

American Eugenics:  
From Pseudoscience to Law,  
Communicating Biases Across Generations

Julia Resciniti  
Senior Division  
Individual Website  
Student Composed Words: 1191  
Multimedia Time: 2:45 minutes  
Process Paper Words: 474

## Process Paper

From the very start, I knew I wanted to focus on disability rights. I found a timeline of disability rights for my state, Pennsylvania, and began from there. I noticed my state had vetoed a bill called “An Act for the Prevention of Idiocy” and it sparked my interest. What was this law? Why had it almost passed my state’s legislature?

From there, I got a book on the science (or lack thereof) of the Eugenics movement. I knew I had to research this topic further. I began digging into the eugenics movement, from its start with Francis Galton to its conclusion in bills across America allowing for forced sterilization. The growth of this pseudoscience was fascinating.

I began to read up on Charles Davenport and the man behind lobbying state legislatures, Harry Laughlin. Doctors were petitioning legislatures to make the operations they were already doing legal. The deeper I got into my research, the more invested I was. The impact eugenics has had on the black and disabled community has been too profound to ignore.

By the time I got to *Buck v. Bell*, a sham case set up to rule forced sterilization constitutional, I already knew eugenics’ path to legalization had been entirely underhanded. My first introduction to the case was in an American Experience documentary, where they explained how the lawyer given to Carrie Buck favored eugenics.

I discovered disability studies through this project, a major offered by a handful of colleges in the United States. I didn’t know exactly what it was I wanted to do upon graduating high school, but this new information was instrumental in helping me form a plan. I want to dedicate my life to disability rights, and to stopping an atrocity like the eugenics movement from happening again. This project also emphasised the importance of being aware of your state government, encouraging me to pay more attention to my state legislature.

Then, as I was researching, a news story broke. Women were being forcibly sterilized in the Irwin County Detention Center. With the reports surfacing, I knew my topic was more important than ever.

I began investigating how communication played a role in the movement, beginning with books and then gravitating toward publications put out by eugenicists. One thing quickly became clear. Without communication, the eugenics movement never would’ve made its way into law. Eugenics also forced its way into the minds of people, people who wanted to believe they were superior. With fitter family contests, the average family could pretend they were a part of the elite.

Beginning with disability rights and following the path to eugenic legislation, I researched communication in the eugenics movement. I was able to find who was involved and how. Even as I was

researching, forced sterilization resurfaced. Eugenics should never be forgotten, lest its dangers also be forgotten.