

University of North Carolina at Asheville

“North Carolina’s Hidden Agenda: The Coerced Sterilization of Welfare Mothers in Post-War
America”

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By
Kelly Carroll

In 1967 Elaine Riddick became pregnant at the age of thirteen by an older man who coerced her into a sexual relationship. She was a young black female whose family regularly corresponded with the county welfare department in Winfall, North Carolina. Elaine lived with her grandmother who received welfare payments at the time that she became pregnant. During a routine visit from the social worker, the welfare department learned that Elaine was pregnant. Subsequently, Elaine's grandmother was nagged continuously by the social worker to sign a consent form for the sterilization of Elaine. Otherwise, Elaine would be taken from her grandmother and placed in an orphanage. Illiterate and threatened, Elaine's grandmother signed the Eugenics Board of North Carolina consent form with an "X".¹ Her grandmother claims to this day she did not know what she was signing, she only signed to keep her granddaughter. Elaine's petition for sterilization was sent to Raleigh, North Carolina – the home of the Eugenics Board.

The Eugenics Board read Elaine's case file and diagnosed her as feebleminded and promiscuous, and the board approved her sterilization. On March 5, 1968 a fourteen year old Elaine gave birth to a son. She did not know that her first child would also be her last. The sterilization operation was performed shortly after the delivery of her new baby, and Elaine was never informed of what happened to her that day. As Elaine tearfully recounted, "They *took* away my life; they took away my rights to be a woman...my rights to have *children*, to be happy. Why didn't they just *sew me up*?"² Later in life, Elaine relocated and married. It was at this time

¹ John Railey and Kevin Begos, "Still Hiding: Woman Sterilized at Age 14 Carries a Load of Shame," *Winston-Salem Journal*, December 8-12, 2002. The series is presented at <http://againsttheirwill.journalnow.com>. (accessed September 2, 2008).

² Railey, "Still Hiding." Italics added by author.

that Elaine realized that she could not produce another child. Her marriage failed, and her husband callously referred to Elaine as, “barren and fruitless”.³ Remembering this time her life, Elaine cried and described how she, “...wanted a baby so bad...and couldn’t have it.”⁴

Elaine’s tragic story is not an isolated incident. Beginning in the 1950’s, the Eugenics Board of North Carolina focused on welfare-dependent African American women and made them the main priority for involuntary sterilization. Fertility curtailment in the form of sterilization among African American women was the result of an era of welfare backlash, during a period when illegitimate births were considered North Carolina’s most important social problem. These sterilizations were successfully carried out under the authority of the Eugenics Board of North Carolina.

During the past decade, many scholars have examined the topic of eugenics. In North Carolina, the Eugenics Program dissolved only 32 years ago, making eugenics a relatively fresh area of scholarly research. Among the most influential scholars for this topic specializing in North Carolina’s reproductive politics was Johanna Schoen. Schoen, a history professor at the University of Iowa argued that North Carolina’s eugenic sterilization program, “reminds us...that the same operation could both restrict and enhance women’s reproductive control.”⁵ Schoen’s focus on sterilization demonstrated how sterilization for some women was a liberation from childbirth bondage and for others a coercive and underhanded form of social control among minorities. Schoen argued that eugenics in North Carolina “represented the state’s financial

³ Railey, “Still Hiding.” Quotation from Maggie Skinner, Elaine’s sister.

⁴ Railey, “Still Hiding.” Quoted from Elaine Riddick Jesse.

⁵ Johanna Schoen, *Choice and Coercion: Birth Control, Sterilization, and Abortion in Public Health and Welfare* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 79.

interest in sterilization more clearly than any other state's program did."⁶ Schoen addressed the fact that North Carolina was the one state whose welfare department worked directly with the Eugenics Board. This meant welfare recipients and their families were monitored by the Eugenics Board through the lens of the Department of Welfare.

Dorothy Roberts, a professor at Northwestern University School of Law also wrote of the sterilization of African American welfare recipients, except Roberts referred to the procedures as, "sterilization abuse of Black women" during the 1960's and 1970's.⁷ Roberts challenged the phrase "reproductive liberty" and argued that black women never possessed reproductive freedom in any form. Roberts argued that scholars of modern feminism and reproductive freedom overlook the importance of race and are focused on the right to an abortion, when true "reproductive liberty must encompass more than the choice to end a pregnancy: it must encompass the full range including the ability to bear a child."⁸ Throughout her book, Roberts illustrated how Black women's history has been "a long experience of dehumanizing attempts to control Black women's reproductive lives."⁹ Roberts provided a history of African-American females' experiences that assisted in contextualizing the sterilizations of the black welfare mothers in North Carolina that occurred under the Eugenics Board. She demonstrated how race was the main motivation for the subjugation of black females' fertility throughout history. Why were welfare mothers the ones who came under fire, though?

⁶ Schoen, 83.

⁷ Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 4.

⁸ Roberts, 6.

⁹ Roberts, 4.

Rickie Solinger, historian of women's experiences in the United States, stated that, "African American women and other "nonmajority" women have had their reproductive lives structured to various degrees by laws and policies devised to define the nonwhite status of these women and their children."¹⁰ Her monograph is a synthesis of other scholars' works on the subject of reproductive politics, including the research of Johanna Schoen and Dorothy Roberts. She explained how the reproductive experiences for women in America were different for each race and class group. This is extremely important since much of the other research conducted focuses on the African American experience of motherhood. Solinger provided accounts of the considerable differences between pregnancy as a white female and pregnancy as a black female. She agreed with Roberts and Schoen in the fact that, "the fertility of different women has been associated with solutions to different problems...the social-problem approach to female fertility has prevailed."¹¹ Women's fertility was a financial problem for society as well, especially when women were on public assistance programs that aided them and their children, such as welfare.

Scholars have reviewed the welfare backlash of the mid-twentieth century that exacerbated efforts to control black women's reproduction. Ellen Reese focused on the political and social climate of the first welfare backlash in the United States, which occurred in post World War II America. This backlash occurred simultaneously North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia as the Eugenics Boards of these three Southern States expanded. Reese argues that

¹⁰ Rickie Solinger, *Pregnancy and Power: A Short History of Reproductive Politics in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 24.

¹¹ Solinger, 4.

attacks on welfare, or Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) escalated during this time after the program expanded to admit minorities. Previously, ADC relief payments were reserved for “deserving” white widows. Reese’s research also found that many states during this time, under lax federal control, found ways to purge the welfare rolls so that it was extremely difficult for minority women to remain on them.¹² Jean Carabine also acknowledged the postwar concern with welfare and its establishment. She explained how social policy was affected by sexuality. She pointed out that, “at the heart of welfarism was a clear concern with the conditions of reproduction.”¹³ Welfare eligibility and payments originally gave preference to widowed single mothers, and Carabine and Reese agreed that the welfare system penalized those who economically and socially deviated from those norms. This especially included black, unwed mothers with illegitimate children.

Other scholars have mentioned the link between welfare and control of reproduction during the 1950’s through the 1970’s, but none have produced a holistic work specifically on this issue.¹⁴ A recurring theme within all works was the deliberate control of women’s fertility as a solution to social problems. This paper reveals how coercive sterilizations were legally

¹² Ellen Reese, *Backlash Against Welfare Mothers: Past and Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 35-44.

¹³ Jean Carabine, “A Straight Playing Field or Queering the Pitch? Centering Sexuality in Social Policy,” *Feminist Review* 54 (1996): 39.

¹⁴ See Harry Bruinius, *Better For All the World: The Secret History of Forced Sterilization and America’s Quest for Racial Purity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), Simone M. Caron, “Birth Control and the Black Community in the 1960’s: Genocide or Power Politics?” *Journal of Social History* 31, no. 3 (1998):545-569, Edmund Ramsdem, “Social Demography and Eugenics in the Interwar United States,” *Population and Development Review* 29, no. 4

performed on African American welfare mothers because of the alliance between the county welfare departments and the Eugenics Board in North Carolina, and how this occurred during a period of welfare backlash and high racial tensions in the mid twentieth century South.

Eugenics, literally meaning “of good birth” was thought to be a credible science at the beginning of the twentieth century. At the heart of eugenic theory was a defective “germ-plasm”. Eugenic and genetic scientists thought that this “germ-plasm” transmitted undesirable traits from generation to generation. They believed that the defective “germ-plasm” was responsible for feeble-mindedness, epilepsy, insanity, criminality, promiscuity and many other societal woes. Moreover, this “germ-plasm” was thought to affect more than ten per cent of the American population at the beginning of the century.¹⁵ Many states responded to this supposed national catastrophe and passed eugenic sterilization laws in hopes of eliminating the offspring of the ‘defective’ or ‘unfit’ people of America.

Sterilization was considered a form of negative eugenics. Negative eugenics sought to reduce the number of “defective” people born within the society, therefore allowing society to improve the biological quality and purity of its people. The United States Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of state eugenic sterilization in 1927 in *Buck vs. Bell* and this decision legitimized state eugenic sterilization as a fundamentally acceptable and credible

(2003): 547-593, and Susan L. Thomas, “Race, Gender and Welfare Reform: The Anti-Natalist Response,” *Journal of Black Studies* 28, no. 4 (1998): 419-446.

¹⁵ Julius Paul, Ph.D., “Population ‘Quality’ and ‘Fitness for Parenthood’ in the Light of State Eugenic Sterilization Experience, 1907-1966,” *Population Studies* 21, no. 3 (1967):295-296.

practice.¹⁶ North Carolina created its very own Eugenics Board in 1927, and additionally 31 out of the 50 states had eugenic sterilization programs of their own.

The North Carolina law, later updated in 1933, allowed the Eugenics Board of North Carolina to provide for the sterilization of three types of people. The types considered “defective” were the feeble-minded, the epileptic, and the mentally ill. These people were sterilized when the Board members believed that the operation was in the best interest of the patient, was for the good of the public, or when it was assumed that offspring born to this person would likely be inflicted with some type of defect.¹⁷ The ‘germ-plasm’ of feeble-mindedness could not be diagnosed physically, so Eugenics Board authorities relied on social clues to determine the intelligence of the person. Some of these clues included poverty, criminality, promiscuity, alcoholism and illegitimacy.¹⁸ Failure among the impoverished to improve themselves socio-economically for generations meant that the entire family’s “feeble-mindedness” was to blame for their social status. The Eugenics Board officially defined “feeble-mindedness” as an IQ of 70 or below. A family of this type was deemed “defective”, “unfit” or “subnormal” and the parents were sterilized to halt perpetuation of their “subnormal” genes. By mid-century, most victims who were targets of eugenics were young women. In their cases, “promiscuous” and “feeble-minded” were interchangeable. A woman who became pregnant outside of marriage was viewed not only as unchaste but also as dim-witted.

¹⁶ Paul, 296.

¹⁷ Eugenics Board of North Carolina, *Biennial Report of the Eugenics Board of North Carolina July 1, 1950-June 30, 1952* (Raleigh, North Carolina, 1952).

¹⁸ Schoen, 83.

The Eugenics Board initially concerned itself with institutionalized patients who were overwhelmingly white. In fact, 60 per cent of sterilizations before 1950 were conducted on inmates in mental hospitals or training schools.¹⁹ Furthermore, by 1950, 1,437 white people and 464 black people had been sterilized, “a proportion which corresponds closely to [blacks’] ratio of 27.5 percent in the general population of the State.”²⁰ This statement was true, as the actual percentage of African Americans who were sterilized was 32 per cent. Within a decade, this figure would almost double with 59 percent of African Americans being sterilized between 1958 and 1960.²¹ This alarming shift of racial sterilizations was deliberate and planned.

The expansion of the Eugenics Board in North Carolina acted conversely to a report by the American Neurological Association that compulsory sterilization laws “lacked a scientific basis.” In spite of this, North Carolina expanded its program at the same time that other states had begun dismantling theirs.²² Many sterilization programs fell out of favor after World War II in the United States, especially after the discovery of similar sterilization programs ran by the Nazis. The only clear evidence for the expansion of the program in North Carolina after World War II was from the support and funding from a private organization in Winston-Salem called the Human Betterment League who worked with the Eugenics Board to popularize sterilization. “It was not until after organization of the Human Betterment League in 1947 that it was used to its present extent.”²³ North Carolina performed almost the majority of sterilizations in the nation

¹⁹ Schoen, 100.

²⁰ Woodside, 16.

²¹ Schoen, 108.

²² Schoen, 104-105.

²³ “State Reported Second in Legal Sterilizations.” *Winston-Salem Journal*, December 12, 1953.

in 1952, only second to Delaware. After learning that North Carolina was number two in the nation for eugenic sterilizations, directors of the Human Betterment League believed it was “proof of our state’s increasing awareness of the need for protection of future generations.”²⁴ The Human Betterment League members hailed eugenics and thought sterilization to be the salvation of society.

The Eugenics Board of North Carolina sought to win public favor through use of the media after World War II to increase its use. The Board made sure that North Carolina society was aware of the “unfit” people with the help and collaboration of a private organization, The Human Betterment League. In order to gain public support for eugenic sterilizations, the Human Betterment League in North Carolina commenced and funded a campaign of newspaper articles to convince the general public of ‘America’s New Major Problem’ in hopes to gain widespread support and justification for the program.²⁵ In 1948, newspaper articles in Winston-Salem issued by the Human Betterment League and written by Human Betterment League member Chester S. Davis warned North Carolinians that 4.5 per cent of all public school children in North Carolina were of lesser intelligence, or “mentally defective.” A study had found that 8 per cent of white students and 34 per cent of African American students had an IQ below 70, and said that “some scientists...leaped to the conclusion that the white child has a higher average native intelligence than the Negro child.”²⁶ Davis further warned readers that the total population of feebleminded

²⁴ “State Reported Second...”

²⁵ Schoen, 107

²⁶ Chester S. Davis, “IQ Tests Show America Has Major New Problem: Are Insanity and Feeble-mindedness Increasing? Study of Birth Rates Points to a Gloomy Future,” *Winston-Salem Journal and Sentinel*, February 29, 1948.

and insane people in the United States was somewhere in the neighborhood of seven million.²⁷

At this point in time, sterilizations were concerned with people who were institutionalized.

These series of newspaper articles, however, tried to convince the general public that most of the “defectives” did not reside within institutions, but rather they lived among “normal” people. Both of these articles asserted that society could not wait for mental hospitals to handle “defectives” because “certainly here in North Carolina it is as difficult to gain admittance to a mental hospital as it is to rise on the waiting list of a fashionable country club.”²⁸ Davis attempted to convince readers that sterilization for males was “about as serious as a tooth-pulling” and for females “correspond[ed] to the removal of an appendix.”²⁹ He regretfully informed readers that over 4,000 patients had been discharged from mental hospitals in 1944, yet only 79 sterilizations had taken place. This illuminated how little the Eugenics program was actually used at the time.³⁰

These publications drew the attention of the public to the “defectives” that polluted the general population and were “breeding” among everyday people. Davis warned that “a superior child born to mentally inferior parents is as rare as a dodo.” These articles published on two Sundays all over Forsyth County, North Carolina no doubt invoked fear and anxiety about the future of the state because it stated that “those who have an IQ entitling them to a moron rating

²⁷ Chester S. Davis, “The Case for Sterilization...Quality Versus Quantity: North Carolina Law, Little Used, Makes Small Dent in Problem; Public Information is Vital to Success of Eugenics,” *Winston-Salem Journal and Sentinel*, March 7, 1948, sec. III.

²⁸ Davis, “Quality versus Quantity...”

²⁹ Davis, “IQ Tests Show America...”

³⁰ Davis, “Quality versus Quantity...”

are out-breeding the most intelligent men and women at a two-to-one rate”.³¹ Readers were probably left with anger because of all of the ‘imbeciles’ out-breeding their good families. Davis posed a solution that “it is a mistake to argue, as some fanatics have done, that unless we launch a vast, mass sterilization program, we will be engulfed in a great wave of insanity and idiocy.”³² Eugenists actually believed that they were on the way to the creation of a better society. One of the articles concluded with a prophetic statement: “It is likely that the heads of the State hospitals and the county welfare departments will begin to use the North Carolina law as they have not used it in the past.”³³ Davis’s prediction was accurate. Beginning in the early 1950’s, the program expanded with the help of the county welfare departments and located new candidates for sterilization: black mothers on welfare with dependent children.

Throughout the next decade, the Eugenics Board of North Carolina shifted its attention to the poor. As early as 1950, an English observer of North Carolina’s eugenics program observed, “it is certainly true that the feeble-minded Negro woman, often with illegitimate children, is a familiar and recurrent problem to health and welfare agencies.”³⁴ This observation was astoundingly correct, because for the next two decades welfare departments and their contingent social workers made North Carolina’s poor welfare mothers their priority for sterilization. Before this time period, African Americans (whether on welfare or not) were *not* targets of the Eugenics Board of North Carolina.

³¹ Davis, “IQ Tests Show America...”

³² Davis, “Quality versus Quantity...”

³³ Davis, “Quality versus Quantity...”

³⁴ Moya Woodside, *Sterilization in North Carolina: A Sociological and Psychological Study*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1950), 6.

The shift from institutional to the public sphere forced eugenicists to change their language of eugenics to rely on environmental factors instead of medical. They argued that not every defective person was a result of heredity but rather that they could be a product of their substandard environment. Social demography, the study of the quality of human populations focused on environmental characteristics of a person such as fertility, morality, marriage and sexual practices.³⁵ As previously mentioned, ‘feeble-mindedness’ could not easily be diagnosed medically, so social clues were used to determine the ‘inferior’ groups. This view held that *social* worth was a determinant of *genetic* worth - an easy shift for eugenicists who had problems producing proof of biological inferiority. Social demography “couched eugenics in terms of social heritage” and “there was no question among demographers which population groups were deemed more desirable...”³⁶ Poor and Black were synonymous and were not desired in North Carolina.

The switch from biological to environmental factors allowed the Eugenics Board of North Carolina to carry out sterilizations based on the diagnoses of feeble-mindedness. It is important to note that “feeble-mindedness” was often diagnosed based on a subject’s sexual activity. Although the IQ of 70 and below was a decree of the Board “...on rare occasions sterilization [was] authorized in borderline cases of slightly higher intelligence where personality factors [were] found to be unfavorable.”³⁷ Since the poor had the least amount of education, they also possessed the lowest IQ’s, so this shift in policy targeted the poor. African Americans

³⁵ Edmund Ramsden, “Social Demography and Eugenics in the Interwar United States,” *Population and Development Review* 29, no. 4 (2003): 552.

³⁶ Ramsden, 579.

³⁷ Woodside, 10.

comprised the largest group of poor people in North Carolina. In 1950, blacks were described as living under conditions of “poverty, neglect, and rural isolation” and that “although the Plantation System has almost disappeared...tradition and custom of former days still influence the behavior of the more ignorant people in the South.”³⁸ African-Americans as a whole were on the verge of destitution and without help from the Jim Crow North Carolina. It is not surprising then, that when minorities became eligible for relief payments after the welfare expansion, they made up a majority of the Aid to Dependent Children rolls.

Aid to Dependent Children, or ADC, was created by Congress as a public assistance program in 1935 during Roosevelt’s administration during the Great Depression. It gave monetary support to families as subsistence and aided with basic comforts of life, and its original recipients were usually widows who were white. ADC functioned with the help of the Federal Government who paid for half of the relief, and states and their corresponding counties paid for the other half.³⁹

In the 1950’s, more and more women of color received payments from ADC. Nationally, black families constituted thirty-one percent of ADC recipients in 1950 and forty-eight percent by 1961. The national rate for out-of-wedlock-births was highest among black women, and these rates tripled between 1940 and 1958.⁴⁰ As a result, attacks on ADC escalated during this time because the program expanded to include more caseloads, and more importantly,

³⁸ Woodside, 83

³⁹ State Board of Public Welfare, *Facts on Aid to Dependent Children in North Carolina*, Robert H. Mugge (Raleigh: 1959), iii.

⁴⁰ Ellen Reese, *Backlash Against Welfare Mothers: Past and Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 37.

women of color and unwed mothers. These women were previously discriminated against for relief payments. Their sudden eligibility greatly disturbed social planners in North Carolina in the late 1950's.

Black women's high illegitimacy rate challenged the 1950's nuclear and patriarchal family structure. The conservative, Southern, and white majority of North Carolina was enraged that so many women of color were 'undeservingly' living off of their tax dollars. This dissatisfaction among authorities quickly trickled down to the public, and the United States found itself within its first welfare backlash. Scholars even argued that unwed mothers who received ADC gave birth purposely to reap a fatter check from the government.⁴¹ The general public also pressed the State Board of Public Welfare for answers to their questions.

The welfare backlash was fueled in part by the media, which portrayed black welfare mothers as dependent and lacking a work ethic. Scholars have found that as rates of unwed motherhood increased during the 1950's, 60's and 70's, so did the discourse about ADC dependency in the media. This media discourse contained strong messages of dependency on the government and a clear relation to illegitimate births. These portrayals were also gendered and racialized, and tried to convince the public that government money should not go to "morally

⁴¹ Phillips Cutright, Ph.D., "AFDC, Family Allowances and Illegitimacy," *Family Planning Perspectives* 2, no. 4 (1970): 4-9. Cutright tries to prove that welfare payments had no effect on illegitimate children birthed. See also Barbara S. Janowitz, "The Impact of AFDC on Illegitimate Births," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 38, no. 3 (1976). This article poses the opposite view. See also Frederick S. Jaffe and Steven Polgar, "Family Planning and Public Policy: Is the 'Culture of Poverty' the New Cop-Out?" *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 30, no. 2 (1968): 228-225, and Hallowell Pope, "Negro-White Differences Regarding Illegitimate Children," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 31, no. 4 (1969): 756-764.

corrupt” women who get pregnant without a husband. Almost half of this media during this time mentioned African Americans as recipients. Allusions to dependency, unwed motherhood, laziness, unworthiness, ‘undermining the family’ and ‘cheating the system’ were all aspects present within the media’s depictions of welfare. These attributes were the highest during the welfare backlash period.⁴² The negative depictions of black welfare mothers in the media convinced many people that welfare went to undeserving mothers, and welfare became a controversial topic. As a result, The North Carolina State Board of Public Welfare was bothered with many questions concerned with how the State’s welfare money was distributed.

In 1959, the North Carolina State Board of Public Welfare published a report “to answer many of the major questions that have been brought to [their] attention.”⁴³ The first issue brought up in the report was state spending on welfare, so obviously welfare costs were one of the forefronts of concerns with ADC in 1959. In 1959, there were 24,592 families receiving ADC in North Carolina with an average payment of \$71.16 per family. The Board took care to mention how the national average for ADC spending was \$104.83 per family. This placed North Carolina below the average national spending.⁴⁴

In addition to the discussion of money, the report contained a section specifically on race. This section explained that in 1950, 73.4 per cent of the population of the state was white, 25.8 per cent was black, and .8 per cent was Native American. The report estimated that the population distribution could not have changed much since 1950 and “it is apparent, then, that

⁴²Joya Misra, Stephanie Moller and Marina Karhides, “Envisioning Dependency: Changing Media Depictions of Welfare in the 20th Century,” *Social Problems* 50, no. 4 (2003): 488-500.

⁴³ *Facts on Aid to Dependent Children in North Carolina*, iii.

⁴⁴ *Facts on Aid to Dependent Children in North Carolina*, 3.

higher proportions of the nonwhite groups are receiving Aid to Dependent Children than that of the white population” because 49.7 per cent of the ADC recipients were African American.⁴⁵

The report also had a section specifically on the subject of illegitimate children. It acknowledged the issue of illegitimacy as a social problem in North Carolina and stated “since questions are frequently asked concerning the relationships of births out of wedlock to the program of ADC, special attention is given here to this factor.”⁴⁶ This statement revealed the widespread criticism of unwed black mothers receiving state aid. It explained that throughout the entire state, 2.3 per cent of white births and 20.3 per cent of nonwhite births were illegitimate. Among those who both received ADC payments and had illegitimate children, 9.3 per cent were white and 8.8 per cent were nonwhite. Therefore, black unwed mothers did not receive more ADC payments than white unwed mothers. The black population was also much smaller than the white. Illegitimate births became the major controversy and social problem that faced North Carolina, and the public and authorities were unforgiving.

The report helped to ignite the issue of illegitimate births to black mothers. Illegitimacy in North Carolina became “one of the greatest social problems”⁴⁷ of the time. Blame for this calamity fell onto the shoulders of unwed black mothers, who were accused of causing the disintegration of society and large state expenditures. Outright hostility broke out in court and made headlines across North Carolina when Senator Wilbur Jolly introduced his sterilization bill at a public hearing. This bill was indicative of the societal obsession with illegitimate births.

⁴⁵ *Facts on Aid to Dependent Children in North Carolina*, 4.

⁴⁶ *Facts on Aid to Dependent Children in North Carolina*, 21.

⁴⁷ *Facts on Aid to Dependent Children in North Carolina*, 21

The bill proposed a mandatory examination by the Eugenics Board if a woman gave birth to two or more illegitimate children. Upon examination and if in the Board's opinion the woman was considered sexually delinquent, she would be sterilized under the Eugenics law. Upon the birth of a third illegitimate child, the woman would automatically be considered sexually delinquent and sterilization would immediately be ordered.⁴⁸ At the public hearing, Senator Jolly addressed a group of African American ministers and other opponents and told them, "You ought to be for this [bill]...one out of four of the Negro race in North Carolina is illegitimate."⁴⁹ His audience was outraged and protested, but their objections were not heard. The judge adjourned the meeting immediately. Jolly also said that the bill was "realistic" and "just another measure to protect society."⁵⁰ Although the Jolly Bill was never successful, it was not the end of punitive suggestions for reproductive control.

A similar proposal for fertility regulation concerning the mothers of illegitimate children appeared in 1962. Three years after the Jolly Bill, illegitimacy was still considered a problem that needed a solution. The *Report of the Commission to Study Public Welfare Programs* was another document, somewhat like the Welfare report of 1959, and it focused on illegitimacy in relation with ADC. Within this report, there were recommendations for solving the illegitimacy problem in North Carolina. Among the recommendations was a familiar idea: "that the mother who continually has children out of wedlock, as evidenced by a third such child, is a morally unfit person and thus to authorize the removal of said children unless the mother can overcome

⁴⁸ Kays Gary, "Senator Jolly in Heated Argument: 14 of 23 Speeches Protest Measure," *Charlotte News and Observer*, April 2, 1959.

⁴⁹ Roy Parker Jr., "Racial Flareup Winds Up Hearing On Sterilization," *Raleigh News and Observer*, April 2, 1959

⁵⁰ Parker, "Racial Flareup..."

the presumption.”⁵¹ This proposal did not threaten the unwed mother with sterilization, but it would have taken away her children. The commission’s recommendation explained, “if nothing is done to remove the children from the home environment...we will have repeated generations of immoral and dependent children.”⁵² Both the Jolly Bill and Recommendation 21 demonstrated that North Carolina believed that social ills within their society could be cured by the regulation and control over unwed mothers’ fertility.

It is important to note that the term ‘unfit’ and the mentioning of environmental factors transferred through generations within this recommendation is eugenic rhetoric. The language within the document proved that social planners of the time were convinced that the population had ‘undesirables’ and that these ‘undesirables’ were producing children who would grow up to be dependent on public funds like their parents. Although Recommendation 21 did not call for sterilization, it was punitive in nature similarly how sterilization was. Some scholars were paying close attention during this time and commented about coercive sterilization.

One of these scholars was Julius Paul. He noticed immediately the connection between the ADC program and sterilizations under eugenic laws. He understood that the popularity of sterilization proposals were legitimized in economic terms “because of welfare costs, or couched in ‘moral’ terms (the alarming rate of illegitimacy, especially among Negroes), and sometimes covertly or overtly on racial grounds.”⁵³ Paul was one of the only authors of this time period that

⁵¹ *Report of the Commission*, 48.

⁵² *Report of the Commission*, 48.

⁵³ Julius Paul, “The Return of Punitive Sterilization Proposals: Current Attacks on Illegitimacy and the AFDC Program,” *Law and Society Review* 3, no. 1 (1968): 78. See also Denton Vaughan and Gerald Sparer, “Ethnic Group and Welfare Status of Women Sterilized in Federally Funded Family Planning Programs, 1972,” *Family Planning*

critiqued the punitive nature of state ordered sterilization of the poor. Paul attested that “any society that penalizes its weakest and most helpless link has taken a long step in the direction of legislating injustice and misery. And these two evils can only bode danger for the future of a society that claims to be both democratic and humane.”⁵⁴ North Carolinians were discontented with all of the illegitimate births to black women, and certainly not happy about these women on their welfare rolls because of the costs.

Alongside the overt nature of the Jolly Bill and Recommendation 21, the Eugenics Board operated on a covert level during the 1960’s and 1970’s to bring illegitimate births and welfare spending under control. This is when the disproportionate number of black females began to be sterilized under the Eugenics Board of North Carolina. As eugenics was now based on environmental factors instead of heredity, the sterilization law served as a solution to the societal woe of out -of -wedlock births, even though the law restricted sterilization on “physical or social grounds of any normal individual...”⁵⁵ A plan was underway to sterilize individuals regardless of intelligence. In 1961, a newly appointed executive secretary to the Eugenics Board wrote that “my objective as Executive Secretary is to work to promote earlier use of the sterilization program; that is after the first [illegitimate] child...which would result in prevention of problems

Perspectives 6, no. 4 (1974): 224-229. This journal refutes that any certain racial group was targeted by sterilization. It mentions, however, that’s its results are inconclusive and more thorough research should be conducted.

⁵⁴ Paul, 106.

⁵⁵ Woodside, 10.

requiring staff time, money...”⁵⁶ This quote indicated that the Eugenics Board did in fact target unwed mothers for sterilization. The Eugenics Board and the Welfare Department worked closely to carry out this agenda. Sterilization after the birth of the first illegitimate child reduced the amount of staff time on behalf of the Eugenics Board and Welfare departments. In turn, it would save money for each institution and would help to stop illegitimacy that was ‘plaguing’ North Carolina.

The State Board of Public Welfare and the Eugenics Board had an interesting association. North Carolina was the only state that allowed the State Board of Public Welfare to work directly with the Eugenics Board. Families who received ADC had regular visits to their homes from social workers. This alliance allowed social workers from the Welfare department to report to the Eugenics Board and select and petition women for sterilization. In a report it clearly outlined that these “skilled casework services can help to combat illegitimacy among this group of mothers.”⁵⁷ The Eugenics Board had an indirect view into the lives of these mothers who were unaware that they were being monitored through the social workers.

The State Board of Public Welfare was the direct channel through which eugenic sterilizations were initiated, after the State disbanded its institutionalized sterilizations.⁵⁸ Public

⁵⁶ Kevin Begos and John Railey, “Sign This or Else...A Young Woman made a Hard Choice, and Life has not been Peaceful Since,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, December 8-12, 2002. Online access:

<http://againsttheirwill.journalnow.com>. Quotations from Sue Casebolt taken from Eugenics Board minutes, 1961. Located within the article.

⁵⁷ Report of the Commission, 47.

⁵⁸ Woodside, 7.

officials of welfare were directed by the Eugenics Board to “institute proceedings for the sterilization of any epileptic, defective or psychotic resident in the county when it is considered that this would be in the individual’s best interests, or for the public good.” In addition to those people “one type of person likely to be brought to the notice of local authorities for this purpose (sterilization) is the dependent mother of one or more children, and also the promiscuous, feeble-minded girl.”⁵⁹ Another excerpt from Eugenics Board minutes recommended “possible sterilization of families, who, while receiving financial assistance, continue to have more children.”⁶⁰ With all the leeway that the Eugenics Board allowed public welfare officials, it is not difficult to see why African American welfare mothers were sterilized under North Carolina’s antiquated law.

Welfare officials were familiar with the families described, and were constantly on the look out for more women who may be pregnant yet unmarried. Grants from ADC did not discriminate between legitimate and illegitimate children and therefore left aid open to unwed mothers. The wed mothers during the welfare backlash never came under scrutiny. It was only the families who ‘drained’ government resources and had “many children but no breadwinner, a category which includes the prolific unmarried mother of low mentality.”⁶¹ This was the social description of the woman who was poor and became pregnant out of wedlock in North Carolina during the mid-nineteenth century. She became the shame of society, was blamed for being a

⁵⁹ Woodside, 41.

⁶⁰ Begos, Minutes from Eugenics Board, 1951.

⁶¹ Woodside, 42.

part of the largest social problem of its time, and was stripped of her human rights to reproductive freedom: the freedom to choose to have children or not. The North Carolina Eugenics Board officially disbanded in 1977, along with its sterilizations. By the 1970's, it had become apparent that eugenics was outmoded and no longer a viable social program. Eugenics Board chairman Clifton Craig wrote in 1970 that because of "the liberalization of sterilization and abortion laws, contraceptive measures and their increasing availability, we feel that many cases could be handled in the community through existing laws and resources."⁶² Women's rights and African American's rights also gathered credibility during this time, and they possessed a louder voice in defense of their rights than in previous decades.

Eugenics reigned in North Carolina for fifty years, but sterilization lasted a lifetime for those who received the invasive operation. One black victim, Nial Cox Ramirez, tried to sue the state for monetary damages in the 1970's. She was sterilized in 1965 and was not aware of her sterilization until five years later, after a gynecological examination conducted out of state. Her requests for reparations were denied on the grounds that she waited too long after the operation to take legal action.⁶³ Almost 40 years later, she is still waiting for justice.

Eugenics and its state-operated sterilizations were an important lesson to North Carolina and the world. The Eugenic campaign of North Carolina was a testament to the tensions between the races and social classes in society that still prevail today. The Eugenics Board is

⁶² John Railey, Kevin Begos and Danielle Deaver, "Little Notice and Less Explanation: The State's Eugenic Board Ordered Sterilizations in its Last Years even as some Members Sought Reform," *Winston-Salem Journal*, February 16, 2003. . The series is presented at <http://againsttheirwill.journalnow.com>. (accessed November 20, 2008).

⁶³ North Carolina House Representative Larry Womble currently fighting for legislation in North Carolina to be passed that would give reparations to sterilization victims like Mrs. Ramirez.

gone, along with its sterilization law. In its place came an elective sterilization law – North Carolina was the first state to have a voluntary sterilization option. Through all of the unjust and unfair practices of involuntary sterilization, the voluntary sterilization option gave North Carolinian women something they never had before, a choice. This choice was up to the individual to decide and act in her best interest, not a decision that went before a board. Having a choice to have children or not in North Carolina made the state a place for true reproductive freedom, and all of the other states eventually followed in North Carolina's footsteps and adopted voluntary sterilization laws of their own. It is important to remember that at one time, not long ago, people made decisions on behalf of other peoples' lives and subsequently many lives were irreversibly disrupted by these decisions.

Primary Sources Bibliography

Published Material

Begos, Kevin., John Railey, and Danielle Deaver. "Against Their Will: North Carolina's Sterilization Program." *Winston-Salem Journal*, 8-12 December 2002. Electronic access: <http://againsttheirwill.journalnow.com>

This is an online database that the Winston Salem Journal published about North Carolina's Eugenics program and includes photographs, articles written by journalists about different eras and phases of the program, streaming video that include oral testimonies, and propaganda distributed both by the Human Betterment League and the Eugenics Board. This site serves both as a secondary and primary source because of its contents.

Cutright, Phillips, PhD. "AFDC, Family Allowances and Illegitimacy." *Family Planning Perspectives* 2, no. 4 (1970): 4-9.

A popular belief during the time of welfare backlash was that welfare promulgated births out of wedlock and increased welfare payments "rewarded" the undeserving. Through a brief yet dense study, Dr. Cutright is able to display that both higher welfare payments and easy access into the welfare system have no effect on the number of persons on the welfare rolls.

Jaffe, Frederick S. and Steven Polgar. "Family Planning and Public Policy: Is the "Culture of Poverty" the New Cop-Out?" *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 30, no. 2 (1968): 228-235.

This journal provided an in depth analysis of how the poor were continuously blamed for societal problems by having the most children which the rest of society had to help pay for through public assistance. Jaffe and Polgar reveal that it is not the culture of the poor that is the problem. There is much argument as to the poorest people are still without contraceptives and therefore bear the most children.

Janowitz, Barbara S. "The Impact of AFDC on Illegitimate Births." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 38, no. 3 (1976): 485-494.

This was another reaction to public concern with welfare and whether or not it was being abused. Special attention is given to the differences between white and black women who were on AFDC during this time period. The article discusses possible motives for black women to not marry because their payments through AFDC were higher than if they were married and had a male supporter whose income would have been less than the welfare payment. It notes a positive correlation between higher welfare payments and

illegitimacy and non-married black women. White women were excused from every negative aspect of AFDC within this article.

Paul, Julius. "Population 'Quality' and 'Fitness for Parenthood' in the Light of State Eugenic Sterilization Experience, 1907-1966." *Population Studies* 21, no. 3 (1967): 295-299.

This journal is a valuable piece because this article acknowledges that sterilization is controversial and critiques eugenics ideology and its failure. It gives a brief history of eugenic theory and swiftly moves to discuss contemporary problems with its practice. This article was written during the time when state ordered sterilization was still being practiced.

Pope, Hollowell. "Negro-White Differences Regarding Illegitimate Children." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 31, no. 4 (1969): 756-764.

This journal is representative of a study done on non-wed white and black women in North Carolina that had illegitimate births on birth certificates for 1961 and 1962. The journal poses some answers for why African American women were more likely to have illegitimate children such as the lack of adoption for black babies, but the study is centered around the biases of the 1960's that African American women were in fact dependent and overall less likely to conform to the mores of white, North Carolinian, 1960's society.

Vaughan, Denton and Gerald Sparer. "Ethnic Group and Welfare Status of Women Sterilized in Federally Funded Family Planning Programs, 1972." *Family Planning Perspectives* 6, no. 4 (1974): 224-229.

The content of this work is interesting because of the authors' ambiguity in their thesis. The point of the article was to negate the fact that African American females were the disproportionate victims of sterilization, but they are unsuccessful. This article contains high society guilt of not wanting to admit the wrongs done to minority women, so it concludes with the statement that such a topic should undergo more thorough research.

Woodside, Moya. *Sterilization in North Carolina*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1950.

This monograph, written by Englishwoman Moya Woodside is over 200 pages long and is Woodside's opinions and praise for North Carolina's Eugenic policies in 1950. This book has multiple case studies about individuals that were affected by the program, tables, and charts. These case studied were imperative for understanding as medical records are sealed in Raleigh – this book was the closest to the real records.

Newspaper Articles

Davis, Chester S. "IQ Tests Show America Has Major New Problem." *Winston-Salem Journal*, 29 February 1948, section III, p. 1C.

This article was written during a time when eugenics was more heredity centered, yet there are still many references within the article to race and environmental factors contributing to lack of intelligence. The article highlights all of the births coming from poorer families who produce more children, and how these groups of people are therefore feebleminded. This propagandist type article serves as the roots to what later would become a racist and classist agenda.

Davis, Chester S. "The Case for Sterilization...Quality versus Quantity." *Winston-Salem Journal* (Winston-Salem), 7 March 1948, page 1 section III.

This article praised the Eugenic Sterilization Law in North Carolina and informed its readers how the law is not being used enough. It has a propagandist feel, as an attempt to frighten North Carolinians. It discussed the rationale for sterilization and outlined its precursors and made sterilization appear a fair, easy, and nondiscriminatory procedure.

Gary, Kays. "Sterilization Bill Hearing Ends in Uproar," *Charlotte Observer*, 2 April 1959.

This also is an article reporting the events of the proposed Jolly Bill of 1959. It reports basically the same coverage as the previous article, except there is more coverage of opposition to this bill and heavily quoted with African Americans' response to Jolly's accusations of the Black race.

Parker, Roy Jr. "Racial Flareup Winds Up Hearing on Sterilization," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 2 April 1959.

This article made front page news in 1959 and highlights the details of what happened when Senator Wilbur Jolly introduced his Senate bill that, had it passed would have required all mothers who bore more than two children out of wedlock to undergo mandatory sterilization by order of the North Carolina Eugenics Board. There are direct quotes from Jolly, especially important because of his overt racism and criticism towards African Americans that day.

"State Reported Second in Legal Sterilizations." *Winston-Salem Journal*, December 12, 1953.

This is a newspaper article from the beginning of North Carolina's Eugenics Program expansion. It contains direct quotes from Board members who were

pleased with the progress the program made. It also contains numerical and statistical data about the sterilizations.

Official Documents

1960 Manual of the Eugenics Board of North Carolina, online access:
<<http://statelibrary.dcr.state.nc.us/iss/Eugenics/EugenicsStateDocuments.htm>>

This is the official manual of the North Carolina Eugenics Board and it contains all of the rules and procedures of how the board was supposed to function, including rules and grounds for sterilization cases. It is important because these rules and regulations were not enforced as outlined within the manual. It seems the manual served a more official purpose rather than practice.

Biennial Reports of the Eugenics Board of North Carolina, online access:
<<http://statelibrary.dcr.state.nc.us/iss/Eugenics/EugenicsStateDocuments.htm>>

These biennial reports provide quantitative evidence of the percentage of who was being sterilized during specific periods of time. The data is broken up by year, sex, race, and county.

Mugge, Robert H. *Facts on Aid to Dependent Children in North Carolina*. Raleigh: State Board of Public Welfare, 1959.

This booklet was published, like the *Report of the Commission to Study Public Welfare* in response to much public inquiry into the Welfare program. It provides statistical information, racially segregated as to whom was receiving public assistance in 1959. The publication clearly points out that more out of wedlock births were happening among African American groups, and even has the circumstances of the illegitimate births such as divorced, widowed, husband incarcerated, etcetera.

Report of the Commission to Study Public Welfare Programs. Raleigh: December 1962.

Because of much public outcry and a backlash towards welfare mothers in the 1950's and 1960's, a special study was conducted to address society's most important problems and pose new solutions to them. According to this study, the most important social issue in North Carolina that needed to be addressed in 1962 was illegitimate births. This packet includes recommendations as how to deal with births out of wedlock. Among these include the punishment of the mother by taking away her children.

Secondary Source Bibliography

Brantlinger, Ellen. *Sterilization of People with Mental Disabilities: Issues, Perspectives, and Cases*. Westport, Connecticut: Auburn House, 1995.

This book provides an excellent analysis of how gender and paternalism fit into the eugenics movement. It also provides understanding of eugenics when it was focused on institutionalized patients.

Bruinius, Harry. *Better For All the World: The Secret History of Forced Sterilization and America's Quest for Racial Purity*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006.

This monograph provides an excellent history of the origins of eugenics and a chronological approach to how eugenics was applied within the United States. It also contains some emphasis on Georgia, North and South Carolina's programs.

Carabine, Jean. "A Straight Playing Field or Queering the Pitch? Centering Sexuality in Social Policy." *Feminist Review* 54, (1996): 31-64.

Carrabine explores many facets of sexuality and its role in social and public Policy with and emphasizes welfare. There is much discussion of reproduction and how it was and continues to be the main preoccupation of welfare issues.

Caron, Simone M., "Birth Control and the Black Community in the 1960's: Genocide or Power Politics?" *Journal of Social History* 31, no. 3 (1998): 545-569.

This journal has great emphasis on black female sexuality including stereotypes and perceptions and how their sexuality was constantly controlled. It examines how sterilizations became directed at welfare recipients with a focus on North Carolina's attempt to alleviate its "Negro Problem" during the late 1950's and 1960's.

Misra, Joya., Stephanie Moller, and Marina Karides. "Envisioning Dependency: Changing Media Depictions of Welfare in the 20th Century." *Social Problems* 50, no. 4 (2003): 482-504.

These three scholars compose this journal article with the results of an intense study that surveyed depictions of welfare over the course of the 20th century and how different frames followed specific historical periods. They empirically concluded that engendered racial images of dependency were highest in the 1960's and 1970's. Welfare in the media is crucial to my research because public opinion affected the way people viewed and formed opinions about AFDC.

Railey, John., and Kevin Begos. "Still Hiding: Woman Sterilized at 14 Carries a Load of Shame." *Winston-Salem Journal*. December 8-12, 2002. The series is presented at

<http://againsttheirwill.journalnow.com>. (accessed September 2, 2008).

This is one of a series of articles within the website and contextualizes one woman's story within history. This is an online database that the Winston Salem Journal published about North Carolina's Eugenics program and includes photographs, articles written by journalists about different eras and phases of the program, streaming video that include oral testimonies, and propaganda distributed both by the Human Betterment League and the Eugenics Board. This site serves both as a secondary and primary source because of its contents.

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Ramsdem, Edmund. "Social Demography and Eugenics in the Interwar United States." *Population and Development Review* 29, no. 4 (2003): 547-593.

Ramsdem discusses the origin of social demography and its important role in eugenics. He explains how eugenics shifted from a biological science to a social science and how social demographers shaped and enhanced the new grounds for eugenic practices.

Reese, Ellen. *Backlash Against Welfare Mothers: Past and Present*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

This book contextualizes the welfare backlash that so many of the other Monographs report, but do not explain. This is a complete examination of the history of welfare programs, and of their neglects and abuses. Reese explains the political climate along with mass media representations and how the two directly affected African American welfare mothers, with much emphasis on the Southern United States.

Roberts, Dorothy. *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty*. New York: Vintage Books, 1997.

Roberts' book focuses solely on African American females struggle for reproductive autonomy, past and present. This book is essential because Roberts chronologically depicts this struggle and puts the sterilization abuses of the 1950's-1970's into a historical context which helps bridge the initial eugenics into what became a major problem for African American welfare recipients.

Schoen, Johanna. *Choice and Coercion: Birth Control, Sterilization and Abortion in Public Health and Welfare*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.

Schoen provides vast information linking welfare reform, women's control over their sexuality and reproductive rights and sterilization. Numerous primary sources are throughout this book as well as statistical information drawn from the primary sources. The shift to preserving the ideal society and saving money because of welfare expenditures are acknowledged and thoroughly covered.

Solinger, Rickie. *Pregnancy and Power: A Short History of Reproductive Politics in America*. New York: New York University Press, 2005.

This monograph provides thorough coverage in reproductive politics. It helped immensely to bridge the gap between eugenics and social control. Solinger emphasizes that throughout history, controlling women's reproduction was key to the maintenance of social order. This is crucial to my thesis because African American females' reproduction was viewed as a threat to social order within the 50's and 60's.

Thomas, Susan L., "Race, Gender, and Welfare Reform: The Anti-Natalist Response." *Journal of Black Studies* 28, no. 4 (1998): 419-446.

This journal is revealing of the motives of sterilization of black females during the 1950's and 1960's and provides explanations for those motives. There is an emphasis on women's sexuality and societal norms, and antiquated legislation that would have put a halt on welfare for women. There are also numerous quotes from a North Carolina senator Jolly.