

# Eugenics and Sterilization in the United States: Patterns, Experiences and Legacies

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Co-director and founder, Sterilization and Social Justice Lab

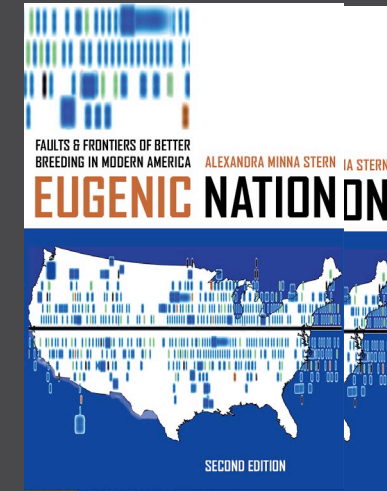
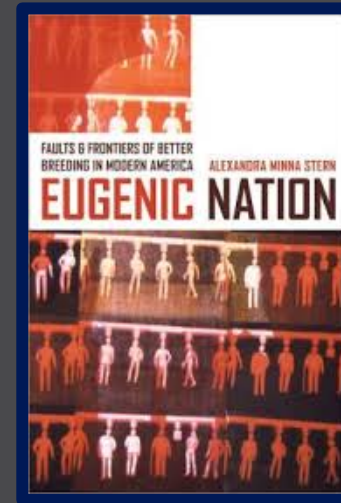
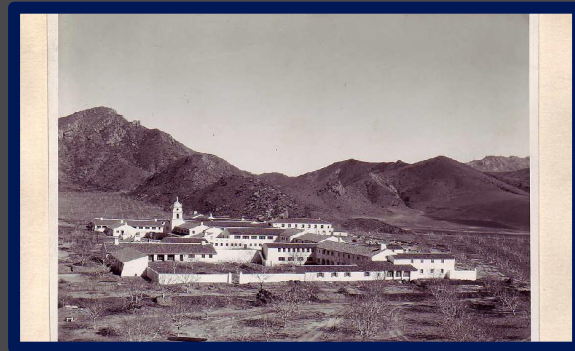


A C G  
C G T  
A C G

# Sacramento 2007



# Uncovering Patterns and Stories of Eugenic Sterilization in California



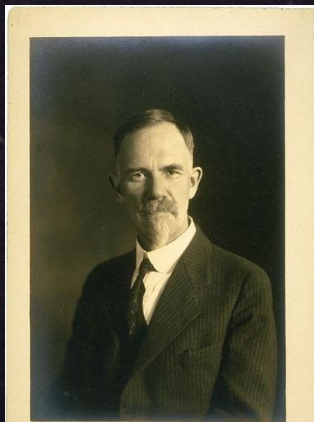


# What is Eugenics?

## Coined in 1883

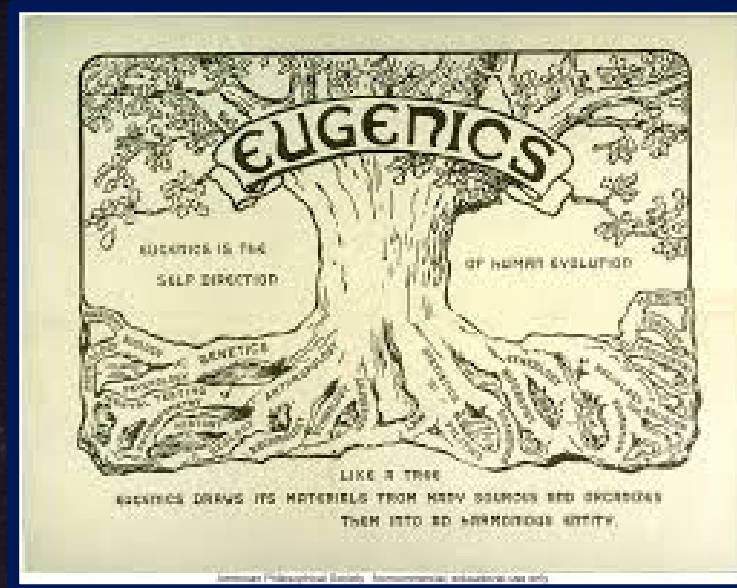


# Fit and Unfit

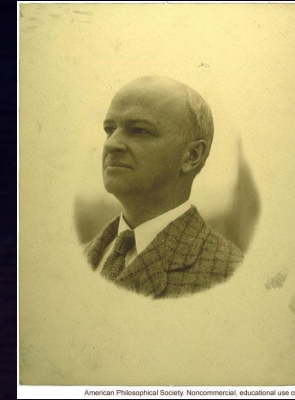


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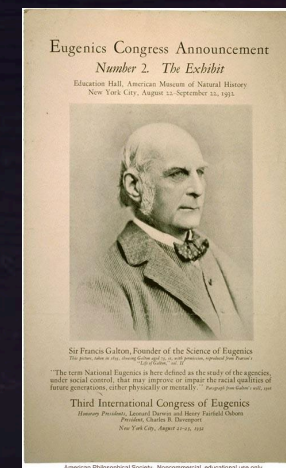
# Better Breeding



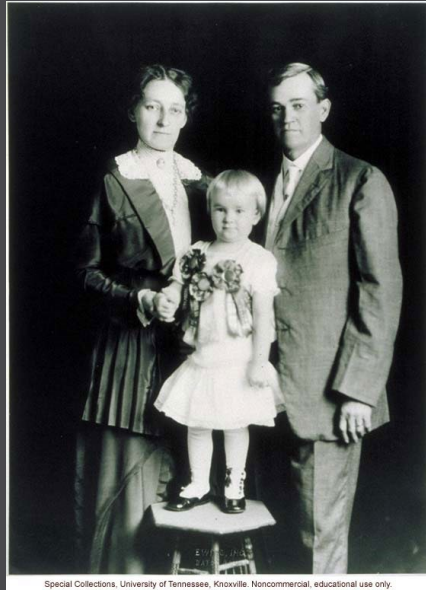
# Improve the “human stock”



# Classify and Control



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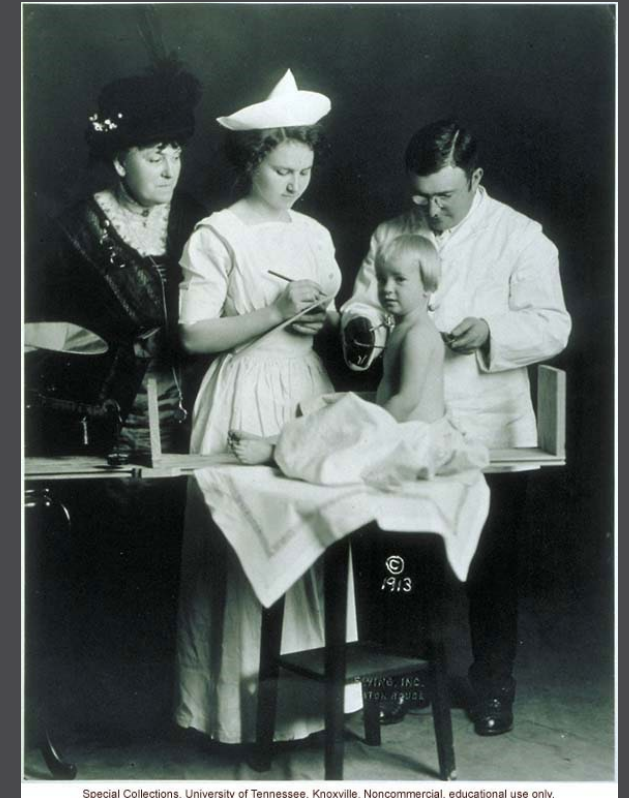
# “Positive” Eugenics

Better babies contests, fitter families contests, marriage counseling  
Encourage the reproduction of the “fit”



JKL 26-06 American Eugenics Society Medal  
Size: 3-inch (76mm)

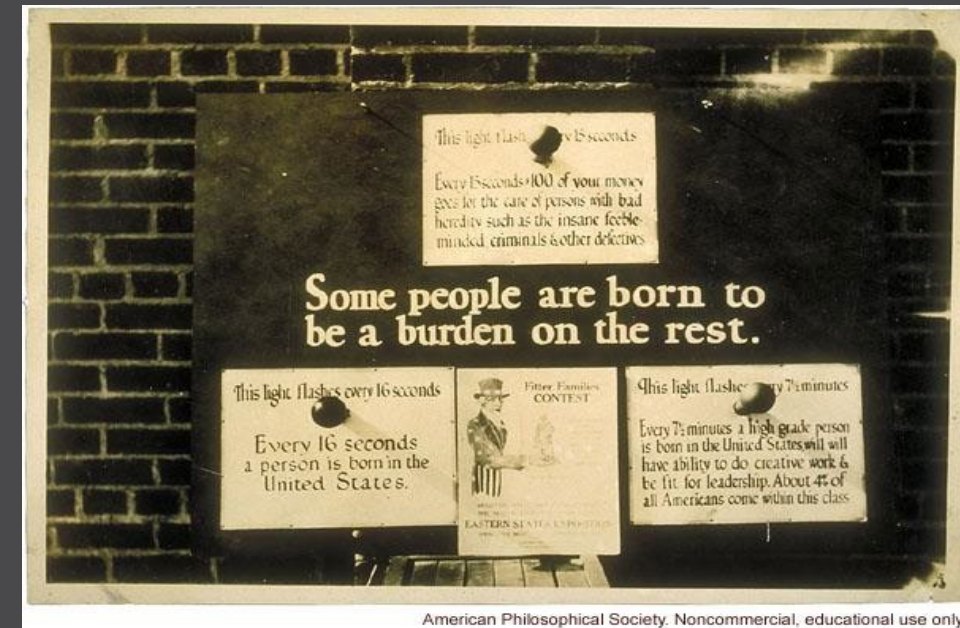
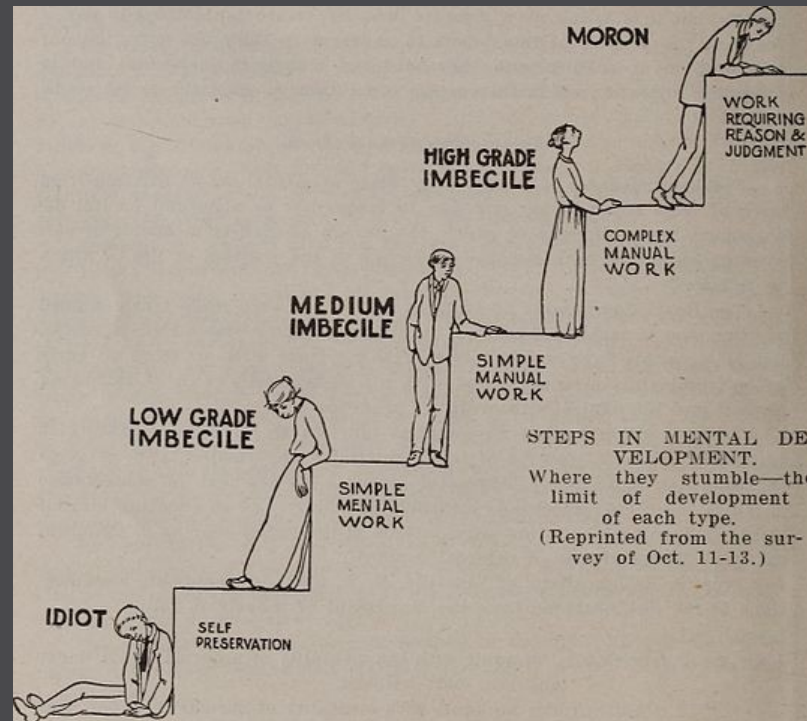
Year: 1926  
Composition: Bronze



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# “Negative” eugenics control the reproduction of the “unfit”



# Eugenic Continuum in the United States

## MEANS PROPOSED FOR CUTTING OFF THE SUPPLY OF HUMAN DEFECTIVES AND DEGENERATES

- I. LIFE SEGREGATION
- II. STERILIZATION
- III. RESTRICTIVE MARRIAGE
- IV. EUGENIC EDUCATION
- V. SYSTEM OF MATINGS
- VI. GENERAL ENVIRONMENTAL
- VII. POLYGAMY
- VIII. EUTHANASIA
- IX. NEO-MALTHUSIAN DOCTRINE
- X. LAISSEZ-FAIRE

*Which of these remedies shall be applied?  
Shall one, two, several or all be made to  
operate.*

*What are the limitations and possibilities  
of each remedy?*

*Shall one class of the socially unfit be treat-  
ed with one remedy and another with a  
different one?*

*Shall the specifically selected remedy be  
applied to the class or to the individual?*

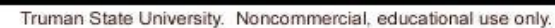
*What are the principles and the limits of  
compromise between conservation and  
elimination in cases of individuals bearing a  
germ-plasm with a mixture of the deter-  
miners for both defective and sterling traits?*

*What are the criteria for the identification  
of individuals bearing defective germ-plasm?*

*What can be hoped from the application of  
some definite elimination program?*

*What practical difficulties stand in the way?  
How can they be overcome?*





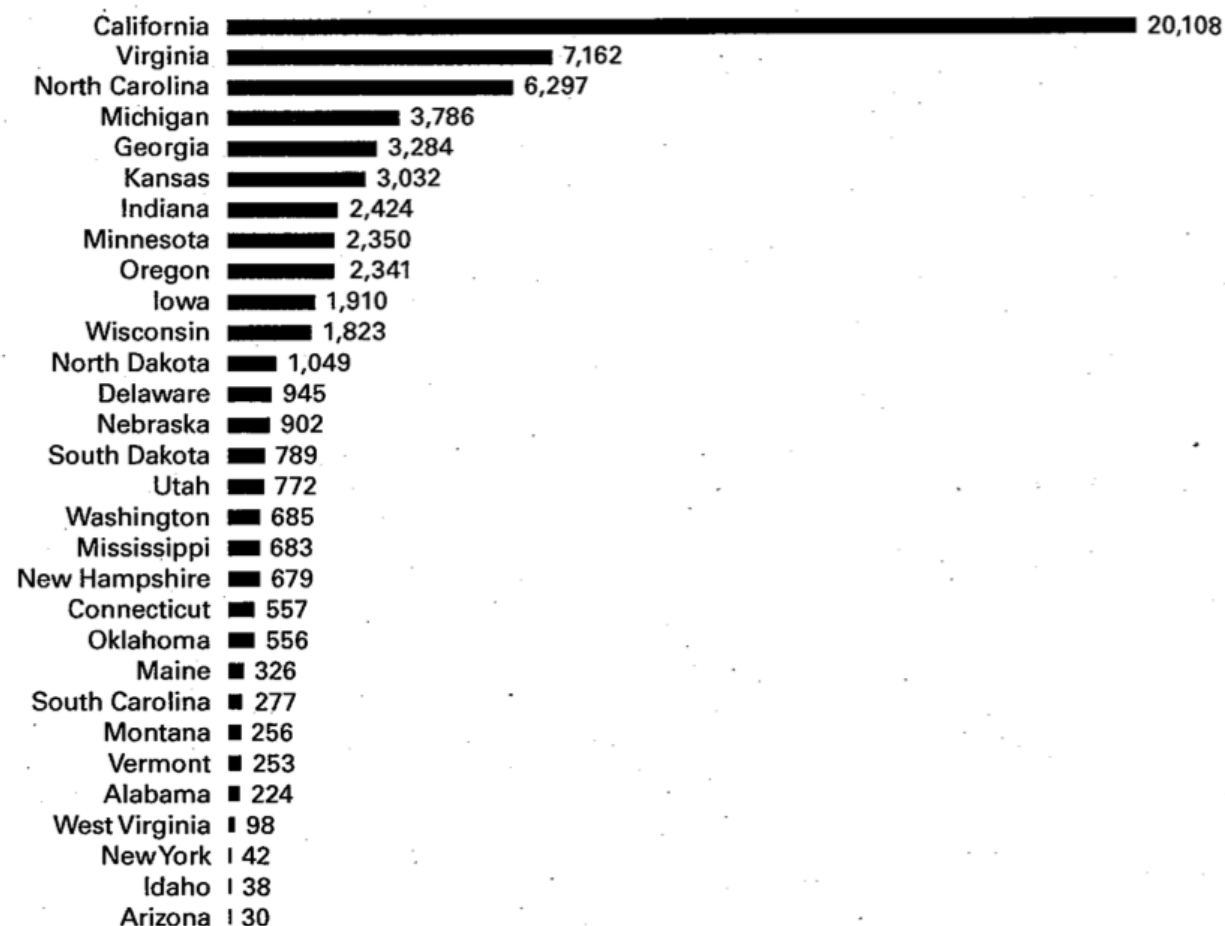


# Disability serves as ideological linchpin in all states

STATE CRITERIA FOR LEGAL EUGENICAL STERILIZATION

STATE	TYPE OF PATIENT
Alabama	"Feebleminded."
Arizona	"Inmates of Hospital for Insane."
California	"Feebleminded, habitual criminals, insane, idiots, mental defectives."
Connecticut	"Feebleminded, insane, idiots, imbeciles and those with inherited tendency to crime."
Delaware	"Mentally defectives, insane, feebleminded or epileptic persons."
Idaho	"Feebleminded, insane, epileptics, habitual criminals, morally degenerate persons."
Indiana	"Hereditary insane, feebleminded or epileptic."
Iowa	"Feebleminded, insane, syphilitic, habitual criminals, morally degenerate persons."
Kansas	"Feebleminded, insane, habitual criminals."
Maine	"Feebleminded."
Michigan	"Mentally defectives, insane."
Minnesota	"Feebleminded, insane."
Mississippi	"Persons with hereditary form of insanity, feeblemindedness, idiocy, epilepsy."
Montana	"Feebleminded, insane, epileptic."
Nebraska	"Insane and feebleminded."
New Hampshire	"Feeblemindedness or certain forms of other mental diseases."
North Carolina	"Mentally defective persons."
North Dakota	"Feebleminded, insane, epileptic, habitual criminals, moral degenerates and sexual perverts."
Oklahoma	"Habitual criminals, hereditary feebleminded, insane, idiots, imbeciles, epileptics."
Oregon	"Feebleminded, insane, epileptic, habitual criminals, moral degenerates and sexual perverts."
South Carolina	"Hereditary form of insanity, idiocy, imbecility, feeblemindedness or epilepsy."
South Dakota	"Feebleminded."
Utah	"Habitual criminals, insane, idiots, imbeciles, feebleminded, or epileptics."
Vermont	"Prevent procreation of idiots, imbeciles, feebleminded or insane persons."
Virginia	"Hereditary insanity, idiocy, imbecility, feeblemindedness or epilepsy."
Washington	"Feebleminded, insane, epileptic, habitual criminals, moral degenerates and sexual perverts."
West Virginia	"Insanity, imbecility, epilepsy, idiocy, feeblemindedness."
Wisconsin	"Insane, feebleminded, epileptic and criminal persons."

## California surpassed all other states . . .

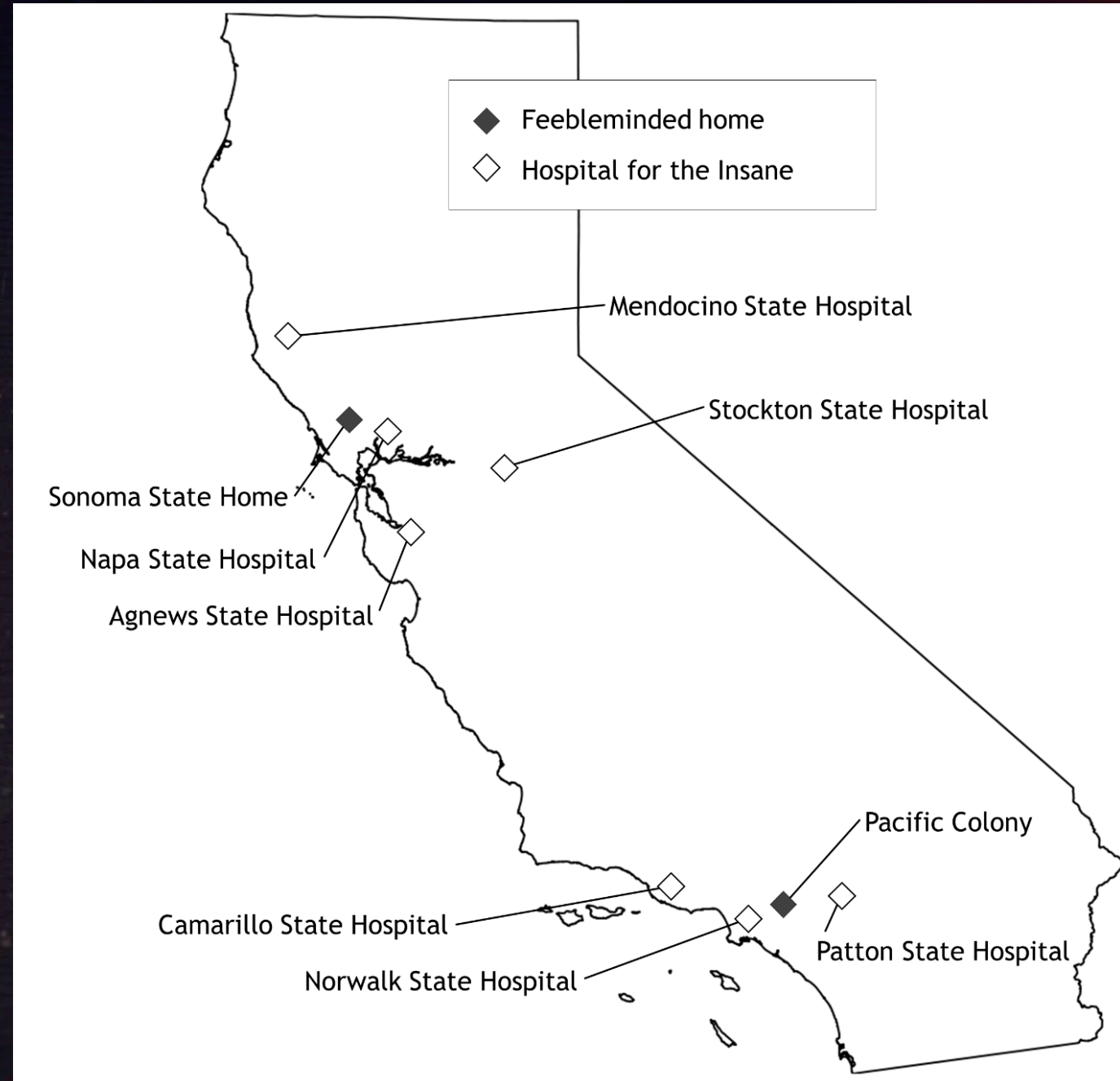


**Figure 2.1**

Cumulative sterilizations by state, 1907–1964, out of 63,643 total. These statistics are misleadingly precise (many sterilizations no doubt went unreported), but the order of magnitude is probably correct. *Source:* Robitscher 1973, appendix 2; graph by author.



# In about 10 different mental institutions



# In those file cabinets I found over 20,000 patient records and forms, 1919-1952

Recommendation and Approval for Vasectomy or Salpingectomy for the Purpose of Sterilization

Name: [REDACTED]  
Institution: Sonoma State Home

PERSONAL HISTORY HOSPITAL CASE NO. 12274  
Age 16-10 Nativity Texas Religion Protestant Education 6th grade  
Marital status Single Sex Male No. of children ---- Ages ----

FAMILY HISTORY (for additional space use reverse side):

CLINICAL HISTORY (for additional space use reverse side):  
Date admitted 10-4-44 Present diagnosis Physically negative  
Attacks (previous, and diagnosis of each):

LEGAL PROVISIONS (compliance with):  
This form is submitted in accordance with section 6624 of the Welfare and Institutions Code of the State of California.  
1. Legally signed and prepared commitment papers { are } on file at this institution.  
2. This patient is afflicted with:  
☐ Mental disease which may have been inherited and is likely to be transmitted to descendants.  
☒ Feeble-mindedness, in any of its various grades (specify grade) I-4.72 Borderline, type Familial  
☐ Perversion or marked departures from normal mentality.  
☐ Disease of a syphilitic nature.

Written consent { not given } by Father refused consent in first letter and ignores further letters on the subject. (See special letter under date of ----- copy of which is attached hereto. attached)  
(If consent not given, submit separate letter giving circumstances)

After careful consideration of the case of [REDACTED] by the members of the Medical Staff of this institution, it is their belief that this patient is suffering from the affliction above noted and it is their recommendation that the operation for the purpose of sterilization be performed, with which opinion and recommendation I concur and do hereby request your approval.

[DATE] July 19, 1946  
Approved and authorization for an operation for sterilization granted this 31st day of July 1946  
Original Signed Personally by Medical Director

Recommendation and Approval for Vasectomy or Salpingectomy for the Purpose of Sterilization

Name: [REDACTED]  
at STOCKTON STATE HOSPITAL

PERSONAL HISTORY HOSPITAL CASE NO. 39575  
Age 25 Nativity Canada Religion Protestant Education Grade school  
Marital status Single No. of children --- Ages ---

FAMILY HISTORY (for additional space use reverse side): No family history of insanity obtainable.

CLINICAL HISTORY:  
Date admitted 5/16/35 Present diagnosis DEMENTIA PARVOX, MODERATE TYPE.  
Attacks (previous, and diagnosis of each): No previous mental hospital record. Has had perverse sex experiences since he was 8 years of age.

LEGAL PROVISIONS (compliance with):  
A. If patient is an inmate of Sonoma State Home or a State hospital for the insane, and the operation is to be performed under Act 139, Section 1, then fill out the following:  
1. Legally signed and prepared commitment papers { are } on file at this institution.  
2. This patient is afflicted: (Patient signed Voluntary Application)  
☒ With mental disease which may have been inherited and likely to be transmitted to descendants.  
☐ With epilepsy or feeble-mindedness (specify grade)  
☐ With perversion or marked departures from normal mentality or from disease of a syphilitic nature.

After careful consideration in the case of [REDACTED] by the members of the Medical Staff of this institution, it is the belief that this patient is suffering from a mental disease which is likely to be transmitted to posterity, and recommend that the operation for the purpose of sterilization be performed, in which opinion I have concurred and do hereby request your approval.

Written consent { not given } by [REDACTED] Father  
Patient has also given his written consent 6/5/35  
under date of June 5th, 1935 copy of which is attached hereto.  
(If consent not given, submit separate letter giving circumstances)

[DATE] June 25th, 1935  
Approved and authorization for an operation for sterilization granted this 20th day of July 1935  
Director of Institution



# Text of 1909 law in the recommendation forms

2. This patient is afflicted with:

- ☒ Mental disease which may have been inherited and is likely to be transmitted to descendants.
- ☐ Feeble-mindedness, in any of its various grades (specify grade) \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Perversion or marked departures from normal mentality.
- ☐ Disease of a syphilitic nature.

Mixed  
methods to  
explore  
patterns and  
experiences

5 institutions  
more than 30  
lab members

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## Sterilization and Social Justice

All requests for information or general queries can be directed to [this contact form](#).

[QUERY FORM](#)

The Sterilization and Social Justice Lab is an interdisciplinary research team studying the history of sterilization in the United States. Our multi-institutional team includes historians, epidemiologists, and digital humanists. We explore patterns and experiences of eugenics and sterilization in the 20th century using mixed methods from the social sciences, humanities, and public health. Initially focused on California, our project now includes Iowa, Michigan, North Carolina, and Utah. We connect this history to reproductive, disability, and racial justice, as we reflect on the relevance of the past to social justice today.



# Funding



NHGRI R01 HG010567-01-06 (2018-2024)

NHGRI R21-HG009205-01 (2016-2018)



NEH Preservation and Access Grant (2019-2022)



University of Michigan MCubed Project #526 (2014-2015)

# Creating the Datasets



212 variables

N=20,052

*For California*

Confidential

California Sterilization, 1920s-1950s  
Page 1 of 15

## Basic Information

Record ID

Last Name

(If spanish surname, remember to check "Spanish Surname" in the Sterilization Request form)

First Name

Sterilization Form Reel Number

- ☐ 114
- ☐ 115
- ☐ 116
- ☐ 117
- ☐ 118
- ☐ 119
- ☐ 120
- ☐ 121
- ☐ 122
- ☐ 123
- ☐ 124
- ☐ 125
- ☐ 126
- ☐ 188

Document Number

(Must be 4 digits)

Institution Name

- ☐ Sonoma
- ☐ Pacific Colony
- ☐ Patton (Southern California State Hospital)
- ☐ Stockton
- ☐ Norwalk
- ☐ Dewitt
- ☐ Agnews
- ☐ Mendocino
- ☐ Modesto
- ☐ Camarillo
- ☐ Napa
- ☐ Other

State Narcotics Hospital?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Other

Year approved by department of institutions

(The year at the bottom of the record. Estimate if illegible )



# Stories of Resistance

No. 12533

ORIGINAL CIV 12533

No. \_\_\_\_\_

IN THE  
DISTRICT COURT OF APPEAL  
OF THE  
STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
SECOND APPELLATE DISTRICT

SARA ROSAS GARCIA,  
vs.  
STATE DEPARTMENT OF INSTITUTIONS OF THE  
STATE OF CALIFORNIA, et al.

AFFIDAVIT OF DAVID C. MARCUS

FILED  
DEC 13 1939

David C. Marcus  
Attorney at Law  
415 Spring and Second Bldg.  
Los Angeles, California.

WOLCOTT FORM 718

Lawsuit and  
sterilization  
recommendation

Andrea Garcia, Sara  
Rosas Garcia  
1939/1940

Recommendation and Approval for Vasectomy or Salpingectomy  
for the Purpose of Sterilization

RECEIVED  
JAN 6 - 1941  
DEPT. OF  
INSTITUTIONS

Name ANDREA GARCIA (Female)  
Institution PACIFIC COLONY - Spade

HOSPITAL CASE No. 2101

PERSONAL HISTORY  
Age 19 yrs. Nativity California Religion Catholic Education 7B grade  
Marital status Single No. of children None Ages --

FAMILY HISTORY (for additional space use reverse side): Father was illiterate; mother sub-normal, alcoholic and immoral; one sister and one brother mentally deficient; one brother and four sisters that to be subnormal. Maternal aunt deaf-mute; paternal uncles drug addicts; "all relatives alcoholic." Unfit home.

CLINICAL HISTORY (for additional space use reverse side): Mentally deficient, sex delinquent girl, unfit home.  
Date admitted: April 24, 1940 Present diagnosis Mental deficiency, High Iabecille level; Familial type.

Attacks (previous, and diagnosis of each):

LEGAL PROVISIONS (compliance with):  
This form is submitted in accordance with section 6624 of the Welfare and Institutions Code of the State of California.

1. Legally signed and prepared commitment papers are on file at this institution.  
2. This patient is afflicted with:  
☐ Mental disease which may have been inherited and is likely to be transmitted to descendants.  
☒ Feeble-mindedness, in any of its various grades (specify grade) High Iabecille grade, I. Q. 46  
☐ Perversion or marked departures from normal mentality.  
☐ Disease of a syphilitic nature.

Written consent not given by Sara R. Garcia Mother  
Name Relationship  
under date of Dec. 18, 1940 copy of which is attached hereto.  
(If consent not given, submit separate letter giving circumstances)

After careful consideration of the case of ANDREA GARCIA  
by the members of the Medical Staff of this institution, it is their belief that this patient is suffering from the affliction above noted and it is their recommendation that the operation for the purpose of sterilization be performed, with which opinion and recommendation I concur and do hereby request your approval.

[DATE] Jan. 2, 1941

Approved and authorization for an operation for sterilization granted this 9th day  
of January 1941

Medical Director and Superintendent  
Director of Institutions



# ROUTINIZATION OF STERILIZATION and farce of “consent”

[DATED] June 7, 1934

I hereby give my permission for the operation for Sterilization and any other condition requiring surgical operation to be performed on my daughter  
Sadie who is <sup>now</sup> ~~now~~ an inmate of the Pacific Colony

The operation has been fully explained to me and is to be performed by the surgeons at the institution with no expense to me.

[Signed] Ervin Bell  
[Address] 112 N. Philadelphia, Anaheim

[Signed] Leora Bell  
[Address] 112 N. Philadelphia - Anaheim Calif

RECEIVED  
JUN 10 1934  
INSTITUTIONS

DATED June 6, 1934

I hereby give my permission for the operation for Sterilization and any other condition requiring surgical operation to be performed on my daughter  
Marquerite Lorna Johnson who is now or may become an inmate of the Pacific Colony

[Signed] Marquerite Lorna Johnson  
Address 1160 Shreve St. L.A.

[Signed] \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_

WITNESSED:

[Signed] Harold R Hughes  
Address 131 No. Eagle Ave

[Signed] Mrs Rhoebe A Magoon  
Address 3572 Opal St Los Angeles



# IN A HISTORICAL CONTEXT IN WITH LIMITED ACCESS TO STERILIZATION AND BIRTH CONTROL

Recommendation and Approval for Vasectomy or Salpingectomy  
for the Purpose of Sterilization

Form 787

Name CLEMENTINA CARRION (CARRION)

Institution PACIFIC COLONY - Spadra

PERSONAL HISTORY

HOSPITAL CASE NO. 2477

Age 26 yrs. Nativity California Religion Catholic Education 9th grade

Marital status Married Sex Female No. of children Four Born 1935, 1936  
1938 and 1940

FAMILY HISTORY (for additional space use reverse side):

RECEIVED

CLINICAL HISTORY (for additional space use reverse side): Epileptic woman, who desired com-  
mitment for sterilization.

Date admitted January 24, 1941 Present diagnosis Idiopathic epilepsy, Dull  
Normal mentality.

Attacks (previous, and diagnosis of each):

1. Legally signed and prepared commitment papers { are } on file at this institution.

2. This patient is afflicted with:

☒ Mental disease which may have been inherited and is likely to be transmitted to descendants. EPILEPSY

☐ Feeble-mindedness, in any of its various grades (specify grade) Dull Normal

☐ Perversion or marked departures from normal mentality.

☐ Disease of a syphilitic nature.

Written consent { received } by Mrs. Zella Gould Mother  
Charles Carrillo Father  
Efra Carrion Husband

under date of 6/28; 6/30/40 and 1/24/41 copy of which is attached hereto.  
(If consent not given, submit separate letter giving circumstances)

After careful consideration of the case of CLEMENTINA CARRION (CARRION)  
by the members of the Medical Staff of this institution, it is their belief that this patient is suffering  
from the affliction above noted and it is their recommendation that the operation for the purpose of  
sterilization be performed, with which opinion and recommendation I concur and do hereby request  
your approval.

[DATE] February 18, 1941

Approved and authorization for an operation for sterilization granted this 21st day  
of February 1941.

ORIGINAL SIGNED  
PERSONALLY BY DIRECTOR

# First publication: estimate of living survivors in California



## California's Sterilization Survivors: An Estimate and Call for Redress

From 1919 to 1952, approximately 20 000 individuals were sterilized in California's state institutions on the basis of

*Alexandra Minna Stern, PhD, Nicole L. Novak, PhD, Natalie Lira, PhD, Kate O'Connor, MPH, Siobán Harlow, PhD, and Sharon Kardia, PhD*



# Disproportionate Sterilization of Latinos Under California's Eugenic Sterilization Program, 1920–1945

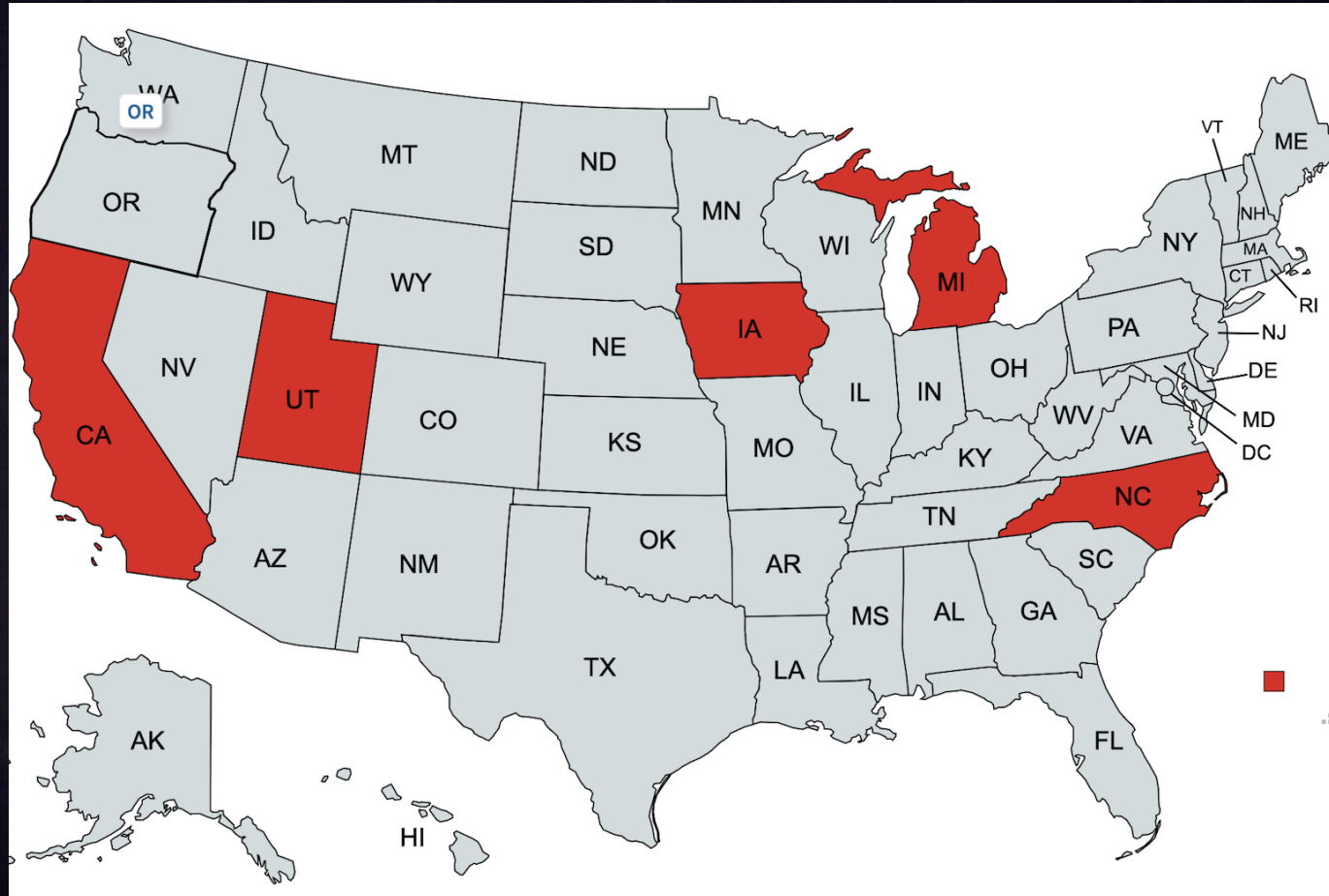
Nicole L. Novak, PhD, Natalie Lira, PhD, Kate E. O'Connor, MPH, Siobán D. Harlow, PhD, Sharon L. R. Kardia, PhD, and Alexandra Mima Stern, PhD

March 2018

During the height of the program, between 1919 and 1952, women and girls were 14 percent more likely to be sterilized than their male counterparts, male Latino patients were 23 percent more likely to be sterilized than non-Latino male institutional patients, and female Latina patients were 59 percent more likely to be sterilized than non-Latina female patients.

# Enlarging the map to include 5 states

## New collaborations



**2018**

*Expanded the research to include North Carolina, Iowa*

**2019**

*Expanded the research to include Michigan*

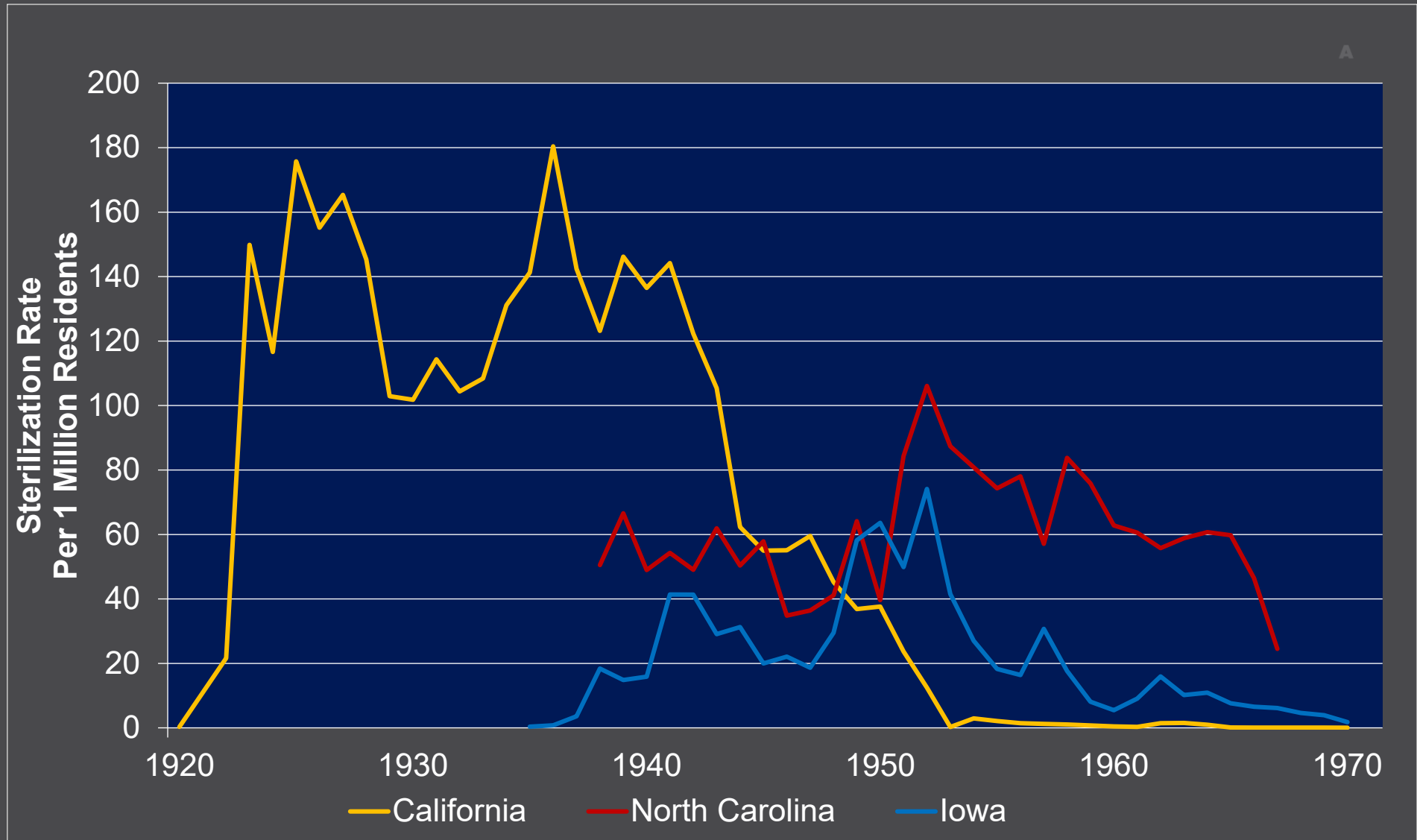
**2021**

*Expanding to include Utah*

**Total: >35,000 records**



# Sterilization Rates Per Year, California, North Carolina and Iowa: 1919-1970



# Mixed methods and new areas of research

- Cross-state demographic comparisons
- “Consent” in California
  - Researcher using NVIVO to examine about 400 cases where consent was refused, and exploring the impossibility of true bioethical consent in carceral spaces
- Disproportionate sterilizations of Asian nativity patients in California
  - Under peer review
- Sterilization in California institutions of approximately 40 Japanese Americans incarcerated at several of the camps during WWII
- Sterilization survivor estimate for Iowa



# Legacies

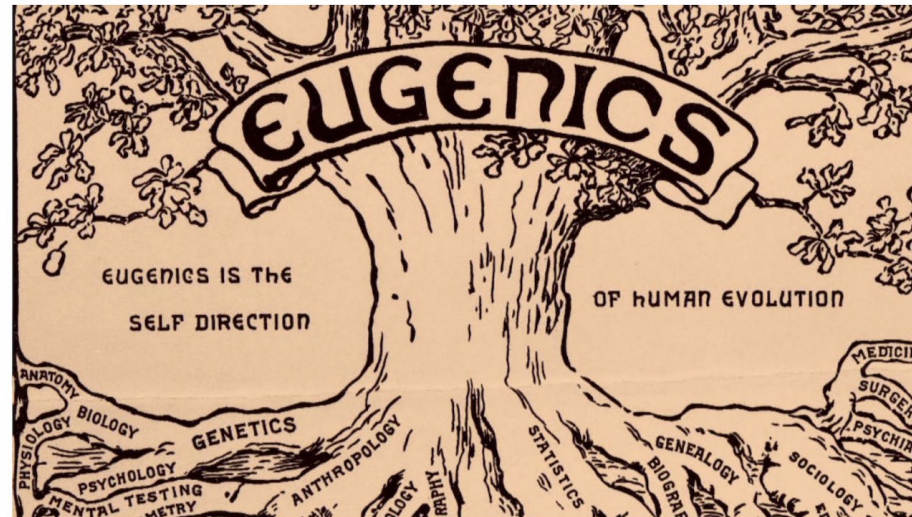
California has established the Forced or Involuntary Sterilization Compensation Program. Survivors of state-sponsored sterilization can apply for compensation through CalVCB in January 2022. Please check back for more details.

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## California will compensate survivors of its forced sterilization program

By Cheri Mossburg, CNN

Updated 4:56 AM ET, Wed July 14, 2021



Eugenics controversy comes to light 05:35

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