Research Highlights

Topic: Disability Policy


**BOTTOM LINE**

This article summarizes the major events and individuals that influenced the rise of eugenics in the United States (the forced sterilization of people with developmental disabilities, mental illness, intellectual disabilities or those considered harmful to society).

**KEY FINDINGS**

- The man most closely aligned with the rise of the American eugenics movement was Charles Davenport, founder of the Eugenics Foundation. Other leading proponents were Ezra Gosney and Paul Popenoe, both affiliated with the Human Betterment Foundation in California.

- Many states launched sterilization programs before they were legal.

- The Supreme Court ruling of *Buck vs. Bell* in 1927 represents a watershed in the history of eugenics. This ruling upheld Virginia’s 1924 law permitting sterilization of people with mental illness, developmental disabilities, and other disorders.

- By 1938 several states enforced involuntary sterilization programs for people with developmental disabilities, mental illness, and/or other disabilities. These states included (shown with the number of individuals sterilized): California (12,180); Virginia (2,916); Kansas (1,915); Michigan (1,815); Minnesota (1,459); and Oregon (1,218).
KEY FINDINGS cont.

• On May 2, 2002, Virginia Governor Mark Warner formally apologized for Virginia’s participation in eugenics, an involvement he called “a shameful effort in which state government never should have been involved.” His statement was issued on the 75th anniversary of *Buck vs. Bell*.

METHOD

• The article was researched through a review of literature, state and federal law, and historical documents.

RELATED PUBLICATIONS


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