

GUEST EDITORS' NOTE

The discussion on eugenics included in this special issue (“Latin eugenics in a transnational context”) revisits the concept of Latin eugenics, proposed by Nancy Stepan in *The hour of eugenics*. Since the release of Stepan’s book twenty-five years ago, historiography has underscored differences within the eugenicist movement; whereas Anglo-Saxon eugenics was grounded in Mendelian conceptions of heredity and promoted policies of direct intervention in the biological makeup of populations, Latin eugenics, drawing inspiration from neo-Lamarckism, believed that improved living conditions would reflect on the biological perfecting of human groups and thus it crafted milder intervention policies. The issues under research and debate in recent years have revolved around the question of “soft” versus “hard” eugenics and to what extent such a distinction is valid. The literature that has examined different national contexts and the circulation of ideas among these countries, including Italy, Spain, Portugal, Argentina, Brazil, and the United States, has looked at these questions on the basis of empirical research and from different interpretive perspectives.

In 1899, Rudyard Kipling wrote the poem “The white man’s burden: the United States and the Philippine Islands,” which posited that it is the white man’s moral duty to civilize colonized peoples; it became one of the key documents of imperialist mentality. In the 1970s, in her analysis of Robert Southey’s *History of Brazil*, Maria Odila da Silva Dias turned to these lines as a prime example of the mentality of the British Empire. In the current issue of *História, Ciências, Saúde – Manguinhos*, in “New races, new diseases: the possibility of colonization through racial mixing in History of Brazil (1810-1819), by Robert Southey,” Flávia Florentino Varella, of the Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, argues that the early nineteenth-century British historian and poet viewed the mixing of Portuguese colonizer and colonized as a kind of “graft” that helped the former cope with the diseases and climate adversities of the tropics. Varella contends that Southey’s argument about racial mixing had less to do with British imperialist practices than with the possibility of colonizing Brazil.

More than fifty years after Southey’s book, Domingos Guedes Cabral released *Funções do Cérebro*, considered a landmark in the Brazilian reading of Darwinism. Juanma Sánchez Arteaga, Ronnie Jorge Tavares de Almeida, and Charbel Niño El-Hani, all of the Universidade Federal da Bahia, explore how Guedes Cabral interpreted Darwin from the perspective of a polygenist understanding of the origin of human races. While Guedes Cabral advocated a policy of generalized education, his political project was constrained by his belief in innate differences between the races. White men carried blacks and Indians as their “burden,” to borrow Kipling’s term.

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Dedicated to Corrado Gini, the article by Luc André Berlivet, of Cermes3, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, investigates the scientific expeditions organized by the Comitato Italiano per lo Studio dei Problemi della Popolazione. Gini used these expeditions to indicate the limits of Mendelism. Berlivet shows how “scientific diplomacy” helped establish a network of European and Latin American eugenicists, which in the latter half of the 1930s gave birth to the Latin International Federation of Eugenics Organization.

Richard Mark Cleminson, of the University of Leeds, points out that the Portuguese physician Almerindo Lessa was responsible for the inaugural conference of the Latin International Federation of Eugenics Organization. Lessa, whose positions were aligned with Latin eugenics, held that the “grafts” produced through racial mixing afforded better adaptation to new regions, enhancing the white population’s resistance to disease. At the same time, Cleminson uncovers other voices in the eugenicist movement in Portugal and makes the case that there was a shaky balance between different versions of eugenics from 1930 to 1960, as Portuguese eugenicists also had ties to major German eugenicists, such as Eugen Fischer.

In an analysis of the Brazilian case, Vanderlei Sebastião de Souza, of the Universidade Estadual do Centro-Oeste do Paraná, also points to the diversity of international ties. Souza shows how physician Renato Kehl and physician and anthropologist Edgard Roquette-Pinto both constructed their eugenicist conceptions through dialogue with German eugenicists and with US anthropologist Charles Davenport. Kehl and Roquette-Pinto engaged with Mendelism but assumed opposing stances as far as the application of eugenic measures. While Roquette-Pinto believed that Brazil’s mixed-race population was healthy, Kehl defended racial inequality and saw miscegenation as the country’s biggest problem.

Ana Carolina Vimieiro-Gomes, of the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, sheds light on debates over national identity under the first Vargas government, when biotypology was finding space in the Brazilian medical and scientific fields. It was not a matter of calling miscegenation into question but arriving at a more detailed classification, as shown by studies of the biotypology of men from the Northeast and from São Paulo. The difference in types in the Northeast was a factor in miscegenation during colonization, and the strength of these types offered proof of the viability of miscegenation among whites, blacks, and Indians. Studies on people from São Paulo identified the “exceptional nature of racial mixing” derived from the absence of blacks and the assimilation of European immigrants while also evoking the ideal of “whitening.” Biotypological classification thus did not do away with the hierarchical division of populations.

In his article, Ricardo Campos, of the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (Spain), argues that even Antonio Vallejo-Nágera, who aligned with Latin eugenics, upheld a theory of degeneration in which the germs threatening *hispanidad* were not biological but ideological, presenting themselves in the guise of “democracy” and “Marxism.” Vallejo-Nágera inaugurated a bureau of investigation that transformed republican prisoners into an object of study in order to understand “constitutional predispositions to Marxism” within the “biopsychic personality.” A malleable conception of the human being translated into practices that were not at all soft.

Diego Armus, of Swarthmore College, engages in a discussion with recent historiography on eugenics and claims that the frequent attempts to identify hard eugenics in Latin countries have not always proven that radical measures were actually put into effect. For example, the proposals concerning women with tuberculosis that stemmed from negative eugenics found little space in the world of practice; neither forced abortions, marriage restrictions, nor biotypological registration had any decisive impact on the lives of tuberculosis sufferers.

The article by Mercedes García Ferrari, of the Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento, and Diego Galeano, of the Pontificia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro, explores anthropometric records and discusses the establishment, in the blurry zone between theory and practice, of dactyloscopy, which recorded nothing but the fingerprints of those detained. Some of the main challenges in setting up government anthropometric offices inside police institutions had to do with the complexity of the method and its high cost. It is within this context that the method proposed by Juan Vucetich in La Plata laid roots not only in Argentina but also in Uruguay, Chile, and Brazil.

Alexandra Minna Stern, of the University of Michigan, writes about forced sterilization practices in California state psychiatric institutions among what were then known as “imbeciles.” She makes us think that the differentiation between soft and hard eugenics should not be cast aside, nor should its relativization prompt the abandonment of categories like “Latin eugenics” and “Anglo-Saxon eugenics.” At least 60,000 people have been sterilized in the United States since 1907. Moreover, this negative eugenic policy had a sharply racial bias, given that the rate of sterilization was much higher among individuals of Mexican origin.

In an interview given to Marcos Cueto and Ricardo Ventura Santos, Warwick Anderson, of the University of Sydney, addresses the issue of imperialism and the debate over whether it is appropriate to differentiate colonial policy models based on the treatment of miscegenation. The issue includes another interview, this one with Jerry Dávila, of the University of Illinois, who studies the role of racial thought in twentieth-century public policies and social and intellectual movements in Brazil. Three research notes also focus on eugenics in this same context.

This special issue leads us to reflect both on the persistence of eugenic practices even after the Second World War and on the corresponding breakdown of the organized eugenics movement. The election of Donald Trump, the rise of xenophobic movements in Europe, the tenacity of the idea of race, and the strengthening of an agenda contrary to the rights of minorities in Brazil and Latin America all evince the relevance of this topic today. The history of eugenics should serve as a memory that urges us to problematize the consequences of reactionary, racist, and exclusionary discourse and practices, whether we live in Latin American or Anglo-Saxon countries.

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