

“And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off”: Human Sterilization, The Press & Universities, and “The Science of Surgery” in Oregon, 1904-1940

Introduction

In 1883, Francis Galton presented the term eugenics in his book *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development*. Galton viewed eugenics as “the science, which deals with all influences that improve the inborn qualities of a race; also with those that develop them to the utmost advantage.” Inspired by Darwinism, Galton wished to create the “fittest race” of humans through national dedication to the issues. While not immediately popular because of its radical call to action, eugenics eventually became a widespread belief across the world—largely because of the social climate in which it was finally accepted.

America was no exception in its readiness to accept these theories. Eugenics became popular in the early 1900s, reaching its peak in the 1930s and lasting into the 1980s. Largely part of the American progressive movement, many of the same activists who fought for temperance, women’s suffrage, political reform and other movements that would create a better society, politically and socially, also advocated for eugenic legislation. Just as in European countries, eugenicists were aided by the social climate that at the time, especially in the years following World War I, was fearful of the surge of immigrants, especially Eastern European Jews and Southern European Roman Catholics. Americans used eugenics to justify anti-immigration legislation through the 1920s. As a member of The Committee on Immigration and Naturalization during the Sixty-Sixth Congress in April 1920, Dr. Harry H. Laughlin, a leading American eugenicist and the director of the Eugenics Record Office in Cold Springs Harbor, Long Island, New York, issued a statement saying “the factor of natural hereditary qualities which will determine [America’s] future characteristic and safety, receive due consideration.” He proposed a plan in which the government would check on a potential immigrant’s “eugenical

facts” before granting them status. He also argued that the early immigrants to the United States “had more to do in determining our national institutions than the millions that have come here later,” therefore proving their “hereditary excellence”; the immigrants coming in the 1900s “have not had the same influence upon our national characteristics” and are much more likely “degenerate stock.” The immigrants then were brave and resourceful to come and settle a new country; the new immigrants in the 1900s were being forced from Europe and encouraged by America’s “tenderness” toward “a lower civilization.” Laughlin’s call to Congress proves that eugenics was not an outlying movement in America—it was a prevalent, widely accepted reform effort by highly educated and influential members of society.

While immigration and stemming the flow of “degenerative blood” into the country were important goals for eugenicists, they also had to address the quality of America’s current citizenry. Laughlin described the “socially inadequate” as:

(1) Feeble-minded; (2) insane (including the nervous and psychopathic); (3) criminalistics (including the delinquent and wayward); (4) epileptic; (5) inebriate (including drug habitués); (6) diseased (including the tuberculous, the syphilifinic, the leprons, and others with chronic infectious segregated diseases); (7) blind (including those with greatly impaired vision); (8) deaf (including the crippled); and (10) dependent (including children and old folks in ‘homes,’ ne’er-do-wells, tramps, and paupers).

Here, Laughlin provided a comprehensive list of the traits that reformers around the country intended to control and prevent. Oregon would also add “habitual criminals, moral degenerates, and sexual perverts” to the list. More specifically, “moral degenerates” and “sexual perverts” meant “those addicted to the practice of sodomy or the crime against nature, or to other gross, bestial and perverted sexual habits”—in today’s terms, male homosexuals or others who engaged in same-sex sexual activity. To cleanse the country of these undesirables, scientific methods were developed to provide objective methods of measurement. Some of these included the IQ

test, popular case studies of “inferior” families, and Fitter Family Contests sponsored at state fairs, which judged families on “their members’ mental and physical health, productivity, and appearance” and worked to encourage people to engage in family planning and “choose their mates wisely” based off of eugenic traits. A solution was needed beyond education though, and while some people used eugenics as a justification for birth control and abortion, most eugenic advocates championed sterilization and eugenic marriage laws as the most effective methods. Often this also led to the popularization of segregating undesirables from the general population through institutionalization — be it through a physical building or “sterilization as a permanent form of segregation.”

This paper examines eugenic sterilization in one state, Oregon. Oregon first passed a eugenic sterilization law in 1917; it was on the books until 1983, and 2,648 people were sterilized—1,713 were women and 935 were men. The archives used to research this paper include the Oregon Historical Society Research Library, in Portland, Oregon; the Oregon State Library and the Oregon State Archives, in Salem, Oregon; and the University of Oregon Knight Library Special Collections and Archives Department, in Eugene, Oregon.

In this paper, I am looking to prove that while Bethenia Owens-Adair, the foremost advocate for eugenic sterilization in Oregon, was a driving force for the entire sterilization movement in the Pacific Northwest, the determining factor in the widespread support of eugenic sterilization laws in Oregon was the overwhelming backing given by the press and by the state universities. The laws written into the legislative books until the 1980s were enacted through radical, punitive methods, largely considered cruel and unusual punishment, and would not have been given so much free reign and support without the backing of these prominent, well-regarded institutions.

Existing Literature

While many historians have looked at eugenic sterilization laws across the United States and the world, only a few have looked specifically at Oregon. Oregon was not the first program, nor the largest program — it was not even the first or largest program on the West Coast, as Washington's and California's first statutes came in 1909, and California continued to make headlines until 2013. The state of Oregon's eugenic program gets mentioned most often in reference to the fact that Governor John Kitzhaber acknowledged and apologized for forcibly sterilizing “hundreds of vulnerable Oregonians over more than 60 years,” making Oregon one of the first states to willingly admit and atone for its past.

The foremost historians of Oregon's eugenic sterilization laws are Mark Largent and Peter Boag. Mark Largent's work focuses on the entirety of the eugenics laws, providing the most comprehensive single-source history on Oregon eugenic sterilization laws. His article “‘The Greatest Curse of the Race’: Eugenic Sterilization in Oregon, 1909–1983” written for the *Oregon Historical Quarterly* in 2002, provides a timeline of relevant events through 1909 to 1983, filled with explanatory details and primary sources. His thesis statement is not obvious until the last page of the article, but seems to be that the coerced sterilization of Oregonians was brought about through “various social, scientific, and political influences,” often progressive in nature, but that these same progressive influences were also the ones that “helped restrict eugenicists’ influence,” providing a good case study of how competing politics make up the state's system of checks and balances. Largent also wrote the book *Breeding Contempt* about the eugenics movement across the country. This book, while referencing Oregon more often than other histories, does not focus on the state specifically and doesn't give much new information not already included in his previous article. Peter Boag wrote *Same-sex Affairs: Constructing and*

Controlling Homosexuality in the Pacific Northwest. As the title suggests, this book focuses on the role that homosexuality played in the history of the Pacific Northwest. The Oregon sterilization laws were just a chapter, albeit a tragic and damaging chapter, in the greater history of the state. His argument in this section shows how the state, fearful of what it did not know about same-sex affairs, reacted harshly and vengefully against the homosexual population of Oregon. He argues that despite careful wording, “from 1913 onward, sterilization measures that the Oregon legislature considered and approved would take aim at same-sex offenders and homosexuals.”

Apart from Largent and Boag, the next best collection of secondary sources is a number of master’s theses and Ph.D. dissertations written over the years. In 1977, Linda Loraine Currey wrote a masters thesis titled “The Oregon Eugenic Movement: Bethenia Angelina Owens-Adair” at Oregon State University. Currey’s thesis named Owens-Adair the “unquestioned ‘pioneer advocate’ of eugenics and eugenic sterilization legislation in Oregon,” detailed her importance in other progressive movements of the time. For broader research, Deborah V. Dolan’s article “Psychiatry, Psychology, and Human Sterilization Then and Now: “Therapeutic” or in the Social Interest?” gives context about how people thought about human sterilization in the early 1900s, and where the line between eugenic social interest and punitive methods were liable to be blurred.

Bethenia Owens-Adair

In Oregon, the movement for eugenic sterilization laws began with an unlikely source — Bethenia Angelina Owens-Adair. Owens-Adair was born in 1940 in Missouri, moved to Astoria in Clatsop County, Oregon with her family in 1943, and later moved to the city of Roseburg. After divorcing her husband, an unusual move for women at the time, she attended the Eclectic

School of Medicine in Philadelphia in 1873, and then graduated with an M.D. from the University of Michigan in 1880. When she returned to Oregon in 1881 to start a practice, she was one of the first female medical doctors in the United States and probably the first in the Pacific Northwest. Along with her medical practice, she started advocating for progressive political movements, such as temperance and women's suffrage. Her real passion came through in her dedication to eugenic sterilization laws in Oregon. Using her medical education as justification, she claimed that her "life's desire is to improve the human race by cutting off the vicious sources of degeneracy by the greatest humane remedy known today — sterilization."

Owens-Adair's first article in the *Oregonian* on March 13, 1905 was titled "Favors Use of Knife." She wrote that, "however strong I might believe that the death at birth of all such would be best for them and for humanity, I could never accept the solemn responsibility of taking a human life, and I am persuaded that it is a power not safely or properly entrusted to any private human judgment." Despite the eugenic principle stated by Francis Galton, the founder of eugenics, that "we must therefore leave morals as far as possible out of the discussion," when eugenics are actually put into practice, morality isn't so simply eliminated. Owens-Adair thought morality must be left intact and solutions through generations of parents "liv[ing] rightly" would lead to a race of "Roosevelts, Willards and Shakespeares — a condition delightful to contemplate, but ... still far in the future." In order to narrow down the problem in order to create a solvable situation, she states that "some of the worst ills to which humanity is heir, such as insanity, epilepsy, and cancer, are almost transmitted by the immediate progenitors," meaning that what Owens-Adair considers the "greatest curse of the race" comes from the mentally ill and the criminal classes reproducing. Her solution is not "chloroform or strangulation but by the science of surgery." She doesn't ask for the killing of the criminally insane in this instance, but

again brings up the idea of castration in an anecdote about a conversation she had with Dr. H of the Oregon State Insane Asylum in Salem, Oregon. She claimed to say, “I would see to it that not one of this class should ever be permitting to curse the world with offspring . . . I would give many of these pitiable unfortunates the one chance of recovery, which might restore their reason . . . It would be nothing less than common humanity to relieve them of the source of their curse and destruction by a simple surgical method that might give them a chance to recover their reason.” Even in her first article about sterilization, it is clear she has an established opinion that she claims to have held for over 20 years. This article was published in 1905, more than 20 years after she received her medical degree, leading one to conclude that this opinion was informed by, if not rooted in her medical education and her experiences with her Oregon practice. This is important to acknowledge because eugenic programs were not always supported by qualified M.D.s. Galton was many things but he was not a medical doctor, and he made most of his conclusions based on the premise that it was not necessary to know how traits are inherited, as long as it is known that they are. Owens-Adair clearly believed that criminality and insanity were passed on through “diseased reproductive organs” and her opinions carried the weight of medical science with them.

Despite being published in the *Oregonian*, Owens-Adair did not think that the time was ripe in 1905 for her to publicly advocate for sterilization, due to her womanhood, which she believed in that “day and age would simply mean ostracism”. In 1907 though, she wrote again to the paper as the state of Wisconsin was making a “serious effort to . . . enact a law for the sterilization of the feeble minded and insane wards of the State.” She expressed her intent to work for legislation like this in Oregon and claimed that the time had come for her to start. It is in this letter that she more explicitly stated her desire for castration as a solution for the

criminally insane, but also alluded to the procedure as a punitive measure. Referencing the Bible verse, Matthew 5:30, “and if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off,” she suggested again that the only appropriate action is to go to the “the very root of this great evil and cut it off.” Later, she claimed that sterilization would be more effective than current punishments because of the well-known fact “that any animal when rendered sterile, loses much of its vicious and ungovernable nature and soon becomes docile, useful and contented.” Simply, she argued for the neutering of human beings, just as a veterinarian suggests you neuter your household dog. She also made her first reference here to the welfare argument used by many states, promoting eugenic laws so that they are “not staggering under enforced taxation for the support of our weaklings, our monstrosities, our insane and our criminals.” This letter ended with a call for a present legislative member to come forward and help her introduce a bill concerning sterilization to the floor.

Owens-Adair wrote the first human sterilization law in Oregon in 1907 and introduced it to the Oregon state legislature, and though it died on the floor, she brought it back in succeeding sessions, leading to the Bill’s nickname: the “Owens-Adair Sterilization Bill.” While she was not a member of the legislature, she developed relationships with many members of the house to whom she submitted the bill that she wrote, and would travel to Salem, if only to wait in the lobby, during the vote. Other influential backers included popular newspapers, the *Oregonian* and the *Oregon Journal*. On October 28, 1909, still early in the campaign for human sterilization in Oregon, the *Oregonian* voiced their support in an editorial:

“We breed criminals in this country, and will probably continue to do so, until Mrs. Dr. Owens-Adair succeeds in getting her sterilization law on the books. We are also obliged at vast expense to take care of criminals whose breeding had but little to do with the instinct they developed later... it becomes all the more necessary that we should shut out as many as possible of the foreign element that comes here with the impression that crime is more free from penalty here than it is in the land that was better for their leaving it.”

The next day, Owens-Adair responded in another letter that made print that she is “thankful — yes, far more than [she] can express — for the support given me through the columns of The Oregonian, knowing well that thousands upon thousands turn daily to its columns for guidance.” It is clear that Owens-Adair knew she made a powerful ally that would help her to get the law passed. The original *Oregonian* editorial also makes it clear that the paper’s view has racist implications against immigrants. These sentiments were the precursor to the strong Ku Klux Klan presence in Oregon that would come in the 1920s and target not just African-Americans, but also Catholics, labor unions, communists, homosexuals, and immigrants of all kinds.

The Press

While many individuals advocated for eugenic sterilization, the movement became much larger once the press started publishing stories about it. The press often wrote about eugenic sterilization in a way that also advocated for things such as eliminating welfare dependency, supporting other movements, such as temperance, or against immigrants. For example, on November 21, 1909, the *Oregonian* wrote an article about alcohol and its effect on heredity. It referenced a doctor’s testimony “that alcohol poisons the germ plasm in men and women both, and for the reason it tends steadily to create a new swarm of degenerates... if they consume the drug, their children are liable to be born degenerate... thus is the tendency of Nature to eliminate drunkenness, which looked so promising a moment ago, is seen to be continually thwarted by the creation of a new army of sortssots which takes the place of the one she has slain with infinite pain and wretchedness.” Essentially, it is argued here that as each generation with alcoholism dies off, another is created, thwarting Nature’s device to kill off the vice. Using the language of eugenics, the *Oregonian* voices its support for temperance and gives a warning: “Those who think the Anglo-Saxon stock is worth preserving should set their wits at work on the drink

problem” because obviously, letting things occur naturally is not working. Owens-Adair voices her concerns about alcohol as well in the *Oregonian*, viewing it more as the match that lights the explosion. “Tens of thousands of bright intelligent men have used both [alcohol and tobacco] through their long lives and never showed the least symptoms of insanity. But had there been a trace of insanity in their blood, then those narcotics would have lighted the torch and the explosion would have been felt.

Under a large headline reading “Eugenics Study Urged” an article claimed that church and science are coming together to “regenerate the human race” through eugenics. “Some day every custom will be judged good or bad by its ultimate effect on the race. Some day eugenics will become the basis of ethics.” Thinking today, it seems unlikely that in a nonsensical, but sadly predictable pairing, the relationship between religion and eugenics was actually emphasized. In Owens-Adair’s book *Human Sterilization*, she published a letter written to the *Oregonian*’s editor that talked about how eugenics “‘make us free’ as we were intended by God to be, free from the debasing things of wrong thinking, which is not of a spirit born to everlasting, but of a spirit bound to an earth life of physical, moral and mental disease.” Another letter, written by a Christian ordained minister, declared his support for the “sterilizing of both men and women... who are either weaklings, physical or mental, the blind, the cripples the hideously deformed, the epileptic, and the insane.” Not only did these letters support the eugenic sterilization movement, but they proved that the *Oregonian* readership was familiar with Owens-Adair’s articles and had come to support them. Similar letters came in to the *Morning Astorian*, which were full of support, or directly to Owens-Adair where she published them in her book. Others, like an attack from Eleanor Baldwin, who wrote a “full column of sarcastic ridicule,” or two “earnest opponents in the criminal ward at the State Insane Asylum” in Salem, Oregon,

responded to her published articles in a negative way. This still shows that her articles were well read enough to make a splash, negative or positive. When *Human Sterilization* was published in 1909, she had at least seven correspondences based on her published works in the *Oregonian*. This is before eugenics reached its height of popularity or a law was even passed.

In a speech given to members of the Multnomah Medical Association in Portland, Oregon, she told people, “every paper to which I have sent communications, have honored me, and several have written fine editorial commendations... For every great reader and thinker today turns first to the editorial page for the best and latest in progress and advancement” When her bill was passed after being heavily amended, the *Oregonian* claimed that it was “spoiled” by the legislative committee, but Owens-Adair defended the edits—showing that the paper cared about this issue as resolutely, though perhaps with less understanding, as Owens-Adair did.

In addition to publishing editorial or news stories that furthered the sterilization movement, the papers were very generous with space for Owens-Adair. Owens-Adair was given a long leash on how much she could write and the content of her articles. She talked about the process by which she submitted the article first to the paper in 1904. “When [she] first wrote [her] first communication to the *Oregonian* [she] received four letters all eulogizing and congratulating [her] on [her] bravery, etc.” Later, she recounted a letter she wrote after “a prominent club-woman startled and shocked her associates by declaring... physicians to destroy at birth all deformities.” Her friend considered this letter, filled with her “vital views on that vital question,” too broad or controversial, but she believed the *Oregonian* would publish it—which it did, “with large, appropriate and attractive headlines.” This support was evidenced in the frequent inclusion of her writing, and also by the many editorials specifically supporting her.

The *North Yakima Herald*, Owens-Adair's hometown paper, also published a good deal of information about her. In the opening sentence of "To Sterilize the Insane", Owens-Adair is referred to as "Dr. Owens Adair, the well known physician... [who] practiced medicine in this city with great success" and follows with the information that she is here to visit her son. After establishing her as a relatable woman of the community, she is then described as "a specialist with wide knowledge of this class of cases and her word in these matters is considered as expert authority." This is followed by specific areas of support, such as a "remarkably strong sentiment" in the Oregon legislature. The rest of the article is a direct question-and-answer interview with Owens-Adair. Her description beforehand makes her seem like a woman the community would like to follow, emphasizing the local roots and her extensive education. Followed by suggestions of a "pruning process" which would apparently "prove a blessing to [those who are sterilized] and protect our commonwealth from further propagation of their kind," her ideas are clearly radical.

Another local paper, the *Daily Astorian* published the entire text of Owens-Adair's address before the Oregon State Women's Woman's Suffrage convention in Portland. While usually a speech would merit simply a coverage summarizing the event, publishing the speech in its entirety gives the locals reading the paper the chance to read what they likely missed, due to its location, and expands the reach of Owens-Adair beyond just big cities. The *Astorian* also published a series of papers written by Owens-Adair on her proposed legislation about human sterilization. She used the *Oregonian* and other papers as a mouthpiece to speak to the Legislature and to the everyday citizen. By calling for their attention repeatedly, in person and publically, it makes her harder to ignore.

Owens-Adair makes many references to the fact that she is a woman, and therefore usually would be ignored. “A woman of your standing should not be mixed up in such a subject,” she wrote, referring to what one relative said to her. But the *Oregonian* is progressive in its view of women, believing in the “new woman.” “[Sterilization] was a rather delicate subject to discuss before a mixed audience, or would have been so considered in the days of our grandmothers, and before the ‘new woman’ arrived. Things were called by their first names in a familiar sort of way, but the feminine portion of the audience chewed gum and took a deep interest, and never batted an eyelash. It was an illustration of the new thought, and the results of taking woman off the high pedestal on which so many years she has stood and bring her down to a real equality with mere man.” This view helps explain why the *Oregonian* is so supportive of Owens-Adair and why she eventually decided the time was ripe for her to begin her sterilization advocacy in 1905.

The problem with eugenics wrote the *Oregonian* is that it is “so plain and simple” that misunderstandings are obvious, and therefore perhaps willful. To make a dramatic statement saying, “eugenics means a wholesale effort to deprive the majority of mankind of the blessings of domestic life” is to miss the real point that “no eugenicist of any importance desires to withhold the privilege of marriage and children from persons of decent lives.” The practice of sterilization refers to a very small population but one that is “pernicious out of all proportion to its numbers.” Because of this, there is only one solution, people might not be able to control reproduction but “the surgeon’s knife can do it easily.” But even that is not the point of eugenics; the point is “purely educational” and meant to teach men and women to be wiser about choosing their life partners. Its aim is not to deprive but to give “children a good start in life.” The *Oregonian* also mentions that there is one more “mistaken notion... that eugenics encourages

‘race suicide’” but what it really encourages is “race conservation” through “a reasonable number of children well born, well bred and well situated in life.”

Oregon Universities

The Oregon State Survey of Mental Defect, Delinquency, and Dependency was started due to the interest of Oregon’s citizens in promoting public health following World War I. State legislature from 1919 determined “that the University of Oregon is hereby granted authority to make such survey and... report the result of its study with recommended legislation to... the next regular legislative assembly, with the understanding that the State will be asked for no appropriations for the purpose.” Coming in the same year as the laws on venereal disease, it shows the Oregon citizen’s focus on public health, stemming the flow of sexually transmitted diseases, and the future of the race. This survey, without funds allotted or allowed by the state, required the director to develop a statewide campaign of volunteers. Over 10,000 citizens were recruited to act as a “special voluntary assistant from a sense of high citizenship and patriotism serving without remuneration,” thus creating the “first State-wide, cooperative citizen survey in the fields of mental, physical, and social hygiene, in the history of the world.” In this process, Chester L. Carlisle, M.D., director of the Oregon survey, specifically thanked the “editors of Oregon who assisted the citizens of the state by the gratuitous publication of survey publicity material,” firstly the editors of the *Oregonian* and *Oregon Journal*. This survey, perhaps better than any other example, showed the unparalleled dedication to this problem in Oregon. The citizens who volunteered, and the university—which provided both manpower and resources, such as departments used to analyze the data—and the press all showed commitment to the issue with no reward but the success of the program.

P.L. Campbell, who was the president of the University of Oregon from 1902–1925, served on the executive committee of the Oregon Social Hygiene Society from 1915 on. His involvement with the society was very well documented through letters, and it affected his actions *vis a vis* the state and the university as well. For example, in a letter dated January 25, 1917 addressed to Mr. H. H. Moore, the Secretary of the Social Hygiene Society, Campbell wrote “I am heartily in favor of the Social Hygiene Society, and shall take occasion to speak to our Lane County delegation personally in its interest.” In another letter, this one undated, Campbell reaches out to Moore again and thanks him for the use of the movie “How Life Begins” which was shown at the University to an estimated nine hundred willing students and faculty.

The Social Hygiene Society of Oregon was started in 1911 and focused on promoting physical wellness and eliminating “immorality,” especially when it displayed itself as sexually transmitted diseases and promiscuity. Though it was started before the Great War, it really built up steam after World War I, when reports on the sexually transmitted diseases of soldiers came out. “During the first eighteen months of the war, one of the greatest powers had more men incapacitated for service by venereal disease contracted in the mobilization camps than all the fighting in the front,” wrote M.J. Exner, M.D. in the *Journal of Social Hygiene* in 1917. When the problem of venereal disease and obvious sexual promiscuity was no longer deniable during the war, limiting the armed forces’ ability to fight a war, there was finally reason to act and an educational plan was enforced in the military, and even more importantly, in greater society. While the Social Hygiene Society wasn’t specifically a eugenics program, it shared many of the goals of eugenics promoters like Owens-Adair.

As the Social Hygiene Society maintained its popularity, the eugenic sterilization movement seamlessly wove its way into the same conversation. The 1913 act to “require medical

certificate as additional requisite to issuance of a marriage license” was an early start championed by the Social Hygiene Society. This act required that the “male person thus seeking to enter the marriage relation is free from contagious or infection venereal disease.” This was ideally meant to prevent the passing of diseases to the offspring produced within the marriage and worked with the society’s ideal of educating people on the results of their sexual actions in order to create a better future. In 1919, Chapter 264 of the Laws of Oregon related to Venereal Diseases dictated specific actions that persons with and physicians dealing with venereal diseases must follow, directed by the State Board of Health. Section 59 of this law declared “all persons who shall be confined or imprisoned in any state, county or city prison in the state shall be examined for and, if infected, treated for venereal diseases by the health authorities of their deputies... such other persons as may be isolated or quarantined under the provisions of section 59 shall be isolated and treated.” The law was complemented by the 1917 bill written to “prevent the procreation of feeble minded, insane, epileptic, habitual criminals, more degenerates and sexual perverts, who may be inmates of institutions maintained by public expense, by authorizing and providing for the sterilization of persons with inferior hereditary potentialities.” The use of sterilization as a permanent form of isolation, as advocated for in Oregon—with an emphasis on using castration—worked together with these laws to stop promiscuity and unwanted offspring.

In a pamphlet titled “Education in Sex and Heredity: A Practical Program” written by Henry M. Grant, the Social Hygiene Society outlined the role and willingness of Oregon educators. “The colleges have a double duty to perform in connection with a program for education in sex and heredity. They must develop in the students who come to them ideals of home-making and of social responsibilities... the colleges have a strong sympathy for such

education, and there is no question as to their doing their part in developing such training to the extent of their facilities.” This pamphlet, and all the work of the Social Hygiene Society, was to “replace misinformation with truth, and prudery with a frank acknowledgement of the normal facts of sex,” which would lead men and women to “develop a code of sex ethics which will enable them to control their sexual impulses.” This control meant only participating in educated and approved marriages that aren’t reliant just on feelings; being careful with immigrants and the laws of heredity that could dictate the “effect immigrating strains will have upon future generations”; and generally, partaking in educated mating similarly to the “commonplace [way] that we breed our domestic animals.” This was not intended to degrade humans to the same level as that of animals, but was meant to encourage youth to “think in terms of future generations.” Along with education, the Social Hygiene Society worked to propose and pass effective laws that targeted health ordinances and city planning. It enabled cities to pursue prostitution more severely and facilities like the city of Portland’s detention hospital were created to specifically take detained girls out of the prostitution system and give them a space to work to improve themselves.

While the Social Hygiene Society did get involved with politics, it primarily focused on education through speakers, pamphlets, informational series, and conferences. It worked in cooperation with other organizations, especially schools, to provide education to create a more hygienic future. These were very successful and the activities of the year were always listed in the yearly report by the Society. In the first year, there were 98 Parents’ Meetings with an average attendance of 59; two Father and Son meetings, average attendance of 19; 43 talks to miscellaneous groups of men with an average attendance of 149; 59 talks to miscellaneous groups of boys, with an average attendance of 34; 45 talks to men in business houses with an

average attendance of 62; seven talks with an average attendance of 39; 10 public meetings in churches and other public places averaged an attendance of 155; two talks to college and high school women and girls averaged 345; one talk to public school principals with an attendance of 46; two addresses before Western Oregon Teacher's Association with an attendance of 300, and three addresses before the Chautauqua Assemblies with an attendance of 600, 200, and 200 were given. These numbers continued through the years, and comments about these presentations included praise such as, "Fifteen different men in our employ came to me personally to express their appreciation of this work," "Several of our men told me this was the best thing they ever heard," and "You couldn't pick out a subject that would do more good for a school of this kind than that one." The main criticisms were that the Society didn't do enough and there was need for more thorough work and that there needs to be a wider reach. This is likely why the society worked in cooperation with standing institutions, so they weren't required to do all the beginning groundwork.

The press praised the society. In an article titled "The Social Hygiene Society and Its Work in the State," the *East Oregonian* wrote, "Little did the 350 men who met at the Portland Y.M.C.A. auditorium September, 1911... realize that the results of that meeting would influence the country at large. They did not know that within the brief space of four years every other state would be asking: 'What are you people in Oregon doing about this matter?'" From this article, it is seen that Oregon was a leader in these matters—a premise backed up by the fact that Oregon had the lowest incidence of venereal diseases of all states among the first million drafted for World War I.

The Social Hygiene Society put on a yearly Conference for Educators in Portland, Oregon focused around "the Training of Teachers who shall be able to give sex instruction to High

School Students.” Some of the keynote speakers at this yearly conference included figures like the President of the University of Oregon P.L. Campbell, the President of the Oregon Agricultural College T. D. Beckwith, and other highly respected educators. Campbell provided the entire university the opportunity to participate in these conferences, and many professors, such as the Dean of Women Elizabeth F. Fox and others, welcomed the opportunity.

Conclusion

The actions of state universities, with the Social Hygiene Society and with the state survey, and the press write-ups, from articles written specifically by Owens-Adair to those written by the paper’s editorial, were the driving force in promoting eugenic sterilization in Oregon. Even before the laws were on the books, these institutions were imperative in creating a larger following and eventually passing the law in 1917. The press and the universities were able to use their prominent statuses, good reputations, and bountiful resources to promote eugenic sterilization in Oregon.

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