4-5-2023

What's in a Name? The Politics of Commemoration from the un-naming of the Alexander Graham Bell dorm at RIT to the Samuel Schmucker controversy at WCU

Brent Ruswick

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WHAT’S IN A NAME? THE POLITICS OF COMMEMORATION FROM THE UN-NAMING OF THE ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL DORM AT RIT, TO THE SAMUEL SCHMUCKER CONTROVERSY AT WCU

Dr. Brent Ruswick
Professor, Department of History
Overview

The Short History of Eugenics (15 min)

Schmucker, Contextualized (25 min)

A Recent, Relevant Example: RIT (7 min)
Overview: Eugenics

Literally: "The science of being well-born"

“Its first object is to check the birth-rate of the Unfit, instead of allowing them to come into being, though doomed in large numbers to perish prematurely. [“Negative Eugenics”] The second object is the improvement of the race by furthering the productivity of the Fit by early marriages and healthful rearing of their children.”[“Positive Eugenics”] -Galton, *Memories of My Life*, 1908, as quoted in Levine and Bashford, p 5.

Related Goals: Promoting Natal, Maternal Health to improve birth outcomes. (“Euthenics”)
Negative Eugenics: To Segregate and Sequester?
• **Marriage restriction laws** in > 40 states

• Tens of Thousands more “unfit” involuntarily institutionalized for decades-to-life, committed to labor for institution’s upkeep.

Or To Sterilize???
• **At least 60,000 involuntary sterilizations** of the “unfit” in U.S.

• **Sterilization laws in 32 states**
  
  • Involuntary Sterilizations upheld in *Buck v Bell* 1927

• Model legislation would have sterilized millions in US, became **basis of Nazi “race hygiene” laws** that sterilized approx. 400,000

Photo: https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Image/IM2003
Targets:

- **1st phase 1890s-1940s:** “feeble-minded,” poor, criminals, both white and black women

  - **Feeble-minded** = “easily manipulated into a catch-all term for any type of behavior considered inappropriate or threatening”

- **Always Rooted in Ableism, Often Rooted in white supremacy:** “Race Suicide”
  - The immediate ancestor to modern-day white supremacists’ “replacement theory”

https://www.bild.bundesarchiv.de/dba/de/search/?query=Bild+102-16748
Philippa Levine and Alison Bashford from the Oxford Handbook for the History of Eugenics:

“these were projects of racial nationalism and indeed racial purity—eugenics was never not about race—but the objects of intervention, the subjects understood to be "polluting" were often not racial outsiders, but marginalized insiders whose very existence threatened national and class ideals.” …

“much, if not most, eugenic intervention was directed at "degenerates" who already "belonged," racially or ethnically: "internal threats" or "the enemy within," whose continued presence diluted the race.” – Levine and Bashford 6, 7
The Question of Black Eugenicists

• Still had all the classism and ableism. Doesn’t make eugenics OK.

“Although African American engagement in eugenics complicates the ways in which we understand its legacy, we also cannot forget that eugenics legislation disproportionately targeted African Americans in violent ways. ...African Americans sought to mobilize eugenics for racial improvement, but were ultimately disproportionately targeted by eugenics legislation.”

Nuriddin, “The Black Politics of Eugenics”
EUGENIC AND CONSERVATION: FELLOW-TRAVELERS

• MADISON GRANT (*Passing of the Great Race*, 1916: Nordic/Alpine/Mediterranean)
• THEODORE ROOSEVELT
• GIFFORD PINCHOT


“prevention and efficiency joined progress, a general faith in the ability of human ingenuity to design and manage a better world, where social problems would eventually be conquered.” ... “Population-based solutions”– Lombardo, *Oxford Handbook of Public Health Ethics*, 643-4
“The primary eugenic goals—to eliminate disease, crime, and poverty by managing heredity and infusing law with science—comprised a hopeful program that included a future of healthy babies and the promise of prosperity. This hopeful side of eugenics generated much of its attraction. ... 

Retrospective ethical analyses of eugenics have focused on how eugenic policies used the stigma of disease, medically coercive practices, racial and ethnic bigotry, and policies of exclusion and discrimination as the means to meet eugenic goals. We associate eugenics with fear, hatred, and racism because the campaign to remake the United States as a eugenic nation relied on those strategies to pass eugenic legislation, and focused that legislation in patently discriminatory ways. Eugenic laws violated expectations of autonomy, equal treatment, and justice by targeting the most vulnerable—the poor, the disabled, and sexual and racial minorities—as the objects of eugenic reform.” Lombardo, 648-9
On the “Just A Man of His Times” Analysis...

- While Eugenics was popular, it was also controversial and fiercely resisted.
  - Religious, especially Catholic Opposition
  - Scientific Opposition (Hardy-Weinberg, 1908; T.H. Morgan, Franz Boas, Alfred Myerson)
  - Political Opposition
    - PA Gov. Pennypacker vetoes eugenics legislation (1905)
  - Opposition of those targeted
Then and Now

Old Narrative: Eugenics ended due to revulsion of link to Nazis, better genetics.

New Narrative: Eugenics changed forms:
- 1940s-1990s, increasingly targeted Latina, Black, and Indigenous women, more by use of coercion, deception, language barriers than by force of law.
- 1980s-Present, targeted all people in poverty, all people with disability, through social welfare and public health policies whose outcomes restrict reproductive choices in discriminatory ways. U.S. approach to covid as a “new eugenics?”

Photo: Library of Congress
The West Chester Eugenicists: Henry Goddard and Samuel Schmucker

Henry Goddard – Professor of Education Psychology 1900-1906

(Greatest Football Coach in WCU History? 1-0 record)

1906-1918: Director of Research, Vineland Training School for Feeble-minded Girls and Boys, Vineland NJ

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>IQ</th>
<th>Mental Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moron</td>
<td>51-70</td>
<td>8 to 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imbecile</td>
<td>26-50</td>
<td>3 to 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idiot</td>
<td>0-25</td>
<td>2 or less</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Creator of IQ gradations, Author of most famous eugenic manifesto, *The Kallikak Family*, proponent of institutionalization for eugenic control of the “Feeble-minded.”
WHAT IS WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?
In Revolutionary War times there was a soldier named "MARTIN KALLIKAK"

While in service he dallied with a feeble-minded tavern girl

She bore a son whom she called "Martin Kallikak, Jr." — later known as "Old Horror."

From "Old Horror" came ten children who spawned hundreds of the lowest humans, with the worst heredity.

She bore him seven fine, healthy, upright children.

From these came hundreds of the most worthy type of humans, with the best heredity.

—after the war he married a worthy young Quakeress

From Armin Scheinfeld, You and Heredity (1939) p. 89
Connections to Samuel Schmucker...

• (Credit to Student Fall 2021 HIS 400)
• Schmucker defends Goddard in a university controversy*
• Approving references to *Kallikak Family in Schmucker, The Meaning of Evolution* (see following...)

*“A Record of the Minutes of the Faculty of the West Chester State Normal School from Sept 2, 1895 to June 10, 1908” (Minutes Book, West Chester University Libraries Special Collections), 208-211.
Schmucker’s Achievements

- Popular Biology, Science-Education professor. 1895-1923
- Popular speaker on Chautauqua lecture circuit
- Popular synthesizer of Protestantism and Evolution, antagonist to creationists, Fundamentalists
- “Believed fundamentally that science teaching was the educational equivalent of a moral crusade” – Davis, 225.
“There is one taint from which society has the right and the duty of freeing itself, so far as in its power lies. This is the trait of feeble-mindedness. Of all the calamities that can befall a human being, feeble-mindedness is, perhaps, the worst. From most misfortunes it is possible to recover; with most of the rest one may exist without detriment to the race. To be feeble-minded simply means to hark back to the level of our animal ancestors, without regaining their power to guide life.

The still worse handicap of an illegitimate parentage, with all its bitter train of scorn and shame. Accordingly, it must be possible before the law for those who are not thoroughly vigorous to marry. But, year by year, we may come nearer accomplishing a finer mating by the aims and purposes we foster in the growing generation. Marriages will never be worth while when they are not freely entered into by the contracting parties. Choice must be free and unrestricted if it is to last for life; but this does not mean that it must be unguarded. It would be bitter folly for parents to leave to their children, without attempt to influence or restrain, the making of their marriages. The mating of our children must be inspired, not directed.

There is one taint from which society has the right and the duty of freeing itself, so far as in its power lies. This is the taint of feeble-mindedness. Of all the calamities that can befall a human being, feeble-mindedness is, perhaps, the worst. From most misfortunes it is possible to recover; with most of the rest one may exist without detriment to the race. To be feeble-minded simply means to hark back to the level of our animal ancestors, without regaining their power to guide life. The human species, in its development, has lost a large portion of its instincts, and has gained, instead, the power of intelligent choice and the ability to learn by imitation. When these drop away, man without his instincts or his intelligence is more helpless than the brute. Students of sociology are making clear to us that a large portion of the criminality of the world, much of the looseness of life, and a large part of the alcoholic excesses are due to this taint of feeble-mindedness. Recent investigations have made it clear that one feeble-minded family in a community may, in the course of years, poison the life of an entire state. The Jukes family in New York, the Kallikak family in New Jersey, have shown the awful possibilities of descent from a single feeble-minded ancestor. Prisons, almshouses, and houses of shame owe their population in no small degree to this bitter curse. It will not be long before society will learn to protect itself against such poisoning of the human stock. Nothing is more clear to the investigator of this subject than that the one overwhelming cause for feeble-mindedness is feeble-mindedness in the parentage.

There is one type of mental weakness, known as the Mongolian idiot, which may arise right out of the heart of an apparently sound family. But the number of these is comparatively small. The num-
Recent investigations have made it clear that one feeble-minded family in a community may, in the course of years, poison the life of an entire state. The Jukes family in New York, the Kallikak family in New Jersey, have shown the awful possibilities of descent from a single feeble-minded ancestor. Prisons, almshouses, and houses of shame owe their population in no small degree to this bitter curse. It will not be long before society will learn to protect itself against such poisoning of the human stock. Nothing is more clear to the investigator of this subject than that the one overwhelming cause for feeble-mindedness is feeble-mindedness in the parentage."
Every attempt to examine large numbers of school children shows a sickening proportion of those who are distinctly feeble. ... Such people rarely live long lives without leaving behind them feeble-minded children, no small proportion of whom are likely to be illegitimate. Against this fouling of the stream at its source, society must protect itself.
Legislators revolt at the somewhat inhuman [sic] but certainly safe method of surgically preventing the possibility of the feeble-minded becoming parents. It would be more creditable and just as effective if society would take upon itself the tremendously expensive task of caring for all its feeble-minded in institutions during their entire life. The cost would be large for a generation, but would rapidly diminish and eventually become small. It certainly would be the humane way. These people in good institutions are by no means unhappy. Within the limit of their capacities they can do many things. Wise management usually will secure from them labor enough of wholesome and simple kind nearly to pay for their own support. Nothing could be better for them than to till the soil, care for the cattle, tend the chickens, and, in (267) this way, provide very largely the materials on which they are fed. How this problem shall work out, time only can decide. With it once worked out, there is no doubt that the level of humanity will be distinctly raised.
“We are rearing our animals with the utmost care, but our human beings are allowed to rear themselves without thought,” said Dr. Samuel Schmucker of Pennsylvania Normal College in his closing lecture to the students of the summer school of the State Teachers’ College here.

“We must apply our knowledge of heredity to human stock as well as animals. Any man who attempts to meddle with monogamy will fail, but that does not prevent the regulation of the human product. We must conserve the weak and maimed of humanity, but we need not lower the human stock by doing so.”

“The blight of feeble-mindedness is hanging over humanity. This tide must be stemmed: they must not be allowed to bring others of their kind into the world. We must segregate them, with profitable labor if possible, for life, and not for a few years.”
capacity, that is a larger range of capacity, than the normal child of the same age. A normal child of ten does a great many tasks for which he has been trained. No one expects a normal child as a rule to set himself to work, to keep himself working, or to use good judgment in meeting the emergencies that arise in connection with his work. This is precisely the case with the defective of this grade. All this means that we must provide him with an environment in which there are few emergencies, in which the activities call for intelligence of his level and may be carried on by habit. This may include much of the routine of farming, of housework, and many kinds of simple industrial occupations. These pursuits, however, require more or less of planning and there are inevitably more or less emergencies, which means that there must always be a person of higher intelligence who can be called upon at a moment’s notice, who will make the plans from day to day. This at once suggests a farm colony and segregation so much discussed at the present time.

In this connection the following industrial classification is of interest.

This classification was made in the following manner: Every employee at the Vineland Training School was asked two questions about every child in the Institution, viz.: What does he do? What can he do? The answers were grouped and all those of the same mental age were put together. From the many answers in each mental age group an expression was sought that would describe the activities of the group. The children of the same mental age were often doing different kinds of work,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mental Age</th>
<th>Industrial Capacity</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 1 yr</td>
<td>(a) Helpless. (b) Can walk. (c) With voluntary regard</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 yr</td>
<td>Feeds self. Eats everything</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 yrs</td>
<td>Eats discriminatingly (food from non-food)</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 yrs</td>
<td>No work. Plays a little</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 yrs</td>
<td>Tries to help</td>
<td>Imbecile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 yrs</td>
<td>Only simplest tasks</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 yrs</td>
<td>Tasks of short duration. Washes dishes</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 yrs</td>
<td>Little errands in the house. Dusts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 yrs</td>
<td>Errands. Light work. Makes beds</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 yrs</td>
<td>Heavier work. Scrubs. Mends. Lays bricks. Cares for bath-room</td>
<td>Moron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 yrs</td>
<td>Good institution helpers. Routine work</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 yrs</td>
<td>Fairly complicated work with only occasional oversight</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 yrs</td>
<td>Uses machinery. Can care for animals. No supervision for routine work. Cannot plan</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One important correction must be mentioned, as it is a matter that bears upon the problem of the feeble-minded. We soon discovered that unless we recognized the physical disabilities, we were accomplishing very little work. We are now endeavoring to extend the classification of industrial work to cover all grades of feeble-mindedness, and to include all the social, domestic, and industrial activities that are now necessary in life.
Does Eugenics Meet the **UN’s Criteria for Genocide**?

- The criteria were written in 1948, when disability was not yet a category the UN conceived of as a possible target of genocide.

- However, revising the standard to add categories disability and sexual identity is a goal of disabled and LGBTQ+ activists.

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

a. Killing members of the group;
b. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
c. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
d. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
e. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.
Schmucker on Race, *Man’s Life on Earth* (1925)

Several pages discussion of inherent and fundamental biological differences in races, mostly regarding hair type and dimensions of crania.
Schmucker on the White Race

“The white race is probably the last evolved of the three, and also, in most respects, the most modified. It has certainly responded most rapidly to civilization, due not a little to its superior adaptability and to its inventiveness.”
Schmucker on interracial mixing

“It is taken for granted by a great many observers that a mixture of any two of the three great races produces a hybrid with the bad qualities of both and the good of neither. There are others who think that matter far from settled. There can be no question that hybrids of the dregs of each race are inferior, and it is the dregs usually that mix. ... As a scientific problem I think most biologists are agreed that the question is quite open whether mixed races, in the absence of social and political stigma, are not entirely the equal of so-called pure races. It will be ages before there will be any larger intermingling of races. We believe religiously in the brotherhood of man; but practically we are far from accepting it as true.”
"The Nordic Race is a conquering, restless, colonizing race and it has swept repeatedly south through Europe ... so that we find tongues of Nordic blood running deep into the distinctively Alpine population...

when they [the Alpine race] take to education and scholarly pursuits they make the most patient investigators and experimenters we have ever had. For the scholarship which is willing to spend a lifetime on what seems, to those not interested in the study, a pitifully narrow range of detail, these people are famous. ... it is on this careful, painstaking, patient collection of data that all later generalizations must depend"
Schmucker returns to Eugenics: *Heredity and Parenthood* 1929

Wants to improve the reputation of eugenics by disassociating it from sterilization, and “promulgating the sort of information that will be really helpful in ... forming a favorable public opinion [of eugenics.]

Note his linking of science, God, eugenics, and human improvement.
Schmucker returns to Eugenics: *Heredity and Parenthood* 1929

- Still referencing all the old eugenic studies of “thoroughly degenerate” families like the “Jukes” study, 1874, the “Tribe of Ishmael” (1888) the “Pineys” (1910s), and Goddard’s *Kallikak family*, again. (1912) (*Kallikak* survey widely discredited in mid-1920s)

- Of 300+ Jukes children who died in infancy: “Who shall say that they and the world were not better for their early slipping away?”

- Still calling for mandatory lifelong institutionalization of all people with I.D. for purpose of eliminating I.D., to be paid for by forced labor.

- First unambiguous rejection of sterilization.
Schmucker on Unmarried and Childless Women *Heredity and Parenthood* 1929

“There is a recent type of woman who can solve her problem in exactly the same way as that described for the man. This bachelor maid lives an active business life during working hours. She plays her golf or her tennis as vigorously and regularly as the man. She runs her sport car as skillfully as he, and can serve on civic committees just as ably. She is an interesting type. We have not had her long enough to know what she will do, should she live to be old. Will her bluff break down? Will she reluctantly at last confess that a woman is not a man, and a woman cannot satisfactorily live a man’s life to the end? I do not know. In any event, she is interesting while she lasts.”

“But the natural outlet for a woman’s sublimated passions is to rear children even though they are not her own, or care for older people who are helpless... Kindergarten work is ideal. Elementary teaching does finely for many women. Vocational guidance of adolescents is a beautiful outlet if she is genuinely sympathetic and a miserable one if she covers her own loss by smiting at their sentiment. Nursing is a noble avenue into which to guide her passions for mothering. In every one of these the misfit is pitiful if the woman is skating along the edge of her own sex enjoyment and fighting back its open expression, dwelling on it in literature and news and scandal and shutting it out of her own activity until she is peevish and fretful and sometimes almost hysterical. A single life may be, very often is, quite nobly and helpfully lived. There are certainly some marriages that are much worse than single life. It is foolish to tell a girl that any marriage is better than none. But, just the same, no life has realized its finest possibilities that does not include, amongst its inmost experiences, a happy marriage and some healthy, hearty children.”
Recent Reckonings with Eugenic History

Recent state-level apologies and reparations

North Carolina (2013)
Virginia (2015)
California (2021)

Apologies of Scientific Organizations

American Society of Human Genetics
Carnegie Institution for Science
Nature
American Museum of Natural History

Renaming of buildings, removal of statues, plaques;

Apologies

- Stanford
- Indiana University
- Rochester Institute of Technology
- CSU-Sacramento
- Emory
- Montana State University
- Guelph
- Berkeley
- University of Southern California
- University College London

See also Public Historian (Vol 29, No. 3, 2007)
The Alexander Graham Bell Dorm at Rochester Institute of Technology

See R.A.R. Edwards, “Chasing Aleck: The Story of a Dorm” The Public Historian 29, no. 3 (Summer 2007) 87-104
Within the National Technical Institute for the Deaf college at RIT

Plaque:
“Only six years before his death, Alexander Graham Bell looked back over his amazing life and wrote: “Recognition of my work for and interest in the education of the deaf has always been more pleasing to me than even recognition of my work with the telephone.” A brilliant and innovative teacher of the deaf, Bell dedicated a great portion of his life to help deaf children develop their potential for listening, speaking, and lipreading. Today, NTID emulates the ideals for which Alexander Graham Bell worked”

– Edwards, 88

(What’s missing from Bell’s “help” to deaf children?)
Bell on Sign Language

• An Oralist
  • Goal of “driving sign language out of existence entirely”
  • Viewed as “akin to other unassimilated foreigners”
  • “increasingly understood to be genetic throwbacks, using a language form, gestures, which had long since been supplanted in evolutionary terms by the far superior form of language, speech. ...preferring to sign made deaf people culturally dangerous.” (Edwards, 89)
Bell on Eugenics

“Memoir Upon the Formation of a Deaf Variety of the Human Race,” National Academic of Sciences, 1883

“Sexual Selection is at work among the deaf and dumb. ... Those who believe as I do, that the production of a defective race of human beings would be a great calamity to the world, will examine carefully the causes that lead to the intermarriages of the deaf with the object of applying a remedy.” (Edwards, 90)

Remedies: Marriage bans and minimizing deaf community-formation (mainstreaming schools, ban ASL, ban deaf teachers)
Controversy, Renaming Efforts

- Bell’s oralism, eugenicism, known at time of naming
- Potentially a purposefully provocative act to signal school's continuing support of oralism against “the cultural forces that were increasingly promoting Deaf culture and ASL usage.” (Edwards, 100)
- Intermittent tensions, protests
- Un-naming, 2008

Photo: The 1977 Disability Rights Protest That Broke Records and Changed Laws
Edwards on the Bell Hall Controversy

• “When historical memories clash, whose memory is validated? Whose is ignored? And why?”

• “Whom the building, and its name, is for” (The administration, or the students? The people who get buildings built, or the people who use them?)

• “When different communities share a space, whose memory of history is accommodated and promoted? And by what mechanisms do we decide?” -Edwards, 103-4
“The real question, I suppose, is this: How do we ... decide what’s in a name? I cannot say that I have all the answers. But what I would hope is for all constituencies to learn more about why this name ... went up into our space in the first place and to consider whether or not the reasons that led to that decision are still reasons we affirm today. Is that original statement ... still the statement we wish to make? Is it still indicative of our values today? Are [his] ideals, in whole or in part, still ideals worth emulating?

As a historian, it is not for me alone to answer. It falls to me only to ask simple questions. And perhaps discover once again that there are no simple answers.” – Edwards, 104.
The Discovery of Schmucker Is an Expression of an Outstanding History Program

Project Assistantship for WCU 150th Anniversary Celebration

Capstone Research Paper Topic in HIS 400, Senior Seminar

Teaching opportunity in HIS 214 History of Medicine

Additional material found by both Gen. Ed. non-majors, and a major with previous internship background in this issue.

Findings become basis for further research, recruitment, with the HIS 450 History Internship opportunities at Elwyn
Our Students’ Work on Schmucker is an Expression of WCU’s Mission and Values Statements

WCU graduates will:

• Apply scientific reasoning and demonstrate quantitative and qualitative literacy
• Collaborate with others to solve problems and address societal needs
• Communicate effectively and participate in civic discourse
• Engage inclusively in a diverse society
• Understand the ethical implications of decisions and the world in which they live
Our Students’ Work on Schmucker is an Expression of WCU’s Mission and Values Statements

The University supports and encourages programs which benefit all people and which seek to eradicate discrimination and injustice. We treasure what we believe to be the highest principles of American society: the worth and uniqueness of each individual, the belief that success is to be earned by individual effort put forth in an environment founded on equality of opportunity, and the appreciation of the ideal of an inclusive society.
The Board of Governors of Pennsylvania’s State System of Higher Education affirms its steadfast commitment to ensuring the entire State System operates from a foundation of values that:

• expects that our universities be places where human dignity is never compromised and every student that enrolls and employee or contractor we engage is welcomed