

A Commentary with Recommendations: The Faith & Action Project and the Christian Theological Seminary

“The task force believes the cause of poverty is like an airplane’s 2 wings: one wing represents the decisions individuals make; the other wing represents all the systemic issues enabling poverty.”

-- The Southeast Working-Class Task Force, 2016

Faith & Action Project

April 7, 2019

Summary Past Hoosier events consist of those possibly affecting how the Faith & Action Project involves the very under-resourced residents they intend to help. This commentary argues the legacy of Eugenics in Indiana lingers in the shadows of doubt as to the discretion and wherewithal of the poor to be partners and/or leaders in the eradication of the poverty the face daily. The proposal suggests a deconstruction and critical analysis of the past will reveal possible subtle reasons why the Project has not involved actual poor people more directly in planning, advising, board membership, or producing spring/fall events and communications more convenient and respectful of the circumstances of poverty the poor endure. Establishing an accountable truth and reconciliation commission is recommended.

A local history of poverty: Eugenics, Politics, Indiana, Indianapolis, Butler University...

Below is the link to a PowerPoint (“A local history of poverty: Eugenics, Politics, Indiana, Indianapolis, Butler University...”) I composed and shared with Lindsey Rabinowitch last November. Centering on Indiana’s 1907 Eugenics law--the world’s first--and certain people and events that took place in Indianapolis, the presentation intends to spur discussions around the possible influences of these past local matters on the Faith & Action Project (F&AP). See more on Eugenics here: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/eugenics-crusade/>

As F&AP moves forward into the third decade of the 21st century, in order to ameliorate the consequences of poverty and effectuate sustainability, the Southeast Working-Class Task Force (SEW-CTF) argues that F&AP must complement and supplement its anti-poverty initiatives by holding up a mirror to the past and dismantling the relevant Hoosier history reflected.

Without deconstructing our past regarding how we Hoosiers contributed to the circumstances of poverty, we will not appreciate how this legacy lingers today, not in direct policy statements, but in public dispositions about the poor, who they are, and why they are poor. See the Appendix (p. 5) for a critique (with recommendations) around how F&AP understand/describes the issues and the words and definitions it uses to describe itself on its website.

"That eugenics moved so quickly from its Indiana start to its eventual status as a mainstream nationwide movement is a very unsettling fact that the book's contributors display for all to see."

-- Susan Currell and Christina Cogdell, *Popular Eugenics National Efficiency and American Mass Culture in the 1930s*

Indiana systematizes the "unfit": Hoosiers codify normalcy

The Eugenics movement introduced the idea of normalcy and its 2 by-products (human inferiority/superiority) into popular culture. Placing blame on individual races and classes, freed industrial, scientific, political, economic, social, cultural, educational, or religious systems from any culpability for societal problems.

[Popular Eugenics: National Efficiency and American Mass Culture in the 1930s by Susan Currell and Christina Cogdell](#) Reviewed by Jason S. Lantzer

In Indiana and Indianapolis, the 1907 Eugenics theme/desire for improving people led to the idea of "improving" poor people (Katz, 1995); that the problem with the poor is they just needed to be "improved" with the insinuated corollary that some could not be improved because they were genetically "unfit" and that this defectiveness was a cause to their poverty. Consequently, sterilization was a logical option for a better society.

Deceitful paupers or worthy poor?

As in the past, the attitude that poverty results from individual "character flaws" subtly manifests in current dispositions/policies that may unwittingly distinguish between the deserving and the undeserving poor. Read about Indy's own Rev. McCulloch and his efforts to organize charities, actions which were the precursor to today's United Way. See more in the reference section on p. 6.

"Deceitful paupers or worthy poor? McCulloch and charity reform"

[The Measure of Worthiness The Rev. Oscar McCulloch and the Pauper Problem 1877-1891](#) by Brent Ruswick

Getting something for nothing: Our American ethos

Ala Carl Jung's concept of the shadow, we have many US citizens projecting their shadows onto the poor. We forget America is all about getting something for nothing: we stole the land from the Native Americans; we built our economy on the backs of kidnapped and enslaved Africans; the Irish dug our canals and along with the Chinese built our railroads and in each case for practically nothing. Today much of our produce is picked by farm workers making minimal wages so we can have fresh vegetables and fruits at quite reasonable prices: 5lbs of Red Delicious apples \$5.92/celery \$1.58 per stalk. Yes, America is all about "getting over." We just can't admit it. So, we suspect others.

"When I feed the poor, they call me a saint, but when I ask why the poor are hungry, they call me a communist." -- Dom Helder Camara

Understanding "The Poor Will Always Be With You" with Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis
<https://kairoscenter.org/understanding-the-poor-will-always-be-with-you/>

Religion and poverty

Looking back we can see the relationships between religion and Eugenics, and how the Protestants, particularly, used religion to justify their ideology and policies around human nature.

[When Slavery Was Called Freedom: Evangelicalism, Proslavery, and the Causes of the Civil War by John Patrick Daly](#) Reviewed by John R. McKivigan.

[Preaching Eugenics: Religious Leaders and the American Eugenics Movement by Christine Rosen](#) Reviewed by Angela Lahr.

Today, religion and poverty are still correlated. In "More Poverty = More Religion" writer Barry Ritholtz (2010) notes:

"Religion has a surprisingly high correlation with poverty, according to a Gallup survey conducted in more than 100 countries. The more poverty a nation has, the higher the 'religiosity' in that nation. In general, richer countries are less religious than poorer ones. The biggest exception? The United States, which has the highest religiosity relative to its wealth on the planet."

Prosperity theology and its unintended consequence

In addition, the long history and present manifestation of "prosperity theology" links material progress with moral virtue: economic inequalities come as a consequence of the personal failings of the underclass.

Here's the problem

Perhaps due to their social standing, F&AP staff and advisory board may lack daily interactions with the poor. So, in spite of their cosmopolitan character and professional backgrounds, board members may have a suspicion (albeit unconscious) that poverty is caused by the subaltern's lack of/effort for developing their human capital.

Or, let's look at it this way*

From the perspective of the SEW-CTF, our Indiana's Eugenics legacy stealthily pervades the policy (orientation and programming) of the F&AP because *though not stated as such, the insinuation is* it just isn't necessary to have: 1) yearly spring conferences and other events convenient (time of day/location/day of the week) for the poor to attend; 2) a parallel advisory board made up of under-

resourced citizens; 3) three members of this parallel board be on F&AP's advisory board; 4) the monthly newsletter respect the communication styles of under-resourced citizens; and, 5) F&AP support/help facilitate the self-organizing of under-resourced people so they can control their own destiny.

And why isn't it necessary?: 1) Indy's poor need to be at work keeping out of poverty or at school, or out looking for work, not attending meetings; ** 2) Indy's poor don't have the discretion to be advising at this level; 3) the advisory board F&AP has is sufficient to do the job--one that's best left to professionals and members of local polite society who can volunteer; 4) the monthly newsletter is not for the poor, it's for "leaders"/professionals who analyze them; 5) let's be honest, under-resourced citizens need the assistance of the wealthy/successful, educated, powerful, and benevolent "who's who" of Indy's non-poor to change their circumstances of poverty because again—the poor obviously can't do it themselves: "If they could, they wouldn't be poor in the first place, right?"

*Please excuse the sarcasm. I took some dramatic license to use a rhetorical device to make a point.

** Not having conferences/events advantageous to the poor sends a message to them that although they will be analyzed, they are not welcome.

A week of recognition and reconciliation

The Southeast Working-Class Task Force proposes a week (7 days) of recognition and reconciliation activities around those parts of local Hoosier history enabling social/economic injustice some of which are exposed in the PowerPoint "A local history of poverty: Eugenics, Politics, Indiana, Indianapolis, Butler University..." <http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Issues-of-poverty-and-social-justice-Indiana-Indianapolis-Butler-University-.ppt>.

Unpacking Hoosier history will inform our conscience and give us the moral foundation to realize our Eugenics past enables implicit biases which influence people to believe the cause of poverty arises from a person's/group's genetic makeup and consequent socio-cultural deficiencies.

*Faith & Action cannot really get anywhere until the project **discredits and abandons worldviews** perpetuating the myth the poor are incapable of self-organizing and helping themselves ease and erase poverty.*

John Harris Loflin
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APPENDIX

Re-wording F&AP's description

SEW-CTF also suggests additions and changes in wording in the 2nd paragraph explaining the Faith & Action Project as stated on this link <https://www.cts.edu/faith-action-project>.

"The Faith & Action Project at Christian Theological Seminary is dedicated to helping to spark a revolution of hope by bringing together faith communities, nonprofit organizations and leaders in business and government in a collaborative effort to turn back the tide of poverty."

Please consider the changes in bold. These revisions/additions can make the F&AP more inclusive and influence the organization to consider what under-resourced people want and not just what others want for them.

*The Faith & Action Project at Christian Theological Seminary is dedicated to helping to spark a revolution of hope by bringing together **under-resourced residents**, faith communities, nonprofit organizations and leaders in **labor**, business, and government, in a collaborative effort **to ease and eradicate** poverty.*

References

Katz, M. (1995). *Improving for people: the welfare state, the "underclass," and urban schools as history*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Ritholtz, B. (2010). More Poverty = More Religion. The Big Picture.
<https://ritholtz.com/2010/09/religions-correlation-with-poverty/>

Articles

[Recasting the Tribe of Ishmael The Role of Indianapolis's Nineteenth- Century Poor in Twentieth-Century Eugenics](#) by Elsa F. Kramer

[Improving Hoosiers: Indiana and the Wide Scope of American Eugenics](#)
by Alexandra Minna Stern

The Eugenics movement in Indiana

["We Cannot Make a Silk Purse Out of a Sow's Ear": Eugenics in the Hoosier Heartland](#) by Alexandra Minna Stern

[Inventing America's "Worst" Family: Eugenics, Islam, and the Fall and Rise of the Tribe of Ishmael](#) by Nathaniel Deutsch; [Comin' Home to Indiana](#) by the [ishmaelites](#) by Elsa F. Kramer

[Tales of the Tribe of Ishmael: A Research Note](#) by Brian Siegel

Dr. Hurty and the Indiana Board of Health

[Indiana's Public Health Pioneer and History's Iron Pen: Recollecting the Professional Idealism of John N. Hurty, 1896-1925](#) by Jennifer Burek Pierce

Women fieldworkers and Eugenics Surveys

["What Indiana Can Do": The Influence of Female Field Workers on the Indiana Committee on Mental Defectives, 1915-1924](#) by Kendra Clauser-Roemer

Eugenic Practices in Indiana Schools

[Education in the Name of "Improvement": The Influence of Eugenic Thought and Practice in Indiana's Public Schools, 1900-1930](#) by Robert L. Osgood

Book reviews

Eugenics and religion

[Preaching Eugenics: Religious Leaders and the American Eugenics Movement by Christine Rosen](#) Reviewed by Angela Lahr

Linking moral virtue with material progress: economic inequalities come as a consequence of the character failings of the underclass

[When Slavery Was Called Freedom: Evangelicalism, Proslavery, and the Causes of the Civil War](#) by John Patrick Daly Reviewed by John R. McKivigan

Videos

War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America's campaign to create a master race by Edwin Black <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IaH0Ws8RtSc>