

Eugenics and the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory

by Kristen Aliano, Cold Spring Harbor High School, New York

Have you ever heard of the term eugenics? It is a word that refers to a field of science that deals with an effort to breed “better” human beings by encouraging the reproduction of people with “good” genes and discouraging those with “bad” genes. People who worked in this field used Gregor Mendel’s theories of genetics and applied them to human inheritance and reproduction.

Eugenics has both social and “scientific” origins. Many people who lived prior to the 20th century believed that social and civil unrest was caused by genetics. For example, during the late 19th century, the United States experience great turbulence and change as immigration and urbanization transformed America, its people, and its landscape. Some Americans began to blame the problems the United States experienced on the southern and eastern Europeans coming to this America. Eugenics used the cover of science to blame others for problems. Some scientists, such as Ricard Dugale, believed that certain environments “create better” types of people. Many people who dealt in this field used data from insane asylums and examined family pedigrees to draw conclusions. They studied various traits, such as hair color, eye color, skin pigmentation, hair texture, mental, and behavioral traits.

Although extensive research was done in this area, it was flawed. Many of the traits that they tried to study were too complex and they had poor statistics and data. Many of these “scientists” lobbied for marriage laws, sterilization laws, and restrictions on immigration. People of different races could not marry; epileptic, diabetic, and poor people were sterilized from having children; immigration quotas, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1892, and immigration checkpoints, such as Ellis Island were enacted. This effort continued into the early 20th century as eugenicists tried to sterilize people who were “genetically unfit” and prevent immigration in

eastern and southern Europe. Many eugenicists used terms within their research that contained racial, ethnic, religious prejudice.

The Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, located on Long



Photo care of Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory web site

Island, New York, was the center of American eugenics from 1910 to 1940. During Hitler’s rule in Germany, the Nazis utilized many American eugenicists’ research as the basis and rationale against their persecution of German Jews. Members of Hitler’s Nationalist Socialist Party viewed the Jews as an inferior race of people; the American research “proved” their theories and allowed the Nazis to blame the Jews for the many

problems that existed in Germany at that time, such as economic dislocation and widespread unemployment. The extreme prejudice against Jews was inflamed by American research and it culminated with the Holocaust.

Today, the 111 year old Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory has a section of its web site devoted to eugenics. On this web site, the laboratory apologizes for its role in such a demoralizing area of research and commits itself to educating others about the dangers of such a science. The site contains medical records, photographs, and pedigrees, all under an editorial policy to protect people’s identities. This site is full of a great deal of information. It is like an “online museum.” It explains the origins of eugenics, as well as research conducted in this field and an introduction to this study. It makes one ponder the racial and religious prejudice that existed in our society and still does today. The site is an eye opener for people to realize that these ideas were not a half a world away, but in our own backyard.

For further information on eugenics, visit the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory’s web site at: www.cshl.org.

Work Cited: Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Web site: <http://vector.cshl.org/eugenics>

The Holocaust Memorial and Education Center Expands Programs

by Dr Regina White, Educational Director of the Center, Nassau County, New York

The primary purpose of The Holocaust Memorial and Educational Center of Nassau County is to provide an educational focus for Long Island to teach about tolerance and prejudice reduction using the Holocaust as the primary vehicle. The Center serves approximately 30,000 people per year the majority of whom are students in junior and senior high school in Nassau, Suffolk, Brooklyn and Queens Counties. Additionally, many adult groups visit the Center. Special programs are scheduled during the year which include authors speaking about their work, films, and art and special

exhibits. Most significant is the fact that students visit the Center to tour the exhibits, learn the chronology of the Holocaust and hear the personal testimony of a survivor and/or liberator. Each presentation stresses the importance of the students understanding this event so they will practice tolerance and help reduce prejudice.

A new program for students is “Student Leadership Attacks Prejudice.” This program encourages the building of an American Community to strengthen the fabric of American society. This program provides students with an historical, as well as a contempo-

rary understanding of the effects of intolerance through creating scenarios, active role-playing, and videos that bring life to the issues. These students will become the community leaders of the future and therefore it is most important they understand the necessity to promote and model positive values toward others. This is essential in an increasingly diverse population.

The Center also holds teacher conferences that provide teachers with the historical background for the teaching of the Holocaust and strategies for teaching about the Holocaust and tolerance at the upper elementary, middle and high school levels.

In addition to its formal curricula and teaching sessions for teachers and students, the Center is a complete educational resource facility for educators and the public. The Center has a library, media center, and speaker's bureau.

We are now living in a technological world. Technology can be used to increase and enhance the teaching of the Center. Interactive multimedia will enhance the learning for both the students and general public who visit the Center. It will allow the visitors to see and hear information that will emphasize what we are teaching. The Holocaust Memorial and Educational Center of Nassau County has become a member of Educational Enterprise Zone, a learning consortium established by the New York Institute of Technology. Through this partnership we can teleconference to schools throughout the world to teach about the Holocaust.

Three years ago the Holocaust Center launched a "Million Pennies Project" involving the schools of Long Island to provide seed money for a garden as a living memorial to all the children who

perished during World War II. The Children's Memorial Garden is dedicated to all the innocent young lives that were lost during this time. Schools have already raised \$23,000 for the garden and enabled the groundbreaking, which was held in May of 2001.

The Garden is located on the site of the formal garden of Welwyn, the former estate of Harriet and Harold Pratt. Welwyn is currently a Nassau County preserve and the home of The Holocaust Memorial and Educational Center. This project will rehabilitate the former garden, designed by the Olmstead Brothers, utilizing all the existing structures and adding brick and bluestone walks, two hand-



Groundbreaking ceremony for Children's Garden

icapped ramps and benches. The design for this garden includes plant material that will bloom each season of the year. The central fountain will consist of nozzles arching water from the outer edge of the pool towards the center. An eternal flame will be located in the center with butterfly sculptures emerging at various heights. Butterflies have come to symbolize the innocence of the children as well as rebirth. The arbor in the back is made of brick pillars with wooden beams. Wisteria, climbing roses and clematis will soften and enhance the arbor. An existing dolphin fountain will add another water element to the garden.

The public benefit upon completion of this project is twofold. The garden will have an area for an outdoor classroom for the thousands of schoolchildren that come through the Center each year. Additionally, the garden will attract many more visitors to the Center and will make them aware of how innocent children were the victims of this tragic period of history. This garden will emphasize to all the need for tolerance and prejudice reduction.

Self Discovery In The Land of the Free

by Krystle Kaul, Cold Spring Harbor High School, New York

The most rewarding feeling a person can get is by helping another. It took me sixteen years to learn this important truth. This past summer, I went to a place so foreign from anywhere I have ever been- a place where people live simply, embrace life and enjoy what they have. This place is called Thailand, meaning, "land of the free." And that is exactly how I felt there--free from everything. I went for all the wrong reasons, but came back knowing all the right ones. I went to Thailand because I was stressed and exhausted. I had been selfish and obsessed with my schoolwork, living in a

bubble and ignoring everything around me. My entire world consisted of my grades, my sports and my clubs. I did not know it at the time, but I was sick...and Thailand was my medicine.

I have always been obsessed with excelling, and often let my ambition get the better of me. But, I now realize that I do not need trophies and certificates to prove my merit as an individual. It took me six weeks in a remote village to realize this fact. The village, Mae Tai, is located in the northern mountains of Thailand, and it possesses a type of serenity and tranquility that I have not

found anywhere else. However, I was not there to vacation but to perform a service for others. Surprisingly, I benefited the most. I joined a program called Global Routes whose goal was to build a community center for the villagers. Our work was long and laborious—shoveling gravel and making cement everyday. But, I never once felt as though this was a duty placed upon me. I understood that building the community center was my main objective and felt good just knowing that I was helping others. Although this work represented my schoolwork, I was now working to benefit others rather than myself. Ironically, it was not until I was free from the confines of my daily routine, pressures and stress that I realized how narrow-minded I had been. For the first time in my life, I was able to truly understand the meaning of the word selfless.

While in the village, we lived with home-stay families. This was difficult because we had to adapt to a strange, new culture that was vastly different from anything we ever knew. The villagers were poor and humble, but they were content. The only thing I taught them was English. Yet, I learned more from them than they will ever know. They taught me that life is not just about speeding towards your predetermined destination, but taking the time to enjoy each moment of the journey. I have come to realize that it is important to find a balance in one's life and to make time for the

truly important things, such as family and friends.

In addition, we went on a four-day trek through a rain-forest, which was extremely challenging for me because I have chronic asthma. However, I was determined to go. I learned important lessons during those few days about life, hardship and perseverance. The endless trekking uphill in the pouring rain with backpacks was strenuous, but I tried to focus on reaching the top of the mountain. When I finally stood at the top, I took a deep breath and took pride in knowing that I actually did it. That one simple moment of triumph made that whole trek worthwhile.

As a result of my trip, I am more sensitive to the needs of others, more aware of my surroundings and more content with

myself. I have learned not to take things for granted and to enjoy life because it truly is very short. My main problem had been that I thought only of my goals and myself. My ambitions had consumed me. However, this past summer, I was able to open my eyes to a world where grades, clubs and SAT scores do not exist. The only important thing was simply helping others. Although my goals are still important, I now see life in a different light. My journey forever changed my perspective of the world by inspiring a new self-awareness within me, and has made me a stronger individual.



A Temple Roof in Bangkok, Thailand, courtesy of <http://mauipov.com/>

The Tragedy of European Jewry in Greece During the Holocaust

by Brittany Aliano, Cold Spring Harbor High School, New York

Most people are educated about the plight of the Jews in Germany during the Holocaust; however, very few people know about the Jews in Greece during Hitler's Third Reich. During the 1940s, the tragedy of European Jewry knew no boundaries. All were efficiently trapped and either massacred on the spot, like the Jews in the Ukraine, or sent long distances to Auschwitz, like the Jews of Greece.

"On April 6, 1941, the Germans invaded Greece and, on April 18, the Greek government fled to Crete. On April 21, the Germans overran Athens and, on May 20, they took Crete." The Germans divided Greece into three occupation zones. "The Germans held western Macedonia, Thessaloniki, a strip of land in eastern Thrace, the major Aegean Islands and Crete. The Bulgarians were given eastern Macedonia and Thrace. The Italians received the Dodecanese Islands,

the Ionian Islands, and a large section of mainland Greece including Athens. At that time, approximately 76,000 Jews lived in Greece: 55,000 in Salonika in the German zone, 6,000 in western Thrace under Bulgaria and 13,000 under Italian control."

In one community in Greece during the Holocaust, "65,000 Jews were killed by the Germans, or 85% of the population, among the highest percentage of losses of any country during the Holocaust." In the winter of 1941-1942, refugees from Thrace, eastern Macedonia and Bulgarian territory ran to Thessaloniki and Athens. The food supplies of Thessaloniki gave out and starvation and typhus were rampant. The Nazis conducted summary arrests and executions. As a result, "approximately 60 Jews died each day." In Greece, "11,000 Jews were deported, and only 2,200 sur-

vived.”

Despite the Nazi invasions and massacres, many people felt the duty to try to protect the persecuted Jews. People rescued others. Some were motivated by a sense of morality. Others had a relationship with a particular person or group. Some were politically driven and were adamantly opposed to the Third Reich. “Other rescuers were involved at work as diplomats, nurses, social workers, and doctors, and continued their involvement beyond their professional obligation.” Many children followed in their parents’ footsteps and became rescuers. Rescuers viewed Jews and other victims not as the enemy, but as human beings. Generally, rescuers were able to accept people who were different from them. They also held the conviction that one person could make a difference.

There were many consequences in helping enemies or victims of Hitler’s Third Reich. Rescuers had to decide whether or not to assume the responsibility of helping and risking the potential consequences. Public hangings, depor-

tation to concentration camps, and on-the-spot shootings were some of the consequences for helping the victims.

Many Greeks tried to save the Jewish community. “The church and the general populace made great efforts to save Jews. Archbishop Damaskinos, for example, instructed all monasteries and convents in Athens and the outlying areas to hide any Jew who sought assistance. The Greek Resistance was helpful and average citizens, at great risk, sheltered Jews.” Twenty-nine Greek Orthodox priests wrote a letter to the Germans in the defense of the Jewish community. As a result, many were persecuted. “In the Italian zone, which included Athens, Jews were not persecuted; racial laws were ignored.” As one can see, there were occurrences affecting the Jews in Greece during Hitler’s

A Greek Grandfather’s Letter to his Granddaughter

By Leonard Eastman, Summer 2001

I’m on the ship just spending three days in Athens. We visited the local Jewish museum and got a fast history of the Romaniote Jews of Greece. It seems that Ionia and a few islands had this group who adopted the Greek language through a 1,000 year history. The Thessalonican Jews mostly were Spanish Jews who arrived there after the Spanish Inquisition. The town was 80 percent Jewish with 100 synagogues, and of course was wiped out during World War II. It seems that lots of Jews left Greece between 1900 and 1920, with the rest being wiped out by the Germans. Today, in all of Greece, there are 5,000 Jews living here.

The Jewish lady who gave us the lecture was complimentary to the Greeks. She said that the chief of police in Athens gave as many Jews as possible false identification with Christian names in order to save them. In addition, the Greek government, after WWII, gave all of the property, that belonged to the Jews that were killed, to the surviving Jewish community that returned to Greece after the war.

She also noted that 29 Greek Orthodox priests wrote a letter to the Germans, and spoke from the pulpit in defense of the Jewish community, and, as a result, many priests were persecuted. It seems; therefore, that the Greeks actually were trying to save the Jewish community, and this Jewish lady confirmed that it was true. To me, that was good to hear.

Third Reich.

Sources

<http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/vjw/greece.html#worldwarII>
<http://www.jewishfrontier.org/frontier>

The Ghetto Vecchio, Italy

by Jennifer Klein, Cold Spring Harbor High School, New York

Making the trip from the center of Venice, San Marco Square, to the Jewish Ghetto Vecchio, the world’s oldest, it is easy to feel as if you are traveling backwards through time. The ancient building’s walls are covered with chipping paint, and laundry hangs out the windows on clotheslines. The extent of commercialism is tiny shops selling Murano glass menorahs and Kiddush cups. People yell to each other out windows from inside apartments with six-foot ceilings in lieu of telephones. Like the rest of Venice, there is a raw, untouched charm to the Ghetto, but one can not help feeling a sense of awe as if observing a holy landmark.

Jew’s were not allowed into Venice until the city was at war with neighboring Chioggia and they needed loans from Jewish moneylenders. In 1516, the Jews, allowed into the city, were then restricted to a small ghetto, the equivalent of two city blocks, which at its height was home to 4,000 people (Levantine and Ashkenazim, Italian and Spanish Jews all lived together). The gates were locked at night and business practices were restricted to a few choice professions which Jewish citizens of Venice under no circumstances were allowed to venture out of. During the day, if residents of the Ghetto wanted to endeavor outside the walls,

they were forced to wear identification, men with yellow circles stitched to their clothing, women with yellow scarves.

Napoleon eventually tore down the restricting gates and recognized the equal rights of the Jews under his empire, but this would not be the end of Jewish confinement and persecution in Venice. By the time World War II rolled around, Jews were once again confined to the ghetto, this time 1,300 of them. 289 were deported to concentration camps. Soon after, the President of the Venetian Jewish Community, President Yonah, was commanded to present a list of the names of all the remaining residents of the Ghetto. Rather than obey this order, he committed suicide. Of the almost 300 men, women, and children deported from the Venetian Ghetto, only 7 returned.

While the ancient buildings still stand, the same can be said for the Jewish Community in Venice. Today, there are only about 600 Jewish people left in the city, but they are as culturally active as ever, upholding a famous museum located in the ghetto itself and five synagogues. As a memorial to all those who perished, a wall in the ghetto still bears barbed wire and an iron gate... a chilling reminder of a not-so-distant past.



Scenes from The Ghetto Vecchio, Italy (2001)



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"The Cold Spring Harbor Central School District wishes to recognize the invaluable contribution made by Mrs. Shirley Mayer to Holocaust education in our district."