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## Study examines disproportionate effect of eugenics on NC's Black population - The Cincinnati Herald

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*Did North Carolina economically breed-out Blacks during its historical eugenic sterilization campaign?*

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DURHAM, N.C. – A sordid element of North Carolina's history is its eugenics program, which authorized sterilization of many citizens throughout much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

A new Duke University study shows that the eugenics program's disproportionate effect on Black citizens was no accident: Instead, the program was designed explicitly to "breed out" nonworking Black residents.

"This suggests that for Blacks, eugenic sterilizations were authorized and administered with the aim of reducing their numbers in the future population — genocide by any other name," the authors state.

The paper, titled, "Did North Carolina Economically Breed-Out Blacks During its Historical Eugenic Sterilization Campaign?" was the result of research by Gregory N. Price, an economics professor at the University of New Orleans; William A. Darity Jr.; and Rhonda V. Sharpe, the founder and president of the Women's Institute for Science, Equity, and Race.

*Gregory N. Price*

The authors studied reports from the North Carolina Eugenics Board from 1958 to 1968, a period in which more than 2,100 authorized sterilizations occurred across the state's 100 counties. They found that sterilization rates were much higher in counties with higher numbers of nonworking Black residents.

Economists sometimes refer to citizens who are not part of the labor force and who may require government assistance as "surplus population."

The authors found between 1958 and 1968, local rates of sterilization increased with the size of a county's "surplus population" – but only if that population was Black. This pattern did not hold true for other racial groups, suggesting that only the Black population was presumed by the eugenics program to be inferior.

*Rhonda V. Sharpe*

The authors say this suggests that a motivation behind state-sanctioned sterilizations in North Carolina was to minimize welfare expenditures triggered by poverty, and eugenic sterilization served as a strategy to minimize expenditures on poverty abatement that would sustain individuals who are presumably genetically unfit and unproductive.

The authors report that eugenic sterilizations increased significantly with the size of a county's surplus Black population in a majority of the specifications. Moreover, a county's White surplus population share is never significant. For Native Americans, increases in their surplus population are positive and significant in two instances for institutional sterilizations. Interestingly, for other racial groups, increases in their population share have a negative and significant effect on the number of institutional sterilizations. Nonetheless, the surplus Black population is solely positive and significant in approximately 67 percent of the specifications, suggesting that in North Carolina, from 1959-1968 eugenic sterilization policies were aimed at eradicating an undesirable surplus Black population.

"The United Nations official definition of genocide includes 'imposing measures to prevent births within a (national, ethnically, racial or religious) group,' " says co-author William A. Darity Jr., a professor of public policy, African and African American Studies and economics at Duke University. "North Carolina's disproportionate use of eugenic sterilization on its Black citizens was an act of genocide."

#### *Historical marker about eugenics in South Carolina*

In 1929 the North Carolina General Assembly authorized the governing body or executive head of any penal or charitable public institution to sterilize any patient or inmate when it was determined to be in the individual's and/or public's best interest. At the local level, county boards of commissioners were authorized to order the sterilization, at public expense, of any individual determined to be mentally defective or feeble-minded upon receiving a petition from the individual's next of kin or legal guardian.

The Eugenics Board of North Carolina was formally established in 1937 by the General Assembly to review petitions for the sterilization of individuals, and authorized any state hospital to charge appropriate local jurisdictions for sterilization expenses, and North Carolina introduced the nation's first state-supported birth control program. The authors note that unlike those in other states, the North Carolina sterilization law also allowed local welfare officials to submit sterilization petitions for their clients. As such, the scope of North Carolina's eugenic sterilization law extended directly to recipients of public welfare.

The Executive Organization Act of 1971 transferred the Eugenics Board of North Carolina to the North Carolina Department of Human Resources. The governor-appointed secretary of the Department of Human Resources exercised managerial and executive oversight over sterilization petitions and proceedings of the Eugenics Board. In 1973, the Eugenics Board was reorganized and became the North Carolina Eugenics Commission. In 1974, the North Carolina General Assembly transferred responsibility for sterilization proceedings to the state judicial system. In 1977 the state formally abolished the North Carolina Eugenics Commission.

#### *Historical marker about eugenics in Virginia*

The authors add that their historical inquiry contributes to the literature on the historical role of coercion and violence in economic and political compulsion, particularly as it relates to Black Americans. For example, lynchings and the threat of lynchings, were utilized to control the supply of Black labor (Christian, 2017), Black voting (Jones, Troesken, and Walsh, 2017), and Black housing/residential choices (Cook, Logan, and Parman, 2018).

They note that, "Nazi Germany, appealing to eugenic theories, used forced sterilizations on the offspring of Black men and White German women, presumably to reduce the population share of Blacks in Germany (Haas, 2008). Our inquiry adds eugenic sterilization to the historical arsenal of possible methods used to control the size of the Black population in the United States.

"Our findings also have policy implications. As genetic technologies such as Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats (CRISPR) have emerged with the potential to improve human reproductive health, our results suggest that any health policies that emerge based on innovations such as CRISPR could have racially biased effects. Given North Carolina's past abuse of genetics as a factor determining reproductive health outcomes, future genetic-based reproductive health policies across the United States could result in additional racially dystopic (or "Brave New World") outcomes and further reductions in trust by Black Americans in genetic-based health reproductive health options. In general, our results cohere with Weinbaum (2013), who emphasizes how reproductive health policies can lead to the exploitation of the reproductive body and reproductive processes based upon the demands of a race-based capitalism.

#### *Historical marker about eugenics in Indiana*

"Controlling Black bodies and their reproductive choices is nothing new," says co-author Sharpe. "Our study shows that North Carolina restricted reproductive freedom, using eugenics to disenfranchise Black residents."

The article appears online in the American Review of Political Economy.