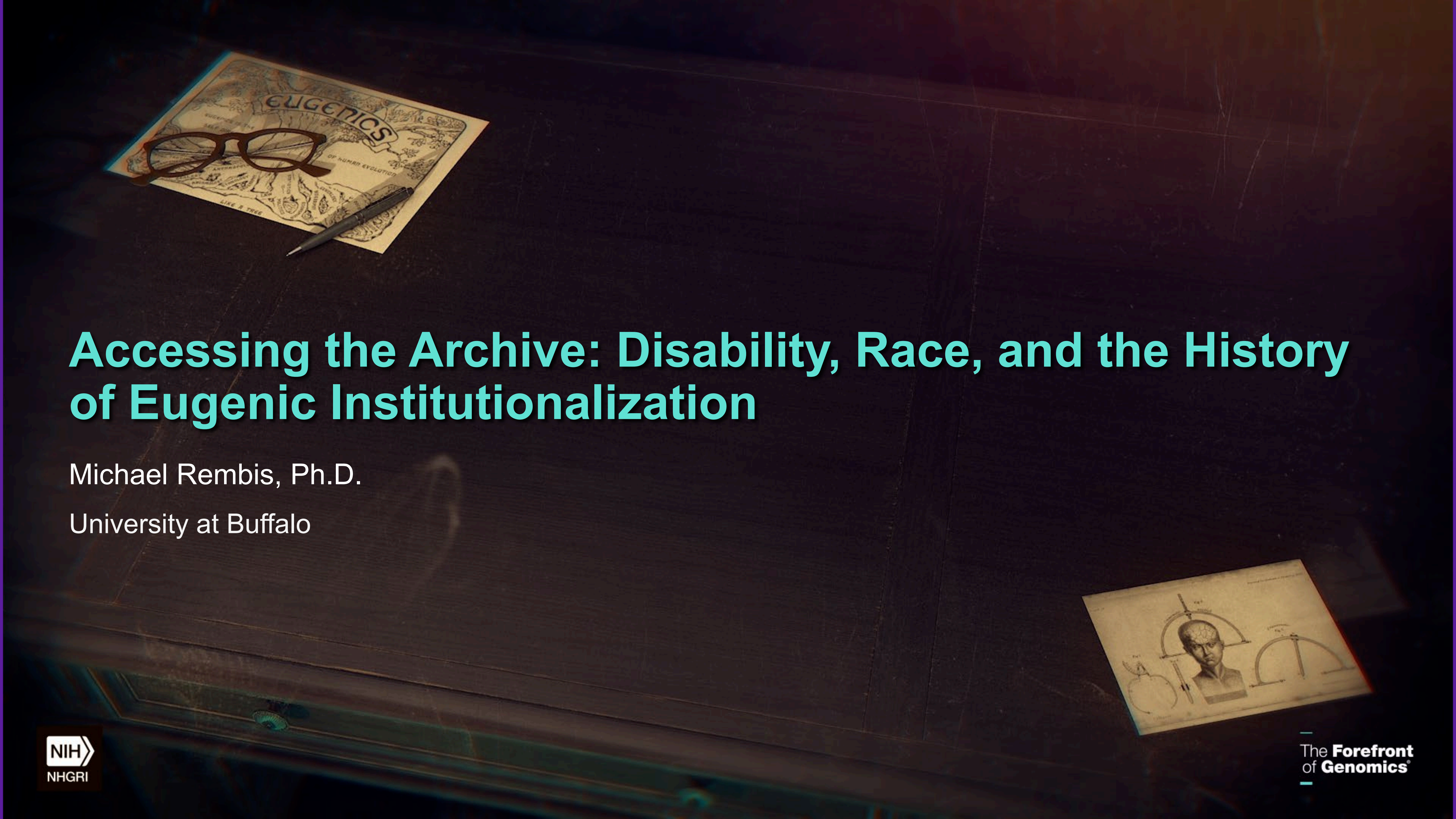

Accessing the Archive: Disability, Race, and the History of Eugenic Institutionalization

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The Forefront of Genomics®

Accessing the Archive: A Personal Story

1996 – I began research for what became my first book.

I was interested in eugenics and the institutionalization of people considered "feebleminded."

I knew that I wanted, as much as it was possible, to tell the story from the perspective of people considered "feebleminded."

I decided to focus primarily on two institutions from 1890-1960: the State Training School for Girls in Geneva and the Lincoln State School and Colony for the Feebleminded, both in Illinois.

Why these institutions? Why Illinois?

Eugenic "Reformers" in Illinois

Illinois offered many ways to nuance what was, in the mid-1990s, an as yet underdeveloped historiography of eugenics.

Eugenics in Illinois involved many progressives and women reformers, and Illinois was one of the few states that never passed a sterilization law.

I also discovered early on in my research that there were thousands of unprocessed (they had not been archived) case files from the State Training School in Geneva that were being stored on the campus of what was at the time the boys correctional facility in St. Charles, Illinois.

Case files can be rich sources – some contain letters and detailed accounts of interactions with physicians, psychiatrist, psychologist, teachers. I knew that these case files would also contain academic progress reports, possibly intelligence tests and psychiatric and psychological evaluations

Major problems: No officials would confirm if the files existed and when I confirmed that they did indeed exist, I had a difficult time accessing them.

Eventually gained access to St. Charles and looked at the records.

Why Not Improve the Human Race?
Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1963); Jan 26, 1908; ProQuest Historical Newspapers Chicago Tribune (1849 - 1985)
pg. E3

The Chicago Sunday Tribune.

Why Not Improve the Human Race?

OTHER ANIMALS AND PLANTS HAVE BEEN IMPROVED BY EVOLUTION
AND NOW SCIENTISTS PROPOSE TO DO THE SAME THING WITH MAN.

Eugenics and “progress” in 1912

- According to eugenicists like Dr. W. A. Evans, campaigning for pure milk and crusading against infant mortality—both of which he did as Chicago’s Health Commissioner—were vital reform efforts, but they attacked only part of the problem. “We have been so busy with environment,” Evans asserted, “that we have forgotten team work. Race betterment is loaded in a two horse wagon, to which is hitched Improved Environment and Eugenics.”
- Evans and other eugenicists contended that insanity, alcoholism, drug addiction, cancer, consumption, neurosis, hereditary deafness, multiple sclerosis, and many other “ailments,” “conditions,” “diseases,” and “handicaps” could all be greatly reduced or even eliminated only if society worked toward improving the quality of the gene pool as well as the swimming pool.

Eugenics and Institutionalization

1900 – 126,137 people/131 state institutions

1929 – 272,527 institutionalized people
1940 – 419,374 people/181 institutions

By mid-1950s – More than 560,000 people/institutions

Why?

industrialization, urbanization, immigration, internal migration

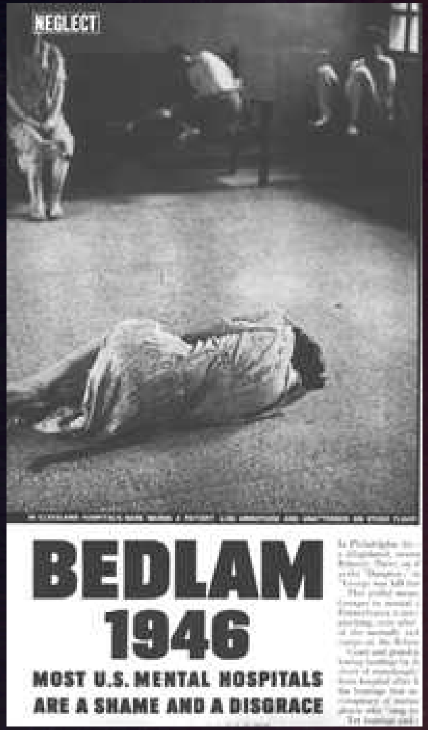
Rise of medical and professional power and authority at the end of the 19th century

- Creation (or further entrenchment) of “deviant” and “defective” bodies and minds through the tools of modern science: labs, statistics, intelligence tests (1908)
- Rise of eugenics

A TYPICAL INTERVIEWING ROOM—The New Institute for Juvenile Research

Deinstitutionalization

- 1946 – May 6 – Albert Q. Maisel publishes “Bedlam 1946: Most U.S. Mental Hospitals are a Shame and a Disgrace” in *Life.*
  - Based on reports of Conscientious Objectors to World War II who served in the hospitals during the war.
- 1946 – U.S. Congress passes the Mental Health Act
  - leading to the creation of the National Institute of Mental Health\
- 1947 – Frank L. Wright Jr., *Out of Sight, Out of Mind*
  - 2000 eyewitness reports of conditions and treatment at 46 mental hospitals
- 1948 – Albert Deutsch, *The Shame of the States - Mental Illness and Social Policy: The American Experience*
- 1955 – U.S. Congress passes Mental Health Study Act
  - creating Joint Commission on Mental Illness and Mental Health
- 1963 –Kennedy signs the "Mental Retardation Facilities and Community Mental Health Centers Construction Act of 1963”



NEGLECT

BEDLAM
1946
MOST U.S. MENTAL HOSPITALS
ARE A SHAME AND A DISGRACE

The rise of the disability rights movement

- Nine-year-old Jane, or Janie, as her mother called her is an example of someone who remained at home.
- Janie became the subject of a feature article written by her mother, Violet Ebb Lundquist, and published in *Bound* – “Iowa's Own Magazine" – in 1958. The article, “I’m Glad We Kept Janie at Home,” begins with the declaration that Janie’s “crudely-cut” Christmas gift for her parents – a calendar – strengthened “our conviction that we had chosen the right course for our family in spite of advice from specialists to the contrary.” Janie was “a mongoloid, a mentally retarded child.” Yet her parents, contrary to both popular and expert opinion chose to rear her at home.
- They were not alone. Although the rate of admission to public institutions for intellectually and developmentally disabled children under six years of age doubled, and children under six went from 9 to 19% of all new admissions to institutions between 1945 and 1955, there were signs that institutionalization was no longer tolerable for many families.
- A 1950 study found eighty-eight local parents groups – most of which had been formed between 1946 and 1950 – with 19,300 members in nineteen states advocating for community living. Also in 1950, local groups came together and formed the National Association for Retarded Children (NARC). By 1960, the NARC had 681 local affiliates and a membership of 62,000 people (at that time mostly parents) dedicated to finding alternative forms of care and education for their children.
- Although she would not characterize herself that way, Janie’s mother was one of those activist parents who would help hasten deinstitutionalization and promote the public education of intellectually and developmentally disabled children.

The rise of the disability rights movement

Willowbrook State School

Staten Island in New York City

Operated for 40 years from 1947 to 1987

Designed to accommodate 4,000 inmates. At its peak population in 1965, held more than 6,000 people

Primarily intellectual and developmental disabilities

Sen. Robert Kennedy referred to it as a “snake pit”

Geraldo Rivera & Willowbrook 1972

Families filed a class action lawsuit in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York State on March 17, 1972

The case went to trial and was finally settled on April 30, 1975, when Judge Judd signed the Willowbrook Consent Judgment in *New York State Association for Retarded Children, Inc., et al., v. Hugh L. Carey*, 393 F. Supp. 715 (1975).

The ruling, referred to as the Willowbrook Consent Decree, established guidelines and requirements for operating the institution and set the goal of reducing the number of inmates at Willowbrook to no more than 250 by 1981

Olmstead v. L. C. (1999)

1980 - Census of U.S. state institutions sets the in-patient population at 132,164, down from 559,000 in 1955.

1990 – ADA

On June 22, 1999, the U.S. Supreme Court held in *Olmstead v. L.C.* that unjustified segregation of persons with disabilities constitutes discrimination in violation of title II of the ADA

Accessing the Archive: A Political Story

1990s - *Olmstead v. L.C.*

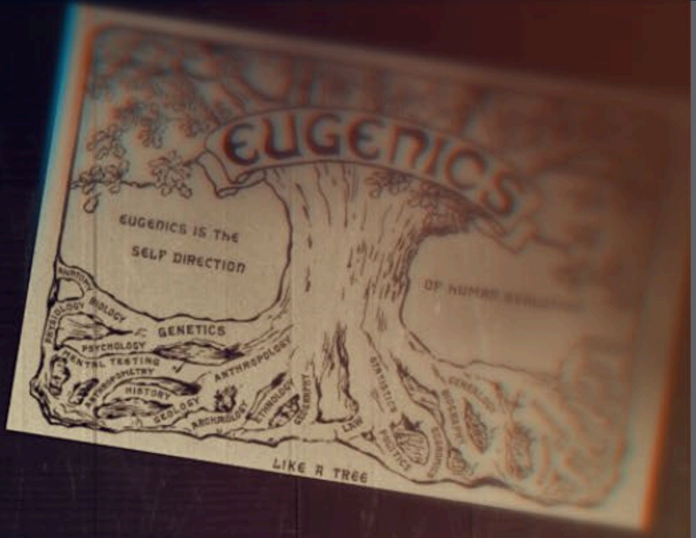
Lois Curtis and Elaine Wilson

Georgia Institution – held against their will longer than deemed appropriate

Race and the legacies of eugenic institutionalization

We need to tell the stories of people like Lois and Elaine, but we cannot, or rather it is quite difficult

Eugenics Archive (Canada)



Thanks!

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