

# The Washington Post

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Sweden Was Not Alone: [FINAL Edition]

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## ▣ Abstract (summary)

As numerous historians of science have documented, the vanguard of the international eugenics movement were not the nations of Sweden or Switzerland but England and the United States. Francis Galton, the British scientist and cousin to Charles Darwin who coined the term "eugenics," saw the founding and growth of a Eugenics Record Office (later renamed the Galton Laboratory for National Eugenics) in England in 1904. It was affiliated with University College, London. Other British eugenics organizations included the Eugenics Education Society, founded in 1907.

In the United States in 1904, the Carnegie Institution of Washington endowed the Cold Spring Harbor Station for Experimental Evolution, which pursued eugenics under the directorship of Harvard-trained biologist Charles Davenport. In 1910, Mrs. E. H. Harriman, widow of the railroad magnate, funded a Eugenics Record Office, and in 1923 another eugenics organization, the American Eugenics Society, was created. This last group publicly supported compulsory sterilization of the "feeble-minded."

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## ▣ Full Text

The story emerging from Sweden and Switzerland of compulsory sterilization programs enforced against so-called "useless" citizens is disturbing. But your Aug. 29 front-page article implies that Sweden's policies were the first of their kind, stating: "Sweden was the first nation to establish an institute on racial biology in 1922."

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sterilization of the "feeble-minded."

To be sure, none of these organizations was state-sponsored (in the sense that they received federal funding), but their activities, including their support of proposed sterilization laws in state legislatures, received national attention and endorsement. The 1924 Immigration Act passed by Congress used the arguments of eugenicists who testified before the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization to justify the restriction of Southern and Eastern European immigration to this country. In 1927, in the case of *Buck v. Bell*, the Supreme Court upheld the state of Virginia's law for the compulsory sterilization of the "feeble-minded." Writing for the court, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes ruled that sterilization laws were part of the police power of the state, and that "three generations of imbeciles are enough."

Edward Ingebreetsen once wrote, "What a social order chooses to forget shows what it needs to remember." Most Americans have forgotten that forced sterilization has an ignoble history of its own in this country, but this is a much-needed context for helping your readers understand the implications of the recent revelations about Sweden. Your paper should have done more than merely allude to this "dark chapter" of American history.

-- Christine Stolba

Your story about the forced sterilization of Swedish women leaves a false impression that needs to be corrected.

One of the cases mentioned in the article is that of a "young woman who had not mastered her confirmation studies well enough to satisfy her priest." Although no details are given about this case, the reader is left with the distinct impression that the Catholic Church cooperated with the Swedish sterilization program.

A priest is as susceptible as anyone else to the temptation to follow the intellectual and moral fashions of his time, and eugenics has on and off been fashionable during this century. But regardless of what an individual priest may or may not have been up to, the Catholic Church has always opposed sterilization for any reason. This should have been made clear.

-- Karen Howard