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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Wendy Kline. *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. x + 218 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-520-22502-2.

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Published on H-Disability (August, 2002)

Sex, Gender, and American Eugenics

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In this bold re-interpretation of American eugenics, Wendy Kline challenges three deeply-held assumptions about the movement's history in the United States. First, she criticizes the standard view that negative eugenics measures to reduce the "unfit" (e.g., sterilization) achieved more success than the positive eugenics campaign to increase reproduction among the "fit." Second, she criticizes the narrow definition of eugenics as a hereditarian science. Third, she argues that eugenics did not decline in the 1930s and 1940s as most historians have thought. In fact, the movement grew more influential because eugenicists adopted a new strategy: promoting the procreation of the fit. The positive eugenics campaign of the 1930s paved the way for the "golden age" of eugenics during the baby boom of the 1950s.

Building a Better Race is the first book to approach the history of U.S. eugenics from a gender perspective, and it brings little-noticed continuities between early twentieth-century eugenics and the pro-natalist culture of the baby boom into view. Kline analyzes a wide assortment of sources, including novels, women's magazines, scientific treatises, a pageant at the 1915 Panama Pacific Exposition, and the records of a state institution, to show that eugenics was a powerful cultural ideal throughout the twentieth century. Kline argues forcefully that eugenics has been central to modern ideas about gender, sexuality, and the family, although readers of H-Disability will be disappointed by the absence of disability in her analysis.

Kline begins her study by charting the rise of eugenics in response to progressive-era anxieties about "race suicide" and moral disorder. Eugenicists coped with women's new sexual expressiveness and the decline of Victorian "civilized morality" by promoting a new concept, "reproductive morality," which urged parents to make reproductive decisions based on a consideration of their offspring's impact on the race. Framing motherhood as "an exclusive privilege rather than an inherent right" (p. 2), they drew a sharp distinction between the white middle-class "mother of tomorrow," who symbolized race progress, and the promiscuous and overly fertile "moron" who threatened racial destruction.

The book's middle chapters focus on the emergence of sterilization as a solution to the problem of female sexuality. Kline traces changing ideas about sexual morality and reproduction through discussions of the Sonoma [California] State Home for the Feeble-Minded; the writings of gynecologist and birth controller Robert Latou Dickinson; and the popular press coverage of a sensational 1936 trial that has been largely ignored by historians. Ann Cooper Hewitt, a young heiress, sued her mother and two surgeons for sterilizing her without her knowledge. The mother justified the operation on the grounds that Ann was oversexed and mentally deficient, but the young woman's supporters condemned the sterilization as an attempt by an abusive mother to deprive her daughter of her inheritance (Ann's late father's will

stipulated that his estate would revert to Mrs. Hewitt if their daughter died childless). Kline insightfully shows how the press placed two "bad" mothers–one actual, the other potential–on trial. She sees the highly publicized case, which ended in favor of the defendant, as significant because it established the principle that personal liberty should be sacrificed for the common good and "popularize[d] sterilization as a moral solution to the problem of female sexuality" (p. 121).

The shift from a culture of individualism to a culture of responsibility, which Kline sees as an important outcome of the Cooper Hewitt trial, was also fostered by the decade's positive eugenics campaign. Eugenicists such as Robert Latou Dickinson, psychologist Lewis Terman (who designed a widely-used intelligence test and a test to measure masculinity and femininity), and Paul Popenoe (a sterilization advocate who became a celebrated marriage counselor) expressed a growing interest in marriage, family stability, and heterosexuality in the 1930s. Their positive eugenics strategy, which emphasized home and environment, rather than heredity, allowed eugenics to attain "a greater degree of cultural authority than ever before" (p. 100). The positive eugenics campaign of the 1930s thus paved the way for the triumph of eugenics in the baby boom.

Kline's provocative re-reading of eugenics raises important questions for historians. First is the dilemma of definition. Kline rightly criticizes an overly narrow definition that equates all of eugenics with negative eugenics and Nazi extremism, but some readers will find her definition to be too broad. For example, many of the values she associates with eugenics–such as the good mother/bad mother dichotomy, the belief in marriage and motherhood as a central goal of womanhood, and even the concept of reproductive morality (that parenthood is not a "right" and should be entered into responsibly because it has implications for the entire society)–have deep roots in American culture and religious traditions. Kline's arguments about gender and the adaptability of eugenics are important, but without analyses of race, disability, and negative eugenics in the 1950s, they cannot answer crucial questions, such as how much modification eugenics doctrine can withstand before it loses its core principles and is no longer "eugenics." A second question the book raises is how to measure the movement's influence. Kline rightly points out the continuities in the thought and actions of prominent individuals like Terman and Popenoe (and Popenoe's son David), but the extent to which other Americans embraced their eugenic beliefs remains obscure. Moreover, while Kline's analysis of the Cooper Hewitt trial and focus on California are welcome–after all, the trial received tremendous publicity and more sterilizations were performed in California than in any other state–the extent to which they are representative is open to debate. For these reasons and many others, *Building a Better Race* deserves a wide readership. Scholars will debate Wendy Kline's captivating arguments about the centrality of eugenics to modern ideas about gender, sexuality, and the family for many years to come.

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Citation: Molly Ladd-Taylor. Review of Kline, Wendy, *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom.* H-Disability, H-Net Reviews. August, 2002.

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