

The Papers of Harry Hamilton Laughlin, Eugenicist

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Harry Hamilton Laughlin (1880-1943) was a prominent leader of the American eugenics movement between 1910 and 1940. Best known as superintendent of the prestigious Eugenics Record Office (ERO) in Cold Spring Harbor, New York, he served for thirty years under the dean of American eugenics, Charles Benedict Davenport. As a strong advocate and propagandizer of eugenical principles, Laughlin contended strongly that the steady influx of immigrants, especially from southern and eastern Europe, had diminished the physical and moral vigor of the American bloodstream. He argued that if the "low grade" immigrants continued to procreate, the physical, mental, and moral qualities of the American population would continue to deteriorate. Laughlin carried his ideas into the realm of action as an energetic researcher, educator, and lobbyist for immigration restriction and other eugenical causes. His testimony before the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization in 1923 and 1924 was instrumental in the passage of the Johnson Act (Immigration Restriction Act) by the U.S. Congress in 1924.¹

Although Laughlin's career as a eugenicist has been briefly discussed in a limited number of sources,² virtually nothing has been written about his personal life or the vast range of his eugenics-related activities. The few secondary sources that do discuss Laughlin's work or influence have, however, sparked our curiosity, or what might better be called our pathological inquisitiveness. When we learned that Laughlin's personal papers were housed in the Library of Northeast Missouri State University in Kirksville, we decided to undertake a survey of the material.

In this paper we will describe the contents of the Laughlin papers,

1. For details see Kenneth Ludmerer, *Genetics and American Society* (Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), esp. chap. 5.

2. See *ibid.*, passim; Mark Haller, *Eugenics: Hereditarian Thought in America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1961); and Frances Hassenchal, "Harry H. Laughlin, Expert Eugenics Agent for the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, 1921 to 1931," Ph.D. diss., Case Western Reserve University, 1969.

and suggest how these papers have been of use in our own studies of eugenics, and how they might be useful to other researchers seeking to understand the American and other eugenics movements.

LAUGHLIN'S LIFE

Harry Hamilton Laughlin was born on March 11, 1880, in Oskaloosa, Iowa. His family moved to Kirksville, Missouri, where "Hi Yi" (as his nine brothers and sisters called him all of his life) spent his younger years. He graduated from Kirksville High School and received a teacher's certificate in history, and then began teaching high school in rural Missouri and Iowa. During this time Laughlin became interested in animal and plant breeding, and acquired a thorough knowledge of the Mendelian theory of heredity, including its application to human genetics and eugenics. In 1907 he obtained a teaching position in agriculture at North Missouri State Teachers College (now Northeast Missouri State University) in Kirksville. Two years later, at the annual meeting of the American Breeders' Association in Columbia, Missouri, Laughlin met Charles B. Davenport, with whom he enthusiastically discussed current issues in eugenics. Laughlin must have impressed Davenport, for in 1910 the latter invited him to become Superintendent of the newly opened Eugenics Record Office (ERO) at Cold Spring Harbor,³ of which Davenport was the director. Highly honored, Laughlin and his wife, Pansey, moved to Long Island, where they lived in a beautiful house on the grounds of the ERO, next door to the Laboratory for the Experimental Study of Evolution, like the ERO funded by the Carnegie Institution of Washington and under the overall directorship of C. B. Davenport. Laughlin remained at Cold Spring Harbor until the funding of eugenics work there was terminated by the Carnegie Institution in 1939.

While he was Superintendent of the ERO Laughlin was awarded the D.Sc. degree from Princeton (1917) for his thesis, "The Duration of Several Mitotic Stages in the Dividing Root-Tip Cells of the Common Onion," written under the direction of Edwin Grant Conklin. Now known as a "scientifically" trained eugenicist, Laughlin turned his attention to the biological consequences of the U.S. policy of open immigration. It was this interest that led Representative Albert Johnson to appoint Laughlin Expert Eugenics Agent for the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization in 1921. That same year he also

3. *The Northeast Missourian*, Nov. 6, 1931, p. 6.

became Primary Consultant to the Municipal Court of Chicago on the subject of alien crime. Later in his career Laughlin served as president of the American Eugenics Society (1927-1928), and of the Pioneer Fund, a private foundation established in 1937 by Laughlin, Frederick Osborn, and Wycliffe P. Draper to promote the study of "racial betterment."⁴ The culmination of Laughlin's career came in 1936, when he was awarded an honorary M.D. by Heidelberg University "in recognition of studies made on human heredity and population analysis and control."⁵

When the Carnegie Institution, for reasons that are still unclear, decided to withdraw its support for the ERO, that institution ceased to function and as of December 31, 1939, Laughlin's job no longer existed. Because of his family connections in the northeast Missouri area, Laughlin and his wife retired to Kirksville in December 1939, bringing with them his many reprints, records kept while he was Superintendent of the ERO, books, and both professional and personal correspondence. Shortly after his death in 1943, Laughlin's widow gave her husband's papers to the Pickler Memorial Library of Northeast Missouri State University.

The collection is at present housed in the attic of the library in a state of considerable decay and disorganization. The materials are unboxed, reposing in manila folders on open stack shelves. A shelf list exists, but designates only the most general categories, such as "Correspondence with Co-Workers" or "Pan American Eugenics Congress." To add to the confusion, much material is misfiled; for example, we found biographical material about Laughlin mixed in with his notebooks of data on the innate racing capacity of thoroughbred horses. Because of the disarray, we had to search virtually every folder to ensure that we did not miss any important items. Despite these organizational problems, we were able to make considerable headway over a period of time, largely because of the helpfulness of Dr. George Hartje, head of the university library, and Mrs. Odessa Ofstad, the special collections

4. Frederick Osborn came from a wealthy eastern family. He was the nephew of Henry Fairfield Osborn, president of the American Museum of Natural History and a staunch eugenicist. Frederick Osborn was a close friend of Laughlin's and Madison Grant's, though he sometimes felt their use of scientific evidence was crude and "non-scientific." Osborn was an enthusiastic eugenicist in the mid-1930s, and in 1952 became head of the Population Council, funded by the Rockefeller's. Draper was a wealthy businessman, sometime philanthropist, eugenicist, and advocate of population control.

5. Laughlin to W. P. Draper, Dec. 23, 1936: Laughlin Papers, Washington University, St. Louis (hereafter W. U.); Laughlin Notebooks, vol. III, "Pioneer Fund."

librarian. They allowed us free access to the papers, so that we could rummage about as much as we wanted, and gave us the use of a private seminar room, where we could spread out the materials and sift through them conveniently.⁶

CONTENTS OF THE ARCHIVES

Correspondence

Laughlin corresponded with many leading figures in the American eugenics movement, including Alexander Graham Bell (eight letters); Charles B. Davenport (about thirty letters);⁷ Frederick Osborn, president of the American Eugenics Society in the late 1920s and later head of the Population Council (about fifteen letters); W. E. Castle, an eminent Harvard geneticist in the first three decades of the century (about twenty letters); Irving Fisher, prominent Yale economist and secretary of the American Eugenics Society in the 1920s and 1930s (about fifteen letters); and James G. Eddy, a Seattle businessman who was interested in forming a "Clinic on Human Heredity" (about twenty letters).

The archive also contains less extensive correspondence (three to ten letters each) with individuals who were in one way or another involved with eugenics: for example, Leon J. Cole (Population Association of America), Harry Olson (Judge, Municipal Court of Chicago), John C. Merriam and Vannevar Bush (successive presidents of the Carnegie Institution of Washington, from, respectively, 1921 to 1938 and 1938 to 1955), David Starr Jordan (the first president of Stanford University and a staunch eugenicist), A. G. Milbank (founder and president of the Milbank Memorial Fund), and Col. Wycliffe P. Draper (founder of the Pioneer Fund). Much of this correspondence deals with the problems of funding and organizing American eugenics programs.

Among the most interesting correspondence is that between Laughlin

6. In cooperation with the American Philosophical Society, a project is now being devised to sort, organize, and microfilm the Laughlin Papers, thus making them more accessible to scholars and easier to use.

7. It is surprising that there are so few letters between Davenport and Laughlin. However, it must be remembered that they were in daily contact and much business was probably transacted in person or over the telephone. In addition, more correspondence between Laughlin and Davenport is in the Davenport Papers at the American Philosophical Society (as part of the ERO Papers, which are included in the Davenport collection).

and Madison Grant (1865-1937), a wealthy New York lawyer, author of a best seller, *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916),⁸ and a leading figure in American eugenics. Their numerous letters, spanning the years 1916 to 1937, provide considerable insight into the deeply rooted racial and nationalistic prejudice that pervaded American eugenics. For example, in 1932 Grant asked Laughlin to review the manuscript of his latest book, "Conquest of a Continent" (published in 1933 by Scribners). In this work Grant appears to have argued (the manuscript is not available) that democracy was an unworkable form of government for non-Nordic races. Laughlin objected to Grant's phrasing of this point, claiming it placed the emphasis in the wrong place: "Your statement about Democracy was made in such a manner as to constitute a shot at Democracy, rather than to reinforce the historic argument of the capacities differential between the Nordics and the colored races." Laughlin goes on to suggest that the following statement would make Grant's meaning more clear: "In experiments in self-government the Nordic races, due to their finer inborn sense of square dealing and self-control, have been infinitely more successful in self-government than the non-Nordics."⁹ Laughlin shared with many of his contemporaries the racial and ethnic biases of the early twentieth century. Like many other eugenicists, he simply assumed that certain human groups were inferior to others, and that this inferiority (or the converse, superiority) was genetically determined. Laughlin's logic was circular in the extreme: social traits said to be characteristic only of the Aryans, such as "square-dealing," "self-control," or the ability to function "democratically," are superior because the Aryans display them. At the same time, the Aryans are said to be superior because they possess these very traits.

The Grant-Laughlin correspondence has also provided some insight into the extent to which Laughlin relied upon the wealthy and politically active Grant as a financial and legal consultant for the ERO.¹⁰

8. Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1916).

9. Laughlin to Grant, Nov. 19, 1932: Laughlin Papers, W. U.; Laughlin Notebooks, vol. I, "Madison Grant."

10. Grant was a founder and president of the New York Zoological Society and of the Zoologist Park; a founder of the Save the Redwood League; and vice-president of the Immigration Restriction League. He was active politically: he worked in the campaign of William L. Strong for mayor of New York City (1894); in 1907 Governor Charles Evans Hughes appointed Grant to the Bronx Parkway Commission and in 1925 Governor Alfred E. Smith appointed him to the Taconic Parkway Commission. Grant was a personal friend of Theodore Roosevelt, a

More important, their correspondence shows how often Laughlin used Grant's contacts to gain special favors or consideration for himself as a representative of the eugenical cause. For example, Laughlin often called upon Grant to recommend him for public positions, such as delegate to the Pan-American Eugenics Congress in 1928, or to commend one of Laughlin's manuscripts to a publisher.¹¹ Reciprocating, Laughlin in the mid-1930s lobbied officials of Yale University in a vigorous but unsuccessful attempt to persuade them to award Grant (a Yale alumnus, class of 1887) an honorary degree. In Laughlin's mind, that degree would have constituted a significant and prestigious recognition of eugenics at a time when the movement was suffering increased criticism from the scientific and law communities alike.

Another man with whom Laughlin corresponded was C. M. Goethe, president of the Eugenics Research Association, a real estate entrepreneur in California and President of the Immigration Study Commission in Sacramento. Both very interested in eugenics, Goethe and Laughlin often exchanged their views about the importance of applying eugenical principles to the solution of social problems; for example, they discussed what was to be done about the Mexican laborers who were immigrating in ever-increasing numbers to California. Goethe's opinions, like Laughlin's, were permeated with racism, sometimes subtle, sometimes blatant. In a letter to Ethel Richardson, who was making a study of Mexican immigrants in southern California, Goethe expressed his formal eugenical views on the Mexican problem:

One cannot help but having a very deep feeling of sympathy for the Mexican peon in his desire to better his condition by coming to America. Perhaps, probably those who would exploit him have not the power that they had during the Diaz regime. However, life there for many is still deplorable. At the same time we must recognize that three-fourths of the Mexicans in the United States are here illegally. We must recognize that the intelligence tests indicate that they have a mentality lower than the Japanese and Chinese, and approximately that of the Negroes and certain Mediterraneans. We must resolutely

Trustee of the American Museum of Natural History, and a member of a number of influential social and athletic clubs (Century Club, University Club, Boone and Crockett Club, Tuxedo Club, and Field Club).

11. Laughlin to Grant, Jan. 16, 1928, regarding the Second Immigration Conference, as part of the Pan-American Eugenics Congress, held in Havana in the spring of 1928.

face the fact that we have here, perhaps, the beginning of another pollution of the old American stock that unchecked, in time may be as troublesome as the Negro problem.¹²

No doubt Goethe was sincere in his sympathy for the Mexican "peon," but his racist views, though here somewhat restrained, come across clearly enough. To his friend Laughlin, Goethe openly expressed his disdain for the nonwhites, particularly the Mexican immigrant. In a postcard sent to Laughlin in 1927 from Arizona, Goethe wrote:

Am down here on the border studying the eugenic aspect of the Mexican immigration problem. One's reaction to their slums surrounding the Nordic quarters of border towns, is that the latter are competing with a rabbit-type birth rate. The more one studies the peon the more one wonders: Did the Conquistadores eliminate the thinkers when they destroyed the Aztec priests and soldiers?¹³

Though Goethe never gave much money to eugenics causes (as far as the correspondence indicates), he did give moral support to Laughlin's work, claiming that "I know of no one, either in Europe or here who is doing more effective work [in eugenics] than Dr. Davenport and yourself."¹⁴

Laughlin's correspondence with Goethe also illustrates the ways in which Laughlin and lay supporters of the American eugenics movement attempted to organize it and give it focus. Goethe, for example, was a member of the Commonwealth Club, one of the most prestigious private associations of businessmen and political figures in California, and he sought to use the club as a vehicle for organizing eugenics societies on the West Coast. In one letter to Laughlin, Goethe boasts that he persuaded the Commonwealth Club to form a section on eugenics, under the leadership of Professor Samuel J. Holmes of Berkeley.¹⁵

12. Goethe to Ethel Richardson, Feb. 19, 1926: Laughlin Papers, W. U.; Laughlin Notebook, vol. V, "C. M. Goethe." Miss Richardson was carrying out a study of Mexican immigration in Los Angeles. In the course of the letter, a copy of which Goethe sent to Laughlin, he expresses a desire for a broad-scale study of Mexican immigration.

13. Goethe to Laughlin, Feb. 8, 1927, *ibid.*

14. Goethe to Laughlin, Jan. 30, 1939, *ibid.*

15. Goethe to Laughlin, Jan. 15, 1925, *ibid.* Holmes was a zoologist, author of the impressive *Bibliography of Eugenics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1924), and prolific writer on eugenics and population control. His personal papers are now housed in the Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley.

Early in 1926 the club held its monthly dinner, with eugenics as the main topic for the traditional after-dinner speeches. Goethe wrote that the result was immensely gratifying:

The monthly dinner meeting . . . was one of the most successful in the history of the club. Another 300 people were present representing the eugenically-worthy group of California. They were big men and accustomed to getting things done. It was tremendously worth while . . .

This same thing could be done all over the country. One cannot help but think of that time when the Rotary Clubs were really accomplishing little beyond good fellowship. Then there came to their national presidency a man so fired with the spirit of social service that his influence radiated throughout not only the Rotaries, but eventually all the service clubs.

Then, with this under way, even more would be accomplished with your concept of a kind of Federal Council of Eugenics Societies, perhaps modelled on the Federal Council of Churches or the A.A.A.S.¹⁶

Both Laughlin and Goethe shared the view that, wherever possible, eugenics work should be organized through existing societies or clubs, rather than through specially created eugenics organizations. As Goethe wrote, "In all of my social service work I try to utilize existing organizations instead of going to the trouble, with consequent loss of energy, in [*sic*] creating new ones."¹⁷ Laughlin and Goethe shared the dream of a great organizational network of eugenic-minded individuals and groups, coordinating the research and propagandistic work to gain specific ends, such as immigration restriction or sterilization.

Laughlin's correspondence with Madison Grant and C. M. Goethe suggest three generalizations about the American eugenics movement in its heyday: (1) its major supporters were drawn from wealthy elites; (2) except for the ERO and a few other institutions, the movement was relatively amorphous and not highly organized; and (3) Laughlin and the ERO served as a sort of clearing house through which the energies of individual zealots were channeled and, to some extent,

16. Goethe to Laughlin, April 30, 1926, *ibid.*

17. Goethe to Laughlin, June 10, 1926, *ibid.*

coordinated. In particular, the Laughlin Papers show how Laughlin himself orchestrated this coordination through extensive correspondence, notes, newsletters, and other communiqués. One of the weaknesses of the movement may well have been that its organizational development rested so much in the hands of a single individual.

Papers on Laughlin's Work with Eugenics Organizations

Laughlin's most obvious connection with eugenics was his position at the Eugenics Record Office. Part of his job as Superintendent was to prepare short histories of the institution. These histories, now in the Kirksville collection, are particularly valuable because they succinctly summarize ERO's budget from year to year. Financial costs sheets are broken down into several categories of expenses: (1) salaries of full-time employees; (2) salaries of part-time employees; and (3) operating costs, such as those for electricity, telephone, water, and general maintenance. There are annual budget reports, listing the general funds coming to the ERO from the Carnegie Institution of Washington and from other major donors, such as the Harriman endowment and the Rockefeller philanthropies. From financial records available in the Laughlin papers, it is possible to piece together the operating budgets of the ERO — important data for understanding the origin and extent of financial support for eugenics.

As Superintendent, Laughlin was also responsible for outlining long-term plans for the ERO. These included everything from schemes for landscaping and designs for new roads, buildings, and signposts, to far-reaching proposals such as that to establish the ERO as an organization operating independently of the Carnegie Institution, but still funded by Carnegie money. In his letters and memos to John C. Merriam, president of the Carnegie Institution, Laughlin shows clearly his desire to obtain greater financial autonomy for eugenical work, and to avoid the vagaries of substantial budget changes from year to year. Intellectual autonomy may also have been an issue. Merriam periodically rebuked Laughlin for his more blatant political and public activities with regard to immigration restriction, and it is likely that he sought to extricate himself from direct supervision and control by Carnegie officials.

In addition to managing the ERO, Laughlin participated actively in a variety of other eugenics organizations. These included, especially, the Eugenics Research Association (ERA) and the American Eugenics

Society (AES).¹⁸ As secretary of the ERA, Laughlin compiled membership lists and treasurer's reports: the archive contains at least one membership list for 1924 and treasurer's reports for the years 1913-1935. The treasurer's reports are of particular value because they show the source of some of many of the private funds that supported the eugenics movement during its heyday. The membership lists also provide some clue as to what sorts of people joined a eugenics organization and constituted its steady supporters.

Laughlin's involvement with eugenics spread well beyond the borders of the United States. In his eugenical outlook he was clearly an internationalist, maintaining that decisions about issues such as immigration could not be left up to individual countries, but required worldwide discussion. The instrument for achieving international agreement, Laughlin thought, was a common world government. The archive contains a copy of his 170-page manuscript, "The Common Government of the World," a work which, as far as we know, was never published. There Laughlin wrote: "For governmental purposes the World is divided into six continents. The legislative function of the World Government shall be exercised by a World Parliament which shall be composed of World Senators."¹⁹ He then went on to describe in detail how "World Senators" and the "President of the World" were to be elected. In essence, Laughlin's "World Government" is nothing more than a model of the United States government applied to the rest of the world. The length of the manuscript and the detailed proposals it contains indicate how much effort Laughlin devoted to this enterprise. A series of letters in the archive (to various publishers) show that Laughlin made repeated attempts to have the manuscript published.

Laughlin's internationalist leanings took a more serious and perhaps realistic turn when he sought to extend the aims and the conclusions of the American eugenics movement to other lands. For those countries that already had eugenics programs, such as England, Germany, and Norway, Laughlin urged that American eugenicists cooperate with their

18. The ERA was founded by the Galton Society of New York, and was intended to be a relatively small organization composed of individuals actively involved in eugenics research. The ERA was selective in its membership, and functioned to gather and publicize the latest eugenical findings through *Eugenical News*. The AES was a more broadly based organization, with an open membership costing \$2.00 a year in 1928. The AES published the journal *Eugenics* beginning in 1928; it contained review articles and discussions of recent books on eugenics.

19. "The Common Government of the World," p. 30, in Laughlin Archives, W. U.; Laughlin Notebooks vol. VI, "World Government."

colleagues abroad. Laughlin thought that cooperation between nations would ultimately create a strong, broadly based international eugenics program aimed at preserving the "noblest" of the human stock. Acting on his convictions, Laughlin took part in the International Organization of Eugenics (much literature on this organization is contained in the archive), and designed and set up all of the eugenics exhibits for the Third International Congress of Eugenics in New York in 1932.

Papers on Laughlin's Other Activities and Interests

The Archives show that Laughlin was involved in activities outside the immediate realm of eugenics. He compiled numerous data books on racing capacities in thoroughbred horses and on the determination of sex in date palms. According to P. O. Selby, Dean Emeritus of Liberal Arts at Northeast Missouri State University, who knew Laughlin personally for many years, the thoroughbred studies were aimed at "breeding a horse that would never lose a race."²⁰ Like many eugenicist, Laughlin was fascinated by animal breeding, and for a serious reason. He believed, through analogy, that the eugenicist was to humans what the agricultural breeder was to animals: a scientist using experimental procedures to perfect the species along desired ends.

The Laughlin Papers also contain numerous reprints: multiple copies of Laughlin's own works and individual copies of reprints he received from investigators all over the world. The reprints-received collection includes papers on genetics, cytogenetics, and eugenics. There is also a small collection of books from Laughlin's personal library, and numerous boxes of the lantern slides he used in his many lectures on eugenics. We also found, in a dusty and battered old box, some of Laughlin's teaching devices: a wall poster (six feet by three) showing the family pedigree of John Burroughs; some oversized pedigree charts showing the supposed inheritance of "scholarship," "pauperism," "entrepreneurship," and intelligence; a demonstration board of Pascal's triangle showing chance distribution in a number series; and a "Mendelian dihybrid shovel," a device to demonstrate probability in Mendelian crosses. In addition, the archive contains numerous forms and questionnaires that Laughlin sent out from the ERO in an attempt to collect hereditary information on families, and copies of surveys he made, on such topics as "The Inheritance of Inventiveness" or the eugenic qualities of aviators and their families.

20. Personal communication, Sept. 20, 1976.

Missing Materials

Despite the completeness of the Laughlin Archives in many areas of eugenics and related subjects, we found some surprising gaps. Given the fact that so much of Laughlin's life was spent in or related to the Kirksville area, we expected to find more personal correspondence from both his early and late life than the collection contains. For example, there were very few materials concerning Laughlin's early life, his college years, or his teaching career in Kirksville. Aside from a number of letters to his mother and one or two to his siblings, there is little in the correspondence of a personal nature.

Even more surprising was the lack of information about Laughlin's major efforts to curtail immigration and impose sterilization on certain groups. There is only a small amount of correspondence between Laughlin and Representative Albert Johnson, chairman of the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, and little about Laughlin's work as eugenics expert for the committee.

Also missing from the archive is information about the final years of the ERO. Some correspondence between Laughlin and the directors of the Carnegie Institution suggests that, by 1937 or 1938, the ERO was falling into disfavor. As of July 1, 1939, its name was changed to the Genetics Record Office (GRO), which existed for only six months, after which it was permanently closed, on December 31, 1939. Laughlin's papers, however, contain little evidence on why the Carnegie Institution decided to curtail, and ultimately eliminate, eugenics-related work at Cold Spring Harbor. This gap in the documents is intriguing, because Laughlin was not one to be reticent about his opinions, and we had expected to find more papers pertaining to the retirement forced on him by the closing of the GRO.

Papers on Laughlin's German Race-Hygienists

Despite the absence of some information we had hoped to find, the Laughlin Papers surprised us by providing extremely useful information about the Nazi eugenics (*Rassenhygiene*) movement.

The German *Rassenhygiene* movement dates from the beginning of this century, though its roots extend well back into the 1800s. In scope, aims, and content, the *Rassenhygiene* movement was the German counterpart of the eugenics movements in other countries in the early 1900s. Shortly after the Nazi accession to power in Germany in 1933, the Nazi party had gained control of all the major universities. Part of

the Nazification program was the introduction of *Rassenhygiene* in various forms into the university curricula, especially in medical schools.²¹ In 1935, drawing largely on "research" in *Rassenhygiene*, the Nazi government passed the infamous Nürnberg Laws banning interracial marriage between Aryans and Jews and establishing guidelines for compulsory eugenical sterilization. These laws did not develop in a vacuum, or spring solely out of Germany's own historical tradition. They were based very much on eugenic "research" and legislation in other countries, particularly the United States.

In June 1936 Heidelberg University planned a celebration in honor of its 550th anniversary. Honorary degrees were offered to a number of European and American scholars, including Laughlin. The degree was granted to Laughlin in recognition of his services to eugenics and the effort to purify the human seed stock. The invitation read as follows:

The Faculty of Medicine of the University of Heidelberg intends to confer upon you the degree of Doctor of Medicine h.c. [honoris causa] on the occasion of the 550-year Jubilee (27th to 30th of June, 1936). I should be grateful to you if you could inform me whether you are ready to accept the honorary doctor's degree and, if so, whether you would be able to come to Heidelberg to attend the ceremony of honorary promotion and to personally receive your diploma.²²

Laughlin's response was enthusiastic:

I stand ready to accept this very high honor. Its bestowal will give me particular gratification, coming as it will from a university deep rooted in the life history of the German people . . . To me this honor will be doubly valued because it will come from a nation which for many centuries nurtured the human seed-stock which later founded my own country and thus gave basic character to our present lives and institutions.²³

The awarding of an honorary degree was for Laughlin a very serious

21. Harry Bloch, "The Berlin Correspondence in the JAMA during the Hitler Regime," *Bull. Hist. Med.*, 47 (1973), 297-305.

22. Dr. Carl Schneider (Dean of the Faculty of Medicine of Heidelberg University) to Laughlin, May 16, 1936, Laughlin Papers, W. U.; Laughlin Notebooks, vol. III, "Nazi Eugenics."

23. Laughlin to Schneider, May 28, 1936, *ibid.*

recognition of the vital role that a unified worldwide eugenics movement could play in bettering the whole human species. He was proud that American eugenics had contributed significantly to the development of race-hygiene in Germany:

I consider the conferring of this high degree upon me not only as a personal honor, but also as evidence of a common understanding of German and American scientists of the nature of eugenics as research in and the practical application of those fundamental biological and social principles which determine the racial endowments and the racial health – physical, mental and spiritual – of future generations.²⁴

The honorary degree symbolized the rapport between American and German eugenics that Laughlin had sought to nurture for a number of years. Laughlin had maintained constant contact with German race-hygienists since the mid-1920s,²⁵ and as late as 1938 he was actively drumming up audiences for a film entitled *Eugenics in Germany* (produced about 1936), which he was trying to show in New York City.²⁶ Although there is little evidence about Laughlin's ultimate feelings about the development of Nazism in Germany (no very explicit letters exist in the archives, for whatever reasons), his correspondence with German (later Nazi) race-hygienists such as Eugen Fischer, Alfred Ploetz, and Fritz Lenz shows enthusiastic concern for the German race-hygiene program. In the late 1920s Laughlin published articles in race-hygiene journals and encouraged Lenz, Ploetz, Fischer and their students to write for American journals and to visit American eugenical institutions.²⁷

24. Laughlin to Schneider, Aug. 11, 1936, *ibid.* Laughlin did not go to Germany to accept his degree; instead it was conferred on him in New York by the German consul-general in December 1936 (see Laughlin to W. P. Draper, Dec. 23, 1936, Laughlin Papers, W. U.; Laughlin Notebooks, vol. III, "Pioneer Fund").

25. See Laughlin to Eugen Fischer, June 30, 1932, April 29, 1935, Laughlin Papers, W. U.; Laughlin Notebooks, vol. I, "Nazi Eugenics."

26. Laughlin to Draper, Dec. 9, 1938, W. U.; Laughlin Notebooks, vol. III, section "Pioneer Foundations."

27. See, e.g., Lenz to Laughlin, Oct. 1928, inviting Laughlin to contribute an article on "eugenical sterilization" to the German *Archiv für Rassen- und Gesellschaftsbiologie*. Laughlin's response was clear-cut: "I should feel highly honored to have this paper appear in the *Archiv*. Your many American friends trust that some time, in the near future, you will be able to visit the centers of Eugenical interest in this country" (Oct. 25, 1928, Lenz Correspondence). Lenz was an avowed race supremacist (see Daniel Gasman, *The Scientific Origins of National Socialism* [New York: American Elsevier, 1971] p. 175-6.) and an important figure in Nazi race-hygiene programs after 1933 (see Bloch, "The Berlin Correspondence," esp. p. 298).

In summary, the Laughlin Papers provide considerable insight into the career of one of the chief organizers and propagandizers for eugenics in the United States. Laughlin's financial sheets for the ERO and the ERA, his notes regarding the Harriman endowment and the founding of the ERO, and his detailed outlines of a wide variety of eugenics activities, are all valuable data for understanding how the eugenics movement was organized and maintained on a day-to-day level. The archive shows that Laughlin expressed his ideas about race, immigration, and intelligence at great length, in both published and unpublished forms. His ideas rarely changed: he was saying virtually the same sorts of things in the late 1930s that he had said before World War I. If his ideas were questioned, as they often were, Laughlin either ignored the criticism or reacted defensively by searching for statistics to bolster his preconceived notions.

From a survey of his papers, Laughlin emerges as a significant leader of the American eugenics movement. His uncanny ability to manage endless details, his enormous energy, and his utopian dedication to the eugenical cause all contributed to his thirty-year reign as Superintendent of the ERO. In the last analysis, however, Laughlin appears to have been more a skillful bureaucrat of eugenics than its visionary statesman.

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