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# Rethinking AP: Black Women, Anti-Eugenics, and Reproductive Justice

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## Background

This will be my fourth year teaching an AP level course, and third consecutive year teaching AP African American Studies, in addition to teaching U.S. History and Black and Latino studies elective. History courses within and beyond the AP realm often center on a Western canon and reinforce dominant narratives about history, literature, and science. This marginalizes the intellectual traditions of non-Western and non-white communities and upholds a narrow definition of what is as rigorous and valuable knowledge, often left to the mercy and decision-making power of the curriculum writers. Although I could see how the development of the content for the AP African American studies course was both a response to and rejection of this eurocentrism, there was turmoil within myself that I could not name nor explain. While I felt excited and grateful for having the opportunity to be the first teacher in New Haven Public Schools to pilot this course, there was an incongruous feeling I couldn't shake: Why did my teaching in this course feel so wildly different and disconnected from the more grounded, student-centered approach I typically used in my other courses? After all, this course was designed to acknowledge and center the rich and complex histories of the African diaspora.

Coincidently, it was only this Spring when I joined Daniel HoSang's seminar on *Eugenics and Its Afterlives* that I finally had the understanding and language to explain the "what" and "why" of my experiences. I identified the following sources of my frustration and discontent:

- The rigid structure and unrealistic pacing of AP courses
- The emphasis and over reliance on memorizing the content of each lesson topic considered "essential knowledge" by College Board
- In trying to ensure I covered as much of the course content as I could, I perpetuated and reinforced a "teach for the test" mindset with my students even though it contradicted my entire teaching philosophy.

Teaching AP African American Studies involves navigating an inherited framework in which success is measured by a high-stakes multiple-choice exam - a system with direct historical ties to eugenics. The term

“eugenics,” meaning “good birth,” has its roots in 19th century Europe coined by Englishman and eugenicist Francis Galton. Galton, cousin of renowned naturalist Charles Darwin, misapplied Darwin’s theory of evolution and Mendelian genetics to human reproduction and hereditary. During the early part of the century many other European “social scientists,” physicians, and law enforcement officials were observing rising social issues such as poverty, criminality, and what they called “feeblemindedness.” They labelled and associated these trends to “social degeneracy” - the belief that society and human advancement itself was rapidly regressing with potentially existential consequences. Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, the professionalization of gynecology and obstetrics created fertile ground for the emergence of the American eugenics’ movement. This movement, which reached its peak in the early 20th century, was founded on the set of beliefs and practices which aimed to create the “perfect” human race through selective breeding. Eugenics would soon be inextricably linked in nearly every aspect of American society. Like their European counterparts, American eugenicists viewed social issues not as products of systemic inequality, but as biological flaws that could be resolved by regulating the reproductive capacities of those deemed “unfit” as the cure for ridding society of its ills. The “success” and pervasiveness of American eugenics movement was largely due to a vast, and well-connected network of individuals with the socio-economic power to transform ideology into policy. These individuals leveraged their influence to institutionalize eugenics and galvanize public support for its widespread implementation. Although eugenics was and has been discredited, the effects linger today and are evident in the AP classroom – so long as we know how to spot them.

The following examples illuminate the subtle yet pervasive legacies of eugenic logic and behaviors:

Meritocracy Myth & Fixed Intelligence: The ideological foundation of eugenics is rooted in the belief that intelligence is innate and biologically determined. In his article, “*The Racism of Intelligence: How Mental Testing Practices Have Constituted an Institutionalized Form of Group Domination”* Jean-Claude Croizet says “Education serves as the screening institution aimed at identifying and selecting the brightest students to provide them with training commensurate to their individual merit. Then, educational credentials impact to a larger extent occupational opportunities and, as a result, the individuals' position in the social hierarchy.”[1] This flawed belief that intelligence is fixed, and some students are just “smarter” by nature is often reinforced in AP classes by failing to acknowledge that one’s success can be significantly impacted – positively or negatively - by existing social inequities within and beyond the education system.

Tracking and Gatekeeping: In connection with the above eugenic idea is the belief that society should be sorted based on perceived cognitive ability.  As applied students are often “tracked” into AP/honors vs the “regular” or standard classes. These tracks often correlate with race, school funding, and socioeconomic status reinforcing social hierarchies under the guise of “academic ability”; When, disparate access and structural racism contribute to gatekeeping who has access to this level of a course. When it comes to planning AP course enrollments for the following school year, teachers (within the context of my school) are often asked to recommend students who they feel are a “good fit” or academically able. This decision is often based on the student’s academic track record and academic performance in the previous school year. Considering a student’s academic performance or skillset to ensure they are not being set up for failure by recommending them for a course they might not be quite ready for – yet – is important, however, is ultimately up to the discretion of the recommender which can be rather subjective.

Overemphasis on Testing and Quantification: The eugenic logic operating here is again this belief that intelligence can be objectively measured, categorized and ranked. The College Board AP system is based on standardized testing. These high-stakes assessments privilege certain types of knowledge and ways of thinking – typically Eurocentric, text-heavy, and analytical – while greatly undervaluing other forms of

intelligence and/or ways of engaging in the course (i.e creativity, emotional, or communally).

These are classic tenets of eugenics that persist within education. These deeply flawed beliefs inform behavior that shapes policy, which works to reinforce systemic inequities.  However, the same way we have all learned and been affected by eugenic thinking, we can collectively and consciously choose to unlearn it.

The purpose of this unit is to explore the history of reproductive regulation of Black women's bodies, the role of eugenics, and contemporary developments within the reproductive justice movement. I will do this within the context of how I currently cover these topics, and approach teaching both the content and skills through a more critical lens. After studying and researching current scholarship on both eugenics and reproductive regulation, I have identified the three major patterns of eugenic behaviors that follows:

- *Rooted in the belief of biological determinism.* The false notion that traits like intelligence, morality, or worth are inherited and fixed. This ideology laid the foundation for policies and political systems that systematically produce and sustain social inequities. It legitimized harmful hierarchies by presenting pseudoscientific "facts" as objective truth, enabling entire fields of study to be professionalized around deeply flawed, and often dangerous, premises.
- *Working in tandem with scarcity mindset that is shaped by white supremacy. In the context of the United States but not limited, dominant social groups (i.e. white upper-middle class/men) have been and are at the helm, exerting their control over marginalized groups to maintain their access to resources, power, and privilege. Perpetuating and reinforcing a socially inequitable hierarchy.*
- *Paternalism.* Rather than seeing the value in collective agency – other than when the benefits or privileges will be reaped for their own communities – elites have this deeply held and perverse belief that they know what is best for others, silencing or outright denying democratic attempts of self–determination in typically marginalized communities.

While these conclusions were drawn largely from my reading of Erik L. Peterson's *The Shortest History of Eugenics,* I gained a nuanced and intersectional understanding of reproductive regulation from Dorothy Robert's book *Killing the Black Body.* Roberts argues that the regulation and control of Black women's reproductive rights has historically been — and continues to be — a cornerstone of racial oppression in the United States. Roberts demonstrates how reproductive regulation is not simply a matter of individual choice or medical policy but must be situated within broader social justice issues such as racism, sexism, and social control[2] .

Initially, I began my research delving into the works of Deirdre Cooper *Medical Bondage*, and Harriet Washington's *Medical Apartheid* which helped me to understand the historical development and professionalization of the field of gynecology, both of which exploited the labor and bodies of Black women. It was only when I transitioned to Robert's book that it became clear how reproductive regulation is linked to many more social issues.

## Content Objectives

This curriculum unit offers a dual-purpose framework: it equips educators with tools to recognize and disrupt how eugenic ideologies are subtly reinforced in Advanced Placement classrooms, proposing anti-eugenic practices as a path toward more equitable instruction. Simultaneously, it engages students in critical content that centers Black women's struggle for reproductive justice, inviting them to challenge inherited narratives and become active participants in anti-eugenic learning. The objectives for this unit are better understood through a content and instructional lens:

In content, we will:

1. Critically examine and respond to various definitions and assumptions about intelligence exploring the historical and social narratives that have shaped what it means to be "smart" in different contexts.
2. Explore patterns of eugenics--eugenic behavior-- throughout the past, present and future.
    a. Define the American eugenics movement and explain the social, political, and scientific context that allowed it to emerge and gain traction in the early 20th century.
    b. Analyze the stated goals of the eugenics movement and how they reflected broader ideas about race, intelligence, disability, and "fitness" in American society.
    c. Identify key institutions (e.g., schools, government agencies, scientific organizations) and influential figures that helped promote eugenics as legitimate science and public policy.
    d. Evaluate how ideas rooted in eugenics have continued or evolved in contemporary systems, especially within the field of education.
3. Explore forms of resistance to eugenic behavior and develop anti eugenic thinking.
    a. Examine the ways individuals and communities resisted or challenged eugenic ideas and policies, including legal, cultural, and grassroots efforts.
4. Understand how the reproductive regulation of Black women's bodies is connected to broader social justice issues that affect everyone.

Instructionally, I will:

1. Embed my interpretation of anti-eugenic teacher practices within the course to disruptthe existing course framework.

## Anti-Eugenic Teacher Strategies

As previously mentioned, this curriculum is a dual-purpose framework, and it aims to expose the subtle yet pervasive legacies of eugenics within education while ensuring teachers are equipped with anti-eugenic strategies to disrupt this continuity. Relating specifically to AP courses, legacies of eugenics include competition and self-promotion, "one size fits" all instruction, and reinforcement of high stakes testing mindset. These "traditional" instructional approaches rob students and educators alike of authentic opportunities to engage in the course – and with each other - in deeper and critical ways. The following teaching strategies are how I envision implementing this unit to challenge the legacies of eugenics within the AP classroom:

**Strategy #1: Engage with history for the purpose of empathy.**

Although students are enrolled in an AP level class and there is explicit expectation for the course to be taught in a test-prep manner necessitated by rigid memorization of facts or the "essential knowledge" facts included in my inherited curriculum, it raised the following questions for me:

1. *What else is essential content that we are missing out on?*
2. *Why does teaching this course feel so regimented, contradictory, and in disagreement with my approaches to the other courses I teach? How can I facilitate this differently, and still set my students up for success?*

This strategy emerged as a direct response to the questions above. Establishing and cultivating strong relationships with students allows the educator to identify additional culturally relevant content that might not be deemed "essential" by the College Board yet rejects the predetermined content of the curriculum. The supplemental content added may not be what students will be assessed on during the AP exam, but it will deepen their understanding of the course content and allow them to make connections within the broader historical context and to themselves; this is the goal of this strategy.  Engaging with history for the purpose of empathy – opposed to regurgitation of information - will provide students with a new lens that humanizes and breathes life into the historical figures and developments they are studying rather than just fixed names on paper or events that have long passed. This approach weaves social-emotional learning and culturally responsive teaching with historical content; Not only does this provide students with greater exposure and representation within the curriculum but also emphasizes the value in studying history through shared human experiences.

**Strategy #2: Cultivating collectivism & student-centered models of learning.**

As in any other field or industry, the practices within education have evolved over time in response to the ever-changing needs of our diverse student populations. Like many educators, I have learned that certain practices or customs no longer serve the best interests or development of our students. Teacher-centered instruction and "teaching to the few" no longer align with my philosophy of what it means to be an educator. As a result, I have intentionally worked to transform my own classroom culture from being traditionally individualistic - where the focus is on the independent achievement and success of the individuals – to a more collectivist classroom where collaborative learning, interdependence, and group success are the goals for our work together. This conscious choice emerged after reading Zaretta Hammond's *Culturally Responsive Teaching & The Brain,* about the dominant culture operating in the United States and how it can affect the learning environment and experiences of our students. The Cultural Dimensions Index created by cultural psychologist Geert Hofstede gives us insight on the cultural archetypes of various countries: The index is comprised of seven dimensions, each is scored on a 100-point scale, however for the purpose of this strategy we are only looking at one dimension which is the level of individualism within a society[3] . The scores are out of 100: the higher the score means the higher individualist culture. The United States has an index score of 91 out of 100 meaning, "our dominant cultural messages and norms revolved around a self-reliance 'pull yourself up by your bootstraps' mindset with a strong focus on competition and self-promotion[4] . Knowing this information, in addition to how eugenic legacies endure within AP classrooms it allowed me to think more critically about practices I could implement to disrupt the continuation of this dominant culture within my courses; Especially considering many of my students have roots in highly collectivist cultures of many Latin and African countries[5] . By understanding the dominant cultural processes operating at all levels within our systems and structures we can honor the diversity of our students and better meet their needs.

The instructional practices I implemented last year already aligned with my new vision for fostering a more communal and student-centered learning experience, and as a result will continue with intention. The following instructional model was developed by the Modern Classroom Project[6] . Not only does this model encourage students to be active participants in their own learning, but it also allowed me to create meaningful opportunities for students to engage in collaborative learning, demonstrating that I am not the only person they can learn from nor are they expected to do this work in isolation. This model has three components:

*Teacher recorded instructional videos:* These videos provide students with the instructional content that essentially would be the "lecture", allowing them to progress through each lesson at their own pace, rewatching as many times as needed. As opposed to a traditional live lecture, where processing time varies for each student, it alleviates the pressure of having to "get it all" right away or risk being lost as the lecture continues. An additional benefit of the videos is it prevents students from missing instruction and ensures equitable access due to the videos being posted on the learning management system.

*Self-paced student learning:* Each lesson sequence has "target dates" - soft deadlines of when the lesson(s) should be done to keep "on pace"- and the "hard deadline" which is when the sequence of lessons needs to be done. Within these lessons students have practice which is essentially classwork where students apply their learning from the instructional video to develop skills and conceptual understandings. This classwork is strongly encouraged and at times explicitly requires students to work with peers who are also in the same lesson as they are to foster that collaborative learning experience. When students are done with the practice, review it, and this gives me the opportunity to work one-on-one or in small groups with students to clarify things before they tell me they are ready for the lessons' mastery check.

*Mastery checks:* At the end of each lesson within a sequence, there is short assessment tailored to the specific learning/content objective. Once students have turned in their classwork and it shows they've grasped the skill/content of the lesson they take the mastery check independently. This is the only component of this model that must be done in-class, whereas the video and notes/classwork can be done within and outside of the class. Each mastery check has a clear criterion for success at the bottom of the page to transparently communicate how they are assessed. If students do not pass the mastery check with a 90% or above, they need to retake as many times as needed, before they are able to move on to their next self-paced lesson. They must choose two or more revision strategies to assist them in their review of the content before a redo.

Collectivism and student-centered models of learning afford students the opportunity of learning in community with others without compromising their individual ability to take ownership of their academic experience.

*(See Note 1)*

**Strategy #3: Assessments & Self-Evaluations.**

This last strategy is two-fold and aims to combat the "teach for test" structure of AP, while inviting students to be self-evaluators to gauge their own progress. Students will still be expected to take the unit tests that I've structured like the AP exam to ensure they are well-prepared to demonstrate their learning on exam day. However, the way students will prepare for their unit tests is going to be quite different. My typical approach to test review/study days has been to provide students with a study guide, and plan for a day of in-class review options. Students are given a menu of options for how they can review/study and even given an incentive for creating their own study/review material. The new strategy regarding assessments will include giving students the actual unit test on the scheduled review day for them to review and complete in small

groups with their classmates. The goal here is to alleviate the pressure and anxiety around testing while giving students the opportunity to engage in academic discussions about the content. By exposing students to the actual test, they will be able to identify gaps or misunderstandings as they work on completing it as a group and it naturally will lead to discussions around what the "right" answers are through collaborative learning. This collaboration not only develops soft skills such as problem-solving, communication, teamwork, but also reinforces interdependence and promotes self-reflection as they determine what they will need to independently review after the whole group reviews the answers to the test. Lastly, the self-evaluations are student-facing versions of rubric criteria for any assessment, with a space for written reflection. Students will be given a self-evaluation after their completion of any large task such as formal discussion, project, or essay where they will circle the score for each rubric criteria, and then reflect in the space provided under each rubric row on why they gave themselves that score being sure to reference specific examples in their work that align with the score they circled. The purpose of this strategy is to open a line of communication between the teacher and student where transparency around grading is prioritized, as well as making students' thought process visible to the teacher. This practice benefits both the student and teacher in different ways: 1) It gives students an opportunity to advocate for themselves regarding their perceptions of the quality of the work they produce; 2) If the students' scores and teacher scores are in disagreement it creates a chance for both parties to discuss and consider the others perspective; 3) Helps to reinforce to students that grading isn't about "getting them" but rather gaining clarity around the grade they received due to the clearly communicated criteria. Students know in advance the self-evaluation they complete is not going to override the teacher's grade but give them a chance to have their thoughts taken into consideration, which does not happen often within education.

## Content & Activities Part 1: History of The American Eugenics Movement

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The current AP African American Studies curriculum does not explicitly address the eugenics movement in the United States. However, it does include topics that implicitly rely on an understanding of eugenics in order to uncover deeper connections. While the lesson activities referenced below are part of the existing AP framework, this unit invites students to engage with them through a critical lens—one that challenges dominant narratives and promotes a deeper understanding of structural power and resistance. As a result, the first week (4 days) of this unit will be taking students through a history and overview of the eugenics movement.

**Day 1: Exploring Ideas on Intelligence**

Guiding question: What does it mean to be "intelligent, and who gets to decide that?

#### Activity 1: Big Paper

Students will begin with an anticipatory activity to get them thinking about ideas and assumptions surrounding intelligence. Students will first participate in a silent discussion utilizing the "Big Paper"[7] strategy. Inform students the first two rounds will be done silently, only responding through written commentary. While the purpose of this activity is to solicit commentary, students might benefit from having guiding questions on how to respond to the statements.

Here are a few examples to share with students that can be easily adapted or modified:

1. *To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?*
2. *What thoughts, feelings, or experiences does this statement invoke in you?*
3. *What questions does this statement raise for you?*

*Round One:* In groups of 3-4, students will receive a big piece of chart paper each with a different statement about what it means to be intelligent. Each student in the group will read the statement and provide their commentary, putting their initials next to their comments. If a student writes a question in response to something their peer wrote, the other peer can respond through written commentary. It is wise to give students different color markers or writing utensils to make it easier to distinguish their writing from their peers. The teacher can determine the duration of round one, however at least 15-20 minutes should be allotted.

*Round Two:* Transition students to round two, still working in silence, leaving their main group and walking around the room to the other big chart papers. Instruct students to bring their marker or writing utensil with them to write commentary on the other big papers. Tell students there doesn't need to be any order in how they navigate the room but that they need to respond to at least 2 other big chart papers, ensuring they write their initials next to their comments. If students are not sure what else to write, encourage them to draw lines and make connections between comments, or refer to the guiding questions in round one. Again, the duration of this round can be determined by the teacher but 15 minutes at minimum is best.

*Round Three:* In this last round, groups reconvene with their original group and big chart paper. Give them time to read through the comments that were added by their peers. At this point you can inform students this is the time now for them to verbally communicate with their classmates, clarifying any questions or comments left on their papers. Allow for 10-15 minutes for students to check-in with other peers at different groups for follow-up conversations.

*Whole Group Discussion:* Lastly debrief this activity with the whole group. Prompt students to pick one of the following questions to respond to:

1. *What stood out to you the most, or invoked a strong reaction?*
2. *What do you think informs or shapes our ideas/assumptions around what it means to be intelligent?*
3. *What role do schools play in reinforcing ideas about intelligence?*

**Closure:**

For an Exit Ticket ask students to take out their notebooks, choose and re-write the statement that resonated with them the most. Have them write their responses to the following questions:

1. *Why did this statement resonate with you the most?*
2. *Do you believe this statement is true for everyone? Why or why not?*
3. *Who benefits from this idea? Who might be left out?*

**Day 2: Origins of American Eugenics movement**

*(See Notes 2-3 prior to this lesson)*

Guiding Question: What conditions in American society allowed the eugenics movement to grow, and why did

so many people believe it was scientific truth?

**Warmup:**

Students will begin by engaging in a "SEE, THINK, WONDER[8] " protocol analyzing an image of the eugenics tree[9] . Once students have had enough time to analyze the image and record their observations, invite them to share responses recording them somewhere visible. Be sure to remind students to not jump ahead in the protocol.

**Interactive Lecture/Guided Notes:**

Tell students to form groups of 3-4 before starting the lecture. Inform them that they will be taking guided notes following a lecture exploring the origins of American eugenics movement. The presentation will include a mix of multi-media sources (videos, primary sources document/images) to ensure the content is accessible to all learners, as well as six check-for-understanding (CFU) prompts to gauge students' understanding and an opportunity for the teacher to clarify as needed. The purpose of having students in groups for notetaking is an intentional effort to cultivate a collectivist culture giving them the opportunity to process and learn from one another, especially as working towards identifying eugenic ideas/patterns of behavior. Give students 2-3 minutes for group discussion after each question and ask someone to share what their group discussed. Here are relevant and potential CFUs to pose to students throughout the lesson that can be adapted or scaffolded further:

1. *What does the term "eugenics" mean, and where did it originate?*
2. *What fears or beliefs were common in the U.S. at the time that made eugenics appealing?*
3. *How did ideas about immigration, race, poverty, and disability influence the movement?*
4. *What did eugenicists believe made someone more, or less "fit" to reproduce? How were intelligence and poverty connected to ideas about heredity?*
5. *What assumptions were made about race, class, and ability?*

**Closure:**

At the end of the Day 2, ask students to respond to the following questions as an Exit Ticket:

1. *Explain the historical context within the U.S. at the turn of the century that allowed the eugenics movement to prosper.*
2. *What is one aspect of this history that seems relevant or like issues/concerns today?*

### Day 3: Yale, The Media, & Eugenics

*(See Note 4 prior to this lesson)*

Guiding question: How did institutions like schools, science labs, and the government spread and legitimize eugenic ideas?

**Warmup:**

Ask students to take out their notebooks and give them 5 minutes to respond to the following warmup question:

1. *What's something you've been told you're a "natural" at – or something people say, "runs in your family"? List a few examples.*
2. *Where do you think those ideas come from, and what do they suggest about our talents, abilities, or intelligence?*

Instruct students to turn and talk with a peer and share their responses. Next, invite them to share aloud to the whole group. Write student responses on the board, even if multiple students say the same thing – it will be helpful to see the trends/patterns that emerge, and refer to, as the lesson progresses.

**Activity 1: Inherited Traits v. Acquired Traits**

Provide each student with access to the chosen source. Instruct them to read/view the source, take notes on key terms/definitions, and write examples of traits that are inherited v. acquired. Depending on the length of the source time will vary but I'd recommend 15 minutes maximum with the debrief included. Once students are done with the source task, ask them to share out some of their examples, recording their responses on a whiteboard/somewhere visible. Ask them to return to their warmup response and mark the example(s) they wrote with an "I" if the trait is inherited, or an "A" for acquired; Clarify for accuracy if needed. Pose students with the following discussion questions:

1. *How does this information impact/change your original understanding or perception of the things you thought you were a "natural" at? What does this reveal to you?*
2. *If we know how heredity works, why do you think we still use this language?*

The purpose of this exercise is to get students to think about the examples they listed in their warmups comparing it to the information on heredity so they can start to see how eugenic ideas were legitimized as scientific despite being flawed.

**Interactive Lecture/Guided Notes:**

Transition students into the lecture by reviewing the guiding question. Students will take guided notes, responding to check-for-understanding questions built into the presentation to support their conceptual understanding. Adapt or modify the following CFUs for your students:

1. *Who were some of the leading figures in the American eugenics' movement?*
2. *How did public institutions - like the U.S. government or universities- support eugenic policies?*
3. *What stands out to you about the specific role Yale played in promoting eugenics?*
4. *What role did education and the media play in legitimizing and spreading these beliefs?*

An anticipated misconception with the content of this lesson might be, "Well, why is the eugenics movement so significant, especially when it ultimately ended?". This is understandable given the United States' track record of white supremacy, racism, nativism, exclusionary policies, and other practices that worked in unison to create and sustain an unjust social hierarchy. However, the point that needs to be emphasized as Eric Peterson states in his book *The Shortest History of Eugenics* about, "what made American eugenics truly a movement around the time of World War 1 turned out to be an organized web highly organized web of actors."[10] This network of organizations within the U.S. is referred to as the "American Eugenics Triangle" comprised of three institutions: The Eugenic Record Office at Cold Spring Harbor, New York; The Human Betterment Foundation in Pasadena, California, and the Race Betterment Society in Battle Creek Michigan. Not only did this Triangle of men, money, and institutions organize a relatively efficient eugenics propaganda

operation, it broadcast the message of eugenics far beyond the U.S. – with disastrous consequences."[11] To avoid reducing this history to the actions of a few "bad actors/individuals" it is important to guide students in critically examining these events through a systemic and institutional lens. Furthermore, teaching the local history of Yale's role in promoting eugenics through a case-study, helps students understand how this fits into the broader eugenics' movement.

The content of this lecture is organized into sections to help students see the interconnected nature of these histories. Many of the following sources - created by students in the anti-eugenic society at Yale- will be used to illustrate these connections:

1. *Tree visual of American Eugenics Society (AES) & Yale's in the 1920* – this image shows how various academic disciplines, and their faculty leaders were connected to eugenics. Helps students to visually see the institutional ties within Yale.
2. *Map of Yale's campus* - This map highlights how Yale faculty and departments were physically and ideologically embedded in the eugenics movement.
3. *Educational material* – These images and sources include graphs, data, and other "scientific" content that eugenicists used to gain public support, particularly for influencing policy.
4. *Quotes/Excerpts* – Selected quotes and excerpts from figures like Irving Fisher (AES founder and Yale economist), James Angell (former Yale president and psychology professor), and Leon Whitney (AES secretary) offer insight into how these individuals legitimized eugenics through their language and positions of power.
5. *Resistance Efforts* – Selected quotes/images from Black intellectuals like W.E.B DuBois, Zora Neale Hurston, and Ida B. Wells who were challenging white supremacy.

Together these sources help students not only understand the contributing factors that gave eugenics scientific credibility and institutional support but also the ways people were actively challenging and disrupting these dangerous narratives at the same time.

#### Closure:

To end this lesson, ask students to demonstrate their understanding of the guiding question by drawing/sketching their response, and labelling to clarify.

### Day 4: Legacies of Eugenics & Resistance

Guiding Question: In what ways do eugenic ideas still show up today, especially in education, and how can we recognize and challenge them?

#### Activity 1: Dominant v. Critical Narratives

*(See Note 5 before this activity)*

Begin this lesson by reviewing the lesson question, instructing students to take out their notebooks. Have students form groups of 3-4 and provide them with the definition a of "*dominant narrative"* and tell them to write it down.  The dominant narrative I am using for this exercise is:

> *"Black history began with slavery and is primarily a story of oppression and struggle"*

Give students 10-12 minutes for this next part. Tell students that within their groups they will examine the

dominant narrative, and answer the following set of questions together, recording their responses in their notebooks *(project the questions to the whole group or provide a copy to each group):*

1. *Who might say/promote something like this?*
2. *Who does this benefit/empower? Who does it harm/disempower?*
3. *What assumptions are being made by this narrative?*
4. *Why do you think this narrative has prevailed?*

Call on a student from each group to share out their responses for one of the questions, inviting other students from different groups to share/compare what they wrote. Clarify as needed to guide them in understanding the purpose of, and ways these narratives' function:

- *maintain/hoard power*
- *many people have heard it and perpetuate it*
- *accepted as a total truth*
- *silence/ignore different perspectives*
- *one-sided story /told from the perspective of the "winner"*

Provide students with the definition of a "*critical narrative*" and ensure they write it in their notebooks. Still within their groups, ask students to discuss and come up with a critical narrative that challenges the dominant example. Give students 8-10 minutes for this. This exercise will help students develop the critical thinking skills they will later use to identify enduring eugenic logic and to adopt anti-eugenic practices as a means of disruption.

**Contemporary Examples:**

Curate a slideshow with current 4-5 examples of eugenic ideas/legacies that persist today such as: DNA testing services, immigration rhetoric/policies, dating apps for "elites", and CRISPR *(not an exhaustive list)*. As you go over each example explain to students the connection/or legacy of eugenics, instructing them to write it down in their notebooks *(keep students in their groups for this it will make the transition to the next activity much easier)*.

**Activity 2: Legacies of Eugenics in Education**

Now that students have the historical background on the eugenics movement the goal in this next exercise is for them to identify and name eugenic behaviors/practices that persist in education based on their own experiences. Project or provide copies of the following questions to each group:

1. *Can you identify any current educational practices/examples that reflect ideas of sorting, ranking, or labeling students?*
2. *How might advance or tracked classes (like AP/Honors) reflect opportunity rather than ability?*
3. *What questions should we ask about who defines "intelligence" or "achievement" today?*

Debrief their responses by assigning each group one of the questions to report on rather than asking each group all four questions. If responses are sparse, invite other groups to share their responses to questions they weren't assigned.

**Closure:**

Ask students to identify one example of a legacy of eugenics in education that emerged from Activity 2 they understand best. Ask them to propose/apply an anti-eugenic idea or practice and explain how this new practice would make a difference.

## Content & Activities Part 2: Introduction to *Killing the Black Body*

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Guiding Question: How has the control of Black women's reproductive choices been used as a way to limit their freedom and equality in society?

**Activity 1: Intersectionality**

Before jumping into the content, it's important to help students understand how, based on our identities, we all navigate the world differently and have unique experiences.  Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, is an American civil rights advocate and scholar of critical race theory. In the early 1990s, it was Crenshaw who coined the term "intersectionality" as a framework to understand how aspects of a person's identity overlap or intersect, creating unique experiences of discrimination and privilege.

Instruct students to open their notebooks and provide them with a definition of this concept before getting into the video *(the video I have used in the past is titled "Intersectionality 101" on YouTube).* Tell students to write the names of the three individuals – Jerry, Fatima, Greta – in their notebook and as the video plays, to draw or write about their experiences *(students may find it helpful to play the video twice, first to just watch, and the second viewing to record their observations)*. After the viewings, discuss their responses, clarifying as needed to ensure they can explain what made each of the characters' experiences so different, even when they shared similar identities.

**Activity 2: Source Analysis & Jigsaw**

*(See Note 6 prior to this activity)*

Select passages/excerpts from the book that help students understand Robert's central argument about regulation of Black women's reproduction. Find passages/excerpts that allows students to identify evidence to support the following claims:

- *Claim #1: Reproductive oppression of Black women has been systemic and deliberate*
- *Claim #2: Reproductive rights must be understood as a matter of social justice*
- *Claim #3: Reproductive control is a tool of broader social and political control*

*Expert Groups:* Divide students into expert groups of 3-4 *(depending on size of class) and* assign each group one of the claims utilizing the "Jigsaw" method. Once students are in their groups, have them read the excerpt together, instructing them to annotate/highlight evidence in the text that supports the claim they've been assigned. Have each group also provide reasoning that explains how the evidence they selected connects to their claim. Depending on the length of the excerpt, time might vary but give students 25 minutes to complete this first round. Provide students with a graphic organizer that has space provided to do this work in

addition to space needed for the teaching group round.  Check-in with each group before the next round to clarify anything as needed.

*Teaching Groups: I*nstruct students that they are now going to move into their “teaching groups" and there needs to be at least 1 representative from each “expert” group in the new teaching groups *(try to limit multiple experts within a teaching group to two).* Instruct students to take turns sharing their assigned claim, the evidence they selected, and their reasoning. As students are listening to their peers, they should write down the information that supports the other two claims on their graphic organizers based on what they’re hearing.

#### Whole Group Debrief:

Bring students back together and debrief their discussions, clarifying any lingering questions.

**Closure:**

Ask students to respond to the following question as an Exit Ticket: *Why is it important to understand Black women’s struggles for reproductive freedom by looking at how race, gender, and class are connected?*

## Content & Activities Part 3: Black Women & Reproductive Freedom

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*(See Note 7 for content/student considerations)*

**Reproduction Regulation During Enslavement**

Guiding question: How was the reproductive control of Black women in bondage used as a tool of systemic oppression - and in what ways did Black women resist and assert their agency over their bodies and futures?

#### Warmup

Ask students to take out a notebook and review their notes from the previous lesson above. Tell them to draw an emoji next to 1-2 ideas that stood out to them; Write why those resonated and be ready to share. This will prime students' thinking and help them make connections between previous content and what comes next.

#### Activity 1: Primary Source Analysis

Because *power* and *resistance* are key themes in both the upcoming activity and the unit as a whole, I use low-stakes questions to help students connect these ideas to their own lived experiences. This approach makes the content more relevant and meaningful as they prepare to engage with complex historical topics. Therefore, before starting the source work, pose the following questions asking students to independently respond in their notebooks:

1. *What are 1-2 decisions in your life that you feel you have the power to make on your own? What are some decisions that others make for you, even if you don't get a say?*
2. *When others make decisions for you, do you think it's fair that they have that power? Why or why not?*
3. *If someone took away your ability to make an important decision for yourself, what could you do to push*

*back or reclaim that power?*

Give students an opportunity to discuss with peers before asking them to share within the larger group; Record responses somewhere visible to connect their examples back to the themes. Then transition in the source work.

Start with direct instruction introducing Virginia's 1662 legal doctrine *"Partus Sequitur Ventrem"* (established the status of a child follows the mother) and ask students to share what their thoughts are on the purpose or impacts of this law. Give a couple minutes to hear their thoughts before instructing them to write down the following effects: 1) codified hereditary racial slavery; 2) invalidated women's claims to their children/denied them the right to parent; 3) allowed male enslavers to deny responsibility for children they fathered (often through assault); 4) commodified enslaved women's reproductive lives; and 5) served as an economic incentive for enslavers to maintain control over Black women's reproduction.

This is also an appropriate opportunity to also address the ways enslaved Black women resisted/reclaimed their power: 1) herbal remedies to induce abortions; 2) seeking freedom with their children (when possible); 3) infanticide (ensure to clarify that for some enslaved women to end their child's life by their own hands was seen as better than a life of bondage to avoid judgements); 4) physically fighting their attackers. Instruct students to write these down.

Next, provide students with a copy of Frances Ellen Watkins Harpers' poem "The Slave Mother." Do a first read of the poem together, & then a second read independently. In the second read, tell students to annotate/highlight their text identifying 2-3 lines/phrases that invoke strong emotions/feelings, and write a short explanation about why that stood out to them.  Once students are done with the second read, give them a chance to talk with a peer next to them before facilitating a whole group discussion. Here are questions you can pose to the class:

1. *What does this poem reveal about the experiences of Black enslaved women relating to parenting/reproductive control?*
2. *How does the poem help us better understand the emotional and human impact of the 1662 law? What do we learn from reading about people's lived experiences that we might miss when reading just the law itself?*

After the discussion, transition students into the decompression activity. There are two prompts to choose from based on the needs/feelings of your students.

**Decompression: Journaling**

1. *Option A:* Write a few lines about how the poem made you feel. Then, write about one way the mother showed strength or love - even in a situation where so much was taken from her. What might it mean to hold on to hope or resistance in the face of injustice?
2. *Option B.* After learning about the pain and injustice in today's lesson, let's also hold space for the strength and resistance that existed alongside it. What is one way that people we learned about showed power, care, or resistance even when their choices were limited?

### Birth Control, Eugenics, & Policy

Guiding question: How did birth control advocacy and eugenic ideology influence/shape public policy – and what does it reveal about who was given the power to decide who should – and shouldn't reproduce?

"What was demanded as a 'right' for the privileged came to be interpreted as a 'duty' for the poor"

-Angela Davis[12]

Historical Context: At the turn of the 20th century, the birth control movement emerged spearheaded by Margaret Sanger. It was Sanger who coined the phrase "birth control" and committed her life and work championing women's right to practice contraception in opposition with societal norms, and outright defiance of the law. During the initial years of her advocacy regarding birth control, Sanger was a staunch feminist and centered her work around the emancipation of women. Her vision of true liberation did not end at ensuring women had access to birth control but extended beyond to include a desire for women to express their sexuality freely, which challenged the prevailing norms of maternity, marriage, and morality. "No woman can call herself free who does not own and control her own body. No woman can call herself free until she can choose consciously whether she will or will not be a mother"[13] . As honorable as all that was, especially given the historical context and all that she had to contend with, Sanger's beliefs and rhetoric would later shift and align with the goals and ideology of the American eugenics' movement. Paralleling the development of the birth control movement was, "eugenicists acceptance of intelligence as a primary indicator of human value. Eugenicists claim that the IQ test could quantify innate intellectual ability in a single measurement, despite the objections of its creator, Alfred Benet. The mental test was the ideal instrument for eugenics central task of distinguishing the fitness of stocks … to be used to rank genetically transmitted ability."[14] These tests were administered to Black people, newly arrived immigrants, military recruits, and those deemed, "feeble-minded" to demonstrate their "intellectual inferiority" which served to justify the implementation of public policies to stop the "unfit" from reproducing.

The following lesson activities are designed to help students understand how the historical developments above converged, shaping policies that continued to regulate Black women's reproduction.

**Warmup:**

Ask students to take out their notebooks and review their notes from the lesson on *Killing the Black Body*. Have them identify a detail/example from their notes that they can explain how

**Activity 1: Primary Source Gallery Walk**

Students will engage with this content through a "Gallery Walk". The sources I would curate for students to help them draw connections between the various concepts in this lesson might include: Sterilization laws/data/charts, Antimiscegenation laws (i.e. Racial Integrity Act 1924); Immigration policies (i.e National Origins Act of 1924); Landmark Supreme Court cases (*Buck v. Bell);* Excerpts from Sanger *(*"Cradle Competition", "The Negro Project"*);* Excerpts from W.E.B DuBois ("Black Folk and Birth Control") and other prominent Black individuals who wrote about their view on birth control. This is not an exhaustive list by any means, but rather suggestions on types of sources that could emphasize the way eugenic ideas were legitimized and codified into policies to achieve their goals.

Provide students with a graphic organizer and I recommend numbering/labelling each source and structuring the graphic organizer in the same sequence, in addition to adding the guiding question. This will serve as the lens for examining the sources.

Post the sources around the room and have students complete this activity in groups of 2-3. Students will navigate the room, analyze each source and record evidence/details from each of the sources that aligns with

the guiding question. Place a stack of sticky notes easily accessible to students so that if questions arise at a certain station, you can “parking lot” the question and clarify later. Time for this activity will vary depending on the length/quantity of the sources.

#### Whole Group Debrief:

Bring students back together as a whole group, having them remain with their partner(s). Give them some time to finish writing their observations before facilitating a discussion. This is a good time to clarify any “parking lot” questions. Here are a few discussion questions that you can adapt/scaffold further:

1. *What emotions did you experience while reading the sources?*
2. *What patterns or common ideas did you notice across the sources?*
3. *How did eugenic thinking influence the way birth control policies were created and implemented? Who benefited from these policies and who was harmed?*
4. *How can policies that appear neutral or scientific—like birth control—support racist ideas or systems?*
5. *How did these ideas specifically target Black communities and other marginalized groups? What language or strategies did you see used to reinforce racial hierarchy?*
6. *What were examples of how individuals/communities resisted and challenged these ideas/policies?*

Give students a couple minutes to think about the questions, discuss with their partner(s) before inviting them to share.

#### Closure: Anti-Eugenic Thinking

For an Exit Ticket, ask students to choose one idea from a primary source they viewed that reflected eugenic or dominant thinking (such as beliefs about heredity, racial superiority, or who deserves to reproduce). Then, explain how you would challenge that idea using a critical or anti eugenic perspective. *(Ex: How might you respond with evidence, values or alternative point of view?)*

### Contemporary Issues & Ongoing Struggle for Reproductive Justice

*(See Note 8 prior to this project)*

Essential question: What are the current developments or ongoing issues in the struggle for reproductive freedom, and how are people fighting for justice today?

#### Project Overview/ Objectives:

The culminating task for this unit is a mini-research project where students will explore current issues related to reproductive justice and make connections to concepts, they’ve learned throughout the unit. Communicate the objectives for this project to students:

1. Identify a current reproductive justice issue.
2. Analyze who is most affected and why.
3. Investigate how individuals and or groups are resisting organizing and advocating for change.
4. Connect present day movement to historical patterns or ideologies (i.e eugenics)
5. Prepare a visual presentation to communicate findings to class.

**Possible Topics:**

Here is a list of possible project topics students can explore but are not limited to only these. If a student is considering a topic that is not listed below but aligns with the objectives, then that is acceptable:

- Black maternal mortality crisis.
- Organizations leading the reproductive justice movement (i.e. SisterSong, National Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice)
- Abortion access and bans (state or federal level)
- Sterilizations in prisons or immigration detention centers.
- The criminalization of pregnancy (i.e miscarriage laws, fetal personhood)
- Reproductive Healthcare access for trans and nonbinary people.

**Guided Research Questions:**

Anytime students are engaged in research-related tasks in my course, I provide them with guiding questions or utilize the Question Formulation Technique (QFT) to help them develop their own. The following questions can be adapted or modified to guide students' research:

1. *What is the issue, and who is most affected?*
2. *What are the historical roots or connections of this issue?*
3. *What are people doing to resist or demand justice? What challenges or opposition do they face?*
4. *Why does this issue matter today?*

**Final Product Options:**

Give students options in how they can communicate their findings, here are some options:

- A short slideshow presentation.
- An informational 1 pager or infographic.
- A poster with key points and visuals.
- A short, recorded audio or video explainer.

## Appendix

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**Relevant and district aligned Common Core State Standards for History/Social Studies 11-12.**

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.6

Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8

Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9

Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.4

Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.

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## Notes

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The following notes align with the numbers embedded within the unit and provide educators with supplemental resources in addition to important content considerations prior to teaching/facilitating lesson activities.

1. With this blended-instruction model students are not in self-paced mode for the entirety of the course. During instructional planning the teacher identifies the duration of self-paced sequences and also plans for whole group activities and instruction. See the Modern Classrooms Project website for more information on the model.

2. Prior to this lesson it might be helpful to gauge students' understanding of the concept of race, especially as a social construct and not one rooted in biology. The series “Race: The Power of an Illusion” covers the origins, beliefs, and consequences of race, and I’ve used these videos with great success in other courses I teach. The scientific racism that emerged in the 17th century to justify the enslavement of African people, as well as the racial classifications codified into law created the foundation and conditions that allowed eugenics to flourish in the 20th
3. The primary sources I have compiled and use in my presentation are from my research and work in the Eugenics and Its Afterlives seminar. These sources are within public domain, and many have been digitized to allow educators to utilize within their classes. The URL link provided is the research guide for the full list of published materials that teaching about eugenics - https://guides.library.yale.edu/eugenics_afterlives/used_in_class
4. Before teaching this lesson, take time to deepen your understanding of “heredity”. This will help you address student misconceptions accurately and avoid unintentionally reinforcing eugenic ideas during the lesson. For Activity 1, I suggest finding a credible source (i.e video, infographic, or chart) ahead of time for students that explains inheritable traits versus acquired traits. YouTube has several short videos that address this content. Additional educator resources for preparing to teach about “heredity”, “scientific racism”, and “eugenics”:
5. I recommend an example that students can think about with some personal distance; while at first glance the example I use in this exercise might seem to contradict my own recommendation for other teachers, it is appropriate and relevant dominant narrative for my specific course and students.
6. For selecting sources, the introduction is a helpful place to start and easily pull passage from. I recommend the following chapters in addition to the introduction to save time: Claim #1 (Ch. 1); Claim #2 (Ch. 2 & 3); Claim #3 (Ch. 4 & 5). These themes are often revisited and overlap throughout the book.
7. These activities can be used on their own, however, it may be helpful to provide students with some background knowledge beforehand. This could include topics such as race as a social construct (rather than a biological fact) and concepts like “scientific racism,” “agency,” and “systemic oppression.” Offering this context helps students better understand the historical significance of the events & ideas explored in these lessons. Additionally, the content in these activities can be emotionally heavy and complex. A goal of teaching this content especially from an anti-eugenic perspective, is to guide students in engaging with these histories thoughtfully and empathetically while helping them find a healthy emotional balance period. To avoid leaving students in a heavy emotional state, consider incorporating time for decompression activities and highlighting stories of resistance and agency that show how people push back against oppression despite the odds.
8. Students in APAAS are required to complete an Independent Research Project at the end of the course that is part of their AP exam. I tend to include other requirements when it comes to research projects at this level, however, I still provide them with appropriate support. Determine for your own students the requirements/additional materials will be needed to successfully complete the project *(i.e. Note-taking method, graphic organizers, support with finding credible sources, etc.)*

## End Notes


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14. Ibid,.63.



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