

A HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN EUGENICS SOCIETY, 1921-1940

BY

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THESIS

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## ABSTRACT

A History of the American Eugenics Society, 1921-1940

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A history of the American Eugenics Society from its origins as the Eugenics Committee of the United States of America to World War II, this monograph represents the first in-depth study of an American eugenic institution. It is critical of the widely held thesis that American eugenics underwent a major transformation between 1915 and 1930. The author disputes the claim that a "new" eugenics emerged after 1930. The AES is viewed in the context of the international eugenics movement. The notion that Anglo-American eugenics developed independently of other European eugenics movements is disputed, and specific examples of foreign influence on American eugenics are documented. The dissertation includes a detailed prosopographical analysis of the 153 members of the Society's board of directors and advisory council between 1923 and 1935 as well as a 135 page appendix containing the biographies of 170 leading members of the Society between 1921 and 1940. There is a detailed comparison of American and Nazi sterilization programs demonstrating the ideological unity of the two programs in the prewar years. There is an examination of AES efforts to restrict immigration between 1921 and 1940. The author shows that a vigorous campaign to restrict immigration of

non-whites, Mexicans, and others was pursued between 1925 and 1940. This campaign paralleled the earlier campaign against Eastern and Southern Europeans. The study concludes with a detailed analysis of the theory and policy of the Society between 1938 and 1940.

In the memory of my mother

ESTHER MEHLER

1914-1987

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In 1981, Jerry Hirsch invited me to join the Institutional Racism Program at the University of Illinois. As a Trainee in the Institutional Racism Program, I received four years of fellowship support from the National Institute of Mental Health [NIMH grant MH 15173-05]. Dr. Hirsch also

brought me into his behavior genetics laboratory, insisting that a historian of eugenics not only understand the fundamentals of genetics, but have actual laboratory experience in behavior genetic analysis.

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