Eugenic Visuality: Racist Epistemologies from Galton to *The Bell Curve*

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**Abstract**

This paper argues that Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray’s *The Bell Curve* re-introduces into American politics a discourse of eugenics created by its founder, Francis Galton. Using a Visual Studies framework developed by Mieke Bal, Lorraine Daston, and Peter Galison, I show how the bell curve has been used to construct a eugenic visuality—a way of seeing, a practice of looking, a set of values, assumptions, and epistemologies—since Galton employed it to classify his countrymen and introduce the necessity of eugenics. Attention to the historicity of eugenic visualities from Galton to the American eugenic discourse of the early twentieth century and *The Bell Curve* in 1994 reveals that the directions of British and American eugenics were not the genocide of all groups of inferior people. The eugenic visualities I examine have been used to construct populations and offer suggestions for their management to protect and optimize national health. Thus, while Herrnstein and Murray do not encourage coercive sterilization or contraceptive policies, their suggestions to revoke social welfare benefits and end affirmative action are eugenic because they naturalize as group inferiority conditions created by structural inequality and scientific fantasy and, on that basis, argue for policies that deepen racial inequality.

Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray’s 1994 text *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* entered a California teeming with racial angst. A ballot initiative that would imprison persons committing their third felony for a minimum of twenty-five years and another barring undocumented migrants’ access to public resources like education, non-emergency healthcare, and welfare were supported by longstanding anti-Latinx and anti-Black sentiment in the state (Gilmore; Gutiérrez). Herrnstein and Murray confirmed these feelings with an argument that racial differences in the propensity to commit crime, emigrate to the United States, experience poverty, have children outside of marriage, and sign up for welfare could be significantly attributed to differences in cultural values and biological characteristics, including intelligence (105, 269, 317-40). While behavioral trends like single motherhood and being on welfare could be significantly attributed to differences in cultural values and biological characteristics, including intelligence (105, 269, 317-40). While behavioral trends like single motherhood and being on welfare are determined by Herrnstein and Murray to be the result of differences in cultural values, they claimed that impoverishment and criminality are likely effects of low intelligence (360, 236). Regardless of their source, Herrnstein and Mur-
ray present trends in fertility among people without “middle-class” cultural values and low IQ as a threat to American society, which could be ameliorated via policy measures similar to the ballot initiatives (235, 293, 339–40, 349, 358, 387–552). It is no wonder that the California propositions meant to “save our state”—the nickname of the initiative targeting undocumented immigrants—from crime and immigrant Latinx fertility met with electoral success. *The Bell Curve* not only confirmed existing racist stereotypes but embedded these stereotypes into the cultural and biological makeup of Black and Latinx people themselves.

*The Bell Curve* constructs and defines populations whose reproduction must be managed for the good of a nation. Therefore, this paper argues that Herrnstein and Murray’s text is an expression of classical eugenic thought in its research epistemology and the policy suggestions it presents. The epistemology that authorizes the biologizing of intelligence and race in *The Bell Curve* is also deployed in a British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS) project on the racial types of Britain chaired by Francis Galton. It became influential in the United States through the work of Henry P. Bowditch and other mainline eugenicists of the early twentieth century and was legally codified through the Supreme Court’s decision to uphold Virginia’s coercive sterilization law in *Buck v. Bell* (1927). In order to reverse dysgenic changes to the national intelligence distribution and prevent the low IQ underclass from becoming “a net drag” on the national economy, Herrnstein and Murray make suggestions that include dismantling much of the federal civil rights and social welfare legislation passed during and after 1964 and a “return to individualism” where IQ, rather than membership in a racial group, determines one’s worth in the economy and society (520, 550). While these recommendations do not immediately seem characteristic of classical eugenics—they are not calling for the state to permanently or temporarily sterilize certain groups—a reproductive justice analysis of their policy suggestions reveals a desire to enact multiple reproductive coercions intended to manage the bodies and reproduction of national populations according to the needs of the U.S. political economy. Rendering populations and individuals in terms of intelligence, defined as a “substantially heritable” characteristic over which one “has no control,” Herrnstein and Murray reproduce racial difference and social deviance as disabilities that ought to circumscribe the political subjectivity and human rights of some on behalf of a nation defined against them (23, 554).

**Francis Galton’s Eugenic Visuality**

Where vision is a physical process, *visuality* is a way of understanding the sensory data gathered through vision. First articulated as a social process by Hal Foster in his 1988 text *Vision and Visuality*, visuality is given a heartier definition by Mieke Bal in a defining text of Visual Culture Studies:
Instead of visuality as a defining property of the traditional object, it is the practices of looking invested in any object that constitute the object domain: its historicity, its social anchoring and its openness to the analysis of its synaesthetics. It is the possibility of performing acts of seeing, not the materiality of the object seen, that decides whether an artifact can be considered from the perspective of visual culture studies. (11)

A focus on visuality does not exclude consideration of image objects but attends to the ways of seeing through which images and objects become legible, and to the field of the visual in which image objects exist and are rendered meaningful. Visuality, in the most basic sense, is a discursive formation, or, as Michel Foucault writes, “a complex group of relations that […] lays down what must be related, in a particular discursive practice, for such and such an enunciation to be made, for such and such a concept to be used, for such and such a strategy to be organized” (Archaeology 73). As Nicholas Mirzoeff explains, “visuality has very much to do with picturing and nothing to do with vision, if by vision we understand how an individual person registers visual sensory impressions” (67). A eugenic visuality, therefore, is the system of relations that organizes and authorizes eugenics as a field of study creating methods of research, identification, and classification and as practices of institutional, state, and non-governmental population management (Archaeology 2).

Eugenics has always been tied to visuality. In its germinal text, Francis Galton proposes the use of composite photography for eugenic research regarding the general physical appearance of the various races of England with the hope that this technique would provide “a clue to the direction in which the stock of the English race might most easily be improved” (Inquiries 10). In the decade before Inquiries into the Human Faculty and Its Development was published, Galton made use of the composite photograph with the photographic atlas and the ‘bell curve’ (or normal distribution) in his work with the British Association for the Advancement of Science’s Racial and Anthropometric Committee. This Committee was founded in 1875 after a paper read to the association argued for the utility of collecting data on the height, weight, build, and growth rates of the inhabitants of the British Isles. It was claimed that the data resulting from such a study would help anthropologists elucidate the physical characteristics of the various races of Britain that had been determined through studies in Philology, History, Archaeology, and Craniology (204). Once established, the Committee decided to also collect photographs of “the typical races of empire” (Beddoe et al. 232). The members of this Committee, which included several doctors and many of the foremost ethnologists, anthropologists, and social statisticians of the period, hoped that “[a] correct description of the main racial types would also afford an opportunity of testing in a more complete manner than is now practicable, the truth of views, believed to be extensively held, on the subject of racial tendencies and proclivities” (Flower et al.
270). Inspired by a desire to solve “many difficult problems in relation to race, occupation, [social and political] climate, culture,” Galton and the Anthropometric Committee forged the visuality of classical eugenics in their project to discover and demonstrate the identifying characteristics of the three racial types of the United Kingdom (Farr et al. 175).

The Anthropometric Committee used three visual technologies to identify and hierarchize racial types: the photographic atlas, the composite photograph, and the bell curve. Following Galton’s belief that one could learn and, thereafter, visualize typical images of objects, animals, and persons via repeated exposure to specific instances, each visual medium the Committee used seeks to impress upon the viewer a general image of each race presented to them (Ellenbogen 8). The assumptions of this visual epistemology were not unique to Galton. In the essay “The Image of Objectivity,” Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison write that the characteristic atlas of the type created by the Committee presented figures of actual individuals, not of types or ideals that had not and/or could not be observed in a single instance. But […] these individuals still embodied types of whose reality the atlas maker was firmly convinced. The typical must now be instantiated in the individual, but the typical nonetheless exists, to be discerned by judgement and long acquaintance with the phenomena. […] This is the essential point. While in the early nineteenth century, the burden of representation was supposed to lie in the picture itself, now it fell to the audience. The psychology of pattern recognition in the audience had replaced the metaphysical claims of the author. Mistrusting themselves, they assuaged their fear of subjectivity by transferring the necessity of judgment to the audience. (95-96; emphasis added)

Collected by the Committee via a call for photographs “representing […] the type chiefly prevalent among individuals belonging to families long settled and intermarrying in the district,” the photographs received were organized into their specific albums according to their adherence to race-typical skull shapes determined via a composite imaging technique developed by Galton (Brabrook 322). Describing his compositing process in 1879, he writes that it operates in the same way and yields the same results as a normal distribution:

we throw the image of each of the eight portraits in turn upon the same part of the sensitised plate for ten seconds […] it is a composite of eight component portraits. Those of its outlines are sharpest and darkest that are common to the largest number of the components; the purely individual peculiarities leave little or no visible trace. The latter being necessarily disposed equally on both sides of the average, the outline of the composite is the average of all the components. It is a band and not a fine line, because the outlines of the components are seldom exactly superimposed. The band will be darkest in its middle whenever the component portraits have the same general type features, and its breadth, or amount of blur, will measure the tendency of the components to deviate from the common type. (“Composite Portraits” 133-34)

While the characteristic atlas and the composite photograph were significant to anthropologists and ethnologists of the late nineteenth cen-
tury, it is Galton’s and, by extension, the Committee’s use of the normal distribution that gave their visuality a utility lasting into the late twentieth century.

Galton began to employ the normal distribution in his eugenic research during the same period in which the Anthropometric Committee started its work. The normal distribution or bell curve is a visual representation of a process designed by the astronomer and mathematician Carl Friedrich Gauss to determine an accurate measurement of an observed variable—in his case, the locations of celestial bodies—via a study of the precision of all or a large number of the total number of measurements. To find the most accurate or the expected value of a measurement that can be affected by multiple random variables one can examine the frequency of several individual measurements; when plotted next to each other, a bell-shaped distribution centered around a cluster of values will emerge. When the individual values are calculated for their mean, it will yield a value precisely within the region of greatest volume underneath the bell curve. The bell-shaped curve that results from the data analysis was also interesting to Gauss as an indication of the probabilities of measurements to be within a certain distance from the calculated mean. He ultimately concluded that there must exist a distribution of error for data—measured in their deviation from the mean—that takes the form of the bell curve for a calculated mean to be considered accurate in addition to precise (see Gigerenzer et al. 45).

Adolphe Quetelet adapted this practice to discover what he termed the “average man” (l’homme moyen). Plotting data like height and weight on a graph, Quetelet observed that the aggregated data tended to densely cluster in certain areas and suggested that these clusters established norms for the communities constituted by those individual instances that make up the cluster. He also extended this research into sociology in order to realize a “social mathematics” governing social phenomena like crime (Cowan 514; Sekula 19–22). Galton was introduced to the multiple capacities of the normal distribution through a text on the probability of mountain chain elevations published in 1861, and he employed it to work in Geography, Meteorology, and Statistics (Cowan 512–13). However, while he argued that certain types of physical characteristics like height and weight among human populations can be estimated using the normal distribution, he did not connect it to heritability until 1876. Ruth Schwartz Cowan suggests that the incorporation of the normal distribution into his anthropological research and the subsequent development of the concepts of regression and correlation happened only once Galton realized the pictorial utility of the bell curve for eugenics (514).

Galton made the assumption that what he called “talent” was normally distributed in Hereditary Genius (1869), but he never talked about them together again until he presented “Typical Laws of Heredity” to the Royal Institution in 1877. After conducting an experiment regarding the heritability of weight in sweet peas, Galton discovered that the peas
yield offspring whose weights are normally distributed within the entire population of parents and offspring and among themselves as a group of siblings. Each group of siblings and the overall group were also found to have the same mean and standard deviation (“Typical Laws” 513). This proved, for Galton, that offspring—peas and people alike—do not directly inherit characteristics from their parents; rather, inherited characteristics are distributed probabilistically within a normally-distributed range determined by the characteristics of the offspring’s genealogical legacy (512; Kevles 15).

Galton began his experiments in composite photography the same year and published five articles on composite photography and its connection to the normal distribution (“Composite Portraits Made by Combining Those of Many Different Persons into a Single Figure” appeared in 1878, “Generic Images” in the Journal of the Royal Institution of Great Britain and Nineteenth Century as well as “Combined Portraits, and the Combination of Sense Impressions Generally,” and “Composite Portraits” in 1879). In one of these articles, he describes composite photographs as “real generalizations, because they include the whole of the material under consideration. The blur of their outlines, which is never great in truly generic composites, except in unimportant details, measures the tendency of individuals to deviate from the central type” (“Combined” 27). Furthermore, in his address to the BAAS Department of Anthropology, he argued that composite photographs would be useful for the discipline in connecting the physical and mental characteristics of various groups of people by providing a description of his research determining the physical characteristics of various types of criminals (98). The Anthropometric Committee then began, under Galton’s influence, collecting “typical photographs” of people in various parts of the United Kingdom in 1877 and, as described above, organized them into characteristic atlases divided by racial types discovered via composite images of skulls. Once he was able to appropriate the visual metaphor provided by the bell curve, Galton was able to ground his ideas on race, heredity, and eugenics in the objectively natural laws of statistical mathematics.

The Anthropometric Committee project was one of many late nineteenth century anthropological projects that sought to discover biological differences among people. Historian George W. Stocking, Jr., explains that the discipline of anthropology in Great Britain grew out of ideas about labor(ers) and political economy in general (30-32). Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm argues that the impetus for such research lies in the professional English classes’—or the bourgeoisie’s, as Marxists say—need to shore up their political dominance:

But more than anything else, [to be bourgeois] meant superiority. The bourgeois was not merely independent […] but one who gave orders himself. He was not merely an employer, entrepreneur or capitalist but socially a ‘master’ […]. Only the member of the liberal professions, or the artist and intellectual who was not essentially an employer or someone with subordinates,
was not primarily a ‘master.’ Even here the ‘principle of authority’ was far from absent, whether from the comportment of the traditional continental university professor, the autocratic medical man, the orchestral conductor or the capricious painter. (246)

Indeed, after the publication of Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* in 1859, “[t]he bourgeois was, if not a different species, then at least the member of a superior race, a higher stage in human evolution, distinct from the lower orders who remained in the historical or cultural equivalent of childhood or adolescence” (247-48). The Anthropometric Committee’s project is itself typical of its period in that it attributes racial superiority to the English professional class (or Type C). Discussing a table comparing heights, the Committee remarks that “[i]t is interesting to find that […] the English professional classes head the long list, and that the Anglo-Saxon race takes the chief place in it among the civilised communities, although it is possible it might stand second to the Scandinavian countries if a fair sample of their population were obtained” (Galton et. al 269-70). It is implied here that the Committee members think of the Anglo-Saxon race and the English professional class to be highly, if not totally, correlated. By virtue of their proximity to the physical and social characteristics of Type C, Type B—identified as primarily Scottish and Scandinavian—is also said to occupy a valuable position in British society (271; Davis and Thurnham 188-89). The Committee describes those in the Type A group—a high proportion of whom live in Wales, Ireland, and Cornwall—as having long straight noses, “thick, unformed” lips, small chins, “dark” eyes, and “very dark, crisp, curling” hair (Galton et. al 307). Given this description, it is not surprising that Committee member John Beddoe later uses the Anthropometric Committee data to describe this group as “Africanoid” in his book on the races of Britain (11). To cement the inferiority of Type A, the Committee also notes that the height and “dark” complexion of criminals and the insane placed a large number of them within this racial group (Galton et. al 273). The desire to know the racial types of Britain, their characteristics, and which among those are heritable and in what ways is coexistent, according to Hobsbawm, with the bourgeois desire to dominate colonized, racialized subjects and “workers, [who] like women, ought to be loyal and contented” (248; emphasis in original).

The Anthropometric Committee’s project and the aims it set for itself are reflective of Michel Foucault’s notion of power-knowledge. In *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*, Foucault argues that a continually shifting power-knowledge matrix governs discourses on difference based in sexuality. The Committee’s legacy of knowledge production in ethnology, heredity, and eugenics contributed to the placement of sex (sexual relations, venereal diseases, matrimonial alliances, perversions) in a position of ‘biological responsibility’ with regard to the species: not only could sex be affected by its own diseases, it could also, if it was not controlled, transmit diseases or create others that would afflict future gen-
erations. Thus [sex] appeared to be the source of an entire capital for the species to draw from. Whence the medical—but also political—project for organizing a state management of marriages, births, and life expectancies; sex and its fertility had to be administered. (*History*, 118)

A newly discovered source of capital in the form of labor and a threat to labor’s maintenance, sex and the ways it is administered become integral to the successful operation of a capitalist political economy in the late nineteenth century, something of which Galton is more than aware when he emphasizes that eugenics would help the United Kingdom improve domestic and social problems and “fulfil our vast imperial opportunities” (“Eugenics” 3). Following the project’s conclusion, Committee member Lane Fox Pitt-Rivers established two ethnologically-focused museums with holdings that included artifacts from archaeological digs completed by himself: the Pitt-Rivers Museum at Oxford and the Dorset County Museum. John Beddoe, the Committee’s instigator, published *The Races of Britain: A Contribution to the Anthropology of Western Europe* in 1885, and Galton published his seminal eugenic texts *Inquiries into Human Faculty* in 1883 and *Natural Inheritance* in 1889. Drawing on the epistemic confluence of the photographic atlas, the composite photograph, and the bell curve, the Anthropometric Committee establishes a visuality—a technology of biopower—that structures the epistemology of difference employed by classical mainline eugenicists and enables the development of a biopolitics that governs life in the interest of the capitalist state (Foucault, *History* 141).

**American Eugenic Visualities and Their Popularization**

One of the earliest proponents of what I call classic eugenic visuality in the United States is Henry P. Bowditch. While a professor at Harvard, Bowditch published a piece on children’s growth rates that was used by the Anthropometric Committee in their 1880 and 1883 reports (“The Growth of Children”). In an 1892 article published in *Science*, Galton argued that Bowditch’s work in a separate article demonstrated that height was more the result of heredity than nutrition or environment (Bowditch, “The Growth of Children”; Galton, “Boston School-Boys” 274). Bowditch began corresponding with Galton about his experiments with composite photography, and, in 1888, sent him examples of composites representing what he believed to be “the two extremes of American society” (qtd. in Maxwell 109). In 1894, Bowditch published these composites of doctors, horse-car conductors, and horse-car drivers in an essay on the subject for one of the first issues of *McClure’s Magazine*—a popular periodical for progressive-era reformers—titled “Are Composite Photographs Typical Pictures?” In this essay, Bowditch argues that composite photographs allow biologists to eschew personally choosing examples of individual specimens to serve as representative of a group “and to give to the typical form a truly objective character” (331). Though he seems to
share the same epistemological values as Galton and the Anthropometric Committee with regard to the mechanical objectivity of the composite photograph, he allows scientists to have faith in their own judgments:

There are, however, certain anatomical peculiarities of too subtle a character to be expressed in figures, but producing results which reveal themselves with unerring certainty to the trained eye. The expression of the countenance, for example, depends entirely upon the complicated relations between the different parts of the skin of the face, but it is obviously impossible by the application of a measuring tape to distinguish between such faces, for instance, as those of an uneducated and of a liberally educated man. The eye, however, detects this difference at once. For the recognition of racial peculiarities the unmeasurable seem to be more important than the measurable differences. (334-35)

The re-valued subjectivity of the scientist allowed the use of composite photographs as teaching and working objects for those who wanted to determine and differentiate groups within a larger population. Bowditch hoped that the in study of “those differences of feature which distinguish the human race [composite photography] may also prove useful and may furnish us with an objective basis for the study of racial physiognomy, in place of the purely subjective conceptions upon which we are now compelled to rely” (340).

The epistemological values that underwrite Bowditch’s work are characteristic of what Daston and Galison term “physiognomic sight” (Objectivity 314). Physiognomic sight is connected to the epistemic value of trained judgment in the sciences, which embraces a certain kind of subjectivity for the scientist as trained expert. Those, like Bowditch, who deployed this epistemic value “needed […] a capacity […] to synthesize, highlight, and grasp relationships in ways that were not reducible to mechanical procedure, as in the recognition of family resemblance” (314). Allan Sekula explains Galton’s method of composite photography as such a tool: “[i]n retrospect, the Galtonian composite can be seen as the collapsed version of the archive. In this blurred configuration, the archive attempts to exist as a potent single image, and the single image attempts to achieve the authority of the archive of the general, abstract proposition” (54). By superimposing numerous images of portraits on top of one another on a sensitized plate, one could achieve an image featuring both the typical physical characteristics of racial types and the range within which observed characteristics might be valid. In other words, the single composite image simultaneously demonstrates the norm for a given population of individual instances, demarcates the range of variation around the norm—or the differentiation typical—of that population, and trains the viewer of the image to recognize in their own observations individual instances that may fall within the distribution presented. The composite physiognomic photograph is, thus, the perfect metaphor and model for sciences of trained judgement. Proponents of trained judgment themselves explicitly recognize the connec-
tion between their values and those of eugenicists and race scientists like Galton and Bowditch. In the preface to their *Atlas of Electroencephalography* (1941), Frederick A. and Erna L. Gibbs write the following in favor of the epistemological value of trained judgement:

Where complex patterns must be analyzed, such [subjective] criteria are exceedingly serviceable. For example, although it is possible to tell an Eskimo from an Indian by the mathematical relationship between certain body measurements, the trained eye can make a great variety of such measurements at a glance and can often arrive at a better differentiation than can be obtained from any single quantitative index or even from a group of indices. (322)

Likewise, the authors of *An Atlas of Stellar Spectra, with an Outline of Spectral Classification* (1943) justified their methodological decisions as such:

It is not necessary to make cephalic measures to identify a human face with certainty or to establish the race to which it belongs; a careful inspection integrates all features in a manner difficult to analyze by measures. The observer himself is not always conscious of all the bases for his conclusion. The operation of spectral classification is similar. The observer must use good judgment as to the definiteness with which the identification can be made from the features available; but good judgment is necessary in any case, whether the decision is made from the general appearance or from more objective measures. (Morgan, Keenan, and Kellman 334)

Using the technologies pioneered by the Anthropometric Committee, atlas makers used the metaphor of physiognomic sight to express their desire to make images that, like race, could be understood “at a glance” (Daston and Galison, *Objectivity* 340-61).

Relying less on the normal distribution than the British or later American eugenicists, Henry H. Goddard combined specially-annotated pedigree charts and photographs in his work to create a eugenic visuality using the work of Gregor Mendel. Though his work was originally published in 1866, Mendel’s work on the inheritance of certain characteristics of peas—like their smoothness or wrinkliness—was not recognized until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when it was simultaneously rediscovered by scientists in Europe, the United States, and England (Kevles 43). The research done in the United States on cell division, sex chromosomes, and genetics cemented the Mendelian framework as the mode of inheritance with which American eugenicists were most comfortable (44). From his position as the Director of Research for the Vineland Training School for Feeble-Minded Girls and Boys, Goddard was focused on “feeble-mindedness” as the cause of social problems like criminality and immorality (*Feeble-Mindedness* 8, 11, 14, 16, 18; *Human Efficiency* 1, 37, 72). He argued that the ordinary vision of people outside institutions like his own is incapable of identifying the inherent and inherited defect of the feeble-minded (5). Using the research he conducted at Vineland, he trained both a scientific and popular audience to ‘see’ the feeble-minded, a category he determined, based on his own transla-
tion of the Binet-Simon IQ test, to be biologically inferior through the Mendelian pedigree chart. Through the labor of several field investigators who were trained by Charles Davenport at the Eugenics Record Office, Goddard was able to collect case histories, including photographs and pedigree charts, for the families of 327 Vineland patients (Kevles 78; Feeble-Mindedness 47-434). I call the type of eugenic visuality that Goddard creates a Mendelian vision, because he uses the pedigree chart to prove that intelligence is inherited in accordance with Mendel’s Laws. While instructions are provided for reading the charts, the image used by Goddard included here as Figure 1 provides readers with a visual example of the Mendelian theory of inheritance that is used to explain patterns of heredity in the 327 preceding pedigree charts (Feeble-Mindedness 48-49, 549). Those who are feeble-minded are indicated by a square or circle with a black background, normal-minded individuals have a white or unshaded background, and those with recessive feeble-minded characteristics have half-shaded shapes. Based on examinations of the charts and calculations, viewers of the Anthropometric Committee’s photographic albums would understand the patients photographed as having a heritable defect that makes them inferior (556).

After giving readers a framework through which to see the feeble-minded, Goddard made suggestions on how the feeble-minded ought to be managed. The last two chapters of Feeble-Mindedness—titled “Eugenics” and “Practical Applications”—argue for the need “to restrain
the ignorant and unintelligent from such matings as will surely result in
defective offspring” and recommend that as many of those determined
to be feeble-minded as possible be incarcerated in sex-segregated insti-

tutions (558, 566). The difficulty of creating enough institutions to house
the large proportion of the feeble-minded could be mitigated through
training programs at home and in school that would provide care for
and teach the feeble-minded to be self-sufficient (586). However, steril-
ization, even though it violated the “sentiments” of some, was the only
certain way to ensure a decrease in reproduction, if only in a few cases
(566). In the last of a series of lectures given at Princeton University in
1920, Goddard writes that correct management of the feeble-minded is
necessary for the preservation of an American democracy.

As Americans we are proud of our claims to freedom and equality and that
it is the inalienable right of everyone to enjoy life, liberty and the pursuit
of happiness. […] The greatest liberty or the highest happiness is only at-
tained when each individual is properly adjusted to the rest, and while as we
have pointed out, there are many factors concerned in that adjustment we
have maintained and tried to demonstrate that the fundamental factor is the
mental level, and that a perfect democracy is only to be realized when it is
based upon an absolute knowledge of mental levels and the organization of
the social body on that basis. (Human Efficiency 126–27)

To undergird his arguments for increased resources for institutional-
ization, Goddard presents data from the intelligence tests given to
American World War I recruits (Figure 2). Goddard takes this data to
represent, in general, the distribution of intelligence among the people
of the United States (23). The number of those who failed to complete
high school, according to the Army’s “Explanation of Letter Ratings,”
is described by him as “startling,” because it shows that the proportion
of feeble-minded people “is vastly greater than has been appreciated” in
addition to being “a potent cause of social inefficiency, individual un-
happiness, misdemeanors and crime” (30, 37). The mandates of democ-


tacy, according to Goddard, thus necessitate the institutionalization and
training of every person, at every mental level, up “to the limit of that
capacity” (125).

Figure 2: Diagram showing a normal distribution of mental level among U.S.
Army recruits (Goddard, Human Efficiency and Levels of Intelligence 24).

Figure 2:—Diagram showing the mental levels of the United States Army as authorised
and published under the authority of the Surgeon General of the Army. For explanation
see text.

Amst 64, 2 (2019): 215–40
While Goddard was at work establishing feeble-mindedness as a Mendelian unit character, Paul Popenoe, a strong supporter of eugenic sterilization in California, and Roswell Hill Johnson, University of Pittsburgh, professor and former assistant to Charles Davenport, re-established Galton’s statistical visuality in the United States. The statistical tools provided by Galton and Pearson enabled Popenoe and Johnson to unchain American eugenics from the medical, psychological, and life sciences that typically espoused Mendelian genetics; in doing so, they enabled eugenicists in the United States to use statistics to speculate about the distribution of physical, intellectual, and other characteristics among specific populations without needing to have actually conducted research on those characteristics themselves. In their influential 1918 textbook *Applied Eugenics*, Popenoe and Johnson conclude that intelligence is normally distributed in the overall population because results for some intelligence tests, when plotted, “arrange themselves in the same general form” (78). A normal distribution of intelligence also provided evidence against Goddard’s Mendelism:

[…], most of the feeble-minded cases in institutions, where the Mendelian studies have usually been made, come from families which are themselves of a low grade of mentality. If the whole lot of these examined were measured, it would be difficult to draw the line between the normal and the affected; there is not nearly so much difference between the two classes, as one would suppose who only looks at a Mendelian chart. (106)

Although they undermined the Mendelian model of inheritance and its usefulness for individual marriage counseling, Popenoe and Johnson strengthened, rather than weakened, its sentiment that “like tends to produce like” by introducing readers to Galton and Pearson’s research on regression analysis, or correlation coefficients (108, 112).

While, therefore, this Galton-Pearson law gives no advice in regard to individual marriages, it is yet of great value to applied eugenics. In the first place, it crystallizes the vague realization that remote ancestry is of much less importance than immediate ancestry, to an individual, while showing that every generation has a part in making a man what he is. (113)

The importance given to immediate ancestry by Galton and Pearson’s work on regression analysis allows the possibility of an applied eugenics, as called for by Johnson and Popenoe.

To put the matter in a more concrete form, there is reason to think that if for a few generations superior people would marry only people on the average superior in like degree (superior in ancestry as well as individuality), a point would be reached where all the offspring would tend to be superior, mediocrities of the former type being eliminated; and this superiority could be maintained as long as care was taken to avoid mating with inferior. (113-14)

After establishing that inherent intellectual differences existed and are normally distributed among populations, they argue that the reproduction of those at “the bottom” cause “a disastrous change in the balance
of population within a few generations” (143). Those at the bottom are then typified by in the photographs shown in the chapter “Desirability of Restrictive Eugenics.” Tying population statistics back to the individual whose sexuality must be managed, Popenoe and Johnson’s textbook borrows a tactic from Goddard and presents photographs of “Young Hank” and others as “specimens” of the types of people whose reproduction threatened “the interests of the many” upon which American government was built (75, 169, 161).

In addition to writing textbooks, American eugenicists engaged in a widespread popular education campaign that introduced the public to eugenic visualities through exhibitions at museums, conferences, and fairs. Exhibitions at fairs were popular forms of entertainment for mass audiences, but those who designed them frequently thought of them as providing mass education through demonstrations of “visible proof” (Rydell 40). Eugenics exhibits meant for national audiences were first shown at the 1915 San Francisco Panama-Pacific International Exposition, whose organizers described eugenics as representing “the very spirit, the very ideal of this great Exposition that we have created” (qtd. in Rydell 40). The exhibition—created by the Race Betterment Foundation, whose officers included Davenport and other notable eugenicists like Yale professor Irving Fisher and conservationist Gifford Pinchot—consisted of charts, portraits, and other images. The eugenics exhibit was widely considered the most popular at the fair and was described by Morton Todd, the official fair historian, as “so admirably arranged that you didn’t have to ask many questions; all you had to do was just to look” (qtd. in Rydell 41-42).

Following the conclusion of World War I, the Permanent International Eugenics Committee agreed to host a second international congress in New York City. The exhibit’s committee for the 1921 Second International Congress of Eugenics—supervised by Harry H. Laughlin—arranged displays in both anthropology and eugenics from over 131 exhibitors. The eugenics displays, as described by Laughlin, consisted of mainly embryological and racial casts and models, photographs, pedigree charts and tables, biological family histories and collective biographies, graphical and historical charts on the character and analysis of population, material showing the principles of heredity in plants, animals and man, maps and analytical tables demonstrating racial vicissitudes, anthropometric instruments, apparatus for mental measurements, and books and scientific reprints on eugenic and genetical subjects. (qtd. in Rydell 45)

While the congress itself lasted only one week, the exhibits were displayed to an audience of between five and ten thousand at the American Museum of Natural History for a month after the congress ended. Eugenics displays that dealt specifically with immigration were, at Laughlin’s direction, installed on the walls of the building where the United States Congress’s Committee on Immigration met (Rydell 48). Eugenic visualities continued to be popularized at local fairs through exhibits and the “Fitter Families for Future Firesides Contest” designed and de-
ployed by Mary T. Watts and Dr. Florence Brown Sherbon. Hired by Fisher on behalf of the Eugenics Committee of the United States of America, Sherbon described their goal as “the stimulation of a feeling of family and racial consciousness and responsibility” (qtd. in Rydell 49). Winning families would receive medals, social acclaim, and free trips to large national fairs where they would be part of eugenics exhibits, sometimes living on the fairgrounds themselves (56). Participating in the mass culture entertainment movement of the early twentieth century, American eugenicists were able to promote a eugenic visuality that created popular support for measures like forced institutionalization, coerced sterilization, racial segregation, and racist immigration policies.

The extent to which a eugenic visuality—whether Mendelian or Galtonian—was accepted as an epistemology of feeble-mindedness is demonstrated in the 1927 Supreme Court Case *Buck v. Bell*. The case centers on a sterilization order for Carrie Buck filed by Dr. Albert Priddy, the Superintendent of the Virginia Colony for Epileptics and Feebleminded. The recently passed *Virginia Eugenical Sterilization Act*—written by Priddy and Virginia Assemblyman Aubrey Strode—was designed to give physicians and officials the legal authority to order the sterilization of inmates in state institutions (Lombardo 289). Carrie Buck’s situation offered what Priddy thought would be an ideal opportunity to circumvent any difficulties regarding his plans to turn the Virginia Colony into a “kind of clearing house” for patients to be sterilized and released back into society by having Virginia’s legislation authorized by the Supreme Court of the United States (qtd. in Lombardo 109). Carrie Buck’s situation differed from the Virginia Eugenical Sterilization Act in that she was pregnant. Though Carrie maintained throughout her life that the pregnancy was the result of being raped by the Dobbs’s nephew, Mr. and Mrs. Dobbs testified that Carrie’s “moral delinquency” was responsible for her condition and made her difficult for them to control (Lombardo 103). They supported their claims about Carrie’s supposed cognitive disability, in part, by submitting information that her mother, Emma Buck, was similarly afflicted and was currently residing at the Colony. Just over a month after she arrived, Priddy prepared a petition to the institution’s board of directors to have Carrie sterilized and made sure to include a note in his records that she “was desirous of taking advantage of the sterilization law” (qtd. in Lombardo 107). After the Board approved the sterilization request, Emma was appointed a cooperative legal guardian, who hired former Colony director, current board member, and eugenics advocate Irving Whitehead to oppose the sterilization order in court.

The evidence presented to the county court in support of Carrie’s sterilization relied, primarily, on the witnesses’ visual perceptions of Carrie, her mother Emma, and her infant daughter Vivian. In addition to testifying that Carrie Buck had a history “of immorality, prostitution and untruthfulness”—claims absent from and contradictory to her commitment
records—Priddy described her as “well grown” but with a “rather badly formed face” (qtd. in Lombardo 134). Emma was described by Priddy in similar terms. Caroline Wilhelm, the Red Cross Nurse who had handled Carrie’s commitment paperwork and accompanied her on the train to the Colony, testified that “as a social worker” she felt Carrie was “obviously feebleminded” (qtd. in Lombardo 116). She had never met Emma Buck, but, based on the previous witnesses’ testimony of her numerous illegitimate children, Wilhelm concluded that Carrie was likely to have more illegitimate children if she were not sterilized (Lombardo 116). Wilhelm had also examined Vivian, Carrie’s infant child, but the results, as they were drawn out in court, hinged on the child’s appearance.

_Strode:_ Have you any impression about the child?
_Wilhelm:_ It is difficult to judge the probabilities of a child as young as that, but it seems to me not quite a normal baby.

_Strode:_ You don’t regard her as a normal baby?
_Wilhelm:_ In its appearance—I should say that perhaps my knowledge of the mother may prejudice me in that regard, but I saw the child at the same time as Mrs. Dobbs’s daughter’s baby, which is only three days older than this one, and there is a very decided difference in the development of the babies. That was about two weeks ago.

_Strode:_ You would not judge the child as a normal baby?
_Wilhelm:_ There is a look about it that is not quite normal, but just what it is, I can’t tell. (qtd. in Lombardo 117)

Having proved that Emma, Carrie, and Vivian shared the same “look about them,” the Supreme Court ruled that the state-sponsored sterilization of the “manifestly unfit” did not violate the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, as the “unfit” were constituted as a class of similarly situated individuals—diagnosed by eugenic vision—that were being treated equally.

**The Bell Curve and the Reorganization of Eugenic Visuality**

Rather than photographs, individual family pedigrees, or expert knowledge, Herrnstein and Murray employed only the bell curve as the basis of their eugenic visuality. In the first chapter of each of the book’s first three parts—“The Emergence of a Cognitive Elite,” “Cognitive Classes and Social Behavior,” and “The National Context”—the authors set up the bell curve as the paradigm for understanding the issues laid out in the rest of the chapters in the section. Explaining the statistical concepts of the normal distribution and standard deviations at the same time as they begin to introduce their theory of the growing cognitive underclass and elite, they write:

Very briefly, a distribution is the pattern formed by many individual scores. The famous “normal distribution” is a bell-shaped curve, with most people getting scores in the middle range and a few at each end, or “tail,” of the distribution. Most mental tests are designed to produce normal distribu-
A standard deviation is a common language for expressing scores. Why not just use the raw scores (SAT points, IQ points, etc.)? There are many reasons, but one of the simplest is that we need to compare results on many different tests. [...] The standard deviation is akin to the inch, an all-purpose measure that can be used for any distribution. Suppose we tell you that Joe has an ACT score of 24 and Tom has an SAT-Verbal of 720. [...] You'll need a lot of information about those two tests before you can tell much from those two numbers. But if we tell you instead that Joe has an ACT score that is .7 standard deviation above the mean and Tom has an SAT-Verbal that is 2.7 standard deviations above the mean, you know a lot. [...] How big is a standard deviation? For a test distributed normally, a person whose score is one standard deviation below the mean is at the 16th percentile. A person whose score is a standard deviation above the mean is at the 84th percentile. [...] Or, in short, as a measure of distance from the mean, one standard deviation means “big,” two standard deviations means “very big,” and three standard deviations means “huge.” (44; emphasis in original)

Herrnstein and Murray continue to democratize the bell curve and the knowledge it supposedly yields about intelligence and difference with the first appendix to the text, titled “Statistics for People Who Are Sure They Can’t Learn Statistics.” The first few pages provide an even more detailed explanation than above of frequency distributions, normal distributions, and standard deviations for complete novices in statistics, and they state that “[i]t makes sense that most things will be arranged in bell-shaped curves” (581). Combined with their frequently-echoed claim that intelligence is at least “40 percent and no more than 80 percent” heritable and Murray’s assertion that “intelligence is conferred on a person through a combination of genetic and environmental factors over which that person has no control,” the bell curve’s visualization of the typical intelligence distribution of a population and all the knowledge that results from that assumption is accorded a definitive status by the text (23, 105, 298, 554).

The first section of Herrnstein and Murray’s text establishes three broad classes of American society based on their average IQ. Aggregating data from the 1930s and 1990s, the authors create Figures 3 and 4. The diagrams are used to demonstrate the IQ distribution of 23-year-olds with and without college degrees as of 1930 and 1990. The distribution of each diagram’s curves ranges from -3 to +3 standard deviations from the mean and includes two separate curves: one for everyone without a college degree and the other for all college graduates. Skewing their data to be proportional relative to the size of the overall population of the United States in each year, the bell curves from each diagram show two things: the very large growth in the proportion of Americans with college degrees and changes in the mean IQ of people in each category. While the diagrams demonstrate that the number of college degrees earned by Americans has increased greatly since 1930, Herrnstein and Murray are alarmed that they also show that the mean IQs of people in each category differ more from each other in 1990 than they did in 1930. The diagram showing data from 1930 shows that the mean IQ of everyone without a college degree was
just slightly less than the overall mean, that all college graduates scored at two-thirds of a standard deviation above the overall mean, and that graduates from the elite schools registered scores just over one standard deviation above the overall mean (45). The data from 1990 show that the mean IQ for everyone without a college degree has decreased to less than one-fourth of a standard deviation from the overall population mean and that the mean IQ for all college graduates has risen modestly to the point where it separates them from those without degrees by an entire standard deviation. The most radical change displayed by Herrnstein and Murray is that the mean IQ among those with elite degrees has doubled relative to their scores in 1930 (46; Figure 3). In the next two chapters, the authors argue that IQ emerges as a strong predictor of job performance and type of employment as American society becomes more egalitarian. As those individuals concentrated on the high end of the IQ spectrum are siphoned into elite academic institutions and high-income jobs as if by an “invisible hand,” they are also increasingly socially and physically segregated from those with lower IQs (52, 101). Herrnstein and Murray assert at the end of the fourth chapter that the effect of this “cognitive segregation” has been the creation of a system of class stratification based on genetic differences in IQ that are visualized by the bell curves in Figure 4 (91, 106, 46).
The second part of the book—“Cognitive Classes and Social Behavior”—defines the cognitive classes into which Herrnstein and Murray sort the American population. The classes are represented by a bell curve divided into five sections dependent on IQ (Figure 5). However, the bell curve on the chart provided by the authors is not based on anything in their data set. It is only a schema they made in order to sort individuals in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) into groups according to their Armed Forces Qualification Test scores (120-21). Writing on this diagram, they say:

[…] we divide the world into cognitive classes—five of them, because that has been the most common number among sociologists who have broken down socioeconomic status into classes and because five allows the natural groupings of ‘very high,’ ‘high,’ ‘mid,’ ‘low,’ and ‘very low.’ We have chosen to break the intervals at the 5th, 25th, 75th, and 95th percentiles of the distribution. The figure shows how this looks for a normally distributed population. (120)

Continuing to develop their Galtonian visuality, the populations visualized by the bell curve in Figure 5 are rendered into genetic classes through the use of a series of regression analyses to assess the relationship between social conditions and behaviors and IQ. The value of a regression analysis for Herrnstein and Murray is that it “tells how much each cause [IQ, socioeconomic status, etc.] actually effects the result, taking the role of all the other hypothesized causes into account […]” (122; emphasis in original). Following their analyses, the authors determine that IQ—which they defined in the first part of the text as an increasingly genetically-determined characteristic—is the single largest determiner of poverty, unemployment, disabling injury, single motherhood, welfare dependency, and criminality for those living in the United States (141, 159-62, 167, 191, 236). These behaviors all constitute violations of what Herrnstein and Murray define as “middle-class values.” In the last chapter of Part II, the authors score NLSY participants based on the behaviors discussed in previous chapters.

A man in the NLSY got a “Yes” if by 1990 he had obtained a high school degree (or more), been in the labor force throughout 1989, never been interviewed in jail, and was still married to his first wife. A woman in the NLSY got a “Yes” if she had obtained a high school degree, had never given birth to a baby out of wedlock, had never been interviewed in jail, and was still married to her first husband. People who failed any one of the conditions were scored “No.” […] The purpose of the MCV Index is to identify among the NLSY population, in their young adulthood when the index was scored, those people who are getting on with their lives in ways that fit the middle-class stereotype […]. (263-64)

The “Very bright,” “Bright,” and “Normal” cognitive classes are found to have populations that score at least fifty percent “Yes” on the MCV, and a regression analysis of this data reveals that probability of scoring “Yes” on the MCV rises as IQ increases (264-65). Because they are strongly
predicted by IQ, behaviors that Herrnstein and Murray consider stereotypically middle-class become typical characteristics of a class of genetically different people.

The third part of the book looks at IQ and its relationship to social behaviors at the level of the entire national population. In the very brief introduction to this section, the authors state that, in writing of the nation, they are speaking of it in terms of race (267). The relationship between racial difference and IQ is described by Herrnstein and Murray as easily predictable:

> Large human populations differ in many ways, both cultural and biological. It is not surprising that they might differ at least slightly in their cognitive characteristics. That they do is confirmed by the data on ethnic differences in cognitive ability from around the world. One message of this chapter is that such differences are real and have consequences. Another is that the facts are not as alarming as many people seem to fear. (269)

The facts presented about racial differences do become cause for alarm as Black and immigrant Latinx people are shown to have IQs that are, on average, one whole standard deviation below the largely white-determined norm (269, 275). The bell curves in Figure 6 were created to further demonstrate

> why a B[ack]/W[hite] difference can be problematic to American society as a whole. At the lower end of the IQ range, there are approximately equal numbers of blacks and whites. But throughout the upper half of the range, the disproportions between the numbers of whites and blacks at any given IQ level are huge. To the extent that the difference represents an authentic difference in cognitive functioning, the social consequences are potentially huge as well. (280)

Controlling for IQ, Herrnstein and Murray find that it accounts for racial differences regarding wages, criminality, and being born impoverished (323, 334, 338-39). However, it does not eliminate differences in unemployment, “welfare dependency,” “illegitimacy,” marriage, and MCV (328-32, 340). Concerning these types of results, the authors write
Racism and other historical legacies may explain why controlling for IQ does not eliminate differences [...] but, if so, we would be left with no evident explanation of education, occupational selection, or wages, once IQ is taken into account. With the facts in hand, we cannot distinguish between the role of the usual historical factors that people discuss [racism, slavery, etc.] and the possibility of ethnic differences in whatever other personal attributes besides IQ determine a person’s ability to do well […]. We do not know whether ethnic groups differ on the average in these other ways, let alone why they do so if they do. (328)

Whether it is cultural or biological, the goal of the first three chapters of this section establishes that there is something different about Black, white, and Latinx people, even if Herrnstein and Murray cannot identify it. The last two chapters identify, in particular, two groups whose cognitive ability, reproduction, and other social behaviors the authors find “worrisome”: African American and immigrant Latinx women (349). The higher fertility of those with lower IQs, among whom African American and immigrant Latinx women predominate, means that these groups “may have a larger proportion of [their] babies than [others] at [a given] IQ” (354; emphasis in original). The increased reproduction of women in these two groups, along with the lower fertility of “privileged” women, could cause a downward shift in the nation’s mean intelligence, causing changes that “would profoundly alter many aspects of American life, none that we can think of to the good” (364–65). The results of Herrnstein and Murray’s analyses show that African American and immigrant Latinx women’s childbearing and family decisions constitute a threat to what they define as middle-class American values.

The middle-class behavior norms that these women of color violate are important for Herrnstein and Murray because they constitute the backbone of American civil society (254). Referred to as “heteronormative” by feminist and queer theorists, the behavioral standards comprising Herrnstein and Murray’s *Middle Class Values Index* (MCV) also demonstrate the interconnectedness of racism and heterosexism. Patri-
Amanda Reyes

Amanda Hill Collins argues that American civil society, as it is defined by Herrnstein, Murray, and others sharing their viewpoint, is constructed against the differences that Black women are made to represent. Collins describes attacks on “welfare dependency,” “illegitimacy,” and high rates of divorce / non-marriage as forms of racist backlash against African American women’s access to government assistance programs following the civil rights gains of 1964 (78). While these gains enabled more working-class African Americans access to financial security and middle-class social status, many more African Americans were shuttled into what is referred to as the “Black underclass” by increased social expressions of white supremacy, legislative and legal challenges to social welfare and civil rights policies, and a changing political economy (59). The image of the welfare queen—a chronically unemployed Black mother who has children to increase her government assistance—emerges in this period to provide “an ideological justification for efforts to harness Black women’s fertility to the needs of a changing political economy” through punitive social welfare structures that increasingly interface with carceral systems (78). Just as slave owners needed hypersexualized “breeder women” to repopulate and profit from the sale of domestic slaves after the end of the international slave trade, the welfare queen’s bad mothering and desire to collect increased welfare payments represent the source of an ever-increasing Black underclass whose lives need to be managed by the state through the social welfare, medical, and carceral apparatuses for the good of American political economy (Collins 79; Herrnstein and Murray 518).

Herrnstein and Murray also substantiate a controlling image of Latinx immigrant women in the United States that centers around their fertility and mothering. Indigenous Latinx women’s fecundity has been a central concern since the beginnings of the settler colonial project in the American hemisphere. First seen as a boon for settler colonial efforts, Mexican women’s fecundity becomes problematic for Americans in the twentieth century. Beginning in the 1920s, American professors and journalists refer to the high birthrates of Mexican women as constituting an “invasion” or “conquest” (Gutiérrez 32-34). Solutions to this problem range from mass deportation of all people of Mexican origin—immigrants or not—to Americanization programs that seek to inculcate Mexican women with middle-class values like family planning, family size, and “modern” health and hygiene practices (34-35). A literature review of social science literature on Mexican American women from 1982 finds that “[a]n exaggerated ‘super-mother’ figure emerges […] about Mexican American women: the unceasingly self-sacrificing, dedicated, ever-fertile woman totally without aspiration for self or initiative to do other than reproduce” (qtd. in Gutiérrez 35). The problem is that Mexican and Mexican American women practice an atavistic heteronormativity that leads to birth rates considered excessive throughout the twentieth century (34-35).
Herrnstein and Murray characterize the reproduction of Latinx women depending on their immigration status and race. Their analyses of the behaviors of Latinx, Black, and white people demonstrate that, controlling for IQ, white and Latinx people score closely in the Middle Class Values Index and probabilities of unemployment, marriage, single motherhood, and welfare recipiency, but these Latinx people are said to be the “native-born” descendants of previous, higher-earning generations of Mexican immigrants (Herrnstein and Murray 328-40, 363). Recent Latinx immigrants, however, have a mean IQ score seven points below that of “native-born” Latinx, and it is their reproduction and that of Black immigrants that is said to be “putting downward pressure on the distribution of intelligence” in the United States (361).

**Conclusion**

*The Bell Curve* dominated print and television news in the weeks leading up to the vote on California’s 1994 “Three Strikes” and “Save Our State” propositions and, while many journalists disagreed with Herrnstein and Murray’s policy suggestions and final analysis, they accepted the statistical information presented in the book as facts (Naureckas para. 5). Because the text was over six hundred pages, including appendices, it took months after the election for the first critiques of *The Bell Curve* to be published. The conclusions presented were, thus, accepted as part of reasonable public knowledge and came to dictate American social and criminal justice policy throughout the 1990s. These attacks on African and Mexican Americans and Black, Latinx, and Mexican immigrants were authorized by a visuality that used statistics to update controlling images that have existed throughout the history of American and British eugenics. This eugenic visuality starts with the work of Francis Galton and the British Association of the Advancement of Science’s Racial and Anthropometric Committee’s project to determine the “racial types of Britain” via the bell curve and epistemologically-related technologies. The assumptions concerning racial difference were also a concern of American eugenicists who used both Mendelian pedigree charts and Galtonian bell curves to forge a visual discourse of eugenics that they popularized through the mass-entertainment culture of the early twentieth century. Herrnstein and Murray, likewise, deploy Mendelian inheritance and the bell curve as metaphors through which to organize images of African American and Latinx immigrant women as excessively fecund abusers of the social welfare system who threaten to bankrupt the United States morally and economically. Hearkening back to Foucault, their goal is “to give [dangerous reproduction] an analytical, visible, and permanent reality: it was implanted in bodies, slipped in beneath modes of conduct, made into a principle of classification and intelligibility” (*History* 44). The point of identification for Herrnstein, Murray, Galton, and the eugenicists deploying these various visualities
is not to suppress the people represented by these figures, but to identify them and their roles as individuals and populations within their respective political economies and to suggest ways that they can be made to fulfill these roles.

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