

EDWARD ALSWORTH ROSS:
AN INTELLECTUAL SHIFT FROM BIOLOGICAL EUGENICS TO SOCIOLOGICAL
RACIAL BETTERMENT

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Abstract

This paper explores Edward Ross, a prominent sociologist and chief architect of modern sociology, and his relationship to eugenics and the birth control movement during a period of correspondence between Ross and Margaret Sanger. This paper contextualizes Ross in the within eugenics from its origins to its legislative history. With regard to the birth control movement, this paper details Margaret Sanger's relationship to eugenics. This paper also analyzes several major published pieces of Ross's work during this period concluding that in the end Ross does not reject eugenics. Rather that Ross embraced birth control as a means of fulfilling the principles of racial betterment he once found through mainline American eugenics.

Introduction

In a speech given in May 1900, Edward Alsworth Ross, a prominent sociologist and chief architect of modern sociology, addressed an audience on oriental immigration. At the forum Ross stated that rather than allow foreign laborers to continue to immigrate, “. . . should the worst come to the worst it would be better for us to train our guns on every vessel bringing Japanese to our shores rather than to permit them to land.”¹ In 1912, Ross, responding to enquiry on his stance of the eugenic methodology of compulsory sterilization, stated “I am entirely in favor of it. . . Sterilization should at first be applied only to extreme cases . . . as the public becomes accustomed to it . . . it will be possible to extend its scope until it fills its legitimate sphere of application.”² In May 1921, Ross rebuked President Harding for congratulating an immigrant family on their twelfth child, suggesting that the president only encouraged a family that had nothing to offer society except the potential burden of their inferior children.³

In each instance, Ross exhibited a belief in a societal dichotomy of inferior and superior races and a belief in extreme measures to reduce the impact inferior races had on the whole of society. In September 1927, when asked about his opinion on eugenics, Ross responded “[any thoughtful] man is thrilled by what might happen from changing the proportion of higher and lower types in the population.”⁴ The common read argued that Ross’s embrace of eugenics

1. Quoted in Julius Weinberg, *Edward Alsworth Ross and the Sociology of Progressivism* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1972), 55

2. Sean H. McMahon, *Social Control & Public Intellect : The Legacy of Edward A. Ross* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1999), 125

3. Edward Alsworth Ross, “Menace of Migrating Menace”, *Century*, 102 (May 1921), 131-135; Edward Alsworth Ross, *The Social Trend* (New York: Century Co., 1922), 16. See also Edward Alsworth Ross, “With the Population Mystics,” *Social Forces*, 5, no. 1 (September, 1926), 32-36.

4. Edward Ross to Leon F. Whitney, September 22, 1927. Reel 16, p 861. Edward A. Ross Papers (microfilm edition, 1982), 1859 - 1969. Micro927. Wisconsin Historical Society,

stemmed from his nativist background. The small body of historical work on Ross marked his nativist period by his early work on immigration reform. Namely, that America needed to restrict immigration to prevent the deterioration of society. Ross's shift to supporting eugenics came from a grown anxiety that pursuing immigration reform was ineffective.⁵ Though Ross never stopped advocating a reduction of immigrants, he believed enough immigrants already existed internally to affect American society. Keeping out immigrants only maintained the quality of the superior race and in reality, even did poorly at that. Ross's arguments for racial betterment at the national level marked his shift to eugenics. Eugenics offered a means by which not only maintained the superior race, but promoted and strengthened it.

In 1921, Margaret Sanger, a prominent leader in the birth control movement, contacted Ross beginning a decade of correspondence between them. Though at first, Ross reluctantly supported the birth control movement. He eventually supported the *American Birth Control League* financially and legislatively.⁶ Scholars mark the beginning of their correspondences as the beginning of a transition. The question remains, what kind of transition these letters mark? One scholar regards this period as a move away from the "racist eugenics" to "liberal reform." Another scholar calls this period a move from "selectionism" to "conservative publicism."⁷ I contend that this transition period marked Ross's shift from teetering on the biological and sociological elements of racial betterment to seeking only sociological means of producing and promoting a superior class of people.

Records housed in Special Collections & Archives, McIntyre Library, University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire. Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

5. Weinberg, *Edward Alsworth Ross*, 164-165

6. Ross to Sanger, 25 October 1921. Reel 14, p 932-933; Ross to Sanger, 12 February 1925. Reel 15, p 815; Ross to Sanger, 28 August 1926. Reel 16, p 408. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969.

7. McMahon, *Social Control*, 131-132; Weinberg, *Edward Alsworth Ross*, 168

I intended to explore Ross's relationship to eugenics during the period of correspondence between Margaret Sanger and Edward Ross. Throughout this period, I will also contextualize Ross in the history of eugenics from its origins to its legislative history. With regard to the birth control movement, I will specifically detail Margaret Sanger's relationship to eugenics all the while exploring the details of Ross's correspondence with Margaret Sanger between 1921 and 1934.⁸ Additionally, I will analyze several major published pieces during this period. I conclude that in the end Ross does not reject eugenics. Rather that Ross has embraced birth control as a means of fulfilling the principles of racial betterment he once found through mainline American eugenics.

Edward Ross: Early History (1866-1906)

Edward Alsworth Ross, born to William Carpenter Ross and Rachael Alsworth in Virden, Illinois on December 12, 1866, became an orphan at age eight. Ross, in his autobiography described his father as "one of a large pioneer family" and his mother as "a tall, stately woman of strong character. . ."⁹ Ross's father dug for gold in California in 1849, eventually moving to Centralia, Kansas taking a section of Government land in 1870. His father, four years later, succumbed to paralysis and died in 1876. His mother passed away from tuberculosis in 1874. After his mother's death, Edward lived with various family members (1874-1876). Eventually Edward settled on a farm four miles outside of Marion in 1876 with non-family members, the

8. To my knowledge, a close examination of their letters has not been done to date.

9. Edward Alsworth, Ross, *Seventy Years of It: An Autobiography of Edward Alsworth Ross* (New York; London: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1936), 1

Beaches. Though not blood related Ross would regard Mary Beaches “as my foster-mother until her death in 1904.”¹⁰

Even though orphaned, Ross described himself as a well treated and intelligent child. His natural curiosity and quest for education lead him to leave the farm at age fifteen for better scholarly pursuits. Ross described a strong fondness for the years that he spent on the farm. The lessons he learned from farm-life had a great influence on him throughout his life. “Thanks to it I have been more concerned with the lot of our farmers than with that of any other class.” Yet, Ross lamented with dramatic emphasis that for those years he spent on the farm his cultural and intellectual upbringing suffered. “When I left the farm I had never read one of the children’s classics. All a boy’s cultural heritage . . . I read while I was in college! . . . I judge that I lost at least two years from lack of cultural opportunity. . . I am still two years behind what I might have been!”¹¹

Ross’s years as a student

Setting out from the farm at fifteen, Ross entered Coe College and earned his bachelor’s degree in 1886 at twenty. “Entering college I became my own master and did what was right in my own eyes.” For Ross, college also offered freedom from the constraints of the conservative farm community. “No one to deflect me from my native bent, to thwart my insatiable passion to *know*. . . No one to curb my education, choose my calling. . .” Ross characterized his college experience as one of a young man with an uncontrollable desire for knowledge and gifted naturally in producing work that his friends and school mates envied. Still Ross insisted that “[neither] in college nor since has ambition been my main driving force.”¹²

10. Ross, *Seventy Years*, 3-5.

11. Ross, *Seventy Years*, 6-7, 9.

12. Ross, *Seventy Years*, 11, 15, 11-20.

In 1888, Ross set out to study at the University of Berlin for one year. During his time there Ross studied the philosophy of Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Spinoza, and Spencer. Though interested in learning from the great philosophical minds at the University of Berlin, he ultimately rejected the abstractness associated with German philosophical scholarship “I have confidence only in that philosophy which begins by renouncing philosophy.”¹³ Rather than steeped in the headiness of metaphysics Ross pursued more tangible matters of economic and social issues. In 1890, Ross returned to the United States and started graduate school at John Hopkins University, completing a PhD in political economics with minors in philosophy and ethics in 1891. During this period Ross met Rosamond Simons, his future spouse and niece to Lester Frank Ward, the first president of the American Sociology Association. Edward and Rosamond married in 1892.¹⁴

Ross's experience at Stanford

After receiving his PhD, Ross had brief stints as professor of economics at University of Indiana (1891-1892) and professor of economics at Cornell University (1892-1893). In between posts he also took a position as the secretary of American Economic Association (1892).¹⁵ Eventually Stanford University offered a position to Ross (1893-1900). Shortly thereafter, Ross experienced some trouble for what later became a famous inability to edit himself with regard to

13. Ross, *Seventy Years*, 32.

14. Ross, *Seventy Years*, 26-39, 40-43. American Sociological Association, “Edward Alsworth Ross,” American Sociological Association, <http://www.asanet.org/page.wv?name=Edward+A.+Ross§ion=Presidents> (accessed Feb 3, 2009); Weinberg, *Edward Alsworth Ross*, 27. Weinberg stated that the minors were history and philosophy.

15. American Sociological Association, “Edward Alsworth Ross,” American Sociological Association, <http://www.asanet.org/page.wv?name=Edward+A.+Ross§ion=Presidents> (accessed February 3, 2009).

controversial topics.¹⁶ By 1894 Ross began teaching and working in the field of sociology, dropping economics altogether. In the same year, Ross began work on his social control theory leading to a series of articles published in the newly established *American Journal of Sociology*.¹⁷ Despite his growing success, on November 13, 1900 Ross called a press conference and declared to reporters, “Well, boys, I’m fired.” By the end of his time at Stanford, Ross had established himself well in the sociological community. In the eyes of Jane Lathrop Stanford Ross was an anarchist and revolutionary with “no place in *her* university.”¹⁸

Ross had several times offended Mrs. Stanford with his outspoken political views believing academia a place for free exchange of ideas. Those ideas, though offensive to Mrs. Stanford, did not discourage him from expressing them. The final straw came in May 1900. Ross spoke at a forum on the subject of oriental immigration at the request of university president D. S. Jordon. At the forum Ross expressed a strong opposition to the continued immigration of Japanese laborers. Ross stated that “. . . should the worst come to the worst it would be better for us to train our guns on every vessel bringing Japanese to our shores rather than to permit them to land.”¹⁹ The Stanford’s used many immigrant laborers building the Union Pacific Railroad. After reading about Ross’s speech Mrs. Stanford demanded Ross’s termination. At the press conference, Ross revealed what had already been known in May, that he was fired. Though coupled with dramatic phrases of injustice, Ross intentionally announced his firing because Macmillan publishing company informed him they would publish his book *Social Control*.²⁰

16. Ross, *Seventy Years*, 50-52. Weinberg, *Edward Alsworth Ross*, 37-39.

17. Ross, *Seventy Years*, 54-57. Weinberg, *Edward Alsworth Ross*, 39-40.

18. Ross, *Seventy Years*, 43.

19. Ross, *Seventy Years*, 47.

20. McMahon, *Social Control*, 22-26, 110-11; Ross, *Seventy Years*, 69-71; Weinberg, *Edward Alsworth Ross*, 45-49. What could be more of a selling point for an author than to

Ross emerged from the situation an admired voice for academic freedom and significant figure within the growing sociological community and took a position as professor of sociology at University of Nebraska (1901-1906). Only his academic work and the recent publication of *Social Control* afforded Ross the ability to find a position so quickly after such a controversial episode at Stanford.²¹ During his time at Nebraska, Ross published his second major book, *Foundations of Sociology*. Both books caught the attention of Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. "I do not repine, but when I read what has given me so much pleasure and encouragement I think it only right to say the author, you are doing a noble work."²² It also caught the eye of another powerful figure.

Justice Holmes told me to read *Social Control* because he regarded it as one of the substantial achievements of constructive scholarship in America. I have been reading it accordingly, and I like it so much that I must take the liberty of writing to tell you so. Sometimes I feel a little blue about the immense amount of printed matter of utterly ephemeral value turned out within our borders . . . and so I always feel a real sense of obligation to the man whose achievement tends to make my fears groundless.

I do not suppose you ever get to Washington, but if you do, be sure to let me know.

Sincerely yours,
Theodore Roosevelt²³

Achieving success while in Nebraska, Ross eventually took a prominent position as professor of sociology at University of Wisconsin (1906-1937). Ross made Wisconsin his last home and, in turn, a foundation for American sociology.

have a guaranteed published book and to be fired for speaking out against something from which his book discusses?

21. Ross, *Seventy Years*, 54-55.

22. Oliver Wendell Holmes to Edward Ross, 6 May 1906. Reel 4, p 332. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859 - 1969.

23. Theodore Roosevelt to Edward Ross, June 15, 1906. Reel 4, p 451. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859 - 1969.

Edward Ross: Transition Towards Eugenics (1901 – 1922)

Edward Ross's work, first as an economist and second as a sociologist, show why one scholar referred to Ross as "one of the most race-conscious" American sociologist.²⁴ Ross saw immigrant labor leading to an economical deterioration of American society. Cheap foreign labor took jobs away from the American laborer and lowered their economic stability. Ross argued that immigrants lacked in qualities essential to successfully contribute to the overall health of American society. In Ross's *Foundation of Sociology*, he characterized immigrants as "... beaten men of beaten breeds."²⁵ American laborers, superior to the incoming foreign laborers, comprised what made America so economical strong. The influx of immigrant laborers threatened to replace American laborers and thus the overall economic stability of America altogether. Furthermore, "Ross believed that immigrants threatened the moral and racial integrity of the nation." Not only did immigrants threaten the economy, but, in Ross's view, the whole of American society.²⁶

Ross's intellectual solidarity with eugenics and birth control came from the fear just described. Ross did not believe immigrant inferiority came just from their biological make-up. Rather, Ross "observed that the physiological traits often reflect cultural influences." Ross rejected the notion that heredity explained the behavior of particular group of people. Instead, he believed that the physiological aspect of a group developed from their environment. In essence, physical traits helped identify behavior because they indicated the kind of environment a person came from.²⁷

24. John, Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New York: Atheneum, 1963), 109; McMahon, *Social Control*, 107

25. McMahon, *Social Control*, 107.

26. McMahon, *Social Control*, 107-108.

27. McMahon, *Social Control*, 109-111; Weinberg, *Edward Alsworth Ross*, 154-155.

Ross also did not accept that the environment solely determined a person's behavior as well. Rather, Ross developed a method of racial categorization on the basis of physical and social factors. To put it another way, "Ross placed himself [between the] efficacy of race mixing and an anti-Darwin activism. . . [Neither] socialization nor heredity fully explained the emergence of superior races."²⁸ In other words, the conditions for a superior race rested not only on biological factors, but environmental factors as well.

In 1901, Ross published his famous article "The Causes of Race Superiority." In this article Ross coined the phrase "race suicide," a phrase frequently used by anti-immigration advocates and American eugenicists. Ross argued that the Nordic race adapted far better to the Mid-West than any other race, solidifying their superiority in that region. By virtue of Nordic's biological disposition, they adapted best to their environment. If the increase of immigrants continued, then the superior races of that region would lose their status. Ross referred to this scenario as "race suicide."²⁹

For a case like this I can find no words so apt as "race suicide." There is no bloodshed, no violence, no assault of the race that waxes upon the race that wanes. The higher race quietly and unobtrusively eliminates itself rather than endure individually the bitter competition it has failed to ward off from itself by collective action. The working classes gradually delay marriage and restrict the size of the family as the opportunities hitherto reserved for their children are eagerly snapped up by the numerous progeny of the foreigner. The prudent, self-respecting natives first cease to expand, and then, as the struggle for existence grows sterner and the outlook for their children darker, they fail even to recruit their own numbers.³⁰

Thus the preservation of the established "higher race" became Ross's greatest concern.

28. McMahon, *Social Control*, 111 Weinberg, *Edward Alsworth Ross*, 155, 155-156

29. McMahon, *Social Control*, 111-113; Edward A. Ross, "The Causes of Race Superiority," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 18 (1901): 67-89.

30. Ross, "Race Superiority," 88.

Ross's work on race greatly influenced not only the general public, but powerful political figures. President Roosevelt, citing his own fear of "race suicide," tried passing legislation that restricted immigration by increasing the entrance fee and administering a literacy test. It did not pass.³¹ In 1912, when Woodrow Wilson won the presidential election, Ross appealed directly to Wilson, urging him of "... the importance of putting at the head of the Department of Commerce and labor a man of American stock who has some sense of the dilution to which our people are being subjected by present immigration. . ." Though Ross believed that Wilson would accomplish policy changes on immigration, he ultimately did not.³²

Ross anxiety over the higher racial differential between Americans and immigrants pushed him to seek a quick solution in the form of eugenics. The fear of "race suicide," fostered "... a rapid synthesis of the science of eugenics. . . ." in Americans,³³ among them Ross. Ross pursued other means of protecting the racial purity of America through immigration policies. The continual failure to restrict the influx of immigrants frustrated Ross, prompting him to look towards eugenics.³⁴

Origins of Eugenics

In 1883, Sir Francis Galton introduced the science *eugenics* into the lexicon of a growing scientific. This new science offered a method of developing a superior race of humans by employing methods of breeding traditionally used for animals. Through statistical techniques pioneered by Galton, ideal traits could be identified. Once the traits were identified, Galton argued that scientist ought to ensure their multiplication. By contrast, scientist should could

31. McMahon, *Social Control*, 115-118.

32. McMahon, *Social Control*, 124; Edward Ross to Woodrow Wilson, 19 November 1912. Reel 6, p 1015. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859 - 1969.

33. McMahon, *Social Control*, 114.

34. McMahon, *Social Control*, 114; Weinberg, *Edward Alsworth Ross*, 165.

identify inferior traits and see to it that they diminish. Galton's ideas contradicted the church's traditional view on the purview of science. Traditionally marriage, sex, and reproduction, belonged under the authority of the church. Galton's *eugenics* attempted to address such matters under a scientific authority, not a religious one. According to Bruinius in his *Better for All the World*, eugenics became a "... new theology that could become nothing less than a religious creed."³⁵ In the latter half of the nineteenth century Charles Darwin already observed "[that] far from being created 'a little lower than angels,' mankind was actually closer to the domestic creatures it knew how to breed."³⁶ Darwin's scientific doctrine of evolution replaced the doctrine of divine creation. Galton articulated a scientific doctrine that replaced the doctrine of original sin. In essence, eugenics offered a new means of redemption through biological perfection³⁷

Galton stated in *Hereditary Genius*, "I propose to show in this book that a man's natural abilities are derived by inheritance, under exactly the same limitations as are the form and physical features of the whole organic world."³⁸ Galton claimed that through a scientific process he could accurately identify inferior and superior traits.³⁹ He believed that for a nation to be great

35. Harry Bruinius, *Better for All the World* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 85, 87-88.

36. Bruinius, *All the World*, 91.

37. Bruinius, *All the World*, 86-91, 107.

38. Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius* (Gloucester, Mass: The Word Publishing Company, 1972), 45. Galton also acknowledged that this particular view, one expressed in an early publication in Macmillan's Magazine was an unpopular one. As a means of asserting his authority in matter, he evoked Darwin's approval of this work. For a formalized definition of eugenics see Francis Galton, "Eugenics: Its Definition, Scope, and Aims," *The American Journal of Sociology* 10, no. 1 (July, 1904), 1-25; Roswell H. Johnson, "Eugenics and So-Called Eugenics," *The American Journal of Sociology* 20, no. 1 (July, 1914), 98-103. "Eugenics is the science and art of the control of human, germinal characteristics. As an adjective, eugenic is applied only to those agencies or influences which improve the aggregate of human, germinal characteristics."

39. Harry Bruinius, *All the World*, 91-95. Before the publication of *Hereditary Genius*, Carl Friedrich Gauss developed the mathematical law of error. The law showed that physical

an increase of most “desirable” of traits must increase. The best means of achieving this came from a method of selective reproduction and maintaining hereditary purity from tainted immigrants. The rise or fall of a nation rested on its ability to protect and nurture those “desirable” traits.⁴⁰

Along with Galton, the growth of the eugenics movement benefited from the work of Johan Gregor Mendel and his plant experiments conducted in 1853. Mendel discovered that each offspring of a parent pea plant displayed only one of the parent color traits. If he cross-pollinated a green pea plant with a yellow pea plant, the hybrid would display only one of the colors, yellow. Mendel observed that the dominant yellow plant, in the cross-pollination of hybrids, had a higher chance of appearing in the new hybrid. Mendel concluded that the traits within a hybrid followed a simple algebraic ratio.⁴¹ Eugenicist translated Mendel’s observations into a scientific technique for determining what characteristics classified as hereditary traits. If a particular characteristic appeared multiple times within a family, then it was a trait. “Mendelian genetics posited that germ plasm [genetic material], the substance of heredity, consisted of discrete and nonblendable factors that were passed unaltered from parent to offspring in sexual

properties when plotted are distributed with descending deviations on either side of the mean.

40. Bruinius, *All the World*, 96; Rudolph J. Vecoli, “Sterilization: A Progressive Measure?” *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 43 (Spring 1960): 190; Elof Axel Carlson, *The Unfit: A History of a Bad Idea* (Cold Spring Harbor, NY: Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press, 2001), 233-235. Galton favored practices like that of German professors who married the daughters of other professors and strongly condemned religious celibacy. Galton argued for what we now understand as positive eugenics; discovering and documenting desirable traits to promote the union of the possessors of said traits. American eugenics developed the contrasting negative eugenics. Namely, discovering and documenting undesirable traits with the intent to purge the nation of them.

41. Carlson, *The Unfit*, 133-134.

reproduction.”⁴² For eugenicist, Mendelian genetics offered not only a reason, but a justification for preventing people with undesirable traits from reproducing.

Charles Davenport, an American eugenicist, follower of Mendelian genetics, and protégé of Galton, undertook a series of his own experiments using domestic animals between 1904 and 1907. Davenport wedded Galton’s belief that all human characteristics derived from their heredity with Mendelian genetics. He then translated the results into a Mendelian genetic ratio for determining human traits, concluding that characteristics identifiable in several generations ultimately identified a biological trait. In most cases the traits identified merely consisted of subjective interpretation. Some eugenicists identified traits by asking women to observe a person because they believed women intuitively recognized traits like feeble-mindedness.⁴³ Among the influences to the eugenics movement, Davenport introduced eugenics to America through his *Statistical Methods with Special Reference to Biological Variation*, published in 1899.⁴⁴ As a result, Davenport quickly established himself as an authoritative eugenicist in America.

Ross’s affiliation with eugenics was mixed and complicated. “He never fully aligned himself with the eugenicists because they left too many factors to obtuse forces.”⁴⁵ In a letter to A. M. Hays, February 15, 1906, Ross wrote “[it] is not clear to me whether the committee you contemplate [American Breeders Association] is concerned with the scientific improvement of the breeds of stock or with the improvement of the human breed.” Adding, “. . . I doubt if I am the sort of man you ought to have on your committee.” Ross argued that the sociologist “[sought] to understand to what extent and how human institutions improve or deteriorate the human

42. Carole R McCann, *Birth Control Politics in the United States, 1916-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 103.

43. McCann, *Birth Control Politics*, 103-105.

44. Bruinius, *Better for All the World*, 135.

45. McMahon, *Social Control*, 115

breed.” Ross suggested Mr. Hays’s put medical and biological experts on his committee.⁴⁶ Ross believed a sociologist should participate in racial betterment, but that they should not employ biological methods. In other words, the sociologist should institute social policies that produced a better human breed and without the use of genetic manipulation. Yet, as one scholar pointed out, Ross in 1903 claimed that “blood of a people determines its social history.” But, Ross also emphasized that people’s social environment equally determined “blood.”⁴⁷

In February 1910, Ross chartered a trip to China for six months, eager to observe a particular group in their native setting. After his return, Ross published a series of articles about his trip. Through those articles and many others, with respect to his other travels, Ross rose nationally as the “race” expert. Ross crossed over into the American mainstream, reaching an audience that consisted of more than just academics.⁴⁸ Though Ross’s work appealed to a larger audience, the sweeping claims on matters of races did not go without criticism. In the articles published in the *Century*, editor C. C. Buel specifically requested that Ross tone down the negative racial assessments and at one point questioned Ross’s approach. “Is it quite fair to publish a sort of test of trustworthiness predicated on anybody’s looks?”⁴⁹ In 1914 Ross published his book *The Old World in the New*, a collection of essays and articles on race. The

46. Edward Ross to A. M. Hays, 15 February 1906. Reel 4, p 222-223. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969. Though Ross addressed the letter to A. M. Hays, the first initial should have been W; W. M. Hays was president of the American Breeders Association in 1903 for ten years. In 1904, Hays became assistant United States Secretary of Agriculture. A. F. Troyer, and H. Stoehr. “Willet M. Hays, Great Benefactor to Plant Breeding and the Founder of Our Association,” *Journal of Heredity* 94 (2003): 435-441.

47. McMahon, *Social Control*, 115; Edward Alsworth Ross, “Recent Tendencies in Sociology III,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 17, no. 3 (May, 1903): 438-455; Weinberg, *Edward Alsworth Ross*, 164-165.

48. McMahon, *Social Control*, 116-118.

49. C. C. Buel to Edward Ross, 10 February 1913. Reel 7, p 125-126. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859 - 1969; Weinberg, *Edward Alsworth Ross*, 157-158.

general market received the book well, but academia less favorably, calling the book an exaggeration and offensive. Some have described Ross's *Old World* as perpetuating a racial fear already articulated by eugenicists. A testament to the protection of America's racial purity, Ross believed the continued growth of immigrants would taint the superior American blood and immediate action required to prevent further deterioration. "Though [Ross] was a strong Progressive . . . he believed in the conventional myth of Nordic supremacy and the need for a program of positive eugenics in order to preserve our Anglo-Saxon Americanism against pollution through immigration."⁵⁰

Ross also sponsored a eugenics club at University of Wisconsin-Madison shortly after returning from his China trip. In a letter addressed to members, on October 28, 1912, Ross proposed a new format for the group. The format consisted of three public addresses to non-scientific minded audiences and monthly meetings for members to further discuss "the problems of racial progress." At these meetings, members consider the topics "the control of feeble-mindedness, the significance of declining birth rate, etc."⁵¹ Prior to sponsoring a eugenics club, asked to explain his position on compulsory sterilization, Ross stated "I am entirely in favor of it. . . Sterilization should at first be applied only to extreme cases. . . as the public becomes accustomed to it . . . it will be possible to extend its scope until it fills its legitimate sphere of application."⁵² There is a recognizable shift in Ross's rhetoric. Though at one time he shied from such statements, by the early 1910s, Ross's view on eugenics appeared significantly more favorable.

50. E. Digby Baltzell, *The Protestant Establishment: Aristocracy & Caste in America* (New York: Random House, 1964), 115, 106-108; McMahon, *Social Control*, 123-124.

51. Edward Ross to The Members of the Eugenics Club, October 28, 1912. Reel 6, p 859. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859 - 1969.

52. McMahon, *Social Control*, 125.

Progression of Sterilization Laws

Between 1899 and 1907, Dr. Harry Clay Sharp, an Indiana State prison physician, conducted his own set of experiments, like Davenport, but on inmates. Forgoing any scientific methodology for determining inferior traits, he instead developed a solution that prevented the perpetuation of pre-determined inferior traits. Dr. Sharp's work with men who suffered from habitual masturbation largely contributed to not only his knowledge of medical techniques for sterilization, but ultimately a means of control over a deviant's reproduction. Dr. Sharp first developed his sterilization technique by performing vasectomies on male patients who suffered from habitual masturbation, the first 1899. Earlier treatments consisted of castration and oophorectomy, procedures that removed the reproductive organs thereby removing the source of uncontrollable sexual behavior. Dr. Sharp had adopted the vasectomy procedure for his patients displaying immoral behavior and low intelligence as an effective alternative to castration.⁵³

Dr. Sharp claimed that he performed 176 vasectomies before 1907, without any legislative approval, at the request of the prisoners. Of course, as a side effect of the procedure the patient no longer reproduced. Dr. Sharp saw this unintended side effect as a means of treating more than sexual deviations. In 1902, Dr. Sharp addressed a group of physicians wherein he described what he had been doing. During his address, Dr. Sharp encouraged others to push for legalization of this treatment and make it mandatory for all convicts. It would " . . . [render] them powerless to reproduce their kind, and it is an undoubted fact that the progeny of

53. Carlson, *The Unfit*, 206, 209-210; Johanna Schoen, *Choice & Coercion: Birth Control, Sterilization, and Abortion in Public Health and Welfare* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 93. Many physicians at the time considered habitual masturbation equally destructive as rape, sodomy, bestiality, and pederasty. Additionally, the concern for habitual masturbation and other sexual deviations did not limit itself to just males, but Dr. Sharp work in a male prison lending his work to deal with this particular gender first. Immoral behavior and low intelligence were equally attributed to those suffered from habitual masturbation.

degenerates becomes a charge upon the state.’’⁵⁴ Though at one time Dr. Sharp treated patients with a particular “ailment” in the form of sexual deviations, he now treated an “ailment” in the form of a inferior person that eugenicist argued society suffered from.⁵⁵

Among Charles Davenport’s ardent followers Davenport saw the most promise in Harry Hamilton Laughlin for the cause of eugenics. Davenport supported Laughlin’s membership into American Breeders’ Association and eventually asked Laughlin to manage the newly established Eugenics Record Office established October 1, 1910. The Eugenics Record Office was established to index eugenical data and to publish the results of eugenic research. In 1914 Laughlin gave a speech at the National Conference on Race Betterment, arguing that ““purifying the breeding stock of the race at all cost is the slogan of eugenics.”’⁵⁶ The same year, Laughlin prepared a report for the ERO where he enthusiastically proclaimed sterilization as means of solving criminal behavior and that current sterilization laws were inadequately crafted. Laughlin set out to offer a ‘model’ law for compulsory sterilization that accounted for due process and recognized a person’s rights under the constitution. Essentially, Laughlin picked up where Dr. Sharp had failed. Though Laughlin never got the chance to see legislation passed utilizing his specific wording, the principles of his work influenced Dr. Audrey Strobe, the architect of a compulsory sterilization law that did become the national standard for sterilization programs in America.

54. Quoted in Carlson, *The Unfit*, 211.

55. Carlson, *The Unfit*, 208-221; Philip R. Reilly, "Involuntary Sterilization in the United States: A Surgical Solution," *The Quarterly Review of Biology* 62, no. 2 (June, 1987), 154-155.

56. Quoted in Carlson, *The Unfit*, 242.

Margaret Sanger

In Carol R. McCann's book *Birth Control Politics*, McCann framed the Margaret Sanger's advocacy of birth control distribution within an eugenic framework. Eugenics provided the birth control movement a scientific authoritative language. In order to convince the public, birth control advocates needed a language that put people at ease discussing sexual reproduction. Eugenics already achieved this. Though Sanger's arguments shared similarities with eugenical logic, she still had her critics. A number of eugenicist believed birth control ultimately encouraged the superior race to restrict their reproductive habits, while the inferior continued to multiply. The difference between Sanger and American eugenicists hinged on Sanger's belief that external factors effected racial deterioration of an individual, an argument most associated with British eugenics. Though Sanger accepted the American eugenicist belief in racial deterioration, but like the "radical British eugenicists," she denied a biological determinism. She favored a "causal explanation found [in] economic environmentalism and conventional sexual morality."⁵⁷

In Britain, the adoption of Mendelian genetics divided eugenicists. Instead of a biological principle for racial betterment, as in Davenport's use of Mendelian genetics, British eugenicists like Havelock Ellis argued for a social principle.⁵⁸ Ellis, a mentor and friend to Sanger, blamed racial deterioration on "the repressive Victorian class and sexual order." Furthermore, he claimed that superior traits did not exclusively come from an upper-class. Class separation prevented those with desirable traits the opportunity to breed with others outside their social class who possessed equally desirable traits. Fundamentally, certain people possessed traits superior to others and that the best method of preserving those traits included a breakdown of class divisions

57. McCann, *Birth Control Politics*, 101, 99-101.

58. McCann, *Birth Control Politics*, 106.

as well as female sexual liberation. Sanger believed women freed from a sexually repressive society produced a higher caliber of children. ““Abused soil brings forth stunted growth. An abused motherhood has brought forth a low order of humanity.””⁵⁹ The strength of eugenics came from a method of identifying superior traits, but in the matter of racial betterment, eugenics that stressed biology did not offer an effective solution.

Sanger certainly came up against criticism by American eugenicists. Prone to reproduce in great numbers, warned American eugenicists, the inferior stock would eventually outnumber the superior stock. Thus the superior stock needed to reproduce at a higher rate to prevent such a situation. American eugenicists claimed birth control advocates promoted small families among the superior stocks. Though a fraction of the inferior stock might use contraception, the likelihood that the superior stock would use it as well did not offer any advantage. Birth control did nothing in the way of promoting the reproduction of a superior stock, which according to the American eugenicists only increased the work for eugenicists. Additionally, for many eugenicists the division of inferior and superior split along economical divisions. In other words the poor were poor because they lacked the genetics necessary to succeed financially. Sanger’s suggestion that the improvement of the human race required a mixing of economic classes or that superior traits existed in the poor contradicted a commonly held belief by American eugenicist.⁶⁰

Margaret Sanger: Similarities and Differences with American Eugenics

Mainstream eugenics and Sanger disagreed on the catalyst for racial betterment, as stated earlier. Like suffragists, Sanger argued that “only voluntary motherhood could be virtuous motherhood.” The environment with which a woman emerged as mother determined the quality of children produced. If a mother gave birth to a number of children it is not entirely their genetic

59. Quoted in McCann, *Birth Control Politics*, 107, 105-107.

60. McCann, *Birth Control Politics*, 107-109.

disposition that makes one inferior, but the economic and social situation that produced inferior children. Thus, if women had access to contraception, they could choose an appropriate number of children based on their economic and social condition.⁶¹ Yet, the core of Sanger's argument accepted the need and work of eugenics' genetic identification, but insisted that only access to birth control achieved racial betterment.

Sanger believed that desirable traits resided in the individual not as a characteristic attributed to an entire race. Sanger argued that a person's association with one particular race did not determine whether they belonged to an inferior stock, a practice adopted by a number of eugenicists.⁶² Though Sanger believed in the necessity of compulsory sterilization laws, she argued for its limited usage and found the logic behind such procedures flawed. "The great hopes eugenicists pinned on compulsory sterilization reflected what was, in her view, their gravest error: pitting nature against nurture. Eugenicists were wrong to 'elevate' heredity 'to the position of an absolute,' because heredity and environment, Sanger noted, could not be 'disentangle[d].'"⁶³ Sanger criticized eugenicists for the arrogance with which they deemed people superior or inferior. Sanger argued that the compulsory sterilization programs may have weeded out traits counted beneficial in the future. In other words, eugenicists spoke and acted too arrogantly about matters too abstract and potentially caused more damage than good.⁶⁴

Of course Sanger utilized eugenic arguments and eugenic language to persuade critics and birth control agnostics. Eugenicist already amassed evidentiary research for the process of

61. McCann, *Birth Control Politics*, 109-111, 117, 119-120.

62. McCann, *Birth Control Politics*, 117. Though there is an emphasis on the individual, McCann concludes this by virtue of Sanger's lack of inclusion or exclusion of particular races at a time when many eugenicists explicitly stated issues of inferiority for entire races, specifically African-Americans.

63. McCann, *Birth Control Politics*, 118, 117-118.

64. McCann, *Birth Control Politics*, 120-121.

selective breeding. Whether the research offered true scientific data did not matter as much as how the public accepted the information. By intertwining arguments for birth control with existing eugenical data, Sanger only needed to convince the public that the goals of birth control advocates and eugenicist overlapped.⁶⁵

Eugenics also provided the birth control movement the strongest advantage in an established scientific sexually neutral language. “The terminology of eugenics (genetic capacity, reproductivity, pregnancy wastage, expressed fertility, and birth rates) desensitized the public discussion of birth control by obscuring the sexual activity that occasioned contraceptive use.”⁶⁶ In essence, it abstracted the idea of sex into a realm that people felt comfortable discussing, which in turn gave birth control proponents a means to discuss the matter publicly.⁶⁷ Despite differences with American eugenicists, the birth control movement advanced intimately tied to eugenics. In order for the birth control movement to succeed, it needed the aid of eugenics to persuade public opinion.⁶⁸

Edward Ross: Birth Control Letters (March 1921 - June 1922).

On March 4, 1921, Edward Ross received a letter from Sanger. She explained her belief in birth control as a means of solving overpopulation and immigration. Through her travels, Sanger came to believe that other countries have already recognized the need for birth control as a means of dealing with the population issue. Sanger went on to request Ross’s opinion on the matter of birth control “. . . stressing the question of the rise and fall of populations.” She offered

65. McCann, *Birth Control Politics*, 122-123.

66. McCann, *Birth Control Politics*, 125.

67. McCann, *Birth Control Politics*, 126-127.

68. McCann, *Birth Control Politics*, 119-120.

to publish his response in an upcoming issue of *The Birth Control Review*, where she held the position of associate editor.⁶⁹

Ross's replied to Sanger that his newly published article on immigration and world peace contained data that Sanger might find helpful to her cause. More importantly, Ross feared that advocating birth control openly might cause people to misunderstand his work.

I feel that I can do more by massing the statistics so as to prepare people's minds for the birth control idea than I can by advocating birth control in some many words. I don't want people to form the impression that my studies in population pressure are made in order to justify my birth control views. . . . So I think that my policy of leading people up to the idea rather than advocating it in so many words will accomplish more in the long run.⁷⁰

On October, 18 1921, Margaret Sanger again requested Ross's to articulate a view on birth control. Sanger emphasized her belief that birth control helped prevent an “. . . increase in defective children and insanity, the rising demands for charity, the heavy burden of the taxes necessary to support prisons, asylums, reformatories and homes for defectives. . . .”⁷¹ Sanger informed Ross that, as a result of these concerns, she had already formed a conference scheduled for November 11, 12, 13 in New York. She urged Ross to contribute to the conference. Two days later, Sanger then requested that Ross join a proposed quarterly magazine as one of the coeditors. The magazine, according to Sanger, “[would] supplement both the Birth Control Review and the Malthusian magazine. . .”⁷²

69. Margaret Sanger to Edward Ross, 4 March 1921. Reel 14, p 163. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969.

70. Edward Ross to Margaret Sanger, 8 March 1921. Reel 14, p 164. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969.

71. Margaret Sanger to Edward Ross, 18 October 1921. Reel 14, p 921. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969.

72. Margaret Sanger to Edward Ross, 20 October 1921. Reel 14, p 927-928. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969.

In reply to Sanger's request, Ross informed her that because of a speech given before the Social Science College in Wisconsin on the subject of overpopulation, Ross "stirred up our Catholics. . ."⁷³ He advocated in his speech for moderate sized families, arguing for "adaptive fecundity," a concept described later on in this paper. Ross also claimed that his position on adaptive fecundity stood to ensure a more reasonable debate than to advocate birth control. Even though he believed his position presented a stronger argument. Nonetheless, he already upset Catholics with even the suggestion of limiting family sizes. Therefore, Ross thought it better for him not to align himself with birth control advocates. "Professors in a private university are somewhat freer than those in state institutions which are, in part, supported by taxes paid by Catholics [public universities]."⁷⁴ In other words, he could not attach his name as coeditor to a review that might bring trouble to the university. Though he did offer to write an article for the review, but not an article that engaged the numerous topics Sanger listed.

In a letter from Marie Stopes, referencing earlier correspondence with Ross, she wrote ". . . for although you hesitate to become openly one of our Vice-Presidents, we are very glad to think of you as converted and interested. . . ." Stopes acknowledges that "[we] have many friends such as yourself, who are really friends, but keep quiet about it for strategic reasons."⁷⁵ Sanger did not give in her letters to Ross the same explicit sentiment articulated by Stopes. As the letters continued, though, Sanger certainly expressed the importance that Ross's words carried in the birth control movement. Stopes, certainly a controversial figure in her own right, started her own organization, *Society of Constructive Birth Control*, and opened the first birth control clinic in

73. Edward Ross to Margaret Sanger, 25 October 1921. Reel 14, p 933-934. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969.

74. Edward Ross to Margaret Sanger, 25 October 1921. Reel 14, p 933-934. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969

75. Marie Stopes to Edward Ross, 27 June 1922. Reel 15, p Unknown. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969

London in 1921, the year before her letter to Ross.⁷⁶ Though not specifically referenced, one can only assume that the vice-presidency that Stopes referred to concerned a position within the SCBC. At the bottom of Stopes letter, where Ross's information as recipient of the letter appeared, Stopes addressed it to "Professor E. A. Ross, Department of Eugenics, University of Wisconsin, U.S.A." Though no substantive evidence for Ross's support of eugenics, it is notable that at least from a significant figure in the birth control movement, Stopes saw Ross as a eugenicist.

Ross in Trouble Again

Fired from Stanford in 1901 for speaking openly about a controversial subject, Ross in 1910 faced a similar situation at University of Wisconsin. Emma Goldman spoke in Madison around this time. Posters announcing her lectures went up around campus. A young woman angered by Goldman's appearance in Madison tore down the posters. Among Emma Goldman's influence on American history, including women's equality, free speech, birth control, and union organization, her anarchism caused the most outrage with Wisconsin conservatives. Though a controversial figure, learning of the women tearing down posters Ross openly condemned the action and announced the time and place of Goldman's lectures to his students. Ross made clear he did not support anarchy, but that he did support the right to free speech.⁷⁷

A few days after Goldman's lectures, Parker Sercombe, the social philosopher, gave a lecture at the school of education largely due to Ross's efforts. In addition to Sercombe's

76. John Simkin, "Marie Stopes," Spartacus Educational, <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/Wstopes.htm> (accessed March 5, 2009); Soylen Communications, "Marie Stopes," NNDB.com, <http://www.nndb.com/people/572/000024500/> (accessed March 5, 2009).

77. Weinberg, *Edward Alsworth Ross*, 143-144; Sally Thomas, "The Emma Goldman Online Exhibition," University of California, <http://sunsite3.berkeley.edu/Goldman/Exhibition/> (accessed April 20, 2009).

philosophical work, he also published a magazine with articles that promoted “free love.” Many Wisconsin conservatives interpreted Ross’s actions (inviting Sercombe and announcing Goldman’s lectures) as a public expression of support for both Sercombe and Goldman and demanded his termination. President of the University of Wisconsin at the time, Charles R. Van Hise defended Ross to the board of regents on Ross’s behalf. On March 2, 1910, Van Hise convinced the board to not fire Ross, but instead they censured Ross’s actions.⁷⁸

Ross’s resistance to come out for birth control probably stemmed from his previous experiences at Stanford and with the Goldman/Sercombe scandal. Fired from one university and almost from another for speaking openly about a controversial subject, he could ill afford another controversy.⁷⁹ Ross’s advocacy for “adaptive fecundity” allowed him to discuss matters of fertility without talking about birth control. Ross already faced opposition from the Wisconsin Catholics for his adaptive fecundity. Certainly advocating birth control invited significantly more opposition that potentially led to another firing.

Adaptive Fecundity, Not Birth Control

In 1922, Ross published *The Social Trend*, a compilation of previously published articles totaling in fourteen chapters. Topics ranged from immigration and immigrant birthrates, the changing female role in society, prohibition, “legal dismissal wage,” and war. The most notable section, “Adaptive Fecundity,” offered the clearest explanation of the concept mentioned in Ross’s correspondence with Sanger between 1921 and 1922. In this section Ross first addressed a concern he had over the comments made by President Harding congratulating a large family of sixteen children. The father made little money making it difficult to care for so many children.

78. Weinberg, *Edward Alsworth Ross*, 144-147; McMahon, *Social Control*, 93-95.

79. McMahon, *Social Control*, 131-132.

Ross believed that the president's actions encouraged other families of commonplace citizenship to increase in size to attain approval from their countrymen.

Though the commandment of "be fruitful and multiply" possessed a long standing influence in the tradition of western families, Ross argued that it no longer applied. "The Divine command . . . was uttered to seven people who were all that remained of mankind after the Flood. There are now 250,000,000 times as many people as there were then."⁸⁰ Specifically, Ross took issue with how the clergy continued to shame couples with *small* families. According to Ross, the clergy and other liked minded individuals consistently demanded fertility practices of old in the light of the dangerous increase in longer living citizens. Ross added, "[naturally] the church became fixed in the idea that overpopulation is nothing to worry about and in her profound wisdom she branded as a sin the deliberate curtailment of conjugal fecundity."⁸¹

Adaptive fecundity called for a change in the culturally ingrained fertility practices. The practice ignored the long standing tradition "be fruitful" in favor of "fecundity that adapts" to an economical situation.⁸² Ross believed that problem of over-population stemmed from a nations ability to increase the longevity of life through medicine and hygiene. Their ability to make such advances came from their economic prosperity. Thus, the economic status determined the degree of danger a particular nation faced over-population. "[An] increasing number of the peoples of the globe *will either have to violate what they are assured is God's law or else multiply until it will be necessary to hang out on our planet the 'Standing Room Only' sign!*"⁸³

80. Ross, *Social Trend*, 16-17.

81. Ross, *Social Trend*, 24, 17-24.

82. Ross, *Social Trend*, 32.

83. Ross, *Social Trend*, 33, 31-33.

In the introduction to *Social Trend*, Ross stated that no one has faced the tide of change that has happened to this point. Namely, social changes that resulted from scientific advances. According to Ross, no one but the sociologist can help to navigate the uncharted waters. Though uncharted, the sociologist humbly watched, scanning the horizon for on coming trouble.. “The sociologist is just a man in a crow’s nest who knows no more of this sea than his fellows.”⁸⁴ “Adaptive fecundity” was Ross’s attempt to “judge the probable course of the ship . . . to avoid trouble.” The “adaptive” method also came out of his ever present concern for unchecked immigration.

Ross described two main concerns about immigration. First, that immigrant groups lacked an ability to assimilate into a “spiritual unity” with America. Though the right of every person to leave their country and whereas only a person of “great imagination” left for the unknown, advances in travel technology changed that. The increase of people emigrating, according to Ross, necessitated social and cultural conflicts. “Spiritual” unification can only occur if a nation placed restrictions on who can and cannot enter a country. Otherwise, that nation must accept a potentially divided society. Ross’s second concern dealt with what he referred to as “blind fecundity.” Whereas practitioners of “adaptive fecundity” assessed their situation and adjusted fertility habits, “blind fecundity” meant uncontrolled, thoughtless fertility habits. Ross often sited immigrants as practitioners of the latter.⁸⁵

Thus, not only did Ross’s method of “adaptive fecundity” face resistance from a long standing religious tradition, but also from the situation created by loose restrictions on immigration. Immigrants brought with them even more traditions that made implementing

84. Ross, *Social Trend*, “Introduction.”

85. Ross, *Social Trend*, 3-15. Ross took up issue of national unification in *Roads to Social Peace*, published two years later and later discussed in this paper.

“adaptive fecundity” harder. Practitioners of the adaptive method, argued Ross, most likely came from the gifted, successful people in a given society. Ross feared that ungifted, unsuccessful immigrants, who reproduced uncontrolled, threatened to outnumber the former group.⁸⁶ In other words, if America did not close its doors to immigrants, then a process for dealing with “blind fecundity” had to be implemented. Otherwise the higher class will reduce their birth rate, but the lower will not, leading to an unfavorable class differential.

Ross argued, as one solution, that when women became economically independent it gave rise to voluntary marriage and motherhood as well as curtailing the birth-rate. According to Ross, at one time the “domesticated” woman shared in equal responsibility in the familial economy. At the advent of the industrial age, those responsibilities diminished and reduced women to an ornamental status in the marriage. Ross believed the current situation caused many woman to shy away from marriage in favor of financial independence. Ross argued that restricting women from the work force did nothing to attract women to marriage. Rather, by opening up the work force to women, they could attain an economic status equal to men and thus their potential husbands. They could once again achieving equal responsibilities for the familial economy.⁸⁷ Equally as important, that during a women’s pursuit of financial independence, their ability or desire to reproduce stalls until she chooses motherhood. Therefore, motherhood does not become a default, but rather an option.⁸⁸ Ross believed that the liberation of women into the work force ultimately effectively treated the problem of getting people to use the “adaptive” method and to curtail “blind” fertility habits.

86. Ross, *Social Trend*, 10-12, 25-26.

87. Ross, *Social Trend*, 78-99.

88. Ross, *Social Trend*, 100-120.

Edward Ross: Supporting Birth Control (May 1923 – February 1934)

On May 16, 1923, Sanger wrote to Ross about how excited she was for him to attend an annual conference, a conference referenced in her letter in October 1921. This, of course, indicated a shift in Ross's earlier hesitation to be associated with it. Sanger categorized the two day conference by dividing the first day into issues of Social Trend with regard to the birth control movement, a term she adopted from Ross's book. The second day dealt with the "constructive side of what can be done" about the identified social trends. It should be noted already the importance with which Sanger placed Ross's involvement in the movement by not only continual insistence for him to be a part of the conference and magazine, but also the influence his work had on the structure of the event. Even though he did not support the movement with the tenacity that Sanger displayed, Ross's work afforded Sanger a sufficient aid in promoting birth control. "I have always appreciated your writings and the tremendous push you have given to the idea of birth control."⁸⁹

Nearly two years later, Sanger again requested for Ross to contribute to the conference, official called the *Sixth International Neo-Malthusian and Birth Control Conference* held March 25-31, 1925. On Ross's return from an Africa and India trip, he wrote that tired and preoccupied with other "scholarly" matters he would not attend.⁹⁰ Sanger had attended the *Fifth Neo-Malthusian and Birth Control Conference* in London before. The neo-Malthusian part of this particular conference diminished in favor of eugenic principles. Both the fifth and sixth conferences did little to address women's rights. In the fifth conference Sanger attended as the only woman and a panel on birth control did not exist. At the sixth conference in New York,

89. Margaret Sanger to Edward Ross, 16 May 1923. Reel 15, p 346; Edward Ross to Margaret Sanger, 21 May 1923. Reel 15, p 348. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969

90. Margaret Sanger to Edward Ross, 20 January 1925. Reel 15, p 791; Edward Ross to Margaret Sanger, 24 January 1925. Reel 15, p 795. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969

“[not] a single session was chaired by a woman; only about one out of ten speakers was a woman. Four out of the total of eleven sessions focused specifically on eugenics, non on women’s problems.”⁹¹

As a follow up, Sanger wrote to Ross on February 7, 1925 and expressed her disappointment about Ross’s intended absence from the conference, but requested the use of his name as a vice-president for the conference. To the left of the letter a list of foreign vice-presidents included such figures as Havelock Ellis, H. G. Wells, Professor Ladislav Haskovec (President of Eugenic Society of Prague), and Sir James Barr (former President of Liverpool Branch of the Eugenics Society).⁹² On February 12, 1925 Ross replied, “. . . I would say that it seems ungracious of me not to be willing to be one of the vice-presidents of the coming Birth Control Conference. . . .”⁹³

He added that “[in] about two and one-half years I hope to get out a book. . . [and] make my fight solely on the necessity of limiting births to balance the great reductions in mortality and to avoid entirely the moral question.” By “moral question,” Ross meant the Catholic objection to promoting smaller families. “I want to prove the necessibility of universal family reduction without locking horns with our catholic friends about the matter of method.”⁹⁴ Unlike his earlier

91. Gordon, *Women’s Body*, 282.

92. Sanger to Ross, 7 February 1925. Reel 15, p 812. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969.; Eric W Owens, “Sir James Barr and the Liverpool Branch of the Eugenics Education Society, 1910-1916,” Galton Institute, http://www.galtoninstitute.org.uk/Newsletters/GINL0212/Liverpool_Branch.htm (accessed March 5, 2009). Sir James Barr later, having spoken against birth control at one time, joined Marie Stope’s Mothers Clinic and vice-presidency in the Society for Constructive Birth Control and Racial Progress.

93. Edward Ross to Margaret Sanger, 12 February 1925. Reel 15, p 815. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969.

94. Edward Ross to Margaret Sanger, 12 February 1925. Reel 15, p 815. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969.

responses to Sanger, Ross had begun to fear less and less the complications with being associated with the birth control movement.

On the Road to Social Peace.

In 1924 Edward Ross published a small book titled *Roads to Social Peace*. *Social Peace* attempted to articulate a means of minimizing social conflicts between various groups. Ross stated that social peace did not consist of merely preventing violent conflict, but to find a means of cooperation in the midst of social conflict. The various methods of cooperation included negotiation, public opinion, impartial judiciary, and objective legislation. According to Ross, in times of international conflict normally differing groups unite. When a country goes to war groups put aside their differences for the sake of national solidarity. In times outside of war, those groups return to their natural state. Ross's *Social Peace* addressed the social conditions after a war. Only a short while ago did Ross see America participate in World War I.⁹⁵

Among the methods for social peace, Ross argued that the United States avoid any kind of sectionalism. Sectionalism existed in nature through innate differences between nations and races. Instead of changing the natural sectionalism, sectionalism with social reinforcements could change. Ross suggested five "techniques of keeping sectional feelings and loyalty within safe limits. . ."⁹⁶ The first three covered proportional equality for groups; representation in government, benefits, and burdens from the government. The fourth required that at times certain groups bore "burden of legislation" for the benefit of the nation. The final technique suggested that in each group a spokesperson and representatives "should be willing to listen. . ."⁹⁷ If, as

95. Ross, *Social Peace*, 1-10.

96. Ross, *Social Peace*, 16.

97. Ross, *Social Peace*, 11-24. See also Edward Alsworth Ross, "Sectionalism and Its Avoidance," *Journal of Social Forces*, 2 no. 4 (May, 1924), 484-487.

Ross stated, sectionalism as a whole will not go away, at least sectional isolationism can through proportional equality and cooperation.

Another method of social peace reduced religious conflicts by ensuring the separation of government from religion. Religious conflicts had the potential to cause the most damage to humanity. An intolerant religious group that attempted to remove or even eradicate another group of people to win God's favor caused the worst damage, according to Ross. Moreover, that when government aligns with a religion, that damage amplifies. Thus, social peace happens by first separating that relationship "Nothing has contributed more to the cause of social peace than the American discovery that religion does not languish if it ceases to be supported and guided by the state."⁹⁸ Ross then suggested the following for what separation of church and state meant.

- a. Freedom of religious belief and the free exercise of worship within the limits of morality and public order.
- b. No religious test to be imposed for naturalization, voting, office-holding or jury duty.
- c. No one may have his civil or political rights abridged by ecclesiastical provisions, nor may religious views absolve one from the performance of his civil duties.
- d. No recognition of ecclesiastical jurisdiction.
- e. No public money to be devoted to the support of religion.
- f. Cemeteries to be controlled by the municipality rather than the church.
- g. No indoctrination of obligatory participation in worship in public schools or state educational institutions.
- h. Ministers not to make the exercise of citizen functions a matter of conscience, or threaten spiritual penalties for ones' political activity.⁹⁹

No doubt, Ross's comments on the church and government spoke to his earlier comments to Sanger in October 1921.¹⁰⁰ If the Catholic Church did not have so much influence politically, as Ross felt, he may have expressed his support for birth control earlier. Moreover, birth control

98. Ross, *Social Peace*, 30, 25-47.

99. Ross, *Social Peace*, 36-37.

100. Edward Ross to Margaret Sanger, October 25, 1921. Reel 14, p 932-933. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969.

advocates may have communicated to the incoming immigrants the use of birth control in order to reduce “blind fecundity,” an issue Ross addressed in *Social Trend*. In these first two methods of social peace, Ross strongly emphasized social policies for improving fertility practices. An idea picked up by birth control advocates as well. Additionally, whereas Ross once stated his fear over exciting Catholics by supporting birth control, his published critiques here indicated that this had become less of an issue for him.

Ross picked up the theme of immigration again later in the book stating, “[the] failure to control immigration and to hold it down to a flow of aliens which this country could assimilate without injury to its ideal and institutions is, in my judgment, the greatest mistake our government has committed within our time.”¹⁰¹ Interestingly, the damage caused by uncontrolled immigration did not “. . . come from an essential inferiority of the immigrants in respect to race fibre . . .” Rather it came from “. . . their unfamiliar[ity] with our language and institutions and ignorant of how to keep from being exploited economically and politically.”¹⁰² Here, Ross articulated a position starkly different than previously stated. Whereas Ross once put the emphasis on the inferiority of the racial make-up of immigrants, here, it is their inability to adapt socially that caused damage to American society. Notably, though, Ross still blamed immigrants for the deterioration of America.

To prevent further deterioration and to solve group conflict, Ross believed America need to concentrate on policies of assimilation. Ross set forth the following principles for successful assimilation: toleration, individualism, worship of progress, voting rights for all, and insistence

101. Ross, *Social Peace*, 48.

102. Ross, *Social Peace*, 49.

on educating the youth. All the principles either deal with America respecting the “old world” customs or immigrants voluntarily or forcibly subjected to aspects central to America.¹⁰³

Strangely, he follows up his principles for assimilation, with principles of avoiding “nationality conflicts” by adding “[we] should concentrate all the discrimination we intend to practice on the alien at our parts of entry. No one should be allowed to come in whose [has] intellectual, moral or cultural deficiencies. . . .”¹⁰⁴ He added that races “visibly distinct from ours” ought to be turned away as well. Ross reasoned that society would not accept the idea of intermarriage between distinct races. Therefore, rather than deal with the social conflict it would be wiser to turn immigrants away. Again, Ross insisted that his reason had nothing to do with a belief in the inferiority of those particular races.¹⁰⁵

Citing as an example, Ross argued that because the US let too many Japanese enter the West, the Ku Klux Klan moved into that area as well. “The spread of . . . the Ku Klux Klan [into the West], chiefly intended to hold in check Jews and Catholics, is a clear indication that the federal government left the gates open too long.”¹⁰⁶ In other words, if the U.S. had closed the ports to the influx of Japanese immigrants long ago, then the spread of the Ku Klux Klan to the West would not have occurred. While Ross at points defended immigrants (a significant shift in its own right) against injustices, immigrants still stood at the center of “injuries” suffered by America. *Social Peace* represented the growing shift in Ross’s position on the validity of eugenics and the benefits of birth control.

103. Ross, *Social Peace*, 54-56.

104. Ross, *Social Peace*, 56-57.

105. Ross, *Social Peace*, 56-60.

106. Ross, *Social Peace*, 63.

On one hand, one cannot overlook Ross's change in rhetoric of the inferiority and superiority of any one particular race, a concept essential to eugenics. On the other hand his rejection of the dichotomy has a lot to do with the biological assumptions about race. He continued to emphasize inferiority in terms of social ineptitude on the part of not only immigrants, but "visibly distinct" races. In other words, the inferiority of a race did not necessarily come from their genetic disposition, but from the long cultivated social disposition. A social disposition that not only differed from the higher class of America, but one might even say still inferior.

With regard to "adaptive fecundity," Ross had feared the inevitability of immigrants reproducing at an alarming rate. Certainly if Ross believed that the rise in group conflicts came from too many of one group entering America, one of the solutions came in the form of "adaptive fecundity." Though Ross favored "adaptive fecundity," he later would change his rhetoric to birth control instead. It suggested that group conflicts might also find aid in the effective reduction of immigrant and "visibly distinct" people's birth rates

On August 28, 1926, Ross wrote to Sanger and explicitly expressed a change in his support of birth control from his previous letters. ". . . I will say that I do think that the time has now arrived when I can identify myself more closely with your work without inflicting harm upon my university." Of the letters between Margaret Sanger and Edward Ross, this letter marked the most poignant shift in his public support of birth control. Ross added ". . . I am willing to serve the League actively when you see some way in which I can do so." Even more enthusiastically, Ross informed Sanger of his current project, a book, mentioned previously, that will ". . . make the most crushing assault upon the enemy which has ever been put out." Presumably Ross referred to *Standing Room Only?*, published in 1927. A month later Ross

requested the assistance from *The American Birth Control League* by sending content of material from the *Sixth International Birth Control Conference* for his book. In previous years Ross had only offered to provide information to birth control advocates, he had never requested.¹⁰⁷

Birth Control as Population Control or Social Control

Ross's *Standing Room Only?* looked at the results of population changes from a non-Malthusian perspective. Ross feared that if the average sized family of old continued, the world risked the potential for over-population because people lived much longer. *Standing Room* purported to tackle this issue directly, indentifying potential means of preventing over-population through various methodologies. As a sociologist, though, Ross believed his responsibility stopped at identification. Implementation belonged to others, not the sociologist. "I insist that what the situation imperatively calls for is 'adaptive fecundity.' Whether this shall be arrived at by fewer marrying, women marrying later, conjugal abstinence, restriction of conjugal intercourse to the (supposedly) 'safe' sector of wife's menstrual period, or by 'contraceptive' measures, is not the sociologist's problem." Yet, Ross stepped out of the role of sociologist and stated "[as] a practical man . . . let me register the conviction that [preventative method] against unwanted children is going to be *contraception* or what is known as 'birth control.'"¹⁰⁸ In the

107. Edward Ross to Margaret Sanger, 28 August 1926. Reel 16, p 408; Edward Ross to Margaret Sanger, 29 September 1926. Reel 16, p 318. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969. See Edward Ross to American Birth Control League, 13 May 1926. Reel 14, p 932-933. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969. In a short note to the ABCL, Ross informed them of a statistical mistake in an article of the *Birth Control Review*. The article caught Ross's attention because he had used the statistic in an unpublished project. After noting the mistake, Ross no longer used it in his book.

108. Ross, *Seventy Years*, 226-228; Weinberg, *Edward Alsworth Ross*, 166-167. See "The Man-Stifled Orient," "Dulling the Scythes of Azrael," "The Old Woman Who lived in a Shoe," *Century Magazine*; "Population Optimism," *Social Forces*; "The Population Boosters," *Journal of Applied Sociology*, "How Fast Can Man Increase?" *Scientific Monthly*; "Deucalion and Company, Ltd.," *The Saturday Evening Post*; "Population Pressure and War," *Scribner's Magazine*. In a letter to his publishers, Ross reiterated that his book did not

end, *Standing Room* argued that current conditions brought on by medical advances negated the necessity of large families. The current conditions, in fact, necessitated reduced family sizes.

The book divided into two sections, internal population and external population. The first section specifically dealt with the internal death and birth rates and their subsequent effect on the population of a give society. The second section dealt specifically with the emigration and the effect it had on population changes in a give society. Chapters I – VII covered an array of statistical data that demonstrated the decrease in the death rate due to medical advances.¹⁰⁹ This argument differs little from his previous arguments in *Social Trend* except in the length and the amount of data provided to support his conclusions. Chapter VIII – IX dealt specifically with the changes in population and the world's food supply.¹¹⁰ In the introduction Ross outlined a formula for determining the conditions for “people's economy.” The growth of population was the first factor and the food supply the second. If the world cannot keep up with the food equal to the population, then the “people's economy” deteriorates.¹¹¹ Chapter X – XVIII dealt specifically with what Ross called “population pressure,” the problem of too many people and too little resources.

Chapter XIX – XXIII dealt with the concept of “adaptive fertility.” Unlike “adaptive fecundity,” which Ross proposed as a method of controlling the birth rate, “adaptive fertility” referenced the conditions for the change in fertility practices through societal changes. Ross, citing a number of statistical data, attributed the change fertility to ten various factors. The factors include economic changes (i.e. cost of raising children, cost of having children, job

just argue for Birth Control. Edward Ross to Lyman B Sturgis, January 26, 1927.

109. Ross, *Standing Room Only?*, 3-83

110. Ross, *Standing Room Only?*, 84-118

111. Ross, *Standing Room Only?*, v-viii

security), social changes (i.e. emancipation of women, decline in church authority, decline in caste system), and finally the implementation of birth control methods (i.e. contraception).¹¹²

Ross goes further and analyzes the specific relationship of “adaptive fertility” to women. Ross attributed changes in fertility practices on the social oppression of women. Whether the embargo of informing women of birth control or standard of involuntary motherhood, Ross believed that to change fertility practices for the better the emancipation of all women must included dissemination of birth control methods to all women. If women continued to fight for economic equality or work place equality without accounting for freedom to choose family size, then the higher class women only benefited. Women of poor status required the ability to limit their family to a manageable size to move beyond their lower class status.¹¹³ In many ways the arguments that Ross articulated were very similar to Margaret Sanger’s. Namely, that there existed a lower and higher class of people and the lack of information on birth control to poor women maintained their lower position. Even more, the suppression of birth control information ensured that their family health did not ever leave the lower position. In fact, many of Ross’s arguments based themselves around a series of letters that Margaret Sanger received from women all over America. *Standing Room Only?* marked the most detailed solidarity with Sanger than had previously been published.¹¹⁴

Ross insisted *Standing Room* offered strong scientific for his conclusions, so when the reviews came out Ross lamented over the criticism that followed. Many of his critics argued that

112. Ross, *Standing Room Only?*, 208-236

113. Ross, *Standing Room Only?*, 240-252

114. See Ross, *Seventy Years*, 257-274; Sanger to Edward Ross, 21 December 1928. Reel 17, p 249; Edward Ross to Margaret Sanger, July 6, 1929. Reel 17, p 346. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969. “I think your book will have the effect of rousing people to the truth that birth control is by no means an academic question, but is a question of human lives and fates.”

Ross foolishly feared problem that would never happen. The way in which reviewers laughed at the validity of *Standing Room* mystified Ross. He concluded that “because their Subconscious *could not bear* to have rigorous scientific thinking applied to the outcome of love and babies!” If Ross did anything worth criticism, he admits that he mistakenly was too alarmist about global over-population.¹¹⁵ By 1936, over ten years after the publication of *Standing Room*, Ross admitted that in the end natural social processes ultimately prevented over-population. Even though he insisted his work offered sound conclusions, the recognition of the alarmist attitude in *Standing Room* starkly differed from the one exhibited at the time of the book’s publication.

On December 7, 1926 Anne Kennedy wrote Ross and sought his advice on a birth control research project. During her review of the *Chicago Birth Control Clinics*, Kennedy discovered that unlike the New York clinics, Chicago gave contraceptives to women on the basis of their economic situation. New York clinics did not offer contraceptives expect for health reasons. With a new Chicago clinic on the way, the administrators desired to perform a scientific study that might aid the birth control movement. Kennedy asked if Ross might suggest a list of questions for their study.¹¹⁶ Ross suggested the following list of questions:

1. Monthly family income.
2. Does the woman contribute to the money income of the family (a) by work at home (b) by work outside the home. If so what is the nature of the work and how much is received.

115. Ross, *Seventy Years*, 228-229

116. Anne Kennedy to Edward Ross, 7 December 1926. Reel 16, p 527. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969. See also Anne Kennedy to Edward Ross, 9 February 1926. Reel 16, p 115; Edward Ross to Anne Kennedy, 23 February 1926. Reel 16, p 127. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969. In her letter to Ross she pressed upon him the importance of responding to an attack on the “principle of Birth Control.” More specifically, an article published by a Dr. Louis Dublin titled “The Fallacious Propaganda for Birth Control.” To which Ross replied that his objections to the article outnumbered the pages allotted in an editorial piece. Rather, as he informed Sanger, his current project carried with it a great weight in settling the objections raised by critics such as Dr. Louse Dublin.

3. Number of rooms in present domicile.
4. Does the family own its home.
5. How much life insurance is carried.
6. Any savings or property.
7. Are adult dependents supported.
8. How many children living and of what age.
9. How many children have died and of what age.¹¹⁷

Between March and July of 1929, a series of letters from Annie G. Porritt to Ross resulted in Ross taking an official role on the editorial board of the *The Birth Control Review*. Annie Porritt held both positions of assistant editor for *The Birth Control Review* and secretary of the *American Birth Control League*. After Sanger resigned as editor of *The Birth Control Review*, the Board Directors of the Birth Control League decided on instituting an editorial board. Anne Porritt, chairman of the newly formed editorial board, along with the board members, she felt that Ross's involvement strengthened the *Review's* position. "The Board of Directors feels that your name and aid would be of very great value to the Review and would help to raise it to a position of pre-eminence among magazines of propaganda."¹¹⁸ Though at first, Ross did not accept her invitation. He stated that having "to many irons in the the fire" prevent him from accepting "any new responsibilities." Following Ross's reluctant letter, Porritt assured him that the position remained his and his responsibilities only extended as far as he decided. "We will try not to expect more from you that you can find time to give, but the feeling that you are one of us will strengthen us for the strenuous effort we are making to produce a magazine that shall be of use to what we consider one of the most important movement of the

117. Edward Ross to Anne Kennedy, 17 December 1926. Reel 16, p 547. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969.

118. Annie G. Porritt to Edward Ross, 21 March 1929. Reel 17, p 278. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969.

present time.” Ross replied, “I will say that I have concluded to agree to go on your editorial board. . .”¹¹⁹

On August 28, 1929, Sanger requested Ross’s endorsement for the *Committee for Federal Legislation on Birth Control*. Prompted by recent strides in the birth control movement, Sanger felt the need to address the matter federally instead of state by state. Specifically, Sanger addressed the illegality of mailing information about birth control.¹²⁰ In a follow up, Sanger informed Ross about a hearing scheduled by the Congressional Judiciary Committee on February 13, 1931. She requested Ross’s attendance to speak directly to the Committee. “I will of course, be only too happy to attend to all your expenses if you will consent to come to Washington.” The importance of the hearing for Sanger signified “a splendid opportunity for us to enlighten some of the members of Congress and now that the ice has been broken it will be much easier to carry on to victory within the next few years.”¹²¹ Sanger’s letter indicated the degree with which she placed Ross’s influence on the success of the birth control movement.

Senator Gillett of Massachusetts introduced the bill that allowed only medical professionals access to imported information and contraception. The hearing involved not only proponents of birth control to address the committee, like Sanger, but also opponents as well. Senator Gillett allowed Sanger fifteen minutes to refute her opponents. “Referring to the argument that restricted families might prevent the birth of great men (viz. Benjamin Franklin,

119. Edward Ross to Anna G. Porritt, 8 July 1929. Reel 17, p 348. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969; Annie G. Porritt to Edward Ross, 10 July 1929. Reel 17, p 352. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969; Annie G. Porritt to Edward Ross, 19 July 1929. Reel 17, p 366. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969; Edward Ross to Annie G. Porritt, 31 July 1929. Reel 17, p 384. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969.

120. Margaret Sanger to Edward Ross, 28 August 1929. Reel 17, p 418. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969.

121. Margaret Sanger to Edward Ross, 24 January 1931. Reel 18, p 54. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969.

10th son of his father, eighth child of his mother), Mrs. Sanger popped out: ‘I call your attention to the fact that the great leader of Christianity, Jesus Christ, was said to be an only child. . .’”

With that statement the hearing ended. Unfortunately, Ross felt an obligation to attend to his classes due to his absences. Ross did give permission to Sanger “[to] quote me as enthusiastically in favor of the bill.” Despite his enthusiastic endorsement, not only did the hearings end abruptly, but the bill died in committee on March 4, 1931¹²²

Not unlike the previous attempt for federal legislation on birth control, Sanger once again requested Ross’s presence at another hearing through a telegram on February 5, 1934. Again, Ross did not attend for health reasons. “Am under doctor’s treatment for rheumatism. Cannot possibly come.” Once again Sanger requested that Ross at least give a statement for the hearing. He replied “[heartily] favor formulating unhindered circulation of authoritative contraceptive information and contraceptives.”¹²³ Certainly his statement reflected a significant ideological change that Ross would not have uttered nearly a decade ago. Ross now advocated birth control openly and publicly. It would be difficult to argue that he still feared retribution for his opinion.

Edward Ross: In Favor of Eugenics, Still?

On September 10, 1926, Ross wrote A. M. Carr-Saunders, a sociologist at the University of Liverpool, eugenicist, and at one time a *Foreign Vice-President* of the *Sixth International*

122. Edward Ross to Margaret Sanger, 27 January 1931. Reel 18, p 65. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969; Kathleen A. Tobin, *The American Religious Debate Over Birth Control, 1907-1937* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2001), 179-182; Time Magazine, “Birth Control Hearing,” Time Magazine, February 23, 1931, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,930381-1,00.html> (accessed April 11, 2009)

123. Margaret Sanger to Edward Ross, 5 February 1934. Reel 20, p 60. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969; Margaret Sanger to Edward Ross, 10 February 1934. Reel 20, p 78. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969.

Neo-Malthusian and Birth Control Conference.¹²⁴ In Ross's letter he thanked Carr-Saunders for sending a copy of *Eugenics*, the newly published book by Carr-Saunders.

I thank you heartily for remembering to send me a copy. The book is a jewel. You have been most cautious and objective and have refrained from allowing your imagination to become incandescent. I am sure your treatment will do much to advance the esteem of eugenics among thoughtful people.¹²⁵

Carr-Saunders's book specifically addressed the debate about environment or biology for eugenics. Discussed earlier, Sanger's incorporation of eugenics stemmed from her relationship with Havelock Ellis, another famed British eugenicist. Yet, as Ellis and Sanger put a premium on the environment in the pursuit of racial betterment, Carr-Saunders emphasized the equal importance of biology and environment. "It is obvious that both an inherited basis and appropriate environmental conditions are necessary."¹²⁶ Keeping with this paradigm, Carr-Saunders suggested both sterilization and birth control for effective means of "racial control."

Like Ross's earlier claim that the upper class tend to adopt the method of adaptive fecundity over the lower class, so did Carr-Saunders claim about birth control. "Knowledge of contraceptive methods is not equally disseminated throughout the population. The 'upper' classes are in general better acquainted with these methods than are the 'lower' classes."¹²⁷ Moreover, that the upper class did not have large families and lower class too large warranted action to change this. Carr-Saunders suggested two legislative solutions. First, women should have access to education and opportunity to enter the work force. According to Carr-Saunders,

124. See Margaret Sanger to Edward Ross, 7 February 1925. Reel 15, p 812. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969. The information noted on the letterhead list A. M. Carr-Saunders among the various *Foreign Vice-Presidents*.

125. Edward Ross to A. M. Carr-Saunders, 10 September 1926. Reel 16, p 415. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969.

126. A. M Carr-Saunders, *Eugenics* (London: Thornton Butterworth Ltd, 1926), 11, 9-28.

127. Carr-Saunders, *Eugenics*, 244.

women educated and working “tend to reduce the birth-rate.” The second legislative solution included making contraceptives available to everyone equally. Yet, Carr-Saunders insisted that legislation did not solve everything. “[It] is rather to a change of attitude towards social duties and obligations that we must look for a remedy. . . .”¹²⁸

Though Carr-Saunders advocated social solutions for “racial control,” he also advocated the use of sterilization to reduce undesirable people. A simple procedure, according to Carr-Saunders, sterilization effectively reduced defective genes from continuing. “It is evident that not only could the increase of persons with particular defects be stopped [by sterilization], but the strains bearing these defects might in time be eliminated altogether from the population.”¹²⁹

Though Ross took up the matter of birth-control in *Standing Room Only?* one year later, he made no reference to sterilization. It is difficult to determine whether Ross agreed entirely with Carr-Saunders assessment on using sterilization, but it is notable that Ross heaped so much praise on a book that supported sterilization.

On September 1, 1927 Leon F. Whitney, the executive secretary of the *American Eugenics Society*, requested Ross’s opinion on eugenics. Whitney planned to put a collection of “eminent persons”’ responses on a pamphlet. Ross responded with the following statement.

Interest in eugenics is almost a perfect index of one’s breadth of outlook and unselfish concern for the future of our race. There is no doubt that a truly angelic society could be built up on earth with a people as gifted and well dispositioned as the best five per cent among us. ‘Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.’ Any thoughtful man is thrilled by what might happen from changing the proportion of higher and lower types in the population.¹³⁰

128. Carr-Saunders, *Eugenics*, 250, 244-252.

129. Carr-Saunders, *Eugenics*, 240, 239-243.

130. Leon F. Whitney to Edward Ross, 1 September 1927. Reel 16, p 849; Edward Ross to Leon F. Whitney, 22 September 1927. Reel 16, p 861. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969

Ross certainly offered a favorable opinion of eugenics, but not a clear opinion on the various methodologies implemented to achieve eugenic principles. Near the end of 1927 the Supreme Court ruled compulsory sterilization legal and according to Justice Holmes, necessary.¹³¹

Sterilization Laws: The Pinnacle of Eugenic Advocacy

In 1907 Indiana successfully passed the first sterilization law in America. Generally, reception of the new law was favorable.¹³² Only several years earlier Michigan attempted to pass a similar law. In 1897, the Michigan law included castration and never made it passed. In 1905, Pennsylvania pushed a law that made it through the legislative houses, but the Governor vetoed it. Within a year's time, the new Governor of Indiana rescinded the sterilization law. Even though Indiana had stopped, many states continued to adopt compulsory sterilization laws so that by 1935 a total of twenty six states had adopted some form of the law. Yet, before so many states adopted a sterilization law, a case of much more significance arose.¹³³

On October 19, 1927, Carrie Buck suffered a "state-sanctioned" procedure performed by Dr. John H. Bell. By 1927, already 8,500 Americans succumbed to the sterilization procedure.¹³⁴ The Supreme Court ruled Carrie's sterilization both constitutional and necessary to prevent a continuation of "her kind" making her case the nationalized standard for states that continued to adopt compulsory sterilization legislation. In 1927, Aubrey Strode successfully wrote a bill for compulsory sterilization that passed in Virginia Senate and House of Delegates, of which

131. For a full list of letters from prominent eugenicist to Ross see Weinberg, *Edward Alsworth Ross*, 160-165.

132. Carlson, *The Unfit*, 211-212, 217-218.

133. Carlson, *The Unfit*, 218-222.

134. Bruinius, *All the World*, 11.

Carrie's case challenged.¹³⁵ A positive decision by the Supreme Court ensured state compulsory sterilization laws stood up to any potential judiciary objections.¹³⁶ Carrie's case occurred at a time of heightened eugenical authority in the public and scientific spheres, making her case one with little chance of being overturned.¹³⁷

In 1906 Carrie Buck was born to Emma Buck. After shortly giving birth to Carrie, Emma's husband Frank left forcing Emma into prostitution to support herself and Carrie. In 1910, at the age of four, the state removed Carrie Buck from her mother's care and placed her in the care of the Dobbs's family. Emma Buck eventually died of pneumonia April 15, 1944 at the Virginia Colony of Epileptics and Feeble-minded.¹³⁸ In 1923 Carrie Buck became pregnant by the Dobbs's nephew when he forced himself on her. The Dobbs's requested that Carrie go to the same Virginia colony her mother lived. The state having already declared her mother legally feeble-minded easily classified Carrie as feeble-minded too.¹³⁹ In 1927, the Supreme Court heard the case, known as *Buck v. Bell*, with Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. writing the majority opinion. Justice Holmes stated, "[it] is better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or to let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind."¹⁴⁰ Shortly after, Carrie had her fallopian tubes cut and cauterized.

In February 1930, Guy Irving Burch, director of the American Eugenics Society and eventual vice-president of the AES, wrote Ross to update him on the newly established Population

135. Bruinius, *All the World*, 58.

136. Carlson, *The Unfit*, 218-222.

137. Carlson, 135.

138. Carlson, 27-29, 40-42, 49.

139. Carlson, 50-53.

140. Holmes quoted in Bruinius, 71-72.

Reference Bureau. Burch also presided over the Bureau as the executive secretary. Burch regularly wrote for the *Birth Control Review* as a strong supporter for birth control. Burch reasoned that birth control prevented the “alien or Negro stock” from replacing Americans. Burch also argued fervently for anti-immigration laws for the same reason he supported birth control.¹⁴¹ The letter sent to Ross informed him that Henry P. Fairchild and Dr. Clarence C. Little accepted the offices of President and Secretary Treasurer, respectively. During this time Fairchild also held the presidency of the AES, while Little held a seat on the board of directors of the AES.¹⁴²

In one of the first orders of business, Burch wrote to Ross about possibly writing a response to issues concerning immigration, of which the Senate was considering. The specific issues outlined by Burch “. . . not only concern[ed] national origins, but (2) the registration of aliens, (3) Western Hemisphere restrictions, (4) alien deportation, (5) selection within quotas, and (6) a gradual reduction of total immigration . . .” Burch also requested “[a] few words concerning birth regulation as the real remedy for overpopulation in European countries. . . .”¹⁴³ Burch, a few weeks later, responded to a letter from Ross missing from the *Ross papers*. Inferred from Burch’s letter, Ross had reservations about the “registration of aliens.” Burch believed that this aspect of immigration reform was essential and ardently tried to convince Ross of its importance.¹⁴⁴

141. Gordon, *Women’s Body*, 283.

142. Gordon, *Women’s Body*, 283; Guy Irving Burch to Edward Ross, 19 February 1930. Reel 17, p 657-658. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969

143. Guy Irving Burch to Edward Ross, 4 May 1930. Reel 17, p 787. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969

144. Guy Irving Burch to Edward Ross, 22 May 1930. Reel 17, p 813-814. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969

Having once gone on record saying “. . . it would be better for us to train our guns on every vessel bringing Japanese to our shores rather than to permit them to land. . . . ,”¹⁴⁵ Ross’s questioning on the right of registering aliens marked a significant shift. Still, Ross felt conflicted about the issue and wrote Harry F. Ward, chairman of the *American Civil Liberties Union* about his advice on the issue. “. . . I believe [the ACLU is] against the registration of aliens in this country. On the other hand the population group with which I work are for such registration.” Ross added, “. . . I am sorry to trouble you but I am torn between the attitudes of two groups in both of who I have complete confidence.”¹⁴⁶

Ward was unable to reply. So instead, one the directors, Forrest Bailey, replied on Ward’s behalf. While admitting that the concern for tracking illegal immigrants had validity, the ACLU did not support any kind of registration based on discrimination. The official ACLU position “has been that aliens who are here should be treated as citizens are treated, so far as civil rights are concerned.”¹⁴⁷ It is unclear whether Ross supported this position or stood with the Population Bureau. Even that Ross initially sought advice on the matter significantly differed from his previous attitude towards immigration registration.

On December 23, 1931 Ross received a letter from the famed eugenicist Harry H. Laughlin. At the time Laughlin wrote on behalf of the *Third International Congress of Eugenics*, of which he was secretary. In his letter he asked Ross to present any “. . . publications, diagrams,

145. Weinberg, *Edward Alsworth Ross*, 55

146. Edward Ross to Harry F. Ward, May 27, 1930. Reel 17, p 820. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969. In 1921 Ross joined the ACLU, in 1925 member of the national committee, and eventually chairman of the ACLU in 1940 to 1950. Weinberg, *Edward Alsworth Ross*, 213-217.

147. Forrest Bailey to Edward Ross, May 31, 1930. Reel 17, p 657. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969

charts, or other material appropriate for display. . . .” at the conference.¹⁴⁸ Ross replied that he had nothing to exhibit, but that “[if] Dr. Baber cares to work up a display of the findings brought out in our joint monograph, he will have my blessing.”¹⁴⁹ By no means does this suggest that Ross was an ardent supporter of eugenics, but his relationship to prominent eugenicists and the eugenics movement continued if not overlapped his work with birth control advocates.¹⁵⁰

Edward Ross: Reflections and Observations

Around 1926 Ross had begun a shift in his support of birth control by evidence of his participation with the ABCL.¹⁵¹ Whereas he once resisted publicly supporting the birth control movement, by 1927 Ross had financially and publicly supported the movement. By 1934, Ross served the movement and supported their legislative pursuits. Yet, during this time Ross continued to work with many eugenicists as well as the eugenics movement. It is difficult to determine the depth in which Ross participated in the eugenics movement by the early 1930s, but it is clear that his participation with the birth control movement significantly grew.

One would do well to remember that birth control advocates utilized eugenical data and arguments. In fact, as one scholar argued, birth control may not have achieved public support

148. H. H. Laughlin to Edward Ross, 23 December 1931. Reel 17, p 698. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969

149. Edward Ross to H. H. Laughlin, 2 January 1932. Reel 17, p 823. Edward A. Ross Papers, 1859-1969

150. See also Guy Irving Burch to Edward Ross, 6 December 1930. Reel 17, p 1062; C. P. Ives to Edward Ross, 29 April 1931. Reel 18, p 358-359; Edward Ross to C. P. Ives, 8 May 1931. Reel 18, p 375; Henry P. Fairchild to Edward Ross, 19 January 1934. Reel 20, p 6; Edward Ross to Henry P. Fairchild, 22 January 1934. Reel 20, p 20; Henry P. Fairchild to Edward Ross, 29 January 1934. Reel 20, p 35

151. Edward Ross to Margaret Sanger, August 28, 1926; Edward Ross to Margaret Sanger, September 29, 1926.

unless they had supported aspects of the eugenics movement.¹⁵² Again, Sanger believed that eugenics benefitted the public by identifying desirable traits, aiding in racial betterment. It is unclear whether Ross shared the same opinion, but we can infer from his letter to Whitney that he believed a superior class existed. Moreover, that eugenics provided a means of elevating the superior class to the benefit of a given society. In his letter to Carr-Saunders we see Ross's support of a eugenics project that embraced the importance of environmental factors in developing a better quality human race. One biography characterized this period as an embrace of liberalism represented by his support of birth control and a rejection of the xenophobic eugenicist.¹⁵³ No doubt that Ross embraced birth control or that he moved away from his once strong position on the matter of race. Even so, one is hard pressed to say that Ross had rejected eugenics altogether.

In his autobiography published in 1937, Ross reflected upon his numerous experiences as a "serious student of society," culminating into a world view. In his reflection, Ross made a point of telling the reader that his perception of race had drastically changed. "*Difference of race* means far less to me now than once it did."¹⁵⁴ Ross admitted that at the beginning of his work, he assumed the supremacy of his own race over all others. Through his numerous trips overseas and diligent study of those societies, Ross's stated that he grew to overcome racial barriers. Furthermore, Ross admitted that at one time he believed in the Nordic Myth and that for significant part of his life people either belong to the superior class or inferior based on their cultural background. In each of these cases, Ross insisted that he categorically rejected them. In

152. McCann, *Birth Control Politics*, 119

153. Weinberg, *Edward Alsworth Ross*, 167-168.

154. Ross, *Seventy Years*, 276.

the closest *mea culpa*, Ross stated that he “rued” his onetime reference to immigrants as “beaten members of beaten breeds.”¹⁵⁵

Even though Ross lamented about his previous statements on race, his following example about “Negroes in the New World” suggested he still believed in the dichotomy of inferior and superior. Ross offered as an explanation for inferiority attributed to Negroes, that due to geographical separation from the Ice Age and the hot climate of Africa, they became best suited for slave work. When brought over to America, stripped of their African culture, they were exploited as slaves. Thus, having been freed, their inferiority came from a “slave heritage” unlikely to change for a long time. “In the meantime, the palpable backwardness of most of them will continue to be interpreted as proof as their mental inferiority. Actually, we cannot yet be sure how this race compares in mental endowment with our own.”¹⁵⁶

At the end of Ross’s autobiography, He included a study done November 1934 by Charlotte Gower, Assistant Professor of Physical Anthropology at University of Wisconsin (1930-1938) about Ross’s physical properties. Her measurements included characteristics like stature, sitting height, height of head, average facial diameter, etc. Comparing Ross to the “Harvard men of his own generation,” Ross exceeded the standard height at 6’6.2”. “Dr. Ross is exceptionally tall . . . when compared with the tallest members of the white race. . . . he corresponds very well to the Nordic type.”¹⁵⁷

Even here, when Ross offers the most poignant regret for his emphasis on the physical make-up of persons as determining factor for the quality of persons they might have been, he

155. Ross, *Seventy Years*, 276-277.

156. Ross, *Seventy Years*, 277-278.

157. Ross, *Seventy Years*, “Appendix”; Robert E. Mattingly, “Herringbone Cloak - GI Dagger: Marines of the OSS,” HyperWar Foundation, <http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USMC/USMC-OSS/index.html#index1> (accessed May 3, 2009).

includes data that suggest that biology held significant weight. So much so that he thought including data in his biography was important to his story. No, though Ross claimed to reject racial factors, the physical aspect of a person still held matter. Only rather than blaming the inadequacies of a particular group on their biology, Ross saw, like Sanger, social elements determined the quality of a person. Ross may have rejected the inferiority and superiority dichotomy essential to eugenics when it came to a person's biology, but not when it came to their sociological make-up. Like Sanger, Ross shift in thought for implementing a series of social policies, birth control among them, to change the differential for increasing superior persons. Therefore Ross's shift from teetering on the biological and sociological elements of racial betterment was a shift to only seeking a sociological means of producing and promoting a superior class of people.

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