

## Grade 11

The Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre is pleased to offer a series of eight (8) units covering the following Grade 11 CAPS topic:

*Ideas of Race in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries – What were the consequences when pseudoscientific ideas of Race became integral to government policies and legislation in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries?*

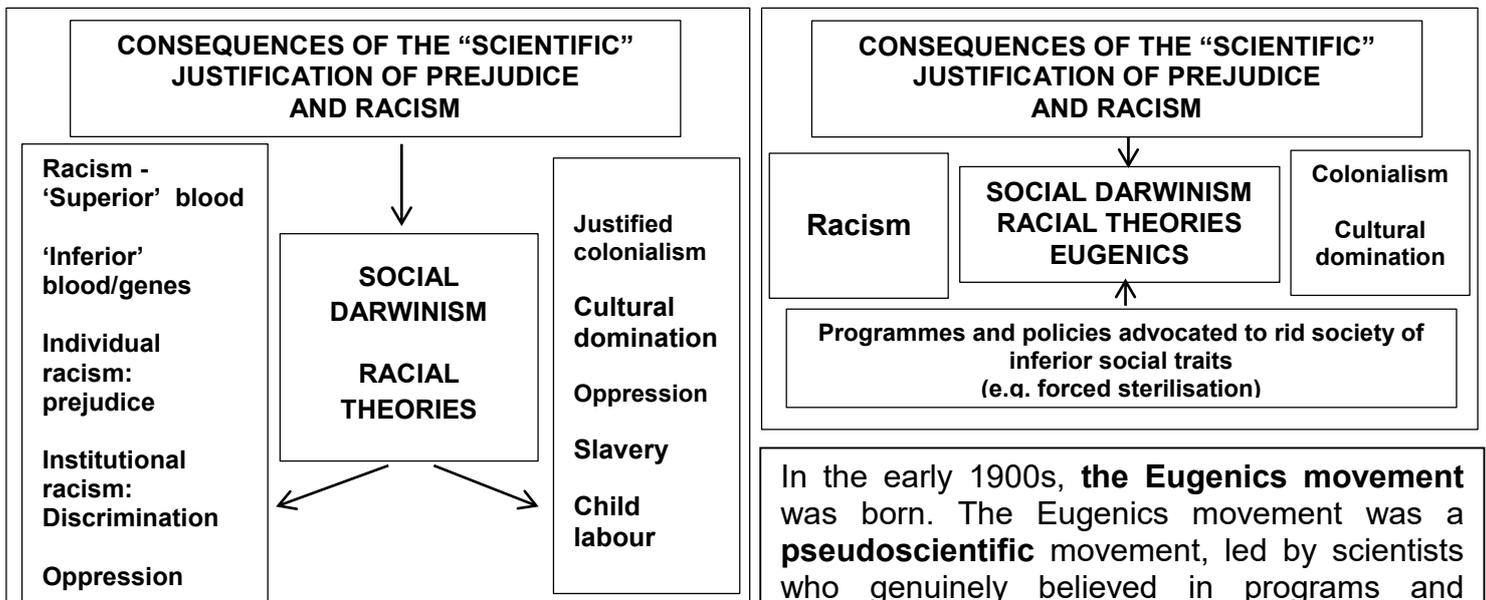
*Case studies: Australia and the indigenous Australians; Nazi Germany and the Holocaust.*

### Unit 3

#### Eugenics

In this unit you will learn about the following:

- The pseudoscience of eugenics.



In the early 1900s, the **Eugenics movement** was born. The Eugenics movement was a **pseudoscientific** movement, led by scientists who genuinely believed in programs and policies which they advocated (promoted/supported/encouraged). These scientists said that their movement would make the world a better place by ridding society of “inferior” social traits and “immoral” patterns of behaviour.

How were they going to achieve this? Well, they would **forcibly sterilise** anybody who did not fit their ideals. Sterilisation here refers to surgical operations that remove reproductive functions. They sterilised male and female children and adults alike. In fact, they sterilised anyone they considered “unfit”. We’re using “fit” here in the same manner as the Darwinists and the Social Darwinists did, so we’re referring to those they believed to be “most able” and thus likeliest to survive and reproduce. People who did not fit this model were forcibly sterilised.

In the previous unit we looked at the history of **Social Darwinism** and **Race Theories**. We spoke about the consequences of this pseudoscientific justification of prejudice and racism which led to both individual racism and institutional racism. We discussed how, at that time, people believed there was actual science backing up these theories, but over time they have all been disproven.

Social Darwinism, particularly, underpinned and justified slavery, colonialism, cultural domination, oppression and many other crimes against humanity throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

In this Unit, we will move onto what happened in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

## The word eugenics (from the Greek eugenes) means well-born or good creation

**Sir Francis Galton (1882 -1911)**

- Applied the principles of Social Darwinism,
- Believed that the biological health of the human race could be improved
- He began using the word Eugenics in his writings which stated that
- Man could take control of his own evolutionary process through

### **selective breeding**

Now, where does all this begin? The word eugenics comes from the Greek **eugenes**, which means ‘**well-born**’ or ‘**good creation**’. The origins of the word are, quite clearly, positive. The first person to use this term in the context of the Eugenics movement was **Sir Francis Galton (1882-1911)**. He lived at a time when the Social Darwinists were gaining ground and popularity. Keep that context in mind. Galton applied the principles of Social Darwinism to the belief that the biological health of human beings could be improved if we, as human beings, take control of our own evolution. We could do this, he said, through **selective breeding**.

<https://www.britannica.com/science/eugenics-genetics>

Selective breeding has been conducted by farmers since animals were domesticated.

For example selective breeding of:



**Cows that produce more milk**



**Chickens that produce more eggs**



**Sheep that produce more wool**

It's important to note that, as a concept, selective breeding is not new. Farmers have been doing selective breeding since animals were domesticated thousands of years ago. Farmers understood that if you've got a very woolly ewe and a very woolly ram, and you breed them together, the offspring will produce even more wool than the parents! More wool means more produce, which means more money for the farmer. The farmers noticed the same pattern in all farm animals, and they bred them together to produce ‘better’, healthier, more expensive versions. This is all actual science – it is known as **agrarian (farming) science** – and not pseudoscience.

## **EUGENICS**

- **“Science” of human improvement through selective breeding**
- **Ridding society of so-called “inferiors”**
- **How to do this?**

The pseudoscience comes in when we apply those agrarian (farming) principles of selective breeding to human beings, which is what the eugenicists did. They said they could use “science” (we know now it is a pseudoscience) to **improve humanity** by selecting who could breed with whom. By having only the ‘fit’ breed, one would eventually rid society of so-called ‘inferiors’.

How were they going to do this?



Look at the words they used. As we said, they took their ideas from agrarian (farming) science, and said they could breed healthy human beings with other healthy human beings so that the offspring would have good genetic stock. Notice how they used farming words like **'breeding'** and **'stock'**! The next step was to get rid of those who were considered weak and therefore inferior. Those 'inferiors' were degenerate offspring – because their 'stock' was not good enough. By breeding improved 'genetic stock', they thought, incorrectly, that they would rid society of all social ills

### **“POSITIVE” EUGENICS**

**ENCOURAGE REPRODUCTION OF THE “BEST WITH THE BEST”**

Focus on progress and power

### **“NEGATIVE” EUGENICS**

**DISCOURAGE REPRODUCTION OF THE “WEAK”**

Waste of money and resources

The Eugenicists encouraged 'breeding' the best with the best; that is known as **positive Eugenics**. They discouraged reproduction of the weak; that is known as **negative Eugenics**. They said that if only the 'best' reproduce, then society can focus on progress and power and building good communities. By discouraging the reproduction of the 'weak', they said governments would not be wasting money and resources on those who are 'unproductive'. If you think this all sounds harsh well you are right! *It is harsh*. The Eugenicist movement was incredibly harsh and ultimately very, very cruel.

## **The eugenics movement taking root in the early 1900 became a worldwide movement**

**It saw itself as fostering a public good:**

It was optimistic that **“scientific” changes in human breeding habits** would solve many complex problems facing modern society.

But in the minds of scientists in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century – whom we now recognise as pseudoscientists – Eugenics was the way of the future. In their context, they believed their work was fostering a public good.

And what was the context, exactly? Well, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, society was in upheaval. The Industrial Revolution had swept through Europe and North America, and many farmworkers were moving away from rural life in villages, and into the cities where they hoped to get jobs in factories. Cities weren't designed for that many people, so they became very crowded, which meant people got ill, and there was crime, and standards of living dropped. Unemployment became a large problem. Social ills, like drugs, alcohol, and prostitution, became commonplace.

While we've spoken primarily of Europe, the Eugenics movement was actually worldwide. It spread across the globe, and everywhere it went, its proponents believed that they were using it to make the world a better place. Eugenicists were optimistic that the scientific changes which they were advocating for would solve many of the complex social problems discussed above.

## Eugenicists favoured

better public health,



family planning,



more thoughtful preparation for marriage, and education about reproduction.



## FORCED STERILISATION OF THOSE THEY CONSIDERED TO BE “UNFIT”

What were the scientific changes they advocated for? Firstly, they favoured better public health. In South Africa today, we have a widespread public health system designed to improve citizens' well-being. Next, they favoured family planning. Today, we have family planning set up in South Africa; the government helps citizens to family plan through free contraception and information programmes and campaigns. These programmes help us to plan how many children our family will have and when, to ensure each child has sufficient resources. Improved public health and access to family planning are both *great*.

But **forced sterilisation** of those they considered to be unfit is very far from great. Forced sterilisation is the point at which the Eugenics movement becomes problematic.

## Countries across the world that practiced Eugenics

Argentina	Italy
Australia	Japan
Austria	Korea
Brazil	Mexico
Canada	New Zealand
China	Norway
Finland	Russia
France	South Africa
Germany	Spain
Great Britain	Sweden
	USA

As we mentioned earlier, the Eugenics movement was international. As you can see, these countries from around the world practiced Eugenics. In the following Unit, we will focus on a case study that looks at how exactly they used Eugenics in Australia. In Units 5 to Unit 8, we are going to focus on the case study of Nazi Germany and look at how they used Eugenics. But look at all the other countries as well; it really was a worldwide movement.

There were universities in all these countries that had departments where highly educated people taught and studied Eugenics. And importantly, most of these countries put forced sterilisation into law. Some of you will be shocked to find out that many of these laws were only taken away in the late 1970s or even later.

In our next Unit, we will look at Case Study: Australia.

## QUESTIONS

1. Which provable science did eugenicist pseudoscientists borrow heavily from?
2. Briefly describe how eugenicists planned to rid society of social ills
3. Compare and contrast Social Darwinist principles with Eugenicist principles
4. Do you believe any Eugenicist principles filtered through to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? Give reasons for your answer.
5. Research one of the countries listed in Image 10 (excluding Australia and Germany) and give:
  - a) an example of a **positive eugenics** programme that existed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (provide a reference for your information)
  - b) an example of a **negative eugenics** programme that existed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (provide a reference for your information)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre: <http://ctholocaust.co.za/>

Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre YouTube:  
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCwVBU5VqvsumuwDdzYIAaQ>

Eugenics Archives: <https://eugenicsarchive.ca/>

The Eugenics Movement: Good Intentions Lead to Horrific Consequences:  
<https://www.encyclopedia.com/science/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/eugenics-movement-good-intentions-lead-horrific-consequences>

White Supremacy, Eugenics and the History of Selective Breeding: <https://youtu.be/7n180eG92gc>

Eugenics is trending. That's a problem:  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/02/17/eugenics-is-trending-thats-problem/>