

De-Eugenicizing Anglo-America Political Culture -
Reckoning with the Second International Eugenics Congress,
American Museum of Natural History, 1921-2021-2121
Jack Tchen

Anti-Eugenics Congress & Gathering (virtual)
American Museum of Natural History
September 24 – October 2

August 17, 24 & 31 remote, Tuesday 1:00-5:20 pm
September 7 – November 2, Tuesday 2:30-5:20 pm

This public humanities research/practicum seminar will be linked to the ten-day Anti-Eugenics Congress & Gathering held to mark the 100th anniversary of the Second International Eugenics Congress held at the American Museum of Natural History, Sept. 1921. This seminar will grapple with the history and practice of contesting eugenics. Tchen is organizing this event which required organizing a pop-up organization devoted to de-eugenicizing the ongoing legacies of Anglo-American and British settler colonial political cultures.

What does this historical reckoning constitute? How can we generate public policy regarding CRISPR designer babies, biased big data and AI, and a Gattaca-like future? The seminar will be engaged with actual research comcomittant to restorative justice and to ongoing questions of reconstruction and reparations.

Since the Anti-Congress is so close to the beginning of the semester, 4.5 sessions will be held in August. The first meeting of the regular semester will be at the American Museum of Natural History (dependent on pandemic safety) That day we'll be reconstructing the 1921 Congress held in auditorium. The 3 credits portion of the semester will end November 2nd when research and reflection papers are due. Those wanting to continue research can register for added credits.

A century ago, New York City and the Eugenics Record Office (funded by Carnegie Institution, Mary Williamson Averell Harriman, and Vernon Kellogg) on the North Shore of Long Island became central to the internationalizing eugenics movement. During this period, such patricians as Madison Grant—descendant of Puritan Robert Treat, conservationist, a founder of the NY Zoological Society, friend to Teddy Roosevelt, and Secretary at the AMNH—wrote *The Passing of the Great Race* (1918). Hitler later cited this paranoid screed as his “bible.” The hierarchy of “the races of mankind,” including so-named “inferior” European races, displayed at the Museum provided the historical backstory to understanding “the great American novel,” *The Great Gatsby* (1925), as far more than an opulent love story. Fitzgerald, uneasy, shared his feelings about the self-proclaimed racial superiority of the gentry of the Long Island Sound—wealth and distinction accrued from Indigenous lands, the bodies of enslaved Africans, and the luxuries trade with “the Orient.”

Eugenics has roots in longstanding European racialized classification systems, varoius Popes doctrines of discovery, Lockean dispossession of Indigenous peoples, policies of Jim Crow segregation, and Chinese immigration exclusion.

During the era of “robber barons” and “the Gilded Age,” eugenics emerged as the solution for elite patriarchs of “progressive” and “conservative” politics to determine and manage all those deemed “normal” and “fit,” and to devise policies to keep all “others” institutionalized and excluded from civic life. Foundational to what *Time* publisher Henry Luce named “The American Century,” eugenics influenced all aspects of US domestic and foreign policies, including the war politics of “free trade” and sending troops abroad to protect “American interests.” We’ll also be thick in the contestation about designer babies, the problematics of statistics, and fundamental problem of the obsessive “progress” logics of human engineering above nature and sub“normative,” “unfit” peoples. At the root, we’ll be grappling with the dispossession of differently abled minds, bodies, spirits.

2021 Anti-Eugenics Congress

American eugenics has dominated 20th century US institutional thought and everyday life. Yet we are not aware of its impacts. To surface those impacts, the Anti-Eugenics Gathering will mirror the structure of the Second Congress, using regional New York as a globally-influential place-based case study. The core of these sessions and programming will be revealing the extreme harm such policies and practices continue to inflict, supporting the processes of ongoing repair and healing, and reimagining our communities as de-eugenicized places where a generative, inclusive, and caring society can be nurtured.

During the ongoing global pandemic, we’ll be using coalitional organizing to counter the techniques and politics of exclusion. We’ll be gathering those most impacted by eugenics policies, past and present, and providing an alternate technology that promotes inclusivity and open access to enlightened, reliable information and historical context. Working with the Black- innovators collective CRUX, we’ll actively build extending, responsive, resource and informational networks.

The Anti-Eugenics Project is part of a larger grassroots, transformative and distributive justice social-reconstruction movement.

What does it mean to de-eugenicize the NYC region and beyond?

- Using transformative, intersectional justice goals to challenge deep historical practices and policies that have sorted out and excluded most Americans as “not good enough” and “not fit enough.”
- Reconnecting with the deep healing and generative practices of human cultures as being part of the glorious living, renewing planet—not as its “masters” to “command and control.”
- Seeding our imaginations with what a de-sorted, foundationally inclusive, thriving human and more-than-human world community is and can be, for all. This is vital to restoring the planetary ecosystems we humans are destroying. There is no Plan(et) B despite the fantasies of billionaires-on-Mars projects.